

making parks better for teenage girls



Make Space for Girls

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Who are we?

- A charity working to make our parks, recs, playing fields etc, more welcoming to teenage girls, non-binary young people and boys for whom current provision doesn't work.
- Not about painting things pink/gender segregation/designing out boys.
- It's about
 - designing in girls.
 - thinking about these spaces differently.
 - tackling the barriers in the system.
 - starting the conversations early and real engagement.

Is it different for boys and girls?

- When facilities are built for teenagers these almost always consist of:
 - Skate park;
 - MUGA or basketball court, or both;
 - BMX track
- Often enshrined in play strategies, planning guidance and council practice
 - “[Our aim is to] provide activity zones for young adults of 12+ years in all the major settlements (e.g. MUGA, skatepark, BMX track etc.)” : Council Play Area Audit and Action Plan, 2020*
 - “[Play areas] can be complemented by other facilities including Multi Use Games Areas (MUGAs) and skateboard parks etc.” Fields in Trust Guidance: Beyond the Six Hectare Standard*
- Dominated by boys and young men. Our survey in 2023: over 90% of MUGA users and over 80% skate park users were boys

what does research tell us?

- Girls feel highly monitored/judged in outdoor spaces by boys, girls and adults in the wider community. Judgement rooted in:
 - Socio-cultural expectations of the behaviour of young women and girls (e.g. staying indoors/being a 'good girl').
 - Gender stereotypes around sport and exercise (e.g. girls are less capable/shouldn't be doing it, and notions of femininity/masculinity associated with being active).
 - Lack of clear, purposeful physical activity leads to judgements around why girls are in park spaces (e.g. loitering, attention seeking, antisocial behaviour).
 - 37% of girls feel judged for hanging around in parks, compared to 25% of boys

what does research tell us?

- Glasgow research summer 2021: only 20% of women and girls who used parks felt comfortable in their chosen park.
- Rowntree Park, York: 90% of girls who were into skating age 10-17 felt uncomfortable on their local skate park.
- Research in Yorkshire published July 2022 (Make Space for Us):
 - Parks don't meet these needs for the majority of girls: 68% saying there is nothing for them to do
 - 49% of girls did not feel safe to exercise in the park compared to 26% of boys.
 - 50% reporting there are no sporting activities for them.
 - 59% of girls don't feel welcome in parks because the spaces are dominated by boys.

MUGAs

- Dr Anna Barker and team at Leeds University: showed images of various MUGAs to 50 teenage girls aged 13-18 years old. Full results at [Addendum - What do teenage girls like and dislike about park play spaces and MUGAs.pdf \(whiterose.ac.uk\)](#)
 - *'You can just go play sports in it, instead of like sitting on a field and getting muddy.'*
 - *"It would be mainly boys...it might make you feel more uncomfortable. It's just like not a very good place."*
 - *'I feel like there should be like different sections, so one for males and one for girls. Coz...if a girl goes there, like a group of girls, like they (boys)'ll just kick you out.'*
 - *'I don't really like that one because there's only...one entrance to get out...you'd feel trapped.'*

Conclusions...

Girls and young women

- generally perceived MUGAs as male dominated and exclusionary for girls
- bring their actual lived experience of MUGAs and fenced pitches to how they approach a new space;
- felt unsafe in enclosed spaces with fewer/less visible exits or obstructed escape routes where they could be 'trapped'.
- focussed on the MUGAs external environment: importance of passive surveillance; the fear of predatory men



do girls want change to happen?

