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Girl Gains empowers women through weightlifting and community

In the heavily male-dominated world of weightlifting, women are breaking stereotypes and inspiring each other to fill the weight room.

“The gym is a place to learn more about yourself,” said Awni Broughton, co-president of UC Santa Barbara’s chapter of Girl Gains, a student-led organization promoting a strong female presence in the weight room. “It’s important to remember that everyone was a beginner at some point, and just because you don't look a certain way or lift a certain amount, it doesn't diminish your ability to be a weightlifter. You’re a weightlifter if you pick up a weight.”

With inclusion and motivation at the forefront, Girl Gains is facing gym intimidation head-on, creating a powerful community of weightlifters who share a common goal: to feel strong and healthy. The organization encourages its members to explore different forms of exercise and offers advice to help beginners flourish in the weight room. Members also attend group fitness classes at local studios in pilates, HIIT, cycling and so on.

Founded at San Diego State University, Girl Gains was inspired by a lack of community and female comradery in the gym. Elisabeth Bradley, Girl Gains National CEO, created the collegiate club to unite womxn and non-binary weightlifters.

This organization aims to break people's unrealistic perceptions about the weight room by promoting lifting as a fun activity to gain strength. It does not focus on hitting certain numbers or expectations besides weightlifting PRs (personal records).

“Girl Gains welcomes womxn and non-binary people from all weightlifting levels and all walks of life. It is truly an arena built for women who want to lift each other up,” Broughton said.

“Swolemates,” a Girls Gains gym-partner program, enhances the gym experience for its members by matching them with other members with the same fitness goals. “When I was matching people for Swolemates, I had two girls that I paired in fall quarter, and by spring quarter, they were still coming to events and working out together,” said Andelina Miller, UCSB’s Girl Gains co-president. Having someone in your corner who cheers you on while weightlifting or hitting a new personal record is what makes this community so special, the co-presidents emphasized. Women in this club are motivating each other to reach their maximum potential.

Indeed, Girl Gains prides itself on establishing a friendly environment for people with similar interests and aspirations. Members meet like-minded people and make friends who in turn motivate each other through their fitness journey, without judgement.

“When I started working out, I noticed that there was a big disparity in the gym,” Miller added. “It's important to have a club like Girl Gains because sometimes it’s hard being a woman in a male-dominated space where you may receive unwanted attention or feel uncomfortable.”

Girl Gains members are empowered to take up space in the gym and to see themselves represented within the weightlifting world. As a female and non-binary organization, the club officers are excited to celebrate the inclusive and diverse body of members at UCSB.

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