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Cristian Ştefan LIUŞNEA

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Fitness or Optimal Physical Condition - Conceptual Delimitation

Cristian Ştefan LIUŞNEA[1]

Abstract

In the elaboration of the paper, we started from the hypothesis that the definition of the fitness concept is important in order to determine then t[he objectives of the activity based on the use of its specific means. Following the elaboration of the theoretical study, we found that there are several opinions regarding fitness, which are explained by the different perspectives of approaching the concept, by the particularities of the socio-cultural evolution of contemporary societies, by the practices and policies thought for each cultural space, determined by standards of living, standards, but also by economic, social and cultural interdependencies. In this context, we have also been interested in the perception of the term in the Romanian space
In our approach we will go from the statements of some authors like Celeste Ulrich [48, 49] who defined Physical Fitness as: "the ability of the human body to function with force and liveliness, without exaggerated fatigue, with enough energy to enjoy leisure activities and to prevent physical stress. Muscular strength, muscular endurance, cardiovascular endurance and vigor are the visible signs of physical condition"

Keywords: *Fitness; physical condition; physical activity; physical exercises; health.*

[1]"Dunărea de Jos " University of Galaţi, Romania, stef_lius@yahoo.com

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Corresponding Author: Cristian Ştefan LIUŞNEA
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1. Introduction

The issue of physical activity, practicing physical exercise in order to maintain the state of health as well as to show the harmony and beauty of the human body has been studied since the Greco-Roman Antiquity. At the same time, concepts of health and well-being appear to be described by physician Hippocrates (about 460-370 BC) as a natural condition as determined by birth: "*Goodhealth*" or "*physiosis*" (φύσις), a balance between different "elements ", c. In turn, the philosopher Aristotel (384-322 BC) describes "blessedness" or "happiness/felicity" (εὐδαιμονία/ "Eudaimonia") as the ultimate and good purpose for man, a process that is, in fact, the condition of human flourishing or of living well.

These ideas, taken over by Galenus (131-216 AD), were circulated with the same meaning until the fifteenth century, while specialists from various disciplines (physicians, pedagogues, sociologists, etc.) were concerned about human health, well-being, recommending and designing exercises in the field of hygienic gymnastics, exercise (exercitatio), movement (motus), gestures and games.

All of these become exponential, especially since the 16th century, as evidenced by the works of such subjects discovered in the funds of the Faculty of Medicine in Montpellier, when the first studies of human body anatomy appear. During the period that followed, there were numerous authors who tried to design school-based training programs and not only to introduce physical exercise systems, that recognized the beneficial effects on man's education through education.

And now, the heavy-weight and device-based exercises have emerged as a result of Frederik Muller's allied activity, alias Eugen Sandow, which has been aimed at increasing the body's muscular mass, being called body-building or bodybuilding. The practice of these exercises had as objectives the development of muscle mass, constantly correlated with the proportion, symmetry, relief, defining, vascularization of the muscular groups, all performed in front of a jury and the spectators, in the field of the competition, such as: "Mr.*Olympia*", "*The Most Beautiful Man in America*", " Mr. *America* "etc. [31].

The means by which the objectives of bodybuilding could be attained were, on the one hand, the work with difficulties (imposing the "bodybuilder" or indoor gymnastics - Glottlob Moritz Schreber, 1855), to which, afterwards, and equipment and apparatus designed specifically for this type of training, and on the other hand a diet rich in "proteins" that had to feed the "muscle" [3], [29], all correlated with a recovery of [31], [32]. Bodybuilding, in its current form, began to develop only after the

appearance of the dumbbell and adjustable dumbbells, means that opened the way for hard workouts and physically less developed individuals.

As for the history of bodybuilding competitions, I have already written extensively [31].

2. Theoretical Background

Exclusive muscular type training with high intensity levels of weight increases the force that causes hypertrophy (increase in cross-section of the muscle), as is the case in bodybuilding, which actually corresponds to an improvement in the physical capacity of the body [35], [38]. D. G. Sale [43] is the one who has demonstrated that the improvement of force is related to muscular hypertrophy, stimulated by the training with loads, requiring the mechanism of protein synthesis as other authors would find [9], [22], [37]. At the same time, Carmelo Bosco, Pekka Luhtanen and Paavo V. Komi [4: 273] considers that "*maximum aerobic power*", measured by the maximum amount of oxygen, is synonymous with fitness.

Starting with the interwar period of the 20th century, the specialists found that there were serious problems with the physical condition of young people, so the practice of exercise was directed towards other goals, based on several components that defined fitness, using methods bodybuilding training. However, with all the differences, if we talk about fitness as a sports practice - then we talk about the beauty of the human body - toned [36]. The argument is that fitness practitioners have as their primary objective the improvement of their aesthetic aspect and only some of them aim at improving the general functions of the body.

