

Original Article

Fitness culture in the era of COVID-19. new reality, new challenges. Perspective of personal trainers.

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Abstract

Sport is, without a doubt, an inherent part of our culture and social life. Changes in social reality connected with the emergence of COVID-19 and resulting introduction of particular actions aimed at prevention of spreading the danger, have not bypassed the world of sport or, widely understood, fitness culture. Colossal changes, which stopped everything for a moment, have ensued. The effect of those changes was suspension of operation of fitness facilities involved in fitness culture, including fitness clubs or gyms. The fitness world, the community of creators as well as consumers of fitness culture, collided with a new reality and new challenges. The loss of workplaces, e.g. for trainers, and the lack of spaces to be physically active have influenced immensely how sport activities look like for the subjects actively taking care of their health, physical condition, their bodies and appearance. What is Polish fitness world currently struggling with? How personal trainers are faring in the era of COVID-19? How does the collaboration of personal trainers and their clients look like? How does the fitness community find themselves in the new “coronavirus”, pandemic reality? What strategies were adopted by the personal trainers to survive and be able to function actively in their professions? I will try to answer these specific questions in this article, based on my own research, which had an exploratory character and was aimed at recognizing the experiences of personal trainers as the main representatives of the new reality connected to the emergence of COVID-19. The research was conducted through interviews with 10 personal trainers who work in Wrocław (Poland). As a result of the qualitative data analysis, six main areas emerged, such as reactions for the introduction of changes; reflections on life; new possibilities; places/spaces for work and meetings; interpersonal relationships and reflections on the future. The fitness culture during the COVID 19 pandemic has undergone a significant transformation. The obtained data indicate a critical, rather negative attitude to the introduced restrictions and their consequences for the widely understood fitness, physical activity and sports sectors. I hope that this small fragment of the reality related to participation in the fitness culture and the struggles of people in the pandemic era, which I mentioned in my article, will be a contribution to further research and will encourage reflection on the fitness culture, social and socialization values of sport and our future.

Keywords: COVID 19, coronavirus, sport, fitness, fitness culture, physical activity, personal trainer, training, fitness clubs, gyms.

Introduction

One of the most recognizable signs of our times is ubiquitous and pervasive change. Impermanence and uncertainty are inscribed in the times, in which it came for us to live. We are witnesses to incessant changes encompassing with their range all aspects of social life. This evolution and continuous metamorphoses are connected with globalisation processes and the advent of times described as postmodernity or liquid modernity. We live in the world full of change, uncertainty, evanescence, risk and fear. „The world I call 'liquid' because, like all liquids, it cannot stand still and keep its shape for long. Everything or almost everything in this world of ours keeps changing: fashions we follow and the objects of our attention (constantly shifting attention, today drawn away from things and events that attracted it yesterday, and to be drawn away tomorrow from things and events that excite us today), things we dream of and things we fear, things we desire and things we loathe, reasons to be hopeful and reasons to be apprehensive. And the conditions around us, conditions in which we make our living and try to plan our future, in which we connect to some people and disconnect (or are disconnected) from others, keep changing as well. Opportunities for more happiness and threats of misery flow or float by, come and go and change places, and more often than not they do all that too swiftly and nimbly to allow us to do something sensible and effective to direct or redirect them, keep them on course or forestall them. To cut a long story short: this world, our liquid modern world, keeps surprising us (...)” (Bauman, 2011, p.1).

The dynamics of ongoing changes (metamorphoses) in social reality means lack of ready and limited possibilities of scenarios for one’s own life. It determines the necessity and need to “adjust to new

requirements”¹(Leszniewski, 2007, p.1), being flexible (Beck, 2004; Giddens, 2001, 2010; Bauman, 2011) and “experiencing yourself in freedom and taking responsibility for your own life” (Berger, 1995, p.167), leading to the fact that “ability of a human being to move effectively in the world requires constant learning of new skills and a reflective approach to their life and the choices made” (Leszniewski, 2007, p.1).

Perfect depiction of aforementioned words about liquid reality and incessant need to reinterpret and self-create one’s own life and designing new ways of acting in the face of surprising changes in the social reality is the current COVID-19 pandemic. This extraordinary time of the pandemic unquestionably influenced immensely our functioning in our well-known ordinary lives and completely revolutionized every area of social life. One of the sectors which were hurt the most is sport, space for physical activity and the fitness world, the areas which are at the centre of my deliberations.

