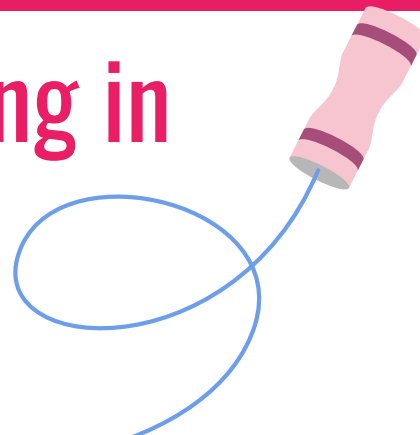
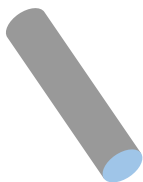




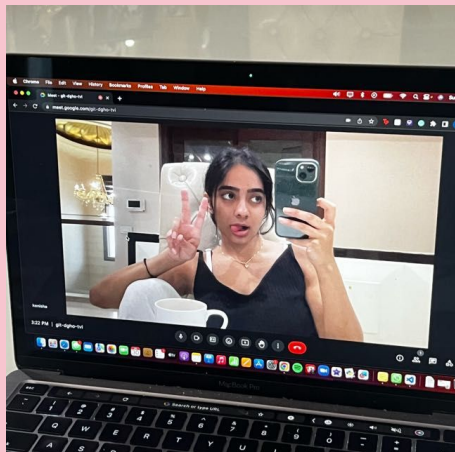
Unlocking Movement:

Understanding Real-World Learning in
the Gym

Needfinding Report



Meet the team!



Kenisha Vaswani



Animesh Sachan



Jenil Prajapati

The background features several abstract geometric elements: a blue line forming a loop on the left, a pink cylindrical object at the top left, a grey cylindrical object at the top right, a purple ring on the right, and a blue and purple cylindrical object at the bottom right. The text is centered in the middle of the slide.

01

Research question & goals

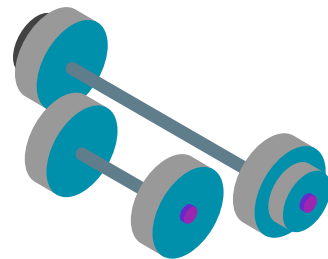
Embodied Learning (Theme 4)

Learning in the gym does not happen in a classroom. It happens through movement, repetition, and trial and error. People build physical skills while managing fatigue, time pressure, and self-consciousness.

Our research focuses on how gym-goers actually learn:

- How they try new movements?
- How they adjust through experience?
- How they move from uncertainty to confidence?

The gym is where learning happens in motion.





The 'Why': Understanding Skill Learning in the Gym

The gym is a real-world learning environment. People don't just exercise, they experiment, adjust, and try to improve through repeated practice. Unlike classrooms, learning here happens under pressure: limited time, social anxiety, and physical fatigue.

Why does studying this matter?

- Many gym-goers feel unsure if they're "doing it right"
- Poor form can lead to injury or stalled progress
- Learning is self-directed, informal, and often lonely
- Design opportunities exist in moments *during practice*



02

Participant profiles + recruitment

THE PLAN

Understand how recreational gym-goers learn and improve lifting technique during real workouts.



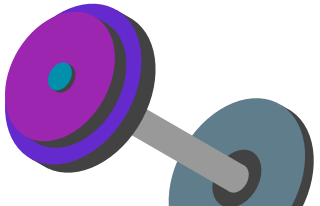
Non UCSB Students



**In person
Interviews**



**Observation in real
gym context**



WHO?

Recreational gym-goers who lift weights

Who:

- Recreational gym-goers
- Not working as a personal trainer
- Mix of beginner, intermediate, and professional lifters

Why:

- They rely on self-observation
- Experiences vary widely by skill level
- They encounter learning challenges during real workouts



WHERE?

At or around local gyms

Why context matters:

- Lets us observe real routines and habits
- Grounds responses in fresh, lived experiences
- Captures differences before and after a workout
- Reveals learning moments in real time

WHEN?

30-60 mins interviews

Time constraints:

- Evening or weekends
- Before and after workouts
- Schedule 2-3 days before so they can plan workouts accordingly

We spoke to..



