**Under embargo until 22:30 Monday 24th August 2020**

**THIS GIRL CAN URGES FITNESS INDUSTRY TO MAKE SIMPLE CHANGES TO GYMS AND POOLS TO ENCOURAGE WOMEN BACK IN GREATER NUMBERS**

* *Findings come after insights show people are keen to get back to newly reopened gyms and pools, but many haven’t visited yet.*
* *Women would like to see simple changes such as a code of conduct in the weights room and hooks by the pool, all of which could increase women’s activity levels which are still lower than men’s.*

One month after gyms and pools reopened, Sport England’s This Girl Can campaign has revealed the top five things its community of women want to see in gyms and pools to make them more accessible.

Women make up 54% of the nearly 3million public leisure memberships. Add to that the huge number holding private gym memberships, and women play a key part in helping the fitness industry get back on its feet.

Encouragingly, Sport England data shows that nearly three quarters of people say they are likely to return to using the gym now they’ve reopened, but many still haven’t visited yet.

New research within the This Girl Can community shows that it isn’t just the pandemic that is holding them back – in fact, of those women who have returned to gyms and pools, 87% said they felt safe with the anti-COVID-19 measures that are in place with facilities adhering to government guidance. However only 27% of the This Girl Can community have actually visited a gym since they were allowed to reopen on 25th July, and even less have visited a swimming pool (13%).

The research revealed other reasons that could be putting women off. Half of women surveyed (51%) reported feeling intimidated or judged when they are at a gym or fitness class, citing reasons such as male gym members dominating equipment (64%), feeling like the space was for fitter people (62%) and feeling like they were being looked at by other members (56%). Over a quarter of women (27%) also reported the same feelings when visiting a swimming pool, with the majority (73%) saying it’s because they didn’t feel comfortable in their swimwear.

To combat these concerns, This Girl Can asked women what they would like to see introduced (alongside ongoing safety measures) to help make them feel more welcome and encouraged to visit. The top five answers were:

* A discreet offer from staff to help with equipment (48%)
* A code of conduct in the weights room like time limits and re-racking heavy weights after use (36%)
* Hooks by the pool to hang towels to restrict time walking in swimming costume (44%)
* Women’s only areas / dedicated swim time for women (36%)
* Fewer full-length mirrors (21%)

As a result of these findings, This Girl Can is calling on organisations in the fitness industry to start making small changes like these to help women get back to exercise.

**Kate Dale, Campaign Lead for This Girl Can says:** “We’ve known for a while that many women feel intimidated or a sense of judgement when they are exercising in public spaces like gyms and pools, which is a major barrier to them getting active. We’re hearing from women that a lot of the measures being introduced already in gyms and pools to help with the pandemic, such as advanced booking systems to limit numbers and social distancing, are already easing some of those fears of judgement because they can see how many people are going to be in the pool in advance of the session for example.

“But many women have frozen or given up their membership and have found alternative ways of getting active. If the fitness industry wants to bring female customers back, or attract new ones, they need to make the changes women have been asking for, for years, or risk losing them as customers forever. Simple things like having hooks by the pool for towels so women don’t have to walk around in their costumes through the pool or gym areas, a code of conduct in the weights room, fewer full length mirrors, women-only sessions or areas and helpful staff can make a huge difference in stopping women from feeling intimidated or judged. We urge the fitness industry to listen to women and make these simple and low-cost changes.”

**-Ends-**

**Notes To Editor**

**This Girl Can Survey**

This Girl Can surveyed 358 members of their online community and wider partners via SurveyMonkey.

**About Sport England research**

Savanta ComRes interviewed 2,029 English adults (16+) online from 31 July to 3 August 2020 . Data were weighted to be demographically representative of English adults by gender, age, region, social grade and the estimated households with children under 16. Savanta ComRes is a member of the British Polling Council and abides by its rules. Full data tables [here](https://indd.adobe.com/view/793b48d5-bbcd-4de3-a50f-11d241a506b3).

**About This Girl Can**

Since 2015, Sport England has been working to address the significant gender gap found in sports and exercise, to build women’s confidence around being active, and help them meet the Chief Medical Officer’s guidance.

The campaign was based on the insight that 75% of women say they want to do more sporting activities or exercise, but one of the unifying barriers found to be holding them back is the fear of judgement.

This Girl Can’s objective is to encourage women to engage in physical activity regardless of shape, size, age or ability.

**Contact**

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