

This Girl Can advert (2016)



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Component 1: Exploring the Media

Focus areas: Media Language Representation Media Contexts

BACKGROUND CONTEXT

- *This Girl Can* is a national campaign developed by Sport England and in conjunction with a wide range of partnership organisations.
- The purpose of the campaign is to break down the primary barrier holding women back from participating in sport – the fear of judgement. The campaign seeks to target and celebrate ‘active women who are doing their thing, whatever that may be, no matter how well they do it, no matter how they look or even how red their face gets’.
- The campaign is currently funded by the National Lottery and backed by a government body, Sport England; there is no commercial aspect to it at all.

PART 1: STARTING POINTS – Media language

Social and Cultural Contexts:

- **Sport England** carried out a lot of research to figure out why there was such a big gender gap in **sports participation**. They discovered that two million fewer 14-40 year old women than men partake in sport regularly and they wanted to understand why.
 - They discovered that:
 - » 13 million women said they would like to participate more in sport and physical activity.
 - » Just over 6 million of these are not currently active at all.
 - » Fear of being judged was the number one barrier for most women who felt they were unable to participate in physical activity.
 - **As a result of the campaign, 1.6m women have started exercising** and the number of women playing sport and being active is increasing faster than the number of men.
- Soon after the launch of the “This Girl Can” campaign, **Nike** released a more motivational campaign called “**Better for it**” which also portrayed a more ‘real’ side to fitness.

Consider the codes and conventions of media language and how media language influences meaning:

- A **central, striking, image** that encourages the reader to become intrigued to find out more about the **advert**:
 - » **A mid-shot of a woman in her thirties, exercising.** Unlike many advertising campaigns, this female is **not a celebrity**. By purposefully avoiding using a sporting legend or an athletic goddess, the campaign is able to **target ordinary women of all ages**, encouraging them to take part in sport and showing them that they can achieve.
 - » The lack of celebrity means that the woman in the advert feels **familiar**. The female in the image has her hair scraped up into a ponytail, she is sweating a lot and her clothes are not what society would consider fashionable. For all these reasons, there is a sense that you know someone like her or, in fact, you are her.
- The **dominance of this image** suggests she is the **protagonist of this narrative**, the ‘hero’ according to Vladimir Propp’s character theory. She is heroic because she is embracing sport; she doesn’t appear to care what anyone thinks and has shed any inhibitions. She is an inspiration to other women as it is obvious from her facial expression that she is really enjoying herself and is completely lost in the moment.
- Across the image is what the **campaign** itself calls a **mantra**, “Sweating like a pig, feeling like a fox.” The campaign has taken a derogatory comment, “sweating like a pig” and turned it into something more positive.
 - » **Historically** it was considered un-ladylike to break into a sweat and, for many women, it is still the case. They don’t want to be seen sweating as it makes them red in the face, ruins their make-up and makes them feel unattractive. However, this mantra turns

this on its head and perhaps suggests that by working out, you are becoming healthier and therefore will become more attractive, “like a fox” - a fox being a young, beautiful lady.

- Towards the bottom but still central is the name of the **campaign, or brand logo**, “**This Girl Can**”. This is a very positive statement with **connotations** of determination. It is used to reinforce the idea that all women should exercise and also to convince them that if they try they can succeed in sport.
 - If you were unaware of this campaign, the limited text and unusual image would act like an **enigma code** (Roland Barthes) for the audience, as we want to find out who this character is and what the advert means by, “This Girl Can”.
 - In the top left hand corner of the advert, there is the **hashtag** “**#thisgirlcan**” connecting readers to the campaign’s social media pages, should they wish to follow it or find out more, and there are logos for the **producers** of the campaign – Sport England and the Lottery. These are much smaller and tucked away so as not to detract from the visuals. Use of the hashtag will hopefully connect women with like-minded others and bring a sense of **social cohesion**. It also allows the print campaign to take readers to the complete YouTube advert, allowing them to understand the campaign and see more positive representations of women enjoying sport.
- like the others in this campaign, has a certain ‘rawness’ to it, focusing on **‘real’** women. There is no glossy finish and it doesn’t resemble any of the high-end adverts produced by commercial sporting brands.
- » The females are supposed to be seen as heroic - **aspirational role models** for the readers. Audience members should see something of themselves in these women, bringing their own fear of judgement to the forefront and considering whether it is actually an appropriate fear to have when they see the amount of fun and enjoyment these women seem to be experiencing.
 - In addition, the **brand name**, “This Girl Can” uses the noun “**girl**” as an all-encompassing term. It is used to represent (and target) **the whole of the female population** and make them feel **included**, a force to be reckoned with, a team, a united front.
 - When used in the context of sport, “**girl**” can be thought of as having some negative connotations – “throw like a girl” is a common simile used to mock someone who cannot throw. It plays on the **stereotype that girls can’t do sport**. Perhaps then this statement is in response to that idea, “This Girl Can”.
 - Interestingly though, considering that the campaign is targeting females of all ages, the word “girl” has been used rather than “woman”. “Girl” is usually associated with younger females and there is an argument to say that women over a certain age may feel disconnected from this campaign.

PART 2: STARTING POINTS – Representation

Consider the social and cultural significance of representations of femininity:

- The campaign’s agenda is to encourage women to participate in physical activities by **challenging the dominant ideology**. In order to do this, the campaign portrays women extremely positively.
- **Stereotypically**, women have often been thought of as the weaker sex and often less successful, particularly where sport is concerned. However, this advertising campaign is seeking to **challenge these stereotypes** and convince women of their potential. The female in this image is portrayed from a positive viewpoint: she is represented as independent, confident and happy. There is a clear focus on her face, showing an expression of enjoyment and fun. By **selecting** such an image, the **producers are seeking to challenge the sexism** and male dominance in sport.
- The **processes of selection and production** have been carefully managed. This advert,