Sport was an inseparable part of our culture and a real phenomenon since the dawn of times. As a part of our reality it accompanied individuals in different forms throughout their whole lives, carrying with it socializing and universal values, as Błajet (2012, p. 89) mentions “it is (sport) not only the model reflection of social life but also autonoimical being, in different ways anticipating social trends”.

Therefore, as you can surmise or base on your own experiences as an observer and a first-hand witness being in the centre of currently crystallizing changes in social reality connected with the emergence of COVID-19, you can see that the ongoing changes and resulting from them commonly introduced particular actions aimed at prevention of spreading the danger, have not bypassed widely understood physical culture with all of its derivatives. Colossal metamorphosis, which stopped everything, has ensued. The effect of those changes was suspension of operation of fitness facilities involved in fitness culture, including fitness clubs or gyms and reduction and shrinking of possibilities to engage in activities within active participation of fitness culture. There are numerous effects of these activities. In this article I will focus on the fitness culture, created along processes of emerging modernity, and then liquid modernity (postmodernity). Simultaneously, with the changes ongoing in social reality, as the presence of consumptionism, instant culture, visual culture, free time culture, society of risk and ubiquitous individualism and incessant reflections of one’s life, chasing the new, the unknown, the pleasure, the self-improvement, reinterpreting your own identity and relationships with others, there was a new space created, known as fitness culture. Concurrently, the narration which noticed possibilities of creating and anchoring these currents in the body has emerged.

What is fitness, what is fitness culture? „Fitness may thus be understood as a cultural field: a set of relatively structured positions within which individuals and institutions, producers, and consumers struggle over the status and definitions of fitness and fit bodies. These struggles occur through the mobilization of particular forms of resources or stakes, some specific to the field – such as physique and sport science expertise – and some generic to consumer societies and services economies – such as impression management and the cultivation of status. The development of the contemporary commercial fitness field has involved the institutionalization of specific social settings (particularly, the health club), a variety of media forms targeting both the consumer (such as exercise manuals and magazines) and the producer (occupational texts and manuals), a cadre of professional producers (such as personal trainers and aerobics instructors), and a range of field-specific goods to signal participation” (Smith Maguire, 2008, p. 21). Fitness culture is a sociocultural phenomenon centered around physical activity, health, body, and appearance - to create your own identity, take responsibility for your fate, control your life and try to feel safe, where “Fitness gyms are at the core of a much broader fitness culture” (Sassatelli, 2010, p. 11) and people (especially trainers, instructors) become both: creators and consumers of this culture (Sassatelli, 2010; Maguire, 2008).

The society of creators, as well as the fitness consumers, collided with new reality and new challenges. The loss of workplaces, eg. of personal trainers and the lack of spaces to do physical activities have immensely influenced how sport activities look like currently for the subjects actively taking care of their health, physical condition, their bodies and appearance.

Material & methods

The research had an exploratory character aimed at learning about the experiences and the way of interpreting daily life and work reality in which personal trainers work and live with particular regard to their role in physical culture from the perspective of changes prevailing and resulting from the pandemic, especially with the regard to limitations resulting from the governmental regulations and their effects on limiting physical activity. The research was conducted through in-depth interviews with representatives of the fitness culture, namely personal trainers. The interviews were realized online or face-to-face with 10 trainers aged 29-39 years. Women as well as men participated in the research. The criteria of choice were: work experience (at least 3 years of experience as a personal trainer); city: Wrocław; the place of work before the restrictions were introduced: fitness club or gym. Sample selection was deliberate, whereas the participants were recruited using the snowball principle method. The material collected, which was recorded to archive the content, was then subjected to next steps in the research process, preparing transcription and double analysis to distinguish and identify main topics from the answers of the subjects.

¹ All Polish quotations, if not stated otherwise, were translated by the interpreter.

The aim of the qualitative and phenomenological analysis was detailed and in-depth recognition and understanding of experiences of trainers as the main subjects functioning in the fitness culture modified by the pandemic. The trainers answered the question whether the emergence of danger connected with the presence of COVID-19, the necessity of isolation, “quarantine”, limitations connected with introduction of restrictions connected with physical activity influenced their work as a personal trainer and what changed. The lengths of the interviews were from 40 minutes to 110 minutes.

