




Bishal

25 years old , .

He/Him

Occupation

Student


Gym use duration

45 Days

Primary use

Weight training

Location

Philadelphia, USA 

Interview time

6:30PM | October 15,2023

Factors Affecting Comfort at the Gym

Being a beginner, Bishal feels uncomfortable at the gym, especially when it's crowded, and he perceives others judging him, particularly those with a more developed physique. He experiences nervousness and lack of eye contact in crowded or potentially judgmental situations. This discomfort decreases when the gym is less crowded, and he's with a friend or a supportive group.

"Working out with experienced friends has been like there's nothing that can beat it."

Bishal mentioned using apps and watching workout videos at the gym. However, he found that watching videos in a public setting added to his nervousness, making him more conscious of being judged. Currently, having a friend or a supportive group significantly boosts his confidence and helps him overcome the discomfort and nervousness associated with public workout sessions. He's committed to consistent effort, believing that over time, the discomfort and judgmental feelings will diminish. His resilience is a significant asset, enabling him to face judgment and nervousness head-on, with a strong belief in gradual improvement. Even when he is busy with his workout or does not have time, Bishal could just shadow and follow what his friend was doing. he could not do that seeing a stranger as they might be offended or feel bad. He feels he is being validated by his friend which makes him confident.

"The fear of judgment is also gone when you have a supportive gym buddy."

He felt people were judging his form

Bishal identifies feeling uncomfortable when he perceives individuals with better physiques observing him during workouts which makes him feel self-conscious about his workouts. This discomfort stems from a lack of confidence, feeling like he might be doing exercises incorrectly, and a concern about his posture.

Social support helps with performance, ensuring gym attendance and consistency

Having experienced friends who guide him during workouts, provide feedback on posture, and encourage progress has notably boosted Bishal's confidence. Their continuous support motivates him to persevere and attend the gym regularly, even on days when he feels judged or uncomfortable. It also instills a sense of commitment and motivates him to stick to his fitness routine, even on challenging days. He feels secure and he also does not even care when someone looking at me when he is with a friend.

Working Out with a Partner vs. Alone

Bishal highly values the experience of working out with a friend or partner, especially as a beginner. Having a supportive partner reduces nervousness, lack of knowledge, and the fear of judgment. Working out with a friend provides a sense of camaraderie, a reduced fear of judgment, and an increased willingness to try new exercises and techniques which he would not do alone.

Impact on Performance and Progress

The fear of being judged impacted Bishal's performance, diverting his focus during sets and making him more cautious. However, this cautiousness did not always translate into better performance; instead, it often disrupted his concentration, affecting the execution of exercises. His determination to improve and achieve his fitness goals remained undeterred despite it.

Acquiring Knowledge for Fitness Journey

Bishal primarily acquires knowledge for his fitness journey through social media platforms, particularly Instagram, where he sees workout reels. This method provides easy access to workout routines and exercises, making it convenient as he frequently uses Instagram. He emphasises that the support and guidance he gains from working out with experienced friends makes most of his learnings.

Seeing more familiar faces are welcoming.

Familiar faces in the gym, especially friends, contribute to a sense of belonging and comfort for him. He felt the gym to be more inclusive and welcoming space when he was surrounded by people he knew.

Digital Platforms for Gym Friendships

Bishal suggests leveraging digital platforms within the gym environment to facilitate friendships since approaching people digitally is easier than in person. An app or feature allowing gym-goers to connect, chat, and share experiences could enhance social interaction, making it easier for individuals, especially introverts, to initiate conversations and build a supportive gym community. It can also be used to know who needs help and who is ready to help. He wished if he could see others schedule and ask to join them accordingly.

Challenges Faced as a Beginner

As a beginner, Bishal struggled with a lack of knowledge about exercises, how to use gym equipment, and doubts about correct posture and techniques. The load of amount of information available online led to confusion and an inability to discern the best practices. Social challenges, including sarcastically discouraging comments from peers and family also worsened his overall gym experience. He often looks around to find a sticker to see how to use a machine at the gym.

The range of support from peer learning

Bishal initially sought support and guidance, primarily from experienced friends, who became a crucial pillar of support in his fitness journey. The assistance ranged from recommending exercises and sets to offering advice on nutrition. He felt no hesitance reaching out to his friend for any advice.

Gyms should conduct group activities for beginners.

Since the gym is a isolated place, Bishal thinks that gyms should encourage social interactions by arranging group activities within the gym enhancing the sense of community by fostering friendships.

Too much information online which conflicts with one another

He found it hard to ensure proper technique alone and was confused by varying workout methods observed in experienced individuals. He also mentioned the overwhelming and often conflicting information available in the fitness realm.

A Friend's support is more personal than a Personal Trainer.

Bishal highlights a significant difference between seeking support from a friend versus a paid personal trainer. The personal trainer lacked a personal touch, often focusing on pushing for results rather than understanding and supporting the individual's fitness journey. It was more relatable than experiences with a paid personal trainer, being personal, genuine, and deeply motivating.

Experienced ones should help others

Bishal thinks that the gyms should communicate with experienced people to help beginners when they see them doing something wrong or struggling.

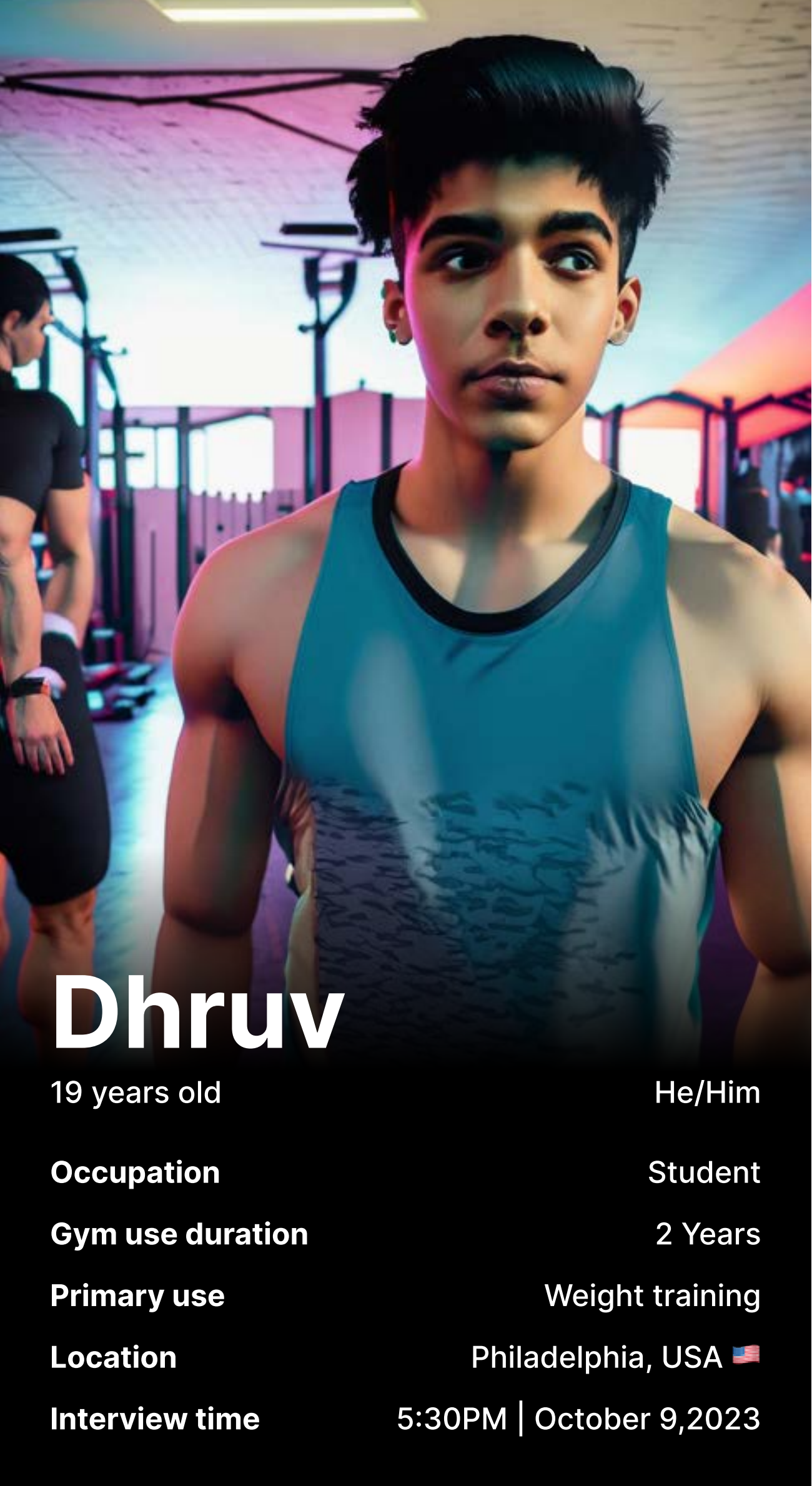
Quotes

"I felt like doing it right is more important than just doing."

