



Anthropological Analysis of the Role of Personal Trainer in Fitness Teaching

Wang Jinjie^{1,*}

¹University of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Beijing, China

Abstract: Based on the theory of Thomas Csordas's theory of anthropology of body, this paper records and analyzes the in-depth interviews with several experienced fitness enthusiasts and personal trainers. This study found that, in the teaching of fitness, the role of personal trainer mainly has two forms: one is cultural objectification, that is the role of cultural objectification expert, which is mainly for students to do physical examination, teaching and guiding fitness movements and making fitness plans, etc. The other is the preobjective function, which is reflected in the accompanying role of students in the process of fitness. In different consumption levels of gymnasium, the role of personal trainer is different.

Key words: personal trainer; fitness; anthropology; embodiment; gym

I. Dual role of fitness trainer

In the teaching of fitness trainer, the role of fitness trainer mainly has two forms: one is cultural objectification, that is the role of cultural objectification expert, which is mainly for students to do physical examination, teaching and guiding fitness movements and making fitness plans, etc. The other is the preobjective function, which is reflected in the accompanying role of students in the process of fitness. In the role of post-objectification, fitness trainer takes on the role of "specialist in cultural objectification", which was proposed by Thomas Csordas.^[1] They regard all parts of the human body as the material objects that can be shaped, and then use the knowledge of sports physiology and nutrition to plan the body shaping process, explaining the subjective body feelings in fitness, such as muscle congestion, pain, stretching and so on. Therefore, the professional level is usually used as the standard to evaluate the fitness trainer's ability. Because fitness trainer master professional fitness knowledge what Merleau-Ponty means by a

"conventional means of expression"^[2], the communication between personal trainer and members is the most orthodox social activity in the gym. Therefore, as a specialist in cultural objectification, personal trainer plays a very important role in teaching and social communication in the gym.

In addition to the role of cultural objectification, fitness trainer also has the preobjective function, that is, the role of accompanying fitness. At this time, fitness trainer is more like a companion and supervisor. When students exercise alone, the preobjective process of fitness is completed alone, and the body feeling stays in their own body, lacking the communication of body feeling between different subjects. When the personal trainer is around, whether it is to supervise, or to protect and help the student with his body, or to carry out the same training at the same time, the personal trainer will complete the fitness action with the student mentally and physically. In this process, there is inter-subjective communication between coaches and students, which includes physical contact, emotional communication and spiritual encouragement and

Corresponding Author: Wang Jinjie. University of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Beijing, China.

Email: wngjnj@163.com

©The Author(s) 2022. Published by BON VIEW PUBLISHING PTE. LTD. This is an open access article under the CC BY License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

support.

The inter-subjective preobjective communication is one of the important attributes of personal trainer 's work, but it is easy to be ignored in reality. Some fitness people tend to pay more attention to its objectification (i.e. professional knowledge and teaching ability) while ignoring its preobjectification when estimating the value of fitness courses. Because of the high cost of personal coaching courses, people who are not well-off will think that the fitness action and equipment teaching courses are worth buying, while accompanying practice courses are not worth consuming. Some people think that accompanying practice is just an easy way for personal trainers to increase their income. Mr. Yue recalled his personal trainer courses:

“Before I bought personal trainer courses, I felt that he would not teach you any systematic things. For example, if you want to lose weight, he would only take you to do some aerobic exercise such as jump and run. He would often take you to do these things but would rarely do strength training. I bought about 20000 yuan for private teaching in Hefei before, and then I bought more in Beijing. I feel that personal trainer is useless. It's really useless. It's useless at all. Because he won't tell you anything really useful, his purpose is to promote the course, and then take you to practice with you, and then let you continue to renew. His purpose is to renew, correct action or something, but I feel useless. Their purpose is to let you renew, although they will correct your action or something, but I feel useless. It's the same if you don't buy it, but you still need to find a very senior person to take you. I lose weight faster because when I went home from vacation, I exercised with my brother, who has been keeping fitness and has a large muscular body, so he would really teach me how to practice.”

