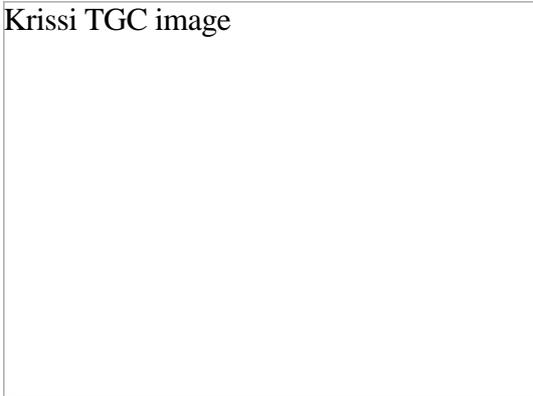


This Girl Can - the importance of being 'normal'

Published 18/04/17 by [Krissi Paterson](#)

Krissi TGC image



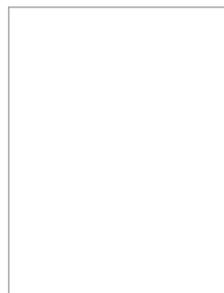
I give my view on Sport England's #ThisGirlCan campaign and how 'normalising' attitudes towards female participation in sport is key to increasing the number of female participants. Elite female athletes in the spotlight are important, but even more so is the everyday normality of seeing people we are familiar with participating - demonstrating that sport is for everyone.

What a time for female sport in this country. Building on an incredible medal return from the Rio Olympics and England Women's Football team's third place finish in the 2015 World Cup, elite female sport is more publicised and celebrated than ever before.

But although this is fantastic, and hopefully inspiring many young girls to engage in sport, as they dream of being the next Jess Ennis, Steph Houghton, Laura Kenny or Sarah Hunter, more than international success is required to make this a long lasting engagement.

I strongly believe the key to increasing female participation in sport is normalising it. If young girls see it as something that females do in the everyday world that surrounds them, they are more likely to continue participating themselves into adulthood, and not drop out when perhaps those dreams of being an elite athlete fade, often even before girls hit their teens.

This is where ['This Girl Can'](#) comes in. Images of girls and women of all shapes, sizes, ages, colours and fitness levels – the kind of women we are surrounded by in our everyday life – taking part in all kinds of sport. For women, it is people they can relate to – not this perfect image of a finely tuned professional athlete, but of someone who is like them. For girls, it is images of people who are like their older sisters, mums, aunts, teachers, the lollipop lady – people in their everyday life. 'This Girl Can' presents sports participation as something that everyone can engage in.



Being a parent is a fantastic motivating tool. Every parent wants their children to be healthy and happy;

setting the example of being active can play significant part in this. I want my children to see it as completely 'normal' - that being active is something the whole family do.

Similarly, as a coach I hope that every time I step on to the pitch or the mats, even though there may be only one or two girls in the session, I hope that those girls, as well as the mums and sisters watching, have a sense that sport is for everyone, including them.

When I first began coaching football, parents would often comment that they loved that their daughters had a female coach. At the time, I didn't fully appreciate what they meant. Now as a parent I really do. We take opportunities to expose our daughters to female coaches when the opportunity arises – not because they'll necessarily coach them any better than a male coach, but because it reaffirms the normality of females being active and involved in sport.

The 'This Girl Can' campaign has reminded me of the importance of how, what we experience in our everyday life, shapes our expectations. The images from the campaign inspire me to get off the settee and be active and to coach; so that perhaps just one or two more girls or women may think, 'Yes, I'll give that a go!'.

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