Gathered data show critical approaches towards the restrictions introduced in the fitness sector, physical activity and sport. The participants were showing rather negative attitudes and they emphasize the necessity to reconstruct pre-existing experiences connected with the profession of personal trainers. Thematic areas that emerged based on the collected material were concerning: 1) reactions for the introduction of changes; reaction for the closing of fitness clubs and gyms; 2) reflection on life 3) new possibilities 4) place/space for work and meetings 5) interpersonal relationships 6) reflection on future.

The results show new insights of the professionals from the fitness sector and those could be the basis for the future research connected with changes and adjustment to currently prevailing work conditions and actions in the space of fitness culture.

Results

The main overtone of the researched topics showed a strong negatively marked approach to the experiences which took place in the lives of the research subjects. Negative and critical approach was discerned in all of the experiences of physical trainers in the perspective of finding themselves in a new reality of the fitness culture after the changes and restrictions were introduced resulting from the emergence of dangers connected with the COVID-19 pandemic.

All participants of the research in most of their statements included key words which expressed a critical-negative approach. All participants reconstructed their experiences descriptively in new reality, using phrases such as “all negatives”, “dramatic”, “critical”, “terrible”, “awful”, “misguided”, “harmful”, “inappropriate”, “reprehensible”, “unacceptable”, “ridiculous”, “dishonest”, “ruin”, “destruction”, “arrogant”. Aforementioned phrases were notoriously repeated in most of the statements. Four of the researched men (Mar 32, Kub 33, Mich 34, Dom 29) and one woman (Mag 39) uttered a sentence describing their opinion and approach to the changes introduced into the fitness culture, formulated like this: “what was introduced is ridiculous”, “what was proposed is ridiculous”. Mat 34 stated: “This is nuts. I didn’t know if I should laugh or cry. They have no idea what they are doing. It is pathetic that someone decides so mindlessly about everyone, about the whole fitness. (...) F***, to destroy everything, the whole fitness market, it must be a joke”. Joa 35 : “It’s some kind of misunderstanding, I don’t know what to think anymore. (...) This [introduction of restrictions, closing fitness clubs and gyms] is harmful for the whole society, for the economy, for everyone, for people”. Jol 31: “I’m waiting for this nightmare to end”. The research subjects were very strongly remarking on the current situation, using a lot of vulgar words emphasizing their anger. Mag 39: “I’ve got only one word on my mind: f*ck! F*ck! F*ck!”. The statements of the trainers were filled with anger but also with the feeling of helplessness. Grz 32: “What am I supposed to do?! I know this is a nightmare but it has to be somehow. I don’t accept what they f*cking order us to do”. A lot of people are waiting with impatience for the end of current restrictions and introducing new actions, as Woj 37: “I’m seriously waiting for this to end. Until this circus ends. Because it is a circus, it’s one big misunderstanding, you know, we want to work normally, not wait, ekhm, for God knows what”.

Theme 1: Reactions for the introduction of changes; reaction for the closing of fitness clubs and gyms. Among the reactions for the introduction of restrictions resulting in the closing of fitness clubs, gyms and other places used for physical and kinesthetic activity, the whole variety of emotions and responses emerged, which show mixed emotions and responses connected with the extension of restrictions introduced in March of 2020 and the next stages of the pandemic. Dominant emotions were fury, anger, fear, helplessness, breakdown. Mag 39: “You know, it was pretty scary at the beginning. I was awfully furious, there is no word to describe what I was feeling. Furious, but I just lived through some kind of a shock, breakdown, I was afraid. What was I supposed to do? Overnight, ah, ok, we’re closing you... I was terrified.” Another test subject metaphorically presented how strong was the blow, the feeling of helplessness, terror, again fear and the feeling of breakdown. Woj 37: “It was a nightmare! So many years of hard work. You know what, it’s difficult to say, but it’s like you were working hard, sacrificing yourself, you arrived at the top, let’s say 10th floor, and suddenly boom. You are at the bottom. You know, so surprising, you take a step, you have plans, you know what to do, you have everything sorted out and... there is no you anymore. Years of hard work are destroyed, it’s literally a knife in the back. (...) I didn’t know what to do next. First impression, I felt terrible. I think I was a bit depressed. (...) You know, it’s like you live in a fairytale, everything is great and the end is without the happy end, it’s like someone shook me or pinched me. I still fear this terror, but (...)”. Dom 29: “Hm, how to say this. I was pretty content, even happy, because it started to work out. And then a breakdown. At first I thought that this is some kind of a joke, that it will be temporary, everyone thought like that and these two weeks have already lasted a year. (...) No work, the clients were also terrified and they left. What is more, they also had some financial

