

## Impact case study (REF3)

<b>Institution:</b> Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU)		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 23		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Increasing women's participation in sport and physical activity		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> August 2013-March 2015		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>
Kaye Richards	Senior Lecturer	2009 – present
Milly Blundell	Senior Lecturer	2006 – present
Simon Roberts	Reader	2004 – present
Matt Reeves	Senior Lecturer	2011 – 2018
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> August 2013-Ongoing		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> N		
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b></p> <p>Despite the acknowledged benefits of physical activity, associated national participation data has indicated a persistent gender gap in sport, with women and girls participating less than their male counterparts. Given this, national strategy to mobilise women and girls to become more physically active is required. Our research examined a targeted sport and physical activity programme for women and girls (14+), funded by Sport England, called 'I Will if You Will' (IWIIYW). It investigated women's and girl's changing patterns of behaviour and attitudes to sport and physical activity, and their engagement with the campaign and associated community education activities. An original aspect of the research was examining the practical application of the Transtheoretical Model (TTM) of behaviour change (Prochaska &amp; DiClemente 1983), for increasing women's participation in physical activity and sport in a community setting. The cognitive and behavioural strategies of this model were examined and mapped across women's life stories of sport and physical activity to show a deep, complex and multi-layered understanding of women's motivation, and behaviour change, and interconnections with 'IWIIYW'. A key recommendation of the research was that for behaviour change in physical activity settings to occur it is essential that women are educated and enabled to use the full range of cognitive and behavioural strategies (as linked to the TTM), in response to different levels of motivational readiness. The breadth of research findings resulted in an increase of Sport England's organisational knowledge, added to the development of national strategy, and informed the ongoing implementation and delivery of sport and physical activity programmes for women and girls across England. This is evident in the design and roll out of Sport England's National Campaign, 'This Girl Can', and the associated development of national educational guidance resources. Consequently, nationally 2.8 million more women have become physically active, 1.6 million women have started or restarted exercise, and there has been a ¼ million increase of sustained participation in women's physical activity weekly. Subsequently, given its recognised success, 'This Girl Can' has now also been licensed for use in Australia (2018).</p>		
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b></p> <p>It is well documented that there are considerable physical, psychological and social benefits for women and girls who are regularly physically active, however, Sport England yearly participation data collected since 2006 has shown a persistent gender gap. In 2012 this national data highlighted that women were participating significantly less in sport and physical activity than men (32.3% of women and 41.7% of men achieving 30 minutes of moderate intensity activity per week) (Sport England, 2012). Additionally, research has indicated that only 12% of 14 year old girls achieve the recommend levels of physical activity, half the number of boys of the same age (Women Sport and Fitness Foundation, 2012). Also, girls' participation significantly drops off after teenage years, yet research has highlighted that both women and girls would like to become more physically active. Given these issues, strategic campaigns and associated community education are still needed to help mobilise women and girls to become physically active. In response to the above, in May 2013 the Borough of Bury was unveiled by Sport England as the location for an intensive yearlong pilot programme called, 'I Will If You Will' (IWIIYW). The aims of this were; 1) to increase women and girls (14+) participation in Sport and Physical Activity (PA)' and 2) to create an associated 'toolkit' of learning for national use. A unique aspect of the community education activities was that it was backed by a major marketing campaign specifically targeted to motivate women and girls to become physically active across a diverse town population</p>		

of 96,000 women (total population 188,000). This approach was the forerunner for the development of Sport England's National Campaign that was launched in 2014 – 'This Girl Can' [R1].

The research undertaken was a comprehensive examination of women's patterns of physical activity, and if and how their attitudes to sport and physical activity changed as a result of the community education, sport and PA programme. Two of the five key components included; 1) a tracking survey administered to both a non-intervention (control) group (n=884) and intervention group (n=373); and 2) in-depth interviews with both groups of women (n=64). The research examined women's motivation for physical activity behaviour change, their engagement, and experiences of 'IWIYW' (including understanding of barriers and enablers of the activities offered), and the changing patterns of physical activity. This provided insight to help ascertain how the associated educational and development activities could be better facilitated to consider a range of psychological processes that influenced women's ongoing behaviour change. For example, helping women to comprehend the benefits of being physically active, and increasing knowledge and awareness via targeted strategies to enable women and girls to read and think about physical activity and sport. These findings were fed into the ongoing 'IWIYW' development phases, through the reporting of findings and engagement via monthly stakeholder meetings with Bury Council (Sport and Recreation), Sport England, and other community health partners (e.g. Primary Care Trust).