"Fear of judgment is gone, because they are your friend and they will not mind you following them."

"It's still challenging. If you learn a set of workout today, tomorrow you will see an experienced guy doing a very different set."

"It's like a family in the gym. When you're around people you know, you feel happier."



Dhruv

19 years old	He/Him
Occupation	Student
Gym use duration	2 Years
Primary use	Weight training
Location	Philadelphia, USA 🇺🇸
Interview time	5:30PM October 9,2023

Building the habit

Dhruv began going to the gym in his junior year of high school, especially when his friend got a driver's license. Initially, he went about once or twice a week, but with increased commitment, he attended the gym 3-4 times a week, gradually progressing to 5-6 times per week during his freshman year at college.

I used to do curls for an hour

In the early stages, Dhruv faced challenges related to plateauing and lack of significant muscle growth. He initially lacked knowledge about proper diet and lifting techniques. He went without an idea of what he is going to do at the gym. However, he actively sought information and incorporated changes in his diet and workout routines.

Learnt from people and teaches people now

Dhruv emphasised the importance of gym partners and friends in the fitness journey. He actively assists his gym partner who is also his roommate, offering insights on proper form and techniques to optimise their workouts and prevent injuries.

“Acting like everyone's already been there 1000 times”

He attributed the discomfort to factors like the loud noises, weights being slammed, and the atmosphere of experienced lifters. The disparity between beginner and expert levels and feeling like an outsider due to the unfamiliar gym culture added to his discomfort.

Comparison leading to doubts

Dhruv initially compared himself to the experienced lifters, feeling inadequate. However, he transformed this comparison into motivation. Instead of being discouraged, he used their achievements as a driving force to improve his own lifting and fitness goals.

They might seem like scary when they're lifting the weight, but everyone's genuinely nice and just wants to uplift other people

Dhruv has transitioned from feeling intimidated by experienced lifters to actively engaging with them, seeking advice and insights. He now sees them as approachable mentors and recognizes the value of the gym community. This shift highlights his proactive attitude towards learning and growth within the gym environment, emphasizing the supportive nature of the community.

“everyone's slams weights like that thing was all new to me.”

Dhruv described feeling uncomfortable at the gym, especially in a new, more powerlifting-oriented environment at college. The presence of experienced lifters and the intensity of the gym atmosphere made him initially feel out of place and inexperienced.

Focusing on himself

Dhruv employed strategies to mitigate discomfort, such as using noise-canceling headphones to create a focused workout environment. He shifted his attention towards self-improvement and sought guidance from experienced lifters, eventually viewing them as sources of knowledge and motivation.

Suggestions for Gym Inclusivity

Dhruv suggested promoting gym access during quieter times to reduce intimidation for beginners. He also proposed creating a peer mentorship system within the gym community to offer guidance and foster inclusivity, where experienced gym-goers can help newcomers.

Envisioned a Gym Buddy system

Dhruv discussed the potential of a gym buddy system, individuals can connect with others for support and guidance, enhancing the overall gym experience. He mentioned that Jefferson could incentivise it with merchandise from campus store

Gathered knowledge from people and internet

Dhruv primarily gathers fitness knowledge from his gym experiences, interactions with fellow gym-goers, particularly more experienced lifters, and his workout partner. He also mentioned using social media platforms like TikTok, where he finds fitness videos helpful and saves them for reference during workouts.



Gokul

28 years oldHe/Him

OccupationWorking professional

Gym use duration1 - 2 Years

Primary useWeight training

LocationPittsburgh, USA 🇺🇸

Interview time3:00PM | October 7,2023

Reluctance due to anxiety and fear of rejection.

Gokul, as an introverted individual, felt anxious and uncomfortable in crowded gyms with a fear of potential rejection while trying to interact with people to share equipment. This led to reluctance to work out in such environments.

Being judged is an internal feeling

Gokul expresses a concern about potential judgment at the gym based on appearance, leading to a heightened self-consciousness. This fear is mostly an internal feeling, projecting concerns about one's looks onto others, even when there may not be actual judgment happening. It highlights the impact of perceived judgments on one's gym experience.

Uses videos and audio books while working out

Gokul encouraged gyms to provide information about equipment and exercises, possibly through a website or app to its beginners feel more confident.

Gyms could have a website to direct beginners

Gokul encouraged gyms to provide information about equipment and exercises, possibly through a website or app to its beginners feel more confident.

Unsure about how to use equipment

Gokul faced challenges in the beginning due to a lack of knowledge about how to use gym equipment and uncertainty about workout plans. Feeling self-conscious about form and appearance during workouts was also a challenge.

Familiar faces are comfortable

Gokul found himself comfortable around familiar faces to workout. This was possible since he had a routine of going to the gym at the same time.

Records his lifts to gain confidence

He records his workouts to ensure correct form and compares it to videos he sees online for guidance on new exercises.

Gyms could pair up people to workout together

Gokul proposed that gyms could host voluntary group or partnership workout sessions where people who often attend the gym at the same time can partner up for workouts based on their expertise, providing a sense of camaraderie and support. He mentioned that this could be an icebreaker among individuals to interact and also reduce anxiety of approaching strangers or feeling alone at the gym.

Opts out for an empty gym

He feels self-conscious about form of his workouts and he prefers empty gyms to work out at his own pace without feeling judged or distracted. He in fact chose the gym hes currently going because its less crowded.

Knowledge from online fitness community


Gokul actively seeks information from online sources like Reddit and YouTube to educate himself about fitness.

Trained harder than usual with a stranger while sharing equipment

Gokul had a positive experience when partnering informally with another gym-goer whom he never knew before sharing a equipment. He found themselves motivating and supporting each other during the workout pushing more reps and sets than his usual.



Joe

19 years old , 

He/Him

Occupation

Student

Gym use duration

9 months

Primary use

Weight training

Location

Philadelphia, USA

Interview time

4:20PM | October 10,2023

Felt discomfort in a crowded gym.

Joe frequently encounters discomfort when the gym is crowded, struggling to secure equipment and decide on workout routines amidst the chaos. The issue of crowding seemed to impede his ease and confidence in the gym.

Grappling with workout routines, injury prevention, and weight selection challenges.

At the onset of his fitness journey, Joe grappled with various challenges. Understanding suitable workout routines, organizing his weekly workout plan, preventing injuries, and determining appropriate weights and repetitions were notable hurdles.

Having a workout partner boosts Joe's confidence, aiding heavier weights and smoother sessions, diminishing self-consciousness.

Joe finds immense value in having a workout partner. It enhances his confidence, enabling him to attempt heavier weights and facilitating smoother gym sessions by reducing any self-consciousness or awkwardness he might feel when alone.

Recommendations for me

In the realm of UX design, Joe suggests creating a solution that encourages social interaction at the gym. This can be a platform or feature that facilitates conversations, meetups, or fitness challenges within the gym community, helping beginners integrate more seamlessly and feel a stronger sense of belonging.

Initial gym discomfort led to infrequent visitsbut growing confidence boosted consistency and performance.

The initial discomfort and challenges significantly impacted Joe's motivation and consistency, leading to infrequent gym visits during his early experiences. However, as he gained confidence and developed coping mechanisms, he saw a notable improvement in consistency and performance.

Joe's triumph: Overcoming challenges, finding joy in surpassing expectations.

Despite the initial challenges, Joe has positive experiences at the gym, particularly during shoulder workouts. He finds a sense of accomplishment and enjoyment when he surpasses his own expectations and lifts higher weights.

Positive Gym Experience:

Despite the initial challenges, Joe has positive experiences at the gym, particularly during shoulder workouts. He finds a sense of accomplishment and enjoyment when he surpasses his own expectations and lifts higher weights.

"I just felt like uncomfortable and anxious because I just really wanted to find something to do."

To mitigate this discomfort, Joe has devised strategies such as going to the gym during off-peak hours or with a workout partner. He believes having a pre-planned workout routine aids in avoiding idle moments and feeling out of place.

Diverse fitness education: Learning from peers, online resources, and gym interactions.

Joe acquires knowledge about fitness through multiple channels. He learns from experienced gym-goers, leverages online platforms like YouTube and social media for workout routines, and occasionally seeks advice directly at the gym.

Advocates for a welcoming gym culture through interactions, easing social anxiety.

Joe emphasizes the importance of encouraging interactions among gym-goers to foster a sense of inclusivity and community. He believes that if beginners engage more with fellow gym members, they will realize that the gym is a safe and welcoming space, reducing social anxiety.

Quotes

Feeling of Being Watched and Judged

"I felt kinda uncomfortable because I felt like I stood out more than everyone else."

"I just felt like uncomfortable and anxious because I just really wanted to find something to do."

Seeking Comfort through Familiarity

"And then, you know, now especially because I've made friends at the gym. I kind of recognise a lot of people which makes me feel a lot more comfortable going through the workout."