Designed by some authors "Light Bodybuilding" or "Soft Bodybuilding," competitive fitness is different from what some authors understand through a healthy lifestyle, as we talk about fitness/bodybuilding [44] the achievement, through specific exercises, of muscle toning [42], a beautiful body characterized by proportionality, strength/trength, etc. [42]. So if health-related fitness targets weight loss and achieving a Better Body Mass Index (BMI), competitive fitness is primarily aimed at toning, proportioning, and building up skills and presentation skills scenic (involving posture, and emphasizing features such as vitality for men and femininity for women) in the competition. Gabriel Stănică Lupu [34] is of the opinion that the two goals of fitness training, namely health and harmonious body, "create the notion of *bodybuilding*".

At the same time, specialists also include a number of benefits, such as improving motor skills, joint protection, preventing bone demineralization, improving humoral tone.

As a result, fitness requires a constant equilibrium of motor activity, completed with the achievement of the best level of functioning of the body, is a better physiological and functional condition, referring to the state of health [47]. Experts, such as Russell R. Pate [39: 77-78], however, find that physical fitness, such as vigor, vigilance, fatigue, joy, is difficult to quantify.

Physical activity in the room, using weights, installations or devices, involves knowing the notions of anatomy, biomechanics, physiology, and physiology of physical exertion, as knowledge about nutrition that is a component of fitness training is needed. Following Brian J. Sharkey and Steven E. Gaskill [45], fitness is one of the most important indicators of work capacity, which is the ability to perform a task and achieve a specific goal without excessive fatigue without harming itself or others. The authors quote include the term of fitness in the *Active Life* concept. In the same idea, Werner W. K. Hoeger and Sharon A. Hoeger [24] argue that Fitness is the ability to safely and efficiently perform simple and specific requirements in everyday life so that there is still energy for recreation.

According to specialists, which I have presented extensively in my previous works [30], [33]; fitness is a form of systematic participation in physical exercise, in order to improve the quality of life [6], [23], including several health-related components: intellectual, social, spiritual and physical fitness"[16]. The authors also note that physical fitness is variable depending on a number of factors, such as: genetic inheritance, somatic typology, physical activity, performance in executions, etc. [11], [19].

During the same period, H.B. Falls [5], [21], stated that "*physical fitness is an important goal in physical education programs*", the standard being, according to Jane Katz [26] the optimal level, both in emergencies and in life daily. For their part, Philip Allsen, Joyce Harrison and Barbara Vance [1] talk about physical fitness in conditions of "*vigor and pleasure .... having enough energy for hobby and recreational activities or for unforeseen situations; this has to do with the mental and physical state of course* ".

Moreover, the American authors, Charles B. Corbin and Ruth Lindsey [11], defined fitness through "*the ability of the whole body, including muscles, skeleton, heart and other parts to respond effectively all the time*" associating the notion of fitness with physical activity that influences the condition of health. In fact, a number of authors refer strictly to physical fitness, which correlates with physical activity and health since the 70's of the last century.

Fitness is defined by John W. Travis and Meryn G. Callander [48] as a balance of physical, mental and social qualities that provide the necessary

reserves which, in everyday life, offer the opportunity to live in harmony with the environment without physical stress and mentally excessive.

According to other authors, fitness is a set of physical and physiological features of a person who is at risk of having premature disease and has a relationship with a sedentary lifestyle [5].

Reviewing all these opinions, we find that there is no unitary and definitive definition for the nature of fitness. Because it refers to the proper functioning of all body systems, some authors confuse the concept of fitness with fitness, which also discusses the integration and complementarity of physical and mental qualities. At the same time, they define it as "a state of well-being", of optimal health.

Other authors, such as Juan Carlos Colado Sánchez [12], relate the term fitness with Wellness to the meaning of life philosophy which aims at raising and maintaining a proper level of health for a balanced lifestyle in which moderate physical exercise, individualized and continuous acquirement of capital importance. According of Juan Carlos Colado Sánchez [12], [13], Fitness can also be defined as "*the philosophy or the particular system of understanding life that claims to achieve the right level of health through a balanced lifestyle in which moderate exercise , individualized and continually gaining capital importance, although supplemented by other customs that increase the benefits it brings* ". The author talks about the fitness in the muscular room [13].

Fitness is a healthy, active, beautiful, and attractive lifestyle that is associated with the success of life and youth [34], a way of life that allows maintaining and strengthening health, balancing your emotional state, improving your physical shape, and promoting a lifestyle active life [28]. Thus, fitness is a cultural phenomenon of the twentieth century and a trend of improving the quality of life to an optimal level that includes social, mental, mental and physical components [25]; being promoted as a lifestyle involving physical mental activity designed to regulate mental and mental state [27]. It reflects the availability and adaptability of body systems to carry out a specific activity [7].