problems, and such, so it was a really hard time”. Kub 33: “I don’t want to go back to that. Before, I only made money from the training, and now.... After this all started, I have to say, it was hard. I had some loans, and no money”. As the trainers emphasize, in the initial phases they lived through disappointment and breakdown. A slight change appeared further, and the statements of the test subjects allowed for another, key theme to emerge.

Theme 2: Reflection on life.

Describing what they experienced and are still experiencing in their “professional” lives as personal trainers living in reality distorted by the coronavirus, is, as emphasized by a few of the test subjects, a huge collision with reality. The necessity to stop, to reflect on their lives, to draw conclusions. Jol 31: “Because you know, it’s like some kind of a bell woke you up, you are a princess and then you are woken by, not a prince, but by the coronavirus, and you are like in a trance. Ok, we are closed, all right for two weeks, but what am I supposed to do now?! And you know, you wake up and you don’t know what to do (...), you have no plans, you cannot meet anyone, you won’t go shopping, you won’t travel anywhere. And suddenly you are totally alone at home, within four walls and you are thinking (...); you have nothing, no life, because from the morning until evening you were running from one workplace to another, to another gym and for another training. OMG! How does my life look like now? I don’t have any life, I live only for work (...). No boyfriend, nor anyone. Alone but only now can I see this. It’s a bit sad but it’s nothing, you have to go on living somehow”. Similar remarks were made by 8 consecutive people. Mar 32: “Yeah, it was a time when everything was subordinated to work. If other people were working, I had time-off (...). And the other way round. I was working in a couple of different places, and suddenly you have to deal with a totally new reality, in a crazy everyday life. There was a lot of time to think, for considerations. I know that it’s necessary to slow down”. Dom 29: “It’s necessary to organize your life anew, you can think and create a new plan. It’s unknown what is coming tomorrow, if it comes back, great, if not...? You have to think, have to deal with it.” Joa 35: “At last I can sit down and think calmly. Maybe it’s a good time to catch up, think, organize your life, think about different opportunities”. Kub 33: “You know, first it was a trainwreck, I had no job, but you can’t just sit still, something can always happen, you never know. So I started thinking, looking for a different idea for myself, and now I’m going to sound like a coach: I made a list in which I compared what I can do, my life up to that point and what I want to do with this and how to organize it now. And I even made a visualization! (...) I take my life in my own hands, I’m not going to be surprised like that again”. Grz 32: “It was necessary to get over it and think hard about the future”. Mag 39: “I came back home, husband, children, and just then I saw how I used to function. Now I know I want to reevaluate everything. I want to say that I love my babes, my trainees and clients, but I need to get a grip on myself. I need to fight a bit with myself, for myself and for my life and I want to do these puzzles as I want them to be”. Woj 37: “I have to pull myself together and live on, what happened is already gone and you cannot go back to it, it’s life, nothing’s eternal”. The participants of the research saw a chance and necessity to take responsibility for their lives in this negative reality. With their backs against the wall, unemployed, with uncertain futures, with time for organizing their lives, their personal matters, abandoning some activities for the sake of a more qualitative life. Mar 32: “Because life needs to be lived happily, not just truded through.” Dom 29: “It’s not so funny right now but I think we still have our whole lives in front of us (...). And actually you need to consider not only quantity but also quality of your life”. The participants saw a chance to change their lifestyles and design their lives anew according to their own rules and principles.

Theme 3: New possibilities.