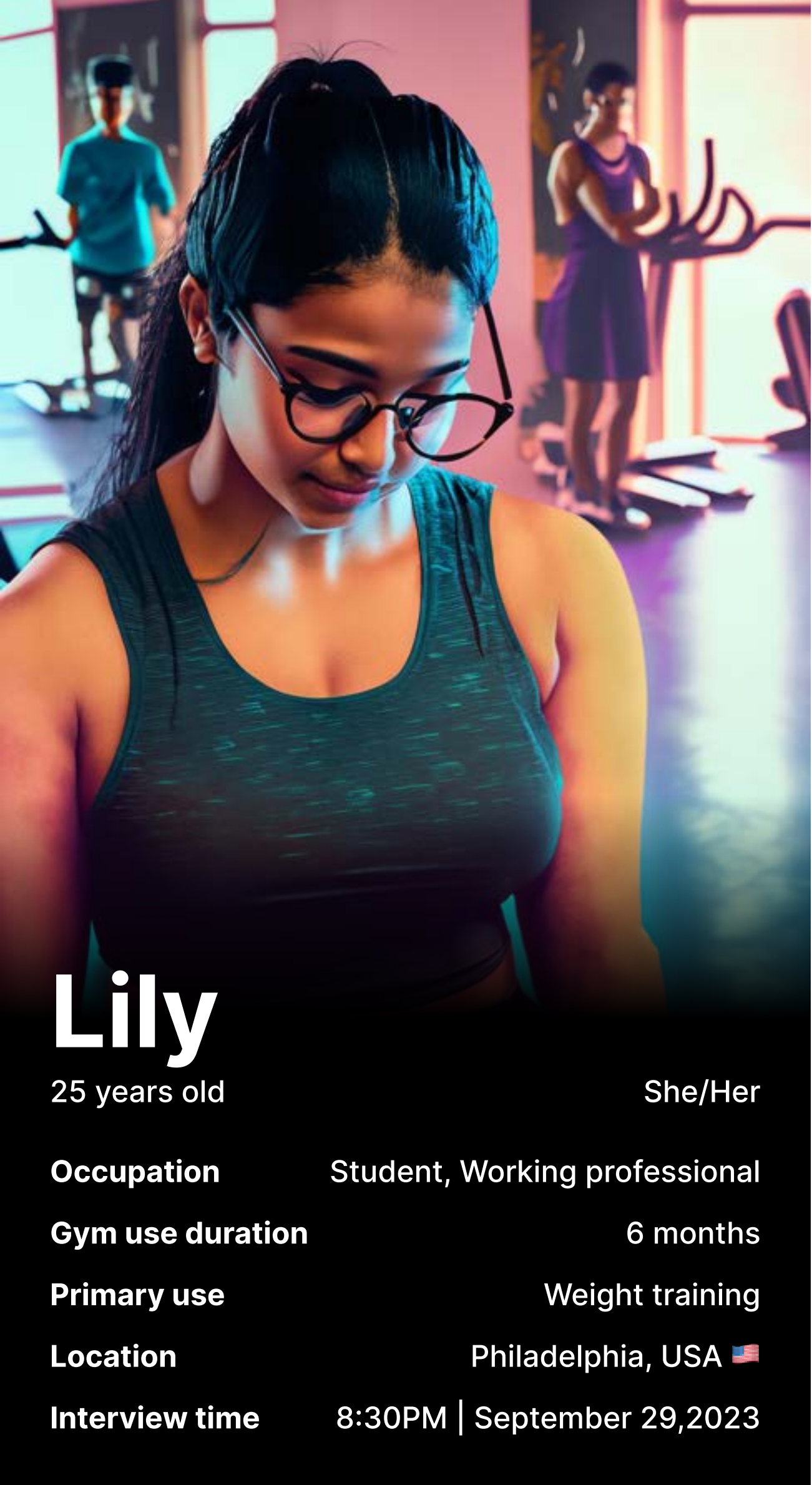
Social Support

"If I feel like I got a very good workout and so, you know, so that just kind of made me feel good."

"I just feel like I'm always doing something when I'm with a partner."

" I feel like the easiest way for a beginner to feel in place and kind of show inclusivity at the gym is like just talking to other people."

"So I think a very big possible solution is just kind of maybe encouraging people to talk more at the gym."



Lily

25 years old

She/Her

Occupation Student, Working professional

Gym use duration 6 months

Primary use Weight training

Location Philadelphia, USA 🇺🇸

Interview time 8:30PM | September 29,2023

“I take my glasses off so that I don't see what's going around”

Strategies to Overcome Discomfort

Lily reduced external stimuli to concentrate and reduce self-consciousness related to others observing her performance. She mentioned wearing glasses with a high prescription and intentionally removing them during workouts to limit her field of vision.

Asking a friend on the first time helped her get past the awkwardness of asking some random person to help.

Did not have time to plan what to do

Lily identified several barriers that hindered her from consistent gym attendance. These included long commutes, work-related fatigue, and health issues exacerbated by unfavourable weather conditions. She emphasised the need for simplified routines and meal plans to reduce decision fatigue and enhance motivation for regular gym visits.

Body Consciousness when coming back

Lily experienced discomfort and self-consciousness routed to irregular gym attendance especially in new gym environments. She highlighted feeling body-conscious, particularly when she had gained some weight, which made her hesitant to fully engage in workout experience. She mentioned it fades of if she is regularly visiting the gym but thats not the case all the time.

Compliments were encouraging

Lily found motivation and gained improved confidence through positive experiences at the gym. Compliments and encouragement from fellow gym-goers and social media posts feedbacks significantly boosted her morale, helping her integrate more comfortably into the gym community.

“Marinate me”

Lily desired that gyms could offer preparatory classes or tutorials for new members, covering fundamental exercises and equipment usage. She envisioned a gym induction program to familiarize beginners with the gym environment, making their transition into regular workouts smoother. Additionally, she emphasized the need for quieter gym hours to accommodate individuals uncomfortable with crowded settings, showcasing her commitment to inclusivity and customization in the gym experience.

Unfamiliar gym equipment

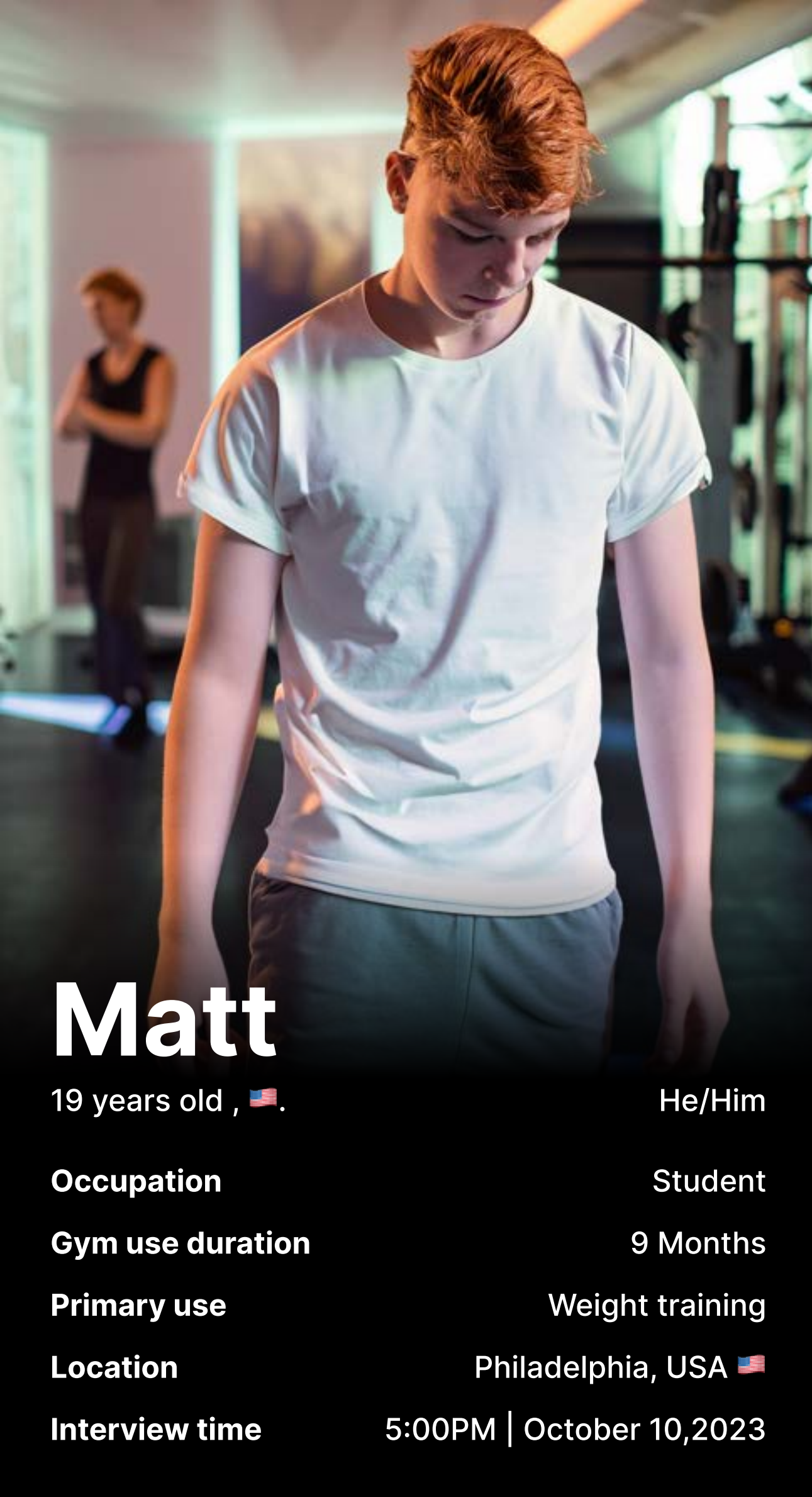
Lily discussed the challenges she faced as a beginner at the gym. These included unfamiliarity with gym equipment, fear of judgment, and a lack of knowledge about suitable workout routines. She stressed the necessity of a beginner's program to overcome these initial obstacles.

