



# YEP, I RUN LIKE A GIRL.

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**As a copywriter, I am constantly aware of the effect that language has in business and marketing - to inform, but also persuade.**

And the language we use in day-to-day life - whether it be at work or at home - is what builds our reality. So when I asked my six-year-old daughter to show me what it meant to 'run like a girl', I was absolutely stoked when she raised her arms, threw back her leg and took off like a freight train.

But when I asked my husband the same question, I didn't get the same response.

Why? Because somewhere between adolescence and adulthood, we adopt gender stereotypes as the norm. Quite literally, we create our own reality.

Language is so developed in our unconscious bias that sometimes we don't even realise that we are reinforcing a stereotype.

How many of us have used the phrase 'man up' without considering that strength is not defined by sex or gender?

Or 'don't be a pussy', implying that having a particular body feature is indicative of being a coward?

## ***#LikeAGirl***

When Proctor and Gamble released the Always 'Like a Girl' campaign, I fell in love.

The three-minute video asks both men and women - and a kid brother - what it means to run, throw and fight like a girl. Their responses

are feeble and stereotyped, with arms flapping and legs flailing. One woman even puts her hands up to her head, saying “oh my hair”, as she flounces.

--pubescent girls are then asked the same question, and their responses are glorious. They kick, they run and they punch with gusto. They are serious, they are confident and they are determined. There is no mocking here.

Somewhere, along the way, we lose our way. We no longer own our own ideas of what it means to be a girl – instead, we adopt and internalise social stereotypes. Somewhere between girlhood and womanhood we are socialised to believe that the meaning of the phrase ‘like a girl’ is feeble, and we implicitly accept the connotations of negativity associated with it.

**‘Like a girl’** is clearly a gendered insult, and although often used by males towards other males, I’ve heard many women use the term. It implies inferiority – if you cry like a girl, run like a girl or even scream like a girl – it all means the same thing.

*You are weak, like a girl.*

But what is interesting is that the group of pre-adolescent girls in this campaign, unlike the rest of the world, hasn’t yet learnt that the term is a negative stereotype. The young girls in the campaign interpret it positively, and it’s the grown women who perform mockingly, with their behavior reiterating the societal belief of what it means to do something ‘like a girl’. There is no power in their body language. They are impotent and weak.

It highlights that not only is language disempowering but also that, as women, we

undergo a transition in puberty that moves beyond the physical, psychological, and emotional. It’s also very social. When it is claimed that over 50% of girls experience a drop in confidence during puberty, and that most of them consider the term ‘like a girl’ to be an insult, it is clear that pre-adolescence is the time in which our language has a significant bearing on gender values. When the phrase ‘like a girl’ is used as a negative, it illustrates just how much. No longer are we strong and independent – we are subject to linguistic acts having, at least in theory, a value and a truth.

Philosopher John Austin believed that words – “performance utterances” – are used as a means of social control. Words or phrases can actually accomplish something in the real world, forging a material reality. Nowhere is this more evident than in modern society, with gendered language quietly affecting the subconsciousness of young girls and reshaping their perceptions of what it means to be female.

That’s why Proctor and Gamble’s Always campaign is so wonderful. It says everything, without saying a thing. It doesn’t state a case about language and stereotyping – it makes one.

So tomorrow morning when I ask my daughter to throw like a girl, I’ll encourage her to hurl that damn ball across the lawn. I’ll be more conscious of my word choices and when she does throw like a girl, I’ll high-five her. Because she’ll be doing it like a boss. And like a girl.

“Yes, I kick like a girl and I swim like a girl and I walk like a girl and I wake up in the morning like a girl – because I am a girl. And that is not something I should be ashamed of”.