Immediately after the participants noticed the chance that was given to them by fate to consider how they want to live, how they want their everyday lives to look like, they thought about their losses and profits and as Joa 35 stated: “I made a comparison of advantages and disadvantages, of profits and losses. And I can tell you that it was a very eye-opening experience. There is nothing to fight for, because there is nothing to fight with, it is as it is but now I’m only positively looking forward to the future. Obviously, don’t think that I’m emotionally unstable, at one moment it is good, at another, it’s bad, but I am still scared and I’m looking for the ways in which to spend this time. I just hope it’s not going to be worse”. Despite further uncertainty connected with the future, the fear of what might happen, the participants look into the future with hope. Mich 34: “If I had to only sit and do nothing, I would probably suffer from depression. I prefer doing anything to thinking about all of this. You have to earn money, you have to go on living, I cannot only complain. You have to think of something (...). I’ve already talked to whom I needed to talk to, I have the equipment so I can do something. No risk no....”. It shows that the reflection of the past became a reflexive project of the future and the necessity of taking risks. Mag 39: “I have more time and I never thought that I would be doing this but I couldn’t convince myself, but I took the risk. I was afraid to work online, I was afraid of being judged, because you know how it is on the internet... But I’m so content. I was convinced by my girlfriends, we were sitting at home anyway. I once conducted [online training] and it started, I liked it. And you know what, I thought that now I can plan everything better. I can be at home more often, or even go on holidays, I can go to another room, close the door (...); I can get off the beach for an hour or when the children are asleep or in the evening and I can conduct a training session from any place in the world. I just had to overcome myself”. Aforementioned statements show that the reflection brought additional desired effects in the development of their professional lives and new ideas,

new approaches came forward. Mar 32: "I've never thought that I could be working online, but it's not terrible (...), actually it's pretty good, there are some effects. We realize everything just as we've done before. I mean I have less people but recently I'm starting my website, social media, I'm recording, I even have quite a nice reception, I've been recording new clips recently (...). I didn't have time for that before, but now something's nice is happening, new challenges." Joa 35: "Oh yes, I went more for keeping my profile towards a healthy lifestyle, I'm showing what to eat, some clothes, how to workout (...) a bit of influencer's actions and it's been going pretty well". Dom 29: "You know, I'm training myself, I'm reading more, I'm doing some courses and workshops, whatever's possible. Before I did it only on-sight but now since I have more time and I can learn more, I would be stupid if I didn't take the advantage". Mag 39: "Gosh, how I loved going to conferences, you know, the atmosphere, we met, all of the girls (...) now I miss it a bit, but, fortunately, I can do something online, but it's not the same. I miss that". Mat 34: "Yeah, I'm doing some workshops, webinars, I have the knowledge, possibilities. I've worked for a bit and I did some nice webinars. I am also a guest speaker as an expert sometimes." Grz 32: "You have to have an open mind, this is the most important. It's just like in sport. Here you have to be always ready and you cannot be sure, you have to constantly try, not to settle. Learning new skills is something that describes me. I have fun from the fact that I am healthy and I can use my body 100% (...). I want to be better by 1% everyday, it's in my nature, I live actively. I don't observe, I don't just exist, I act". As is clearly visible, the new reality also brought new possibilities. The test subjects accepted their current situation, which is unfolding independently of them. Moreover, through overcoming the crises and managing even if faced with adversities, they try to find new paths of actions and, despite the frustration visible in their remarks, they try to deal with changes, sometimes by taking risks, sometimes working in new spaces, they are going forward step by step. Furthermore, some of them are conscious of the fact that the only correct attitude towards life is the proactive attitude and reacting to everything that daily life throws at them. The courage to take next, new steps and incessant process of finding yourself in the change, the necessity to acquire new abilities and competences is the proper way to finding yourself in this life and facing it. Kub 33: "Lack of perspectives and going back to the state before the pandemic caused me to make a manly decision and look at everything rationally and I chose. I changed my field of work. I have only a couple of collaborations and I know nothing will come out of them. I believe that everything will come back to normal quickly". In this theme we can distinguish three subthemes, which are connected to possibilities: 1) online classes 2) self-improvement 3) conducting webinars, training others 4) taking risks 5) proactive attitude.

Theme 4: Place/space for work and meetings.