Needs a tool to customise and teach beginners

Lily advocated for a more inclusive and supportive approach for beginners, proposing the development of a preparatory program. This tool would customise workout routines based on individual fitness levels, available gym equipment, and personal fitness goals, eliminating the reliance on paid sources like personal trainers.

Desire for Clear Guidance

Expressing her desire for clear and personalized guidance, Lily stressed the necessity of precise instructions regarding pre-gym routines, exercises, and nutrition. She underscored the need for tailored advice specific to her gym and daily schedule, believing that such guidance would simplify the process of starting and maintaining a fitness routine.



Matt

19 years old , 🇺🇸.	He/Him
Occupation	Student
Gym use duration	9 Months
Primary use	Weight training
Location	Philadelphia, USA 🇺🇸
Interview time	5:00PM October 10,2023

Difficulty in finding workout variation, It's form and intensity

Matt highlighted the initial challenges faced by beginners at the gym, such as not knowing what exercises to do, how to perform them with proper form, and the difficulty in selecting appropriate weights.

The Importance of a Supportive Network

Having a gym partner or a supportive group positively impacted Matt's gym attendance and consistency. The presence of a support system helped him feel more secure and motivated during workouts. Being alone without a spotter, he encountered difficulty while attempting to bench press. He couldn't lift the bar, leading to a moment of struggle and feeling goofy, possibly due to the pressure and embarrassment of the situation. Being with someone on call while working out influenced his confidence and motivation.

Records himself and gets form reviewed by himself and peers.

Matt relies on experienced friends at the gym to guide him in maintaining correct form. Occasionally, he records videos and seeks feedback online or from these friends for improvement on his form.

Anxiety and Social Discomfort

Matt shared his struggle with social anxiety at the gym, particularly in crowded and noisy environments, causing discomfort and a lack of concentration during workouts. He even skips being at a space where it is noisy.

The feelings of discomfort faded but its never fully gone.

Initially, Matt was anxious and self-conscious at the gym, but as he saw progress, he gained confidence. Presently, he still faces occasional anxiety, especially during body transformation phases, but it's significantly reduced, occurring about once or twice a week.

Seeking Knowledge and Guidance

Matt discussed various sources of knowledge acquisition, including friends, online communities, YouTube, and TikTok videos. He emphasized the importance of guidance and support from more experienced individuals.He also observes others at the gym and watches videos on platforms like TikTok and YouTube to learn and mimic exercises. Online videos help him understand the correct form for various exercises when he's unsure about his technique.

Enhancing Gym Welcoming Atmosphere

Matt stressed the importance of a welcoming atmosphere, citing the positive impact of friendly interactions with gym staff. He suggested creating a more inclusive and encouraging atmosphere for newcomers.

The size of the gym matters.

The gym's size and crowd significantly affected Matt's comfort level. A larger, less crowded gym provided a more comfortable environment for him to focus on his workouts without feeling self-conscious.

“Nearly 99.99% of the time I'm with the gym partner.”

If Matt is alone, he tends to seclude himself, feeling less confident in lifting weights without assistance. It triggers anxiety and a desire to finish quickly and leave the gym. Having a gym partner makes him feel confident, more at ease and less self-conscious and secure knowing they'll help if needed. It alleviates these feelings, enabling a more comfortable and productive workout session.

Effect of Positive Feedback:

Positive feedback from peers and gym-goers significantly boosted Matt's confidence and motivation. Compliments and encouragement made him feel more welcomed and integrated into the gym community.

Suggested Improvements

Matt proposed features like clear exercise instructions displayed on gym equipment and the concept of a gym buddy to facilitate connections with fellow gym-goers, aiding beginners in overcoming social alienation.

Strategies for Comfort and Confidence

Matt discussed coping mechanisms like wearing noise-canceling headphones, maintaining focus on his workouts, and avoiding excessive interaction to reduce social anxiety and enhance his confidence at the gym.

Reached out to people he know at the gym for information

Matt sought assistance with form and other gym-related queries from acquaintances at the college gym. These were individuals they recognised from their housing floor, although not necessarily close friends. Seeking guidance from them showcased the desire to improve and learn within the gym environment.

"I finally got up 185 and I felt super, super happy, like I was on top of the world. I was so ecstatic."

Achieving milestones like increasing weights in bench pressing, instill a sense of pride and elation. Going from benching 175 to 185 pounds brought immense joy and a feeling of being on top of the world.

Finding gratification in aiding others at the gym,

Matt mentioned that helping people struggling with form or routines, contributes to a positive gym environment and enhances his self-esteem. Helping fellow gym-goers provides a sense of fulfillment and elevates personal satisfaction.

Quotes

"The more you do it, the better I'm gonna get, but that didn't provide as much comfort as I would have liked to know."

"When you go with a gym partner, you feel like that sense of security, and if you can't get a weight up, they'll help you, they're always there."

"When people compliment you, you're like, 'Oh, I can really see my own improvement.'"

"Being in a group is the best way to get over that [social alienation]."

"Those people [who compliment you] give you so much more comfort and confidence within yourself."

"When people come up to you and say, 'You're looking good today,' or 'Can you keep it up?' those people give you an insane amount of confidence within yourself."



Usman

21 years old	He/Him
Occupation	Student
Gym use duration	1 - 2 Years
Primary use	Weight training
Location	Philadelphia, USA 🇺🇸
Interview time	6:00PM October 6,2023

Felt judged on appearance

Initially, Usman felt uncomfortable and nervous at the gym, worrying about being judged due to his perceived lack of fitness. These feelings were most prominent in the first few days as he was conscious of others' perceptions and concerned about not being in good shape.

Challenges Faced as a Beginner

Usman found planning and understanding the various workouts and programs intimidating, making it difficult to start confidently.

Too many options to pick from

The multitude of exercises, splits, and techniques at the gym overwhelmed him, hindering his initial progress.

Made sure the habit was independent

Initially, Usman chose to work out alone to build confidence and discipline in working out alone without depending on anyone else. Eventually, he started working out with friends, finding it enjoyable and socially motivating without causing discomfort.

Sense of not belonging

He had recurring thoughts of not being good enough and felt a sense of not belonging in a fitness-oriented environment.

Step by step

Usman stressed the importance of embracing discomfort as part of the journey and building confidence through challenges. He emphasised the value of positive reinforcement and support in facilitating a positive gym experience for beginners.

Impact of Positive Experiences

Positive experiences, like receiving encouragement from others, significantly impacted Usman's consistency and motivation to attend the gym regularly. Encouragement from fellow gym-goers enhanced his determination to progress in his fitness journey.

Realising his misconceptions of the community

Initially, Usman feared judgment upon returning to the gym, expecting discomfort due to self-consciousness. However, he soon realised that the gym community was supportive and growth-oriented, challenging his initial beliefs and making his gym experience welcoming and encouraging.