Rosaline



Adam



Jose

Fieldwork





...and the questions we asked

- Is there anything you're currently trying to get better at in the gym?
- When you're doing a lift, how do you know if it went well?
- Tell me about a time you felt unsure during a workout.
- What do you do when something feels off while lifting?
- How do you usually get feedback on your form?
- How did you originally learn how to do these exercises?
- Have you ever worried you were doing an exercise wrong?
- What's usually going through your head between sets?
- What's frustrating about trying to get better at lifting?



03

Empathy Maps

ROSALINE



- 32 Years old
- Parent
- Working
- Doing an online degree
- Goes to the gym 5 times a week
- Interview: Outside Planet Fitness

Empathy Map (Rosaline)



SAY

"I hate being on my phone at the gym."

"I feel like everyone's watching me."

DO

Arrives with a clear plan to finish quickly

Avoids using her phone during workouts

"I go a lot, but I still feel unsure sometimes."

"The gym is kind of my only 'me' time."

"I don't have time to overthink every set"

Watches others discreetly instead of asking questions

Relies on memory for form cues

Chooses machines over free weights when unsure

THINK

"I hope I'm doing this right."

"Everyone else seems confident."

FEEL

Self-conscious

Determined

"I can't afford to waste time here."

"I want results, but I don't know what I'm missing."

"I don't want to look stupid."

Proud of showing up consistently

Motivated but unsure

Anxious about being judged

ADAM



- 23 Years old
- Employee 9–5
- Fast food worker
- Goes to the gym 5 times a week
- Interview: Opposite Planet Fitness

Empathy Map (Adam)

SAY

"I'm just trying to add more weight to my workouts."

"If I feel like I couldn't do anymore, then it went well."

DO

Judges workout quality by soreness and fatigue

Self-checks form using mirrors or bodily feel

"I felt unsure when a lot of people were there."

"If it doesn't feel good the second time, I just go home."

"I care too much about what other people think."

Stops or leaves early when something feels off

Learns from online videos and self experimentation

Reflects mentally during rest between sets

THINK

"More weight equals progress."

"If it hurts, I might be doing it wrong."

FEEL

Motivated by beating previous performance

Discouraged in crowded gym environments

"Other people are watching and judging me."

"Good sets should feel exhausting."

"I need to figure this out on my own."

Self-conscious when surrounded by others

Anxious when experiencing unfamiliar pain

Frustrated by uncertainty around form and improvement

JOSE



- 21 Years old
- SBCC Student
- Goes to the gym 3 times a week
- Learns primarily through family
- Interview: Behind Girvetz Hall

Empathy Map (Jose)

SAY

"I go to the gym like three times a week."

"You might struggle at the end, but once you put it down you feel it."

"I'll just ask my brothers — they know their stuff."

"If I'm doing it wrong in the middle of the gym, it makes it worse."

"Go lower weight, go slower, and just feel it."

DO

Lifts slower when unsure about technique.

Goes to the gym consistently.

Pays close attention to physical sensations while lifting.

Sometimes scrolls Instagram between sets anyway.

Repeats exercises over time, hoping for gradual improvement.

THINK

Proper form matters more than lifting heavy.

Feeling the muscle is necessary to know an exercise is working.

Learning is trial-and-error and takes time.

Relational support (brothers) is more trustworthy than mirrors.

Progress is uncertain and delayed, which can be frustrating.

FEEL

Motivated by physical sensation and soreness.

Self-conscious when performing exercises that feel awkward or exposed.

Determined to improve despite uncertainty.

Frustrated by the slow pace of visible progress.

Slightly anxious about doing exercises incorrectly in public.



04

Summary

Putting it all together!

1

Embodied Feedback

People rely on physical sensations.

2

Confidence Through Familiarity

Learning feels safer and more effective when movements are familiar

3

Form Over Performance

People value correct technique more than lifting heavier weights, even when progress feels slower.

4

Socially Mediated Learning

Gym skills are learned through trusted people.

Next Steps...

TARGET 1

Synthesize findings into Point-of-View (POV) statements

TARGET 2

Generate in-depth How Might We (HMW) questions to guide exploration

TARGET 3

Explore early experience-based concepts to support learning without interrupting flow