Talking about the frustration and new possibilities, I smoothly proceed to the next theme, which was clearly emphasized in the trainer's statements. Closing of the fitness clubs and gyms caused the loss of work and the loss of steady income or, at least, problems with financial liquidity. The facilities in which sport life was going on were closed and, therefore, fitness culture lost its spaces. Apart from the layoffs, terminations of contracts with the trainers, they also lost their workplaces with all necessary equipment and tools. That was a huge issue and a very difficult experience for the test subjects. Jol 31: "I was working in 5 fitness clubs, now I have nothing left. I used to acquire some clients through being at the gym, they saw me, approached to talk. Some of them based on recommendations, of course, they used to find me the most clients through the reception desks at the gym. Now you have to work a bit harder". Mat 34: "I had my workplace, we used to meet there, the clients were coming, I had the equipment, everything I needed (...); at the beginning I was left with nothing. I was meeting outside, in garages, in a basement, even in a shed. I also used public sport fields or tracks, but it's not the same. There is no comfort. If the weather is nice outside, it can be very pleasant but a lot depends on the outside factors." Dom 29: "For me, the lack of gym was a total breakdown. You know, I have a lot of different people, with different problems, sometimes you do need some equipment sometimes and there is nothing. I had to carry my own with me and lend it. We were training the most often in parks, some outdoor gyms but there is no comfort, you don't have enough equipment, no comfortable place, no toilet nor shower, no dressing room, a lot of different people around, lack of comfort both for me and my client. And you know how it was, we were supposed to meet at the gym, the client had a certain motivation to come, get himself together and now it is as it is. More excuses, terrible weather or some rain. (...) Apart from that, our relationships looked differently, we used to be, eee, a big family of sport freaks. You saw where you were coming and what for. Now everything is blurrier. If you still have some regular clients, ok you can begin, but with a new person it is hard to start. You don't know if he's going to like you or the place or the conditions to train in." Mag 39: "When I was coming to the club everything was easier to divide, private space from the workspace and now it's sometimes impossible". Joa 35: "You were coming to the gym, you knew where you were! Everyone has similar aims, no one stares at you, you are only focusing on what you are supposed to do, and so, on the open air, you're worrying not only about your comfort, it's the slightest problem, but you know, your trainees are embarrassed." Jol 31: "Everything was closed before, now we have to figure something out. Some gyms are open, but you know, you were coming to your own, you had comfort, you were at home, you knew everything, and know there are hard times and especially when everyone comes flocking to this one gym just like ants, everyone is on top of everyone else, but you know, everyone wants it, the equipment is there. Woj 37: "There isn't even any comparison. All of the equipment was there and now it's either take everything with yourself, but believe me, it's sometimes a bit

problematic, or you aren't doing something 100%. I don't think it's about this. You have to deal with this but I sometimes feel guilty. These training sessions are sometimes mundane because we have limited resources and limited possibilities". Kub 33: "You know how it is at the gym, there was comfort, you could always find your place. Apart from that, you were in one place for the whole day and now you don't even have a place to pee." Mich 34: "Fortunately, I have my own equipment but I had to buy everything myself. My online clients are supposed to have their own basic equipment, but you know, it's obviously some additional money and you need to have a place to keep it. Generally sometimes it's convenient for me that I don't need to go anywhere, I'm just staying at home, as well as for the clients, but you know, if you went to the gym, you could disconnect from all the noise, your daily life, your problems. You lived a bit differently." Grz 32: "Now I cannot tell my wife nor my children that I'm going to work and I'm not there, and sometimes you have to spend time with them, help with something, you don't have this kind of your own space".

Theme 5: Interpersonal relationships.