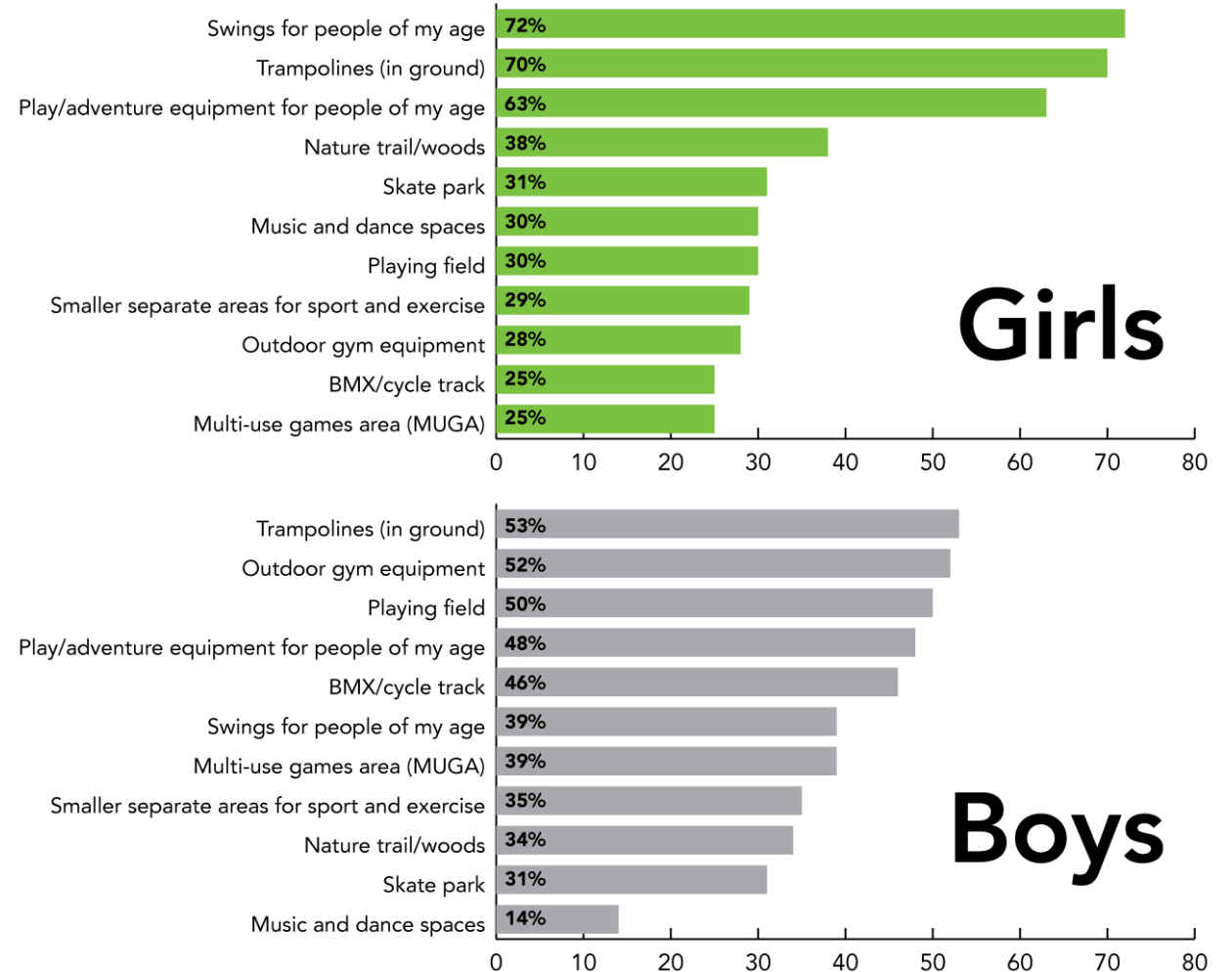
- Women in Sport talked to 1,518 girls age 12-18 between October 2020 and Feb 2021
 - 82% of girls will put more effort into being fit and active after the pandemic;
 - 55% said being physically active makes them happier;
 - 54% said being physically active made them less stressed.
- In a Girlguiding survey, 82% of girls thought they should be more involved in designing parks and open spaces.
- *“Now, parks help me if I get upset or angry. As long as there is a light in the park, I am happy”*

What do teenagers want?

Research published by Women in Sport/Yorkshire Sport in 2022

194 girls; 185 boys; age 13-15.

Question: what would make you more active in the park?



challenges

Football FOUNDATION Insight May 2021:

“Women and girls really appreciate their own space”

Over 90% of MUGA users are men and boys... men and boys have their own space.

How can this be changed?

- build it and they will come doesn't work; need build it and activate it;
- how do we overcome the belief that MUGAs are male spaces?
- need to organise and book use by teenage girls;
- sole use for teenage girls at certain time- but what if its empty then?
- how to stop boy's and men's team block booking.
- Monitor and evaluation [Active Design \(sportengland-production-files.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com\)](https://sportengland-production-files.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com)
- How do we share and learn what works and what doesn't work?