

MAKE SPACE FOR GIRLS BROOMFIELD

Summary of the evidence case for change from Make Space for Girls

Introduction

Provision for teenagers in parks and public spaces is usually considered in terms of a relatively small range of facilities – skate parks, MUGAs and other pitches and BMX or pump tracks. This approach is often enshrined in play or park strategies. While no one actively sets out to make these places unwelcoming to teenage girls, in practice they all tend to be dominated by boys and young men and so teenage girls do not have spaces that they can claim for play.

In a recent survey carried out by Make Space for Girls in Spring 2023, 92% of the users of fenced pitches (MUGAs) were boys and young men; as were over 84% of the users of skateparks.

The gendered use of fenced pitches (MUGAs) has been subject to very little research; but there has been more research on skateparks eg [Whatsitliketobeagirlskateboarder.pdf](#) (2023) from the University of Nottingham, which states in its introduction: *“that despite [a] rhetoric of openness, skateboarding is in practice dominated by white, middle-class, male participants, with a historic prevalence of hypermasculine and homophobic culture”*.

The absence of provision for play for teenage girls has a number of implications: for the rights of girls and for their sense of belonging in the wider community; for the impact on activity levels of teenage girls and the consequential impact on physical health and for the impact on mental health. This means that creating outdoor spaces which include them is important.

Recommendation

Councils need to create parks that work better for teenagers and girls, non-binary young people and those boys for whom the current standard teen provision isn't working. Change isn't about painting areas pink, separating boys and girls. Nor is it about undermining the use of skateparks or MUGAs (which have roles to play in a balanced teenage provision).

It is about creating spaces in our parks that are more inclusive for all. It means:

- thinking about these spaces differently;
- engaging with girls and minoritized genders;
- creating great social value;
- supporting people to do things differently

Data

It is important to listen to what girls and young women say about parks. Research in Yorkshire published July 2022 ([Make Space for Us](#)) showed:

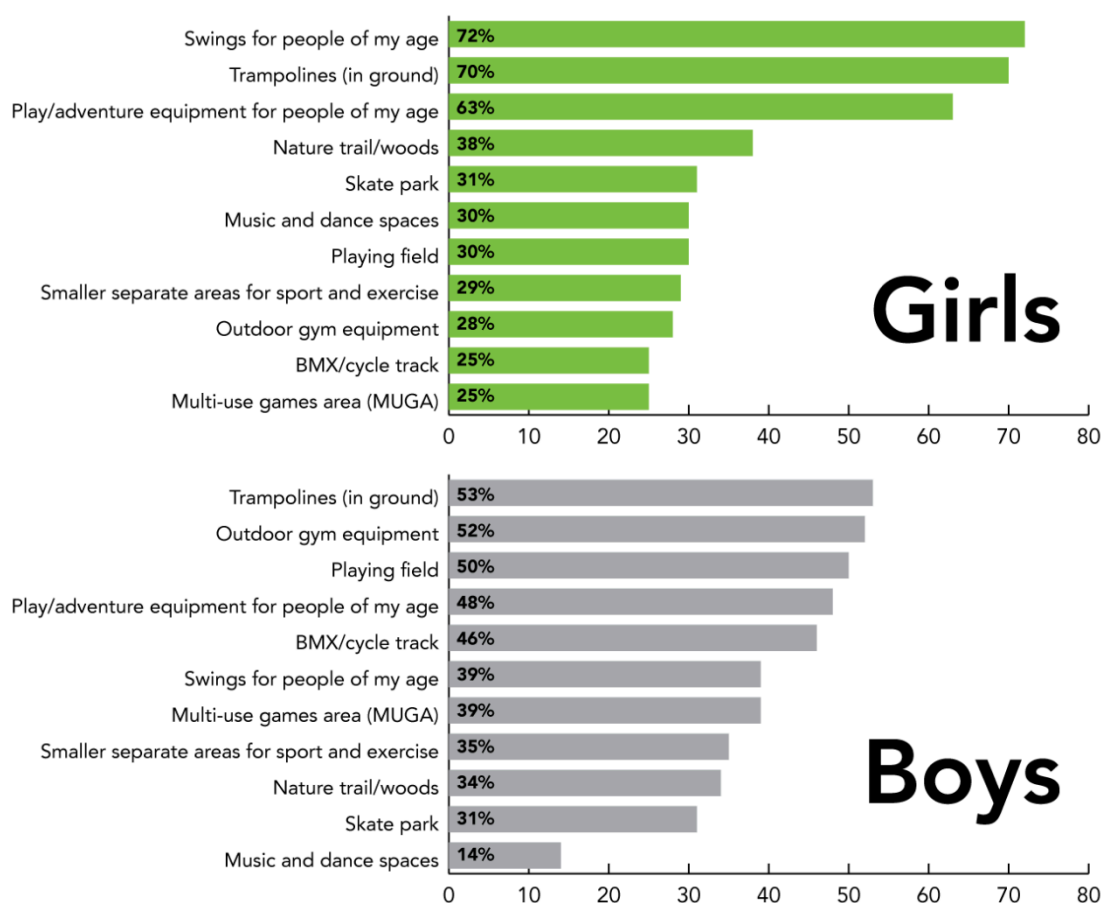
- Parks don't meet the needs of the majority of girls: 68% saying there is nothing for them to do and 50% reporting there are no sporting activities for them.
- 49% of girls don't feel safe to exercise in parks compared to 26% of boys.
- 59% of girls don't feel welcome in parks because the spaces are dominated by boys.

During 2022 and 2023, MSFG teamed up with Julia King from LSE Cities to explore in greater detail how gender impacted the way that young people experienced the public realm (see full report at

[Young-Researchers-in-Residence](#)). The quantitative and qualitative results from that research shows how young people in general and young women in particular have been designed out of public spaces, like parks. Julia King presented this work at events during the Conservative and Labour Party conferences in autumn 2023.

Safety in parks is a big issue for teenage girls and there can be a gap between their views on this and the views of some park professionals. For example, in recent work on parks in West Yorkshire, 89% of park professionals felt that their local parks were safe – but only 22% of teenage girls thought the same.

Research shows clearly that the current standard teen provision doesn't work for teenage girls; and doesn't work for a lot of boys. When 185 teenage boys and 194 teenage girls were asked what was likely to make them more active in the park, this was the result:



This data helps to frame a council's obligations to proactively consider the need to reduce the inequality suffered by disadvantaged groups as part of complying with the Public Sector Equality Duty under the Equality Act 2010.

Many park and play equality assessments recognise how disability can be a bar to enjoying play: but few recognise the impact of gender. The Public Sector Equality Duty provides a fantastic lens through which to improve the gender inclusivity of parks.