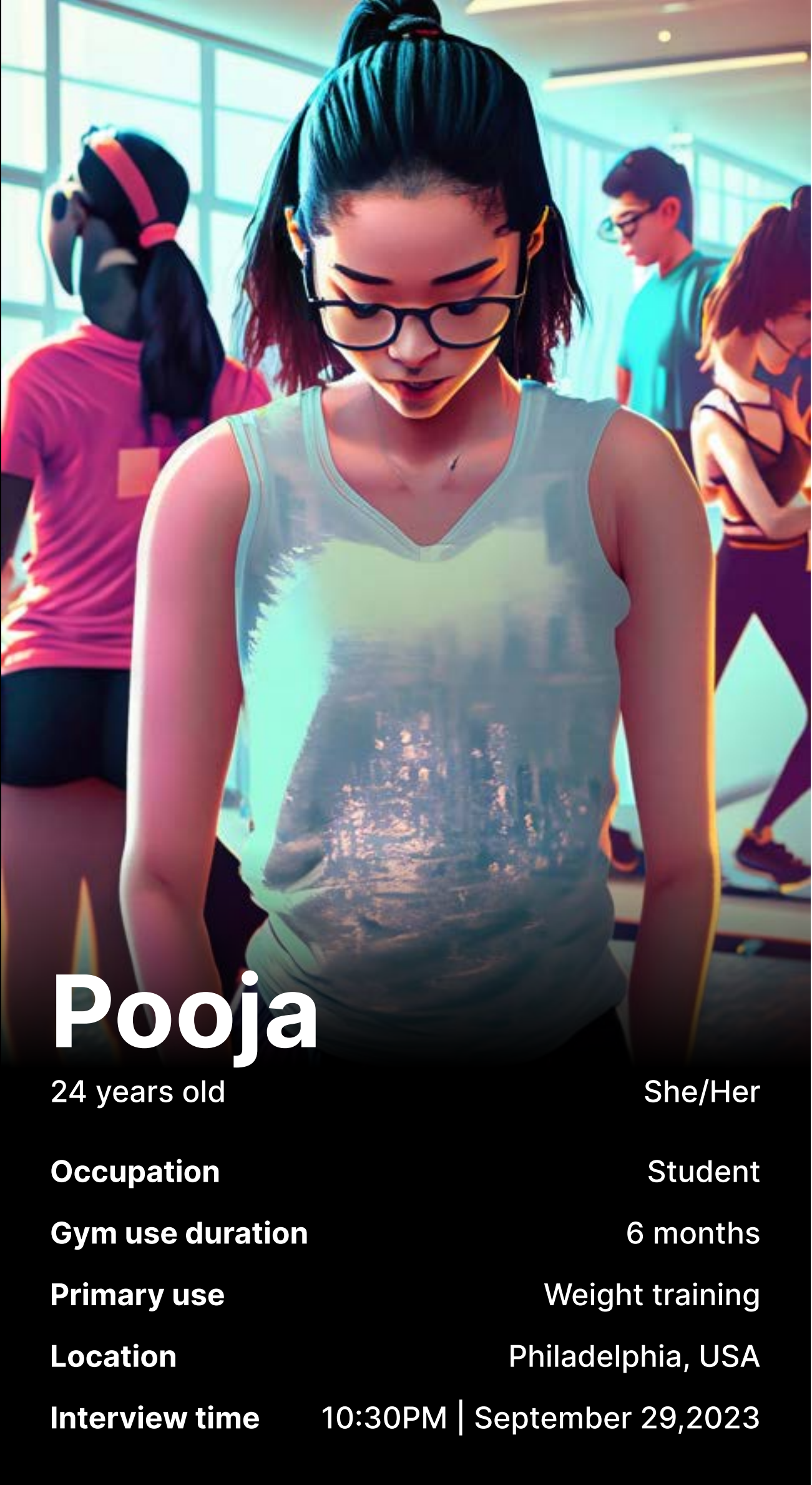
Interactions led to comfort

Interactions with supportive students at the university gym significantly alleviated his discomfort and boosted his confidence. Usman highlighted the importance of positive interactions and support from fellow gym-goers in creating a welcoming gym culture.

Measures to interact with the pros

Usman suggested creating a gym culture that openly supports newcomers, emphasizing friendliness and encouragement. He recommended initiatives like allowing newcomers to work out with experienced individuals, fostering a sense of community and belonging.

“ I was a bit nervous, because I didn't want people to like judge me, I'd say the hardest part of coming to the gym.”



Pooja

24 years old

She/Her

Occupation

Student

Gym use duration

6 months

Primary use

Weight training

Location

Philadelphia, USA

Interview time

10:30PM | September 29,2023

“There are people just passing comments on you, I know it shouldn't bother but it happens.”

Throw thoughts out

Pooja discussed mental preparation and focusing on self, gaining control of her sight, blocking out external judgments. Using mirrors for form correction and seeking guidance from a more experienced friend helped her gain confidence. “threw those thoughts out”

Desired Optimal Experience

Pooja envisioned an optimal gym experience involving a well-planned workout, focused on personal goals, and rewarding feelings of accomplishment at the end. She likes the gym not crowded since it feels chaotic.

Value of Experienced Guidance Over Online Resources:

Pooja emphasised the vital role of guidance from an experienced gym-goer over online sources. Half of her fitness knowledge and confidence came from her experienced friend as a mentor, whose insights and practical expertise provided a unique and safe approach to workouts, beyond what online resources could offer. It made her feel sure of her workout form preventing her potential injuries. She mentioned that she likes to have a friend while she is working out.

Initial Discomfort and Challenges

Pooja shared her initial discomfort and self-consciousness at the gym, particularly as a skinny and novice individual. The unfamiliarity with equipment and fear of judgment from others were significant factors causing discomfort.

Tendency to quit and question coming back

Uncomfortable experiences sometimes led to incomplete workouts or affected motivation to return to the gym on subsequent days, negatively impacting consistency. She does feel good after a workout but she struggles with the initial push to get up and go to the gym.

The Gym Stare

Pooja highlighted issues of discomfort caused by unwelcome staring and lack of inclusivity in the gym, particularly affecting female gym-goers. She expressed the need for initiatives to address these concerns and promote a more supportive and empowering atmosphere

“It feels like they know everything and you don't”

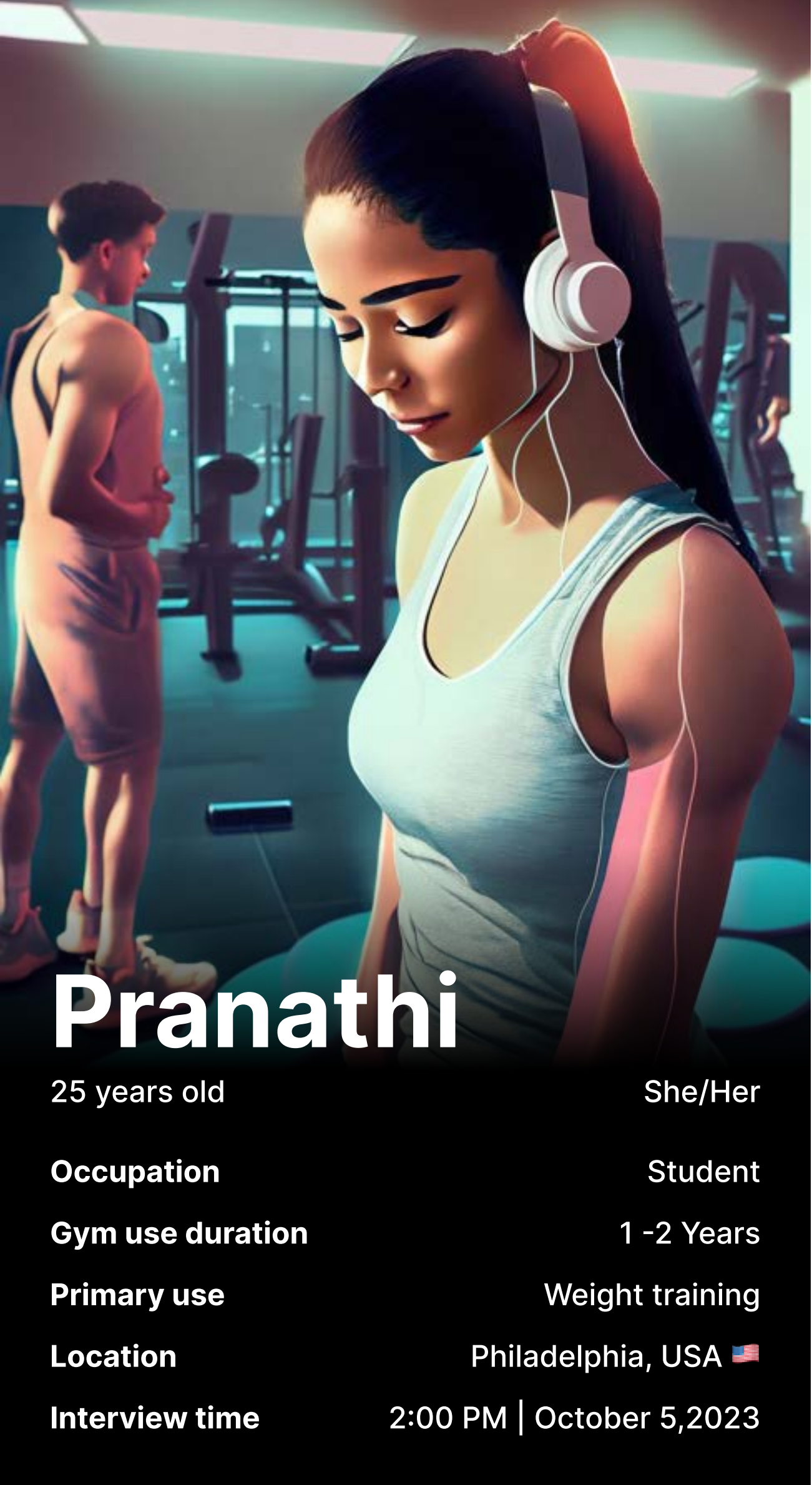
She described feeling overwhelmed and cautious due to the lack of guidance for beginners. The presence of a crowd heightened her self-consciousness, causing sweating and impacting her ability to focus on the workout.