A central feature of the research was examining how the Transtheoretical Model (TTM) of behaviour change could be applied and utilised for increasing participation in sport and physical activity. The TTM indicates that people move through specific stages to change their behaviour (from pre-contemplation i.e. not even thinking about becoming physically active through to maintenance i.e. meeting physical activity guidelines for six months or more). Additionally, the model suggests that people use various cognitive and behavioural strategies to become more physically active (known as the processes of change). Here the cognitive and behavioural strategies were examined and mapped across women's life stories of sport and physical activity to show a deep, complex and multi-layered understanding of women's motivation, and behaviour change, and interconnections with 'IWIYW'. The use of the model in this way enabled us to examine the delivery of the cognitive and behavioural components of the educational programme of activity. It also offered insight and guidance into how the theoretical underpinnings translated into the practical setting during different delivery phases of 'IWIYW'.

The key finding of the research was that the TTM was applicable as a behavioural framework for increasing women's participation in physical activity and sport in community settings (See Section 4 Part One). This provided insight on the ways in which the delivery of the programme activity was facilitating women's behaviour change. For example, it was identified that women were under utilising the processes of change, as only three of the ten strategies were being actively used. Further, recommendations were made to delivery partners as to how 'IWIYW' could better facilitate women's utilisation of all the strategies in response to different levels of motivational readiness to change. This consequently informed the development of the learning toolkit and enabled the IWIYW programme to better embed the TTM into practice [R1].

A key recommendation for Sport England and Bury Council was to consider how to embed and apply the theoretical framework (TTM) more robustly and systematically in any future behaviour change programmes, campaigns, and associated activities, i.e. 'This Girl Can'. This denoted that for behaviour change in physical activity settings to occur, it is essential that women are educated, encouraged, and supported to use the full range of cognitive and behavioural strategies more effectively. This recommendation was actioned by both Sport England and Bury Council (see 'Section Four: Details of the Impact', Point One) [R1].

A further recommendation of the research was that future campaigns or programmes of educational activity needed to better accommodate the different motivational factors that drive and sustain women's participation in sport and physical activity. To achieve this we recommended the use of a range of role models in marketing/branding that better represents the diversity of everyday women participating in a greater variety of sports and physical activities. Evidence of how this recommendation was implemented is apparent in the national campaign, 'This Girl Can', and the development of associated educational resources (see 'Section Four: Details of Impact, Point Two). These findings were also shared internationally, alongside Sport England, at the 6<sup>th</sup> International Working Group World Conference on Women in Sport (Helsinki, 2014). In

conclusion, the collective findings of the research were used to maximise the reach and impact of the implementation of 'IWYW' and Sport England's national campaign 'This Girl Can' [R1].

### 3. References to the research

[R1] Blundell, M., Richards, K., Roberts, S., McIlroy, D., and Reeves, M. (2014) Measuring women and girls sport behaviour and attitude change in Bury. Research Report: Liverpool John Moores (LJMU) University (pp 1-75.) Available on request

The analytical approach and report were screened and approved by Senior Researchers at LJMU and findings are awaiting publication in international peer reviewed outlets.

**Funding:** £98,670 Measurement of Women & Girls Sport Behaviour & Attitude Change in Bury. 1 August 2013 – 1 March, 2015 (Contracted dates). Sport England / Bury Council

### 4. Details of the impact

The research led to three core impacts.

#### 1. Enhancing Sport England's organisational learning, and national strategy and policy development

The research and the associated knowledge of behaviour change, which included the TTM [R1], was a key foundational contribution to building Sport England's capability of applying theoretical models into their applied activities and practices. For example 'This Girl Can'. This is corroborated by Sport England's Head of Research:

*"I don't think we were working with any kind of behavioural models at all before that. ...in those early years it wasn't a regular part of conversation, internally and that has definitely changed, over these last 10 years and I think, I Will If You Will was an early example of us ... introducing that into the work and ... it is now much more widespread and common, as a discussion across all of the work that we do ... I Will If You Will was ... a relatively early attempt to do that, to put that type of thinking, very much in the heart of the development of the project and certainly 'This Girl Can' ... informing every decision we made about the design and implementation of the campaign" [E1].*

This is further demonstrated through the inclusion of the TTM as a framework for the Sport England strategy: Towards an Active Nation (2016-2021) [E1]. Evidence of how the research findings demonstrate our role in educating Sport England on the TTM, are also corroborated with other contributions made during different implementation phases of IWYW [E2]. This collectively shows how our work has informed Sport England in adopting a systematic approach in the application of the TTM of behaviour change in their strategic activities [E3]. This result is further corroborated by Sport England's Head of Research [E1].

