

Technological Basics I: The Exam Project Report
The Gym-Girls-GUI
Building a prototype for an application to unite women in fitness

Module: Technological Basics I

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GYM-GIRLS-GUI – Research, Social Impact, Uniqueness

The fitness industry has seen a surge in participation from people of all genders. “With the rise of media-oriented ‘workout culture’, and parallel ‘wellness’ trends in society, gym training has become increasingly popular” (Turnock 2021, 1). Consequently, the gym has become an increasing site for social research; More recently, scholars are particularly interested in analyzing the gendered norms of gym cultures and spaces (cf. Clark 2017, Fisher et. Al. 2021, Vasudevan 2021).

Despite promoted inclusivity, women often face perceived barriers in gym culture, leading to feelings of intimidation and discomfort. This project aims to address these challenges by developing a user-friendly application that unites women in fitness, facilitates finding of female gym partners, and provides a safe space for exchanging experiences and tips. When developing my idea on researching and designing an application to build in context of this course, I put an emphasis on creating something that I would personally make use of.

Having started attending the gym regularly a few months ago, I experienced the challenges firsthand. The initial struggle to settle in and the constant feeling of being surrounded by a predominantly male environment fueled the desire to create a solution. I remember feeling uncomfortable in the beginning, having little to no knowledge about how everything worked. Near spaces predominantly used by men, like the weights and bench press area, I often found myself being overly aware of the fact that I am a woman.

My research for an application that addresses the unique challenges women face in fitness, consisted of three main aspects: literature research; looking into existing platforms that address similar issues; and conducting a sort of own research by asking among my friends. When reading on women’s gendered experiences within mixed-gendered gym spaces, I recognized my own experiences in a lot of them. In her research paper, Clark (2017) discusses ‘the gaze’ and its impact on the female experience: How there are different types of female subject formation, the often discussed ‘male gaze’ theory but also more internalized gazing forms of women between women or self-objectification. I often, especially in the beginning, felt hyperaware of my appearance, self-conscious, anxious, or in a position of comparing myself to others. “For many women”, Fisher (2021) describes, “the gym space [as] an arena of constant evaluation, not just on their physical capabilities but also on their experience”, the gym experience as “isolating”, and “issues of body image and evaluation on skills” (p. 484) as anxiety inducing.

One way women negotiate the sometimes disempowering spaces of mixed-gender gyms is to attend women-only gyms or sections. While they may help women to participate more freely, internalized judgement and self-surveillance remains. Moreover, she argues, this space “served to further exclude them from more male-dominated sections” (p. 485).

My gym for example offers “Damensauna” every Tuesday, which means the spa is only open for women. Needless to say, I only go on Tuesdays, even though I would want to go more often.

Women entering male-dominated gym environments therefore often encounter challenges that hinder their full participation in fitness activities. I realized I needed an application which helps women navigate the gym space more comfortably. Implementing features to help locate gyms that offer women-only options was crucial, but I found it more important to include features to unite women, to encourage them and to lower discomfort in male-dominated spaces by approaching them together: connect women within the same gym membership or city; provide safe spaces for exchange; help women find other women with similar fitness goals to support each other and share experiences and tips.

When looking into other applications I realized, while there is great deal of fitness focused options, there are none that specifically target and emphasize the unique challenges women face. Most of them allow you to track physical progress and nutrition or log your workouts as a more isolated and personal form of fitness journey documentation. More community-based applications allow you to connect with friends and compete in fitness challenges with them. There are also versions which promote finding the perfect “gym buddy” or workout partner. While the general idea is to create a supportive community, the sole focus on matching algorithms makes them appear dating-app-like. I wanted to avoid any forced dynamics or sources of further objectification.

I told four of my friends who regularly go to the gym about my plans with the project to gain feedback and assess the demand on such an application. My two male friends report rarely feeling uncomfortable, and that they did not struggle to settle in at the beginning since they already had a good number of friends, either at their gym or in general, to which they could resort to for advice or help. Both of my female friends however, said that it took them a while to get used to the environment, that they often feel unsure, and that they wished for an accompanying friend or source of support.

We exchanged ideas on features we found important to address struggles we seemed to share. I will elaborate on these features, how I tried to implement them, and what possible enhancements for future work on the application could look like, in the next section.

Features, Implementation, and Potential Enhancements

I started by using Tkinter as the basis for creating my GUI. I wanted it to be a user-friendly interface and the format to resemble an app on your phone, so I set the geometry accordingly.

The GUI itself consists of three frames, filled with widgets such as labels, buttons, and entry boxes:

The first frame contains two Entry boxes for putting in a username and password, just like you would in any other app. The “Join GymGirls” Button leads you to the main frame of the application. I did not add the main widgets at this point since I wanted it to be easily navigated. The only option is therefore to create your profile. When “Create Profile” is clicked, users can input personal details such as name, age, gym membership, fitness goals, and whether they're seeking a gym partner. This provides the foundation of the community-based platform I am trying to create. This way, users can compare their interests to others and make valuable connections.

The “Save Profile”-Button leads you back to the main frame. This is the central hub of GymGirls. I added buttons to the interface that still require logic to be implemented and provide room for future enhancement. They will enable users to explore various functionalities. Under “Share Your Training” I imagine users to share workout routines, thereby helping newcomers find inspiration and structure, but also some sort of calendar or time schedule mechanism in which they can log training times and availability. Similar to the “Connect with Gym Girls at your Gym” feature, this promotes the formation of workout partnerships and conveys a sense of camaraderie and support.

If desired, users will have the possibility to locate Gyms that offer Women-only options.

The “Share Experiences”-Button should encourage users to share their fitness journey, challenges, and successes to help support and motivate others. It will also provide a safe space to address concerns related to gym culture and inclusivity, emphasizing the overall objective of GymGirls:

To create an environment where women feel connected and supported in navigating their fitness journey. By providing a space for networking, sharing and exchange, GymGirls aims to break down barriers, promote inclusivity, and contribute to a transformative shift in the landscape of gym culture for women.

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