Proceeding from the theme of gyms, fitness clubs as specific places, spaces for the work on your own body to the spaces where fitness culture is still alive, I cannot omit another, the last main theme, that was emphasized in the remarks of researched trainers about their experiences. The trainers, as they emphasized in previous aspects, showed that fitness clubs were the places to which you come in with a particular motivation, plan and with a certain goal. It's the place where you know you are surrounded by people with similar interests, with similar aims and similar problems. How do the relationships look like now? Joa 35: "It's a bit different, and I'll admit it honestly that I miss it terribly. You knew everyone, you could talk, and here, on the open air, you don't feel this community, you wouldn't chat and even you sometimes feel like an intruder. It's obvious that your relationships with the clients, the new ones, you meet them, do your thing and go your separate ways. In the past, you were talking before and after. It looked totally different." Dom 29: "In fact, if you think about the relationships before the coronavirus, it was definitely better. We were a gang, you could feel the atmosphere. Now it's just different and you don't get to meet new people because there's no place for it. The majority of my clients are the regulars and I can honestly say that our relations are much tighter but on the other hand we are only for ourselves, we don't have any other stimuli. Apart from that, you know, the pandemic, the problems, are catching up to all of us and we support each other and it's so cool. I feel very well with some of them that I'm real friends with, even long-term, even like a family." Mar 32: "Now I have a clear group of regular clients with whom we've been working for a long time, we know everything about each other. We meet after the training sessions, we are really tight-knit." Grz 32: "With the new [clients] it's different, but with the regulars we have super friendly relationships. You know, it's a bit of a specificity of this job, you have to trust one another. As a trainer I have to be a bit of a psychologist and I listen about all these problems, but it's normal. We're not only talking about how to do something but also they came to me to open and talk about anything. Mich 34: "Yeah, I had a lot of support from my regular trainees. You know it was so nice because we actually have a very strong bond. They are aware of what they want, they don't want to stop, they want to fight. There are some adversities, such as closing the gyms but they didn't let me feel, even for a moment that I'd be left alone. Ha, they even proposed some solutions themselves. You know what, I think I just got to know people, and it is different, but the ones I work with, I know I can count on them always. They feel like that themselves because we support each other, and, moreover, if they didn't want to, they wouldn't talk to me about their private matters (...) so this time verified the relationships for sure. Yeah, it's about quality, not quantity".

Theme 6: Reflection on the future.

The last important thing for trainers which was mentioned in their statements was reflection on the future of fitness culture and people, especially in terms of caring for health, a rational approach to a healthy lifestyle, and physical activity. They focused on incomprehension towards the decision of the Polish government and lack of proper education in terms of health and physical activity as a basic, the most fundamental quality of life of people. Kub 33: "I do not understand the government's decisions and their groundless arguments, as e.g. low ceilings in clubs. And this is the reason for closing us (fitness world)?! Isn't that important? How will people live in the future? Will they choose sports or stay at home – which attitude will be better? Only one answer is correct, unfortunately...". Dom 29: "Sports and health education is insufficient. We (trainers) cared for people and set a good example." They emphasized that fitness culture has dissipated to its various dimensions and areas and this situation can be dangerous for people. Mar 32: "Gyms are closed, people exercise at home or not at all. When they exercise it is good, although they try, I dread the thought of effects of this. They have no control, care, or support. Majority of people do not know how to act. They watch exercise videos, but we do not have control over how they do them, and the wrong technique can only worsen their health. Lack of an individual plan and, for example, lack of results can also result in frustration. You know, because we not only shared our knowledge on how to exercise, but we were mentors, motivators – we worked as a psychologist, a coach – people need that more than just showing them how to do something. Woj 37: "We educated them and gave them tips: how to live and act both now and in the future." Jol 31: "I can't stand it – people are taught now that sport is bad, unnecessary. They (the government) show that sport and physical activity pose a threat to people's health. It's stupid! I wonder what will happen in the future since now we get such sick information. The

obesity and general health problems will surely increase, and people will not seek help in sports". Moreover, the trainers mentioned that they are appalled at the lack of cooperation with people, possibilities of teaching good habits and lack of work have disturbed some people from the fitness world. They pointed out that fitness culture has dissolved to its various dimensions and areas and they spotted two opposite sides of this situation. Mich 34: "You know when I think about all of us in the gym world, we as personal trainers are not too bad. Fitness instructors who lead only group classes are in the worst situation. They don't have a way to work now. I think about people who came to those group activities also. Everything was taken from them. Not everyone can afford individual classes. Maybe they practice something, but most of them probably does nothing. They do not know how, they don't have any possibilities, no equipment, no space, and probably no motivation. We give them something more than sport. We motivated and gave mental support. Maybe all effects of the gym closures haven't emerged yet but they are coming and it will be a health disaster". Mag 39: "Physical activity is the basis, and now people are persuaded that it is unnecessary, that to sit at home, wash your hands, take medication is enough and everything will be fine. Well, it won't be. I'm afraid of the future".