Most people understand the importance of accompanying fitness, and most of them think that personal trainer courses are necessary if they have enough financial ability. People recognize the above two functions of personal trainer. But in the case of limited financial ability, people have to reduce their own curriculum budget and only use the role of professional guidance of personal trainer while give up the role of accompanying fitness. Mr. Zhang shared how he used 30 personal trainer courses for one year:

“I just bought personal trainer courses to let the coach teach me how to practice, not to let the coach accompany me. So I made a clear appointment with my coach to have class every

Monday. For example, if my coach teaches me four movements of chest training on Monday, then I will review them on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. In the second week, we taught shoulders, in the third week, we taught legs. About five weeks later, I will learn all the training methods of chest, shoulder, back, leg, biceps and triceps. As a result, I learned most of the knowledge and movements in only five classes in five weeks. Then, during the self-training period, you must meet some fitness partners, and they will help you correct some movements. After five classes, I will talk with the coach: next, I'll have a class every two weeks, and let him teach me some new or more accurate actions, never learn repeated content. It means that I have been very proficient in the movements of chest, shoulder, back and leg in almost ten classes. In this way, I bought 30 private classes for a year. When my coach was angry, he also praised me that this method was quite scientific, but he grabbed my neck and said, 'don't tell others'.”

Most people understand and need the interaction of being accompanied during fitness. Only the economic reason may be the barrier between personal trainer and students. Under the condition of meeting the economic conditions, people's requirements for personal trainer are all-round, not only limited to the initial action teaching, but also whether the students can get the best preobjective body feeling in the fitness environment created by the personal trainer. Mr. Li, the boss of the company who has been keeping fit for five years and has reached a very professional fitness level in body shape and movement, still insists on buying private classes. He said:

“It is necessary to hire a personal trainer. If the economic situation permits, we must pay for it. Don't hire the cheaper one. You must hire more expensive one. For example, if you train for a period of time, you will find that the quality of the students brought by some coaches in this gym is very good, not the kind that some old men and women come to chat with, but his own members also seem to be very professional. Through his students can understand his professional level, because good members will definitely choose a good coach. It is impossible for a person with good fitness level to hire a personal trainer whose training is not as good as him. Therefore, we must hire a personal trainer. At the beginning, the frequency of classes can be less, such as twice a week, and then practice two or three times by yourself. In fact, it's not much over a month. I think this method will be very good, at least when you train, someone will supervise you. I have bought a lot of courses in

the gym. I chose boxing courses more, and the coach became my partner. But in my usual fitness, the coach trained with me, and we were fitness partner. For example, I'm in the gym. The three best coaches are training, and if I exercise that part of my body today, we'll be fitness partners on that day."

Mr. Hu graduated from the Institute of physical education. He has sports foundation, so he has never asked a personal trainer. But he is still used to looking for someone to accompany him when he is doing fitness:

"I had a special instructor on the road of fitness, but he was not my personal trainer. Once we practiced together, but later he did better than me, so he took me to practice."

According to the survey, people who keep fit for a long time will pay more attention to the preobjective role of personal trainer and the accompanying process of fitness. Especially when some experienced and professional fitness people with coaches exercise together, they are more like fitness partners or companions. For them, the role of fitness coach culture objectification experts is weakened, while the role of preobjective participant of subjective experience is strengthened. In this way, the bodybuilders can better understand the embodied experience in the interaction of fitness, that is, the empathy and synaesthesia between the subjects. The process of passion, emotion and body feeling transmitting among subjects is the embodiment value of fitness.

II. Differences of social roles of personal trainers in different levels of gyms

The communication between fitness members is largely based on fitness coaches. In the gym, in addition to the most basic health needs of physical exercise, most of them have a clear goal of body shape. Thus, the most basic and pure social relationship is established between the fitness coaches and members based on professional body building. The orthodoxy of this social relationship is that the fitness coach can provide professional knowledge to help members shape their bodies to achieve the goal state. High end gymnasiums use economic screening mechanism and good environment to ensure the purity of the social intercourse between coaches and members. The communication and chat between coaches and students become much easier and easier, without too much distractions and interference. When this pure purpose is interfered by the sales behavior and some low quality behaviors of low-end gym, the guidance and social contact function

of personal trainer is no longer pure. At this time, the identity of specialist in cultural objectification experts is weakened, and their chat up and guidance with members will also be regarded as suspected of sales. As a result, many members are suspicious and resistant to the communication with personal trainers, so the social contact function of the gym will be weakened to a certain extent. The following interview cases show that there are differences in the roles of personal trainers in gyms of different consumption levels:

Mr. A has been to many gyms of different consumption levels, and knows the difference of personal trainers in different gyms very well:

"When I just graduated, I would definitely go to some cheaper gyms. The environment would be very bad, dirty and greasy, and the equipment would be very old. But when my financial situation is better, I would definitely choose a gym with 5000 yuan to more than 10000 yuan. You would find that the equipment will be much newer, and then the quality of members and coaches would be much better. Because the gym was too cheap, in fact, no one was going to buy private classes. Everyone was training on their own. Once my friend bought a new pair of shoes, but it was stolen in the bathroom. It's just that some members have poor quality, but a good gym will be better. A good gym can provide more recessive social opportunities. In a relatively cheaper gym, there will be a big problem, that is, we often hate the harassment of fitness coaches when we go to the gym. But in fact, if you go to a good gym, you will find that the lessons of a good coach are very popular. Sometimes you may not be able to buy them if you want to. A good coach's lessons are full, such as who's on Monday, who's on Tuesday, who's at 5 o'clock every day, who's at 6 o'clock..... If you want to buy his lesson all of a sudden, he doesn't have to arrange time for you to attend it. Unless a member leaves in the middle of the way, he will have a vacancy. However, in a bad gym, the sales pressure of coaches will be very large. Because the members almost will not pay for classes, and the sales pressure of coaches is so great that he will twist all over his butt to ask if you want to buy a class or something. If you are chased by a coach to buy his lessons, especially when a poor level coach chases you to buy, your best way is to exercise hard and make yourself stronger than him. This will make him feel that he is not qualified to sell his courses to you."

Mr. Fan, a fitness trainer, initially worked in a low-level gym

in Beijing, and later successively worked in a medium and high-level gym in the center of Chengdu. He felt the difference in the relationship between fitness coaches and students in different levels of gyms:

“The more common, especially large-scale gymnasium, it was in bad taste, and the threshold for the crowd was not high, so there were all kinds of people. So in this case, it was actually a test for the coach, which became a headache for the coach. Because of different member groups, coaches needed to work or think of different ways, and the communication between coaches and members was actually more difficult. Because the level of members you contact is different, and then there are many members who basically spend money to just take a bath or take a gymnastics class. When you communicated with such a crowd, there was basically no communication and no common topic. The higher the end of the gym, the clearer the purpose of its consumer groups. They don't need coaches to ask him to buy classes or do all kinds of sales. He just needs to communicate with the coach, to say clearly what kind of fitness needs he has, how long can he achieve the ideal body effect, so simple. Then the usual communication is equivalent to when I open my whole mouth and someone else gives me a direct drop, and how much I can swallow, but in fact, this process is smoother. In the high-end gym, the relationship between coaches and members will be more stable.”

In the gym, personal trainers are professionals who can communicate with members directly without any other purpose. Even if there is no member who has purchased the course, the fitness coach will directly communicate with the member in the way of course promotion or action guidance. Coaches in low-end gymnasiums are faced with customers with weak consumption ability. Since then, the sales pressure of coaches is very high. Therefore, coaches must devote most of their energy to the promotion of courses, so they can't concentrate on the communication with fixed members. At the same time, in order to avoid being promoted by fitness coaches, members intentionally reduce the communication with coaches in the gym, which leads to the poor social experience of low-end gyms. Moreover, the entry threshold of coaches and members of low-end gymnasiums is low, which leads to uneven quality of them, and the service experience cannot be guaranteed, which will affect the mood of members. In contrast, in high-end gyms, personal trainers have fixed customer groups, higher income protection and less sales pressure, so they

pay more attention to the communication with members, and the communication between members is relatively stable.

III. Conclusion

Through the research of fitness people and personal trainers, we find that the role of fitness coach in gym is not single, but multiple compound roles. Fitness coach is not only responsible for the obvious role of teaching and sales. In the process of fitness teaching, personal trainers actually play the role of specialist in cultural objectification. They use professional knowledge as a traditional way of conventional means of expression and explain the students' body feelings and body shaping process. On a deeper level, fitness instructors enable the emotions, body feelings, and movements of the preobjective in the fitness process to be transmitted between subjects by accompanying the interaction of fitness and physical contact. The synaesthesia under the preobjective state improves the efficiency of fitness teaching and enhances the students' sense of experience. Through this kind of embodied learning, fitness technology is more easily internalized into their own body knowledge.^[3] At the same time, these interactions are also the most important social process in the gym, which directly determines the consumption experience of the gym. There are many factors influencing the high-quality and stable interaction and social relationship between personal trainers and students, including the sales pressure, the quality and consumption level of coaches and students, etc. These differences are reflected in different grades of gyms. Therefore, the operation mode, staff and consumer groups of the gym have a very important impact on the experience of fitness teaching.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest to this work.

References

- [1] Thomas Csordas. Embodiment as a Paradigm for Anthropology. *Ethos*, Vol. 18(1), 1990, p.5-47.
- [2] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, Translated by Colin Smith, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962, p.166.
- [3] Jesper Andreasson, “‘Shut up and squat!’ Learning body knowledge within the gym”, *Ethnography & Education*, Vol.9(1), 2014, p.1-15.