Suggestions for Improvement

Pooja suggested providing free advice and guidance at the gym, especially for beginners. She emphasized the importance of inclusivity, creating a less chaotic environment, and empowering individuals to gain self-motivation.

Difficulty in self-monitoring

She finds content online to follow but while she’s on her own, the only option she has to check her form is to watch the mirror. Meanwhile she felt more confident while performing it with her friend by her side.



Pranathi

25 years old	She/Her
Occupation	Student
Gym use duration	1 -2 Years
Primary use	Weight training
Location	Philadelphia, USA 🇺🇸
Interview time	2:00 PM October 5,2023

Equipments on demand when crowded

Pranathi highlighted discomfort in crowded gym spaces, particularly when equipment was in high demand. She felt hindered by a bustling gym with many people, affecting her ability to transition between exercises seamlessly. In the university gym. She mentioned that people wander and chat, disrupting focus during workouts.

Its annoying when others play loud music

Pranathi felt distracted and irritated gym-goers' loud music, especially when played through their own speakers in the university impacting her ability to concentrate during workouts.

Gyms can make people interact

Pranathi proposed that gyms could organize programs for beginners, teach basic lessons, and conduct events to build community and connections fostering a welcoming gym atmosphere.

Trainers taught basics, she researched online too

Pranathi described seeking knowledge and guidance from trainers, friends, and online resources to enhance her understanding of workouts, diet, and overall fitness. Trainers and friends provided valuable advice, and online sources, including research papers, contributed to her fitness knowledge.

Unfamiliarity after a break

Despite her prior gym experience, Pranathi expressed feeling like a beginner due to intermittent breaks from working out. These breaks led to a sense of restarting and regaining familiarity with the gym environment.

Hit PRs and got compliments

Pranathi emphasised the importance of progress and motivation in her fitness journey. Setting and achieving small goals helped boost her confidence and encouraged consistent workouts. The initial negative effect of comparing herself to others eventually transformed into a drive for self-improvement. She also felt good after a workout which contributed motivation for future sessions. She recalled the encouragement and praise she received from the trainer after achieving a deadlift personal record, which significantly boosted her confidence.

Me vs me

Pranathi shared her strategies to overcome feelings of self-consciousness, emphasising the importance of focusing on personal progress rather than comparing oneself to others. She also discussed the need to set achievable goals and monitor individual progress for a more positive gym experience.

New place and new people

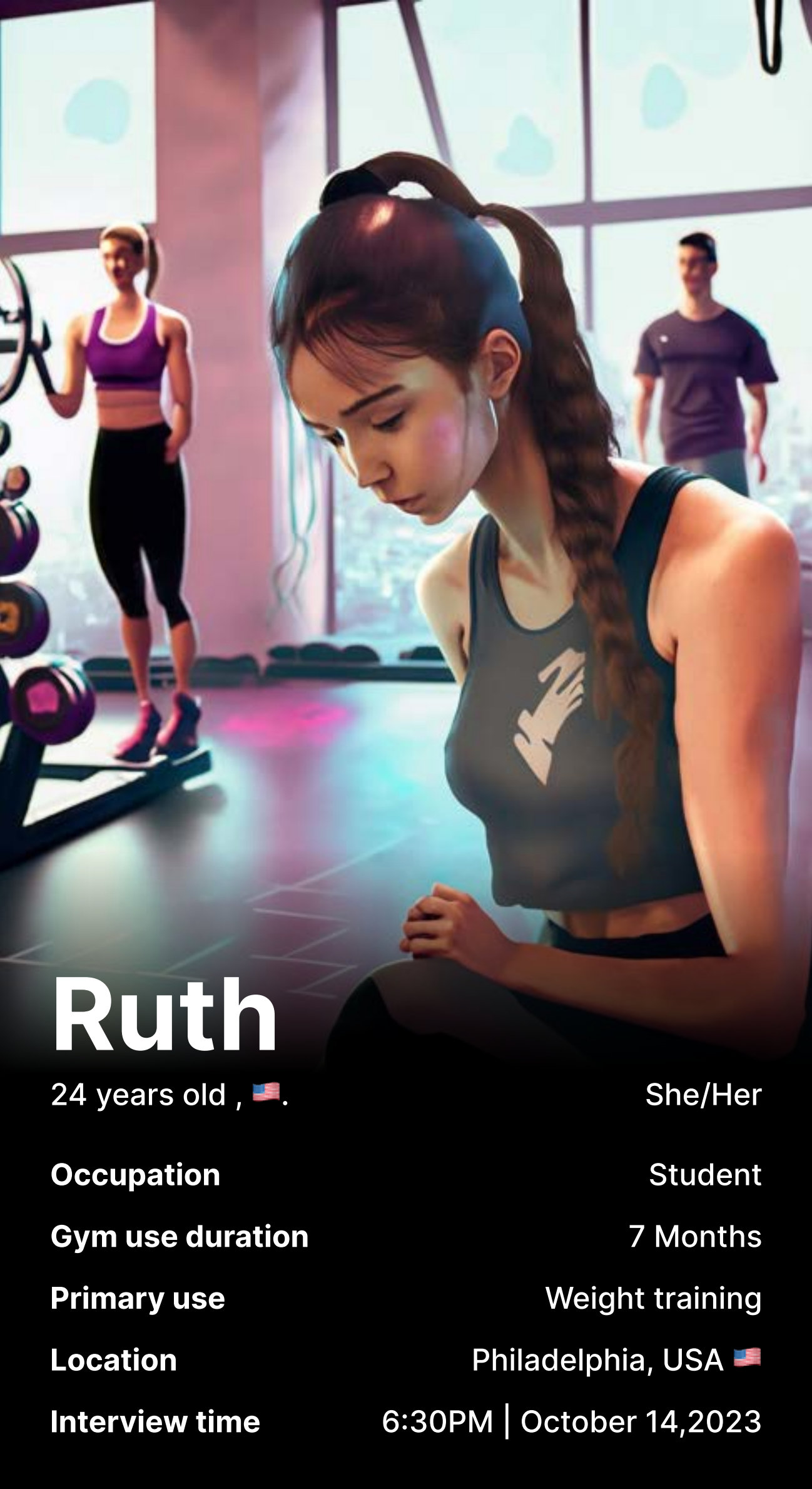
Pranathi outlined challenges in utilising gym equipment and feeling self-conscious when observing experienced individuals. These challenges led to concerns about her own progress and abilities.

Trained better and consistent with a friend

Pranathi found having a gym partner like her friend highly motivating, keeping both consistent in their gym routine even on less motivated days. They motivated extra reps, crucial for muscle building, pushing each other, resulting in enhanced outcomes compared to solo workouts. Going to the gym alone has somewhat dampened her enthusiasm. She is currently looking for someone to go along with.

Trying to push beyond capacity

Pranathi discussed instances where external factors, such as observing others' performance, affected her own workout performance and motivation. These observations sometimes led to attempting exercises beyond her capacity.



Ruth

24 years old , 🇺🇸.

She/Her

Occupation

Student

Gym use duration

7 Months

Primary use

Weight training

Location

Philadelphia, USA 🇺🇸

Interview time

6:30PM | October 14,2023

Ruth was consistent but was not enjoying it alone.

Ruth stopped going to the gym back in India a few years back despite her initial consistency because she didn't feel comfortable going alone and found the experience lacking in guidance and variety. The repetitiveness of exercises and the absence of a supportive environment made her discontinue her gym visits during the trial period.

What if People stare at me while I blank stare at equipment not knowing what to do?

When her friend, who usually guided her, wasn't available that day, she struggled to remember the workout routine and the correct form for exercises. This led to a feeling of being lost and self-conscious, worrying that others might perceive her as inexperienced or unsure about how to use the equipment. The fear of being judged or stared at added to her discomfort during this gym session.

Going with friends boosts confidence

Ruth initially faced challenges summoning the motivation to attend the gym due to anxiety and self-consciousness. Going with supportive friends helped boost her motivation and consistency in attending the gym regularly. Having gym buddies at a similar fitness level fosters companionship and reduces feelings of isolation or judgment, encouraging Ruth to stay consistent with her gym visits. Exercising with friends helped her stay engaged, diverting potential anxiety and allowing her to immerse herself in the workout experience, reducing self-consciousness. Additionally, she acknowledged that many others in the gym were also in a similar learning phase, fostering a sense of understanding and diminishing judgment, contributing to her growing comfort in that environment. Overall, having a partner made the gym experience more manageable and enjoyable for her.