*"One of the things that struck me, when I was looking back, that was reflected in your work ... was an attempt to more systematically apply behavioural understanding into the design and delivery of opportunities...so I suppose by that I mean the stages of change, the processes of change ... but certainly that attempt to work in that systematic way and some of the learning about what was and wasn't effective, I think did inform, This Girl Can, which similarly attempted to apply that type of behavioural understanding, into the design of the campaign and some of the associated activities."*

More recently, Sport England have indicated in their strategy (2021-2031) 'Uniting the Movement' that they will 'continue to develop and deliver behavioural campaigns, building on the success of This Girl Can' and other targeted campaigns.

#### 2. Informing the development of national educational resource guidance for increasing women's participation in sport and physical activity

Our research findings have contributed to a number of national educational guidance resources which are utilised by Sport England's key partners and all organisations in the sector who want to engage women and girls such as National Governing Bodies of Sport and County Sport Partnerships across England. To increase women and girls (14+) participation in sport and physical activity nationally, the creation of a 'toolkit' of learning that could be replicated elsewhere to create, promote and support sports opportunities and activities, was developed based on key learnings from the 'IWYW' evaluation (The 'IWYW' evaluation is listed as a contribution source in this toolkit (page 49) [E4]. This toolkit supported the roll out of 'This Girl Can' across England. This was corroborated below:

*“So I think ...all of ... our experiences with I Will If You Will informed the subsequent decisions we made around This Girl Can. One of the kind of specific ways that happened was ... I don't know if you ever saw this, ... but we produced ... a compilation of some of I Will If You Will, this advice pack called 'Go Where Women Are' [a learning tool kit]” (Head of Research, Sport England) [E1].*

The learning toolkit resource, which 13,000 national partners have signed up to use [E3], explores current understanding of women, their relevant motivations, barriers and triggers to getting more active, and what this means for sports and exercise activities and initiatives. The toolkit has also been cited in Public Health England's evidenced-based guidance for commissioners understanding and addressing inequalities in physical activity (2021). [E5]

Following the development of Sport England's 'Go Where Women are' insight pack, Sport England subsequently developed 'Helping Women and Girls to Get Active: A Practical Guide' to support organisations in practical implementation strategies. Our research findings were part of the learning that contributed to the development of this document. This is evidenced in the document with the following statement:

*“Sport England has funded programmes aiming to increase the attraction of sport and physical activity to women and girls – including more than £2m for a large-scale practical investigation in Bury, Greater Manchester called I Will If You Will (IWIYW). We have spent time pulling together all of this valuable learning, and we hope that you find this resource useful” [E6]*

This was further corroborated by the then Sport Minister Helen Grant:

*“All the lessons learnt from phase one of I Will If You Will are currently being collated into a guide that will be available for other councils and organisations to use when setting up a programme to help get more women and girls take part in sport and physical activity.” [E6]*

### **3. Increasing women's participation and engagement in sport and physical activity**

Our research findings were used to inform both the development and delivery of the local pilot IWIYW and Sport England's National Campaign, 'This Girl Can' through sharing research insight in relation to factors that influence sport and physical behaviour change for women. This is corroborated by Sport England below:

*“Targeting delivery strategies to different types of women ... thinking about how different groups of women, what motivates them, what's appealing to them, what's available and then those kind of social and emotional influences alongside ... practical influences and what people do were all things I think that our own understanding, changed through the experience of being involved with I Will If You Will and those experiences informed what we did subsequently [This Girl Can].” (Sport England Head of Research) [E1].*

Added to this, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, Final Report of the Governments Women and Sport Advisory Board, stated that IWIYW in Bury is yielding some valuable insight (2015) [E7].