Discussion

Trying to answer the question of how the fitness culture looks like in the era of COVID-19, appealing to my own research presented before, it needs to be firmly emphasized that it underwent some sizeable changes. It seems different, though maybe thanks to it even more, especially in some sectors, some features of postmodernist society were highlighted, such as ubiquitous fear, anxiety and uncertainty, which were visible in relation to the reactions of trainers to the changes taking place. Apart from a lot of initial negative experiences, "the change was seen as a new chance" (Heinemann, 1989; Sztompka, 2002; Czerska, 2003). Through exploiting moments of standstill for the whole sport space, the trainers reflected on their whole lives up to this point and they took responsibility for their own fates and futures. Recognizing new possibilities, and adopting proactive attitudes regarding the reality surrounding them, showing courage and facing the risks. Despite the fact that in the era of coronavirus, the fitness market stopped, personal trainers acted according to the future oriented idea, they take care of their education, expand their competences and acquire new skills by participating in courses and workshops organized online. "Personal trainers do not simply stand between the consumer and the fitness field; they actively weave the two together through their own commitment to the field. They are thus a particular brand of service workers, involved in both the production of the fitness lifestyle and its consumption – for it is their own lifestyle that they are selling (Bourdieu, 1984)".

Referring to the next thematic area that was distinguished at the stage of the analysis of my own research, it is the fact that the "experiencing of sports" has also changed a little, which is related to the closing of gyms and fitness clubs and the transfer of this experience through the body to outdoor spaces, as well as home space by conducting online classes (Gerrish, 2020).

Referring to the theme of the relationships sector, we need to confirm that the trainers are not only "educators" of a healthy lifestyle and correct physical activity but the relationships between the trainer and their trainee, their client are based on something deeper. As mentioned in Maguire (2007) "Trainers work as body and exercise experts as well as emotional workers, mediating between the precise promotional needs of the fitness industry and the often vague body aspirations of the clients. Like theme park animators, fitness trainers have to get consumers to partake in a meaningful experience, inducing them to experience things in a particular way, furnishing them with a series of cognitive and emotive instruments to read and enjoy the scene which they are entering. They are key resources to qualify as free, self-gratifying, personalised, amusing, and creative a place like the gym which could otherwise be felt as too instrumental, rationalised and standardised" (Sassatelli, 2008, p. 17). Immensely crucial, simultaneously being a vital symbol of the fitness culture are fitness clubs and gyms, which are experienced not only as an ingredient in the search of a perfect body but also a well-organized place where you can negotiate a variety of meanings and identities; "having a relationship with the development of a certain club atmosphere which provides the client with crucial relationship stimuli" (Crossley, 2006).

As stated in the last theme which focused on the future, we can see that trainers perceive themselves as an important link in the process of health education and sports socialization. They wonder how the current situation (closing the gyms, deprivation of the places of cooperation and deprivation of the common (controlled) space for fitness culture will affect our society. "The gym, however, offered far more than a utilitarian function of building muscle. It provided a sense of escape and therapeutic, ritualistic and remedial qualities. The familiarity of routine itself provided security and structure in response to the chaos of the outside world" (Brighton, Wellard, Clark 2020, p. 3). Familiar space, familiar people, controlling the body, expert knowledge are just examples that can be used to take control over your own life and increase your sense of security. This is one of the reasons why the fitness culture, fitness club, gyms and personal trainers are vital elements in our lives, which I tried to present in my article. Even Plato emphasized the importance of regular practice and the significant impact of physical activity on the quality of life, which is articulated in this sentence "Lack of activity destroys the good condition of every human being, while movement and methodical physical exercise save it and preserve it" (Kumar, 2017, p.1).

Conclusion

Fitness Culture in the era of COVID-19 refers to the new reality and new problems connected with physical activity. Personal trainers as subjects in my studies emphasize the need to adapt to changes and look for new opportunities, but at the same time, they look with some fear in the future. I hope that this small fragment of research of fitness culture will have an influence on the perception of the fitness culture, fitness clubs, trainers and people belonging to this community as activities not only aimed at appearance and body, and will show the more important side of practicing physical activity focused on health understood holistically (both physical, mental and social health). The changes mentioned by the surveyed trainers show them as entities aware of their role in society. They notice the changes taking place and try to follow the course of time and adapt to the current conditions. More importantly, I hope that readers will start to see, for example, opportunities to fill the gaps related to inappropriate physical education, insufficient sports socialization, global health problems connected with obesity and sedentary lifestyle in personal trainers and fitness clubs and the entire fitness culture.

This research is only a small fragment, a section of changes happening in the fitness culture due to the COVID-10 pandemic, though it can be a basis for further research.

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