Felt intimidated, self-conscious and anxious which escalated in a crowded gym

Ruth's initial gym experience was uncomfortable and intimidating, particularly due to her lack of familiarity with gym equipment and exercise routines. She felt self-conscious and anxious, especially when observed or corrected by people she does not know. This discomfort escalated in crowded settings or when she struggled to recall how to use specific equipment.

Emotional Division of Energy

Ruth experiences a split in mental energy between ensuring privacy and focusing on her exercises. This mental strain affects her ability to exercise mindfully and impacts her engagement during workouts. While not directly affecting her physical performance, the mental distraction from concerns about being observed reduces her ability to push her limits and engage fully in exercises.

Challenges Faced as a Beginner

Ruth outlined several challenges, including a lack of knowledge regarding exercises and routines, inconsistency due to dependence on her workout partner's availability, and feeling uncomfortable in crowded gym settings. She found herself counting minutes and focusing on completing workouts swiftly due to her discomfort.

“it's just an internal battle with myself, because the scenario is much worse in my head than it actually is.”

Ruth expressed her fear of embarrassment at the gym is primarily an internal struggle. The negative scenarios she imagines in her mind are usually much worse than the reality of the situation. She realises that these fears are often irrational, but they still affect her mindset and confidence. By taking the time to observe others and realise that people are generally focused on their own workouts and not scrutinising others, she found reassurance.

“ I have like a buddy who is at the same level as me, so I know that I'm not alone over there.”

Initially, Ruth hesitated entering the gym due to anxiety and fear of embarrassment. However, she found motivation and comfort in going with friends in a group of three, where one was experienced and one was at her level, reducing her sense of isolation.

“I am the dumbest person in there, but thankfully I have friends who know what to do there. So I just followed their lead.”

When her friend, who usually guided her, wasn't available that day, she struggled to remember the workout routine and the correct form for exercises. This led to a feeling of being lost and self-conscious, worrying that others might perceive her as inexperienced or unsure about how to use the equipment. The fear of being judged or stared at added to her discomfort during this gym session.

Peer learning experience

Ruth values her friend's guidance at the gym. He helps her focus on specific muscle groups during exercises, aiding her understanding of the workout and ensuring she's doing it correctly. She also sees content on social media platforms like Instagram.

Wanted the validation that she is not alone

Addressing Bodily Insecurities: Ruth emphasises the need to address bodily insecurities and anxieties by creating an environment that assures individuals that they are not alone and won't be judged, making the gym a more welcoming space.

Feeling conscious

She was once struggling to perform exercises correctly and maintain the proper form when the presence of three to four people observing and attempting to correct her made her conscious of her body and form. This self-awareness and the fear of being judged or stared at by others led to a sense of discomfort and embarrassment.

Only does what she knows when alone.

When alone, Ruth opts for simple, safe exercises like running and cycling. These activities don't require intense focus and make her feel comfortable. With a partner or trainer, she's more inclined to try diverse workouts.

Need to match timings with friends

Ruth depends on her gym partner's availability and schedule when deciding when to go to the gym. Their availability significantly influences her exercise routine and attendance at the gym. The timing and frequency of her gym visits revolve around when her gym partners are available to go with her.

Community Support and Inclusivity

Ruth suggests conducting crash courses or group sessions for beginners to ease them into the gym environment. Providing daily workout routines can reduce decision-making anxiety and promote inclusivity.

Comparing her fitness levels to others

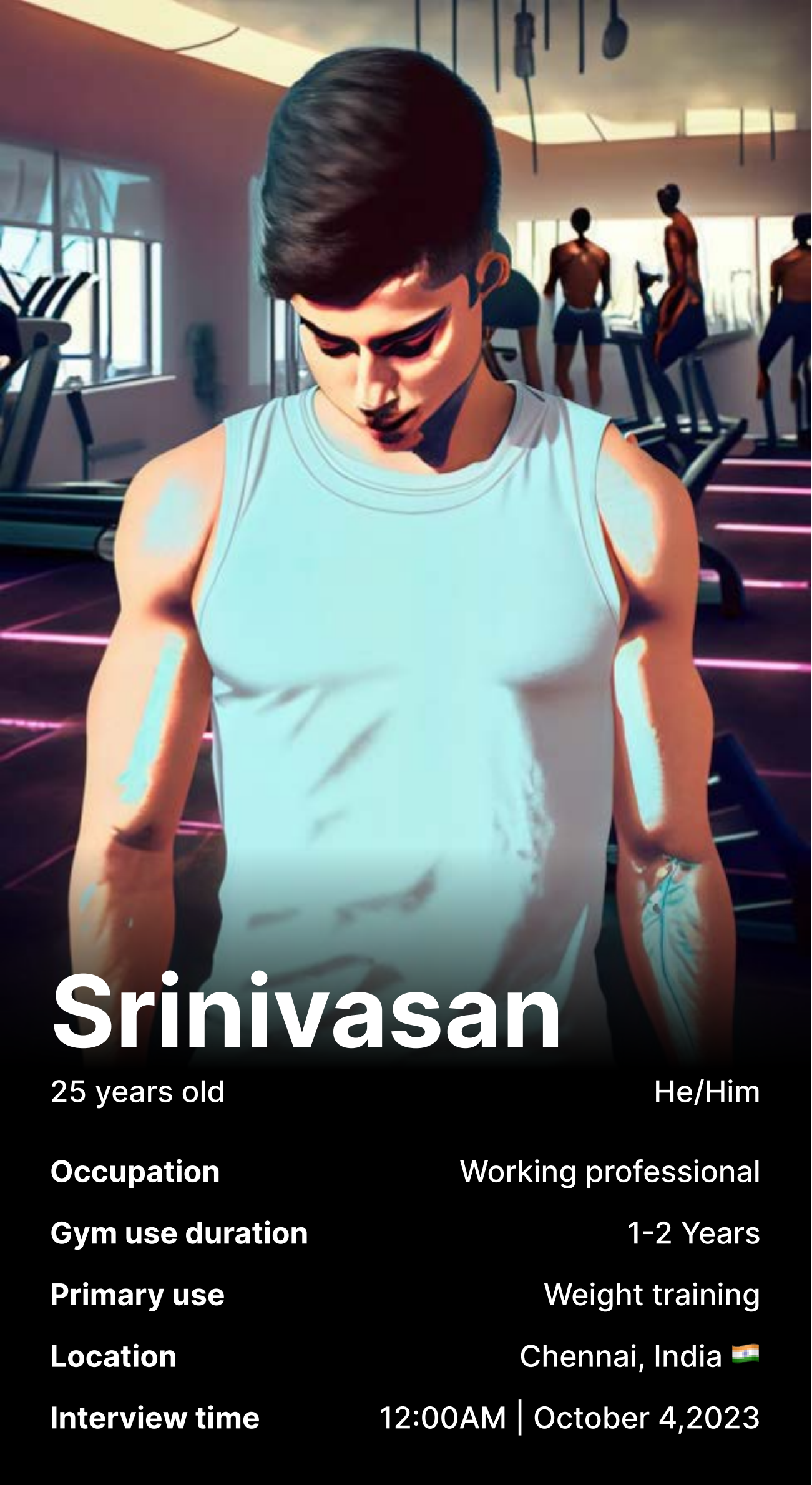
Ruth's discomfort was heightened by her perception of being less experienced compared to others at the gym. This led to feelings of inadequacy, anxiety, and a lack of confidence. She emphasized the internal struggle between focusing on completing sets and feeling conscious of her surroundings.

Evolution and Coping Strategies

Ruth highlighted the reduction of discomfort through acclimatization and familiarization with the gym environment. Going at off-peak hours to avoid crowds and rationalizing that everyone at the gym was primarily focused on their own routines also contributed to her increased comfort.

Feedback and Validation

Positive feedback from friends, acknowledging her progress and efforts, significantly boosts Ruth's confidence, contributing to a positive gym experience and motivating her to continue her fitness journey.



Srinivasan

25 years oldHe/Him

OccupationWorking professional

Gym use duration1-2 Years

Primary useWeight training

LocationChennai, India 🇮🇳

Interview time12:00AM | October 4,2023

Initial Challenges and Intimidation

Srini felt overwhelmed and intimidated when stepping into a gym for the first time and highlighted this initial unease can deter any individuals from fully engaging with their fitness journey. He noted that feelings of self-doubt are common, especially for beginners, emphasising the importance of professional guidance.

Consistency and Routine for Progress

Consistency in workouts and maintaining a routine was deemed crucial for achieving fitness goals, with Srini advocating for finding a balanced routine that aligns with one's lifestyle to ensure steady progress and results.

Personal Evolution in the Fitness Journey

Srini sees the gym as a platform for personal evolution, where confronting challenges and surpassing limits contributes to significant personal growth and self-discovery, fostering a holistic transformation beyond physical fitness.