Our findings were further utilised in the development of the Bury Council Physical Activity and Sport Strategy (2015-2020). In the section titled 'Summary of what evidence tells us works' it identifies that significant learning has been developed through phase one of the programme [IWIYW] which informed the strategy. The strategy acknowledges that *“bringing innovative behaviour change thinking to traditional sports development is challenging but necessary and productive” [E8].*

IWIYW has delivered over 25,000 activity sessions and has engaged 6,500 women and girls. The impact of this engagement in activity is evidenced by Councillor Jane Lewis, Cabinet Member for Communities and Culture (Bury Council):

*“We've gathered some great stories from some really inspirational ladies, who've managed to take that first step, break down the barriers and realise a more active lifestyle. We've been blown away by the journey some of our local ladies have embarked on and what they've managed to achieve” [E6].*

This is further evidenced by Phil Smith, The Sport England Director of Sport highlighting the impact of IWIYW both locally and nationally:

*“I Will if You Will has already had a major impact locally and the lessons learned so far have allowed us to better understand how women and girls take part in sport. It's also helped shape our new national 'This Girl Can' campaign. With two million more men than women playing regular sport, I Will If You Will can help us close the gender gap.” [E6]*

Given the success of the first phase of 'IWIYW' further funding (£2M) was provided by Sport England to continue to build upon this and continue to increase women and girls (14+) sport and physical activity participation. This is corroborated as follows by both Sport England and Bury Council:

*"We are really pleased to be working with Bury Council to extend and expand 'I Will If You Will'. Great results have been achieved so far and there are strong plans for the next two years."* (Phil Smith Director of Sport, Sport England) [E6].

*"Continuing the programme for another two years is massively important. It gives us a fantastic opportunity to build on what has already been achieved and carry on working towards a borough where being regularly active is the norm and second nature for Bury women and girls. A fitter, happier, healthier population is what we want to achieve."* (Councillor Jane Lewis, Cabinet Member of Communities and Culture, Bury Council) [E6].

The learnings of the IWIYW evaluation have been applied on a national scale to reduce the gender gap in sport, by getting more women and girls physically active. The Lancet Public Health Editorial (August, 2019: E360) highlighted 'This Girl Can' as a promising intervention in tackling the physical activity gender gap in sport. The national collective impact accumulated is evident below [E9 & E3]:

- **2.8 million** women being more active
- **1.6 of the 2.8 million** started or restarted exercise (e.g. got back into exercise after a break)
- **¼ million** increase of sustained participation in physical activity weekly (reduction in the gender gap based on the national yearly Sport England Active People survey data)
- **95 million** views of the initial media campaign
- **1.2 million** visits to its website
- **6.8 million** women aged 14-40 recognised the campaign advert
- **£66 million** total gross value to economy
- **£320 million** total economic value of health benefits
- **£387million** total estimated value.

Alongside this national impact, 'This Girl Can' has been adopted by Australia state government to reduce the gender gap in sport. This is evidenced in the statement, *"Australia is the first country in the world to license this powerful campaign"* [E10], and further corroborated below:

*"Following the success of 'This Girl Can' England, VicHealth, an Australian state government health promotion agency, entered into a licence agreement with Sport England to launch 'This Girl Can' in the state of Victoria"* (Rowe and Sherry, 2020: 168).

##### **5. Sources to corroborate the impact**

**Evidence 1:** Impact Interview with Head of Research, Evaluation and Analysis at Sport England & Sport England: Towards an Active Nation: Strategy 2016-2021 (see specifically pp. 6 & 8 re behaviour change model)

**Evidence 2:** Strategic Supplier Meeting Minutes & Strategic Supplier Meeting PowerPoint Presentation Example (including Behavioural Change Model content)

**Evidence 3:** Sport England 'Applying Behaviour Change Theories' publication & Sport England (2020) 'This Girl Can' Campaign Summary Report (see page 24)

**Evidence 4:** Sport England toolkit 'Go Where Women Are: Insight on engaging women and girls in sport and exercise' (see page 49 which cites 'IWIYW' evaluation)

**Evidence 5:** Public Health England (2021) 'Understanding and addressing inequalities in physical activity-Evidence based guidance for commissioners' (see page 41)

**Evidence 6:** Sport England resource guidance 'Helping Women and Girls to Get Active: A Practical Guide' (see page 5) & Sport England webpage 'I Will If You Will to continue in Bury' (<https://www.sportengland.org/news/i-will-if-you-will-to-continue-in-bury>)

**Evidence 7:** Department for Culture, Media and Sport (2015) Final Report of the Government's Women and Sport Advisory Board (see page 7)

**Evidence 8:** Bury Council (2015-2020) Physical Activity and Sport Strategy (see page 22, point 2.37).

**Evidence 9:** Sport England 'This Girl Can' Phase One Report, November 2014-2015

**Evidence 10:** 'This Girl Can' Australia (Victoria) 'About Us' (<https://thisgirlcan.com.au/about-us/>)