Supportive Atmosphere Eases Alienation

Srini emphasised that if people at the gym are encouraging and helpful, feelings of being out of place disappear quickly. A supportive environment makes newcomers feel comfortable and accepted, overcoming any initial sense of isolation or alienation.

Personal Coping Mechanisms

Srini stressed self-motivation and pushing limits, highlighting how mental resilience helps in the challenging gym setting. He actively corrects himself during and after his workouts, underlining his determination to overcome obstacles. Over time, he realised it's about his progress, not others' opinions, enabling a sharp focus on his fitness objectives.

Building Self-Confidence Through Progress

The importance of building self-confidence through progress was a recurring theme, with Srini sharing how achieving small milestones and witnessing personal growth significantly boosted his confidence, encouraging a sustainable fitness journey. He shared how pushing beyond his limits and focusing on muscle engagement rather than sheer weight instilled confidence in his abilities. His mantra was "the higher you go, the more confident you get". he strategically shifts to exercises he's proficient in, lifting heavier weights.

Fostering Community Engagement

He highlighted the benefits of engaging with the gym community, promoting a sense of belonging and providing a platform for shared experiences and mutual encouragement, ultimately enhancing motivation and the overall gym experience.

Crucial Role of Trainers

Srini highlighted the significant role of gym trainers in providing essential guidance and support for beginners, stressing how their expertise is instrumental in fostering proper technique and preventing and training around injuries.

Creating a Supportive Gym Culture

He stressed the need for a supportive community within the gym, where experienced members actively help newcomers, fostering a positive and inclusive atmosphere that eases the integration of newcomers. He also mentioned that despite being cautious, he tends to miss out on form details, showcasing a need for guidance and improvement in technique.

Love for an empty gym

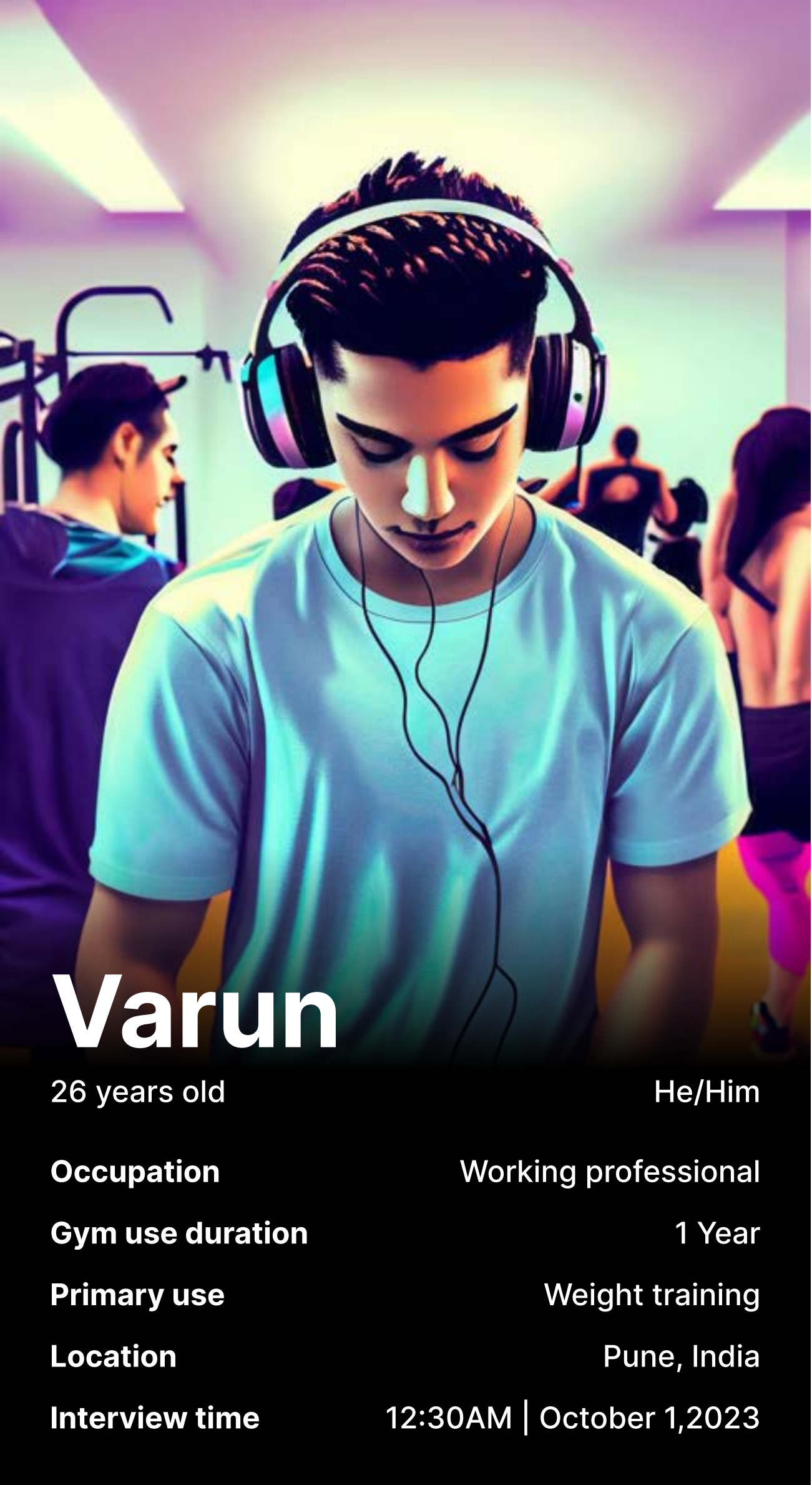
Srini finds a sense of ownership and comfort during the late evening gym visits, relishing the emptiness. The space feels personalised, allowing him to freely express himself, even dancing to the tunes

Gym as a Small Community

Srini pointed out that the gym is like a small society where everyone supports each other. Having a mix of different people makes the gym a friendly and welcoming place for everyone. It's like a little community where everyone belongs and feels empowered to reach their fitness goals.

They'll tell me what I don't know and I'll tell them what they're doing about their workouts.

“My elbows snap around a minor crowd. I felt very bad about it. I did not want to fail around girls.”



Varun

26 years old	He/Him
Occupation	Working professional
Gym use duration	1 Year
Primary use	Weight training
Location	Pune, India
Interview time	12:30AM October 1,2023

Comfort through Routine and Familiarity

Varun highlighted the significance of a structured routine in his gym visits. He likes to keep his workout timings specific encountering familiar faces during those hours. The routine not only provided a sense of predictability but also allowed for interactions with other regular gym-goers, promoting a community-like atmosphere.

Noone really cares. Its in the mind.

Varun shared a significant insight regarding the perception of judgment in the gym. He pointed out that often, the fear of being judged is more internal than external. In reality, fellow gym-goers are often immersed in their own workouts and are willing to extend help and support.

Utilisation of Online Sources and Personalisation

Varun's extensively used online platforms like Google, Reddit and YouTube showcasing the range of sources of fitness knowledge acquisition. He sought knowledge from them and customised to align with his personal preferences and lifestyle.

Navigating Initial Discomfort as a Beginner

Varun his initial discomfort and apprehension as a beginner which magnified during crowded hours when trying out new exercises. Uncertainty about performing exercises correctly and the fear of being judged by others were prominent challenges. If he was feeling uncertain of how to do a workout, he would skip it.

Impact of Support and Guidance on Confidence

Seeking assistance and advice from both experienced gym-goers and online resources has boosted Varun's confidence. Learning from others' experiences and gaining insights into correct forms and routines were crucial aspects.

Recommendations for Overcoming Challenges

Varun provided actionable recommendations for beginners, advocating for consistent workout timings, structured plans, and even considering a trainer. These suggestions aim to instill confidence and regularity in beginners, aiding them in navigating the initial hurdles and establishing a sustainable fitness routine.

Strategies to cope up

Varun mentioned his strategies for comfort at the gym include using headphones, avoiding eye contact, and occasionally closing eyes to focus on exercises and reduce self-consciousness. He also used to google the non crowded hours at the gym since he like it that way.

The role of gym environment

Varun highlighted how the gym environment shapes one's experience, influenced by fellow gym-goers' behaviour. He emphasized positive interactions within a welcoming gym community, sharing how he initially started by nodding and gradually socializing with others. Varun values seeking assistance and mentioned adopting an exercise a stranger taught him, showcasing the helpful atmosphere.

Working out solo VS with a Partner

While working out with a partner, Varun noted that the intensity and variety of exercises may increase, but the duration of the workout may also be longer due to breaks. However, working out alone allows for a more efficient and focused session, typically with shorter rest intervals, resulting in quicker completion of the workout. Despite this, Varun mentioned that having a partner can provide motivation and support during the workout making it fun.

“If there's a bit of crowd, when I'm uncertain about an exercise, I just used to skip it”