Activities to achieve "physical condition" have permanently accompanied the training of athletes during the period between the two world wars, when too many methods for developing motor skills have not appeared. In the Romanian space, the term was neglected, but it returned in the last decades with the fitness (in English). In the Anglo-Saxon vocabulary, Fit "*to be adapted to a goal, objective or desire", "to have the necessary qualifications or to be competent*"; "*Be prepared or ready*". It was only toward the end of the 20th century that the meaning of the term was related to the human body. Fitness, as perceived in Romanian language, is closely related to bodybuilding, and here the emphasis is on the harmonious development of

the muscles, by means of exercises with weights and appliances. Both fitness and bodybuilding aim to develop a healthy, strong, proportioned body with harmonious and well-muscled muscles, with the specification that bodybuilding is also intended to develop muscle mass in volume (hypertrophy).

Contemporary man must constantly fight for a better physical and mental condition to cope with the "stress" of everyday life. In this context, it is commonly referred to as "*physical condition*" or "*fitness*", meaning either the activity to accomplish it or its results.

From a logical and methodological point of view, the scope of the term "physical condition" encompasses all types of activities meant to achieve it. Given the fact that some people prefer only one type of activity, swimming, for example, solves only the need for recreation in the first phase, but in order to achieve a good physical condition, it must be practiced according to the methodical guidelines recommended by the specialists.

Formally, physical condition has been related to health in the **Toronto Model, Physical Condition, Physical Activity, and Health**, which defined it as a state of energy and vitality that allows individuals to fulfill the everyday tasks of everyday life, enjoying free and active time and confront potential unexpected emergencies without excessive fatigue, while helping to avoid hypo-kinetic diseases and to develop the maximum intellectual capacity, fully experimenting with the joy of living [5].

Authors rightly believe that physical activity is any movement that the body carries out with energy-consuming, effortless- daily life (in occupational, sports, domestic, etc.), physical exercises (physical activity), physical activity, physical form, physical condition and physical fitness (representing a series of attributes to be acquired and targeting health) representing different concepts [7: 126].

Physical activity is a complex, difficult to measure behavior, being represented by any body movement produced by skeletal muscles, which is carried out with an energy expense and found in everyday life in: professional practice, sports and other activities. The basic characteristics of physical activities to ensure physical fitness are as follows: engage large muscle groups; impose a task that is higher than usual and impose substantially higher energy consumption. While, Dragan Cvejić, Tamara Pejović, and Sergej Ostojić [8] believe that physical fitness is an excellent indicator of health for children and adolescents, and can help make predictions for health in their future lives.

In terms of **physical exercise**, this is the physical activity planned, structured and repeated, with the ultimate or intermediate goal of improving or maintaining physical form [7: 126]. Included in individualized programs,

this is the most effective way to obtain and maintain of an optimal physical condition [17: 327]. Bodybuilding exercises are movements against resistance, namely, free weights, weight, devices, elastic bands, and the purpose of doing these exercises is to increase muscle mass, increase strength, tonify muscles, improve sports performance, etc.

The physical exercise features are:

- Influences both the biological and the psychological spheres;
- Repeat systematically according to goals;
- Can be adapted to gender, age, degree of physical training;
- The content of exercise is determined by body movements or segments;
- Quantified by volume, intensity and complexity.

Another concept related to fitness and physical condition is the physical form that specialists defined - is the capacity our body has to deal with the physical demands that occur in everyday life, in other words, the optimal functioning of all the physiological systems of body, but with emphasis on those structures that favor movement: the nervous, cardiovascular, respiratory and musculoskeletal systems. Specialists consider physical form as a physiological parameter, while exercise or physical activity represent behaviors or habits [7: 127].

The American College of Sports Medicine [20] defined physical form as the ability to perform physical activity at moderate to vigorous levels without the appearance of fatigue and the ability to maintain such possibilities throughout life.

Speaking of physical fitness components, following Charles B. Corbin, Linus J. Dowell, Ruth Lindsay, and Homer Tolson [2], these are:

1. cardiorespiratory endurance,
2. muscle strength,
3. muscle strength,
4. body composition (ratio of muscle mass to adipose tissue of the individual,
5. flexibility.

In an attempt to clarify the meaning of the concepts we operate with, we believe it is right to leave the etymology, as Rodriguez, Alejandro Damián proposes [15], the term fitness - which first appeared in the field of biology [41] - related to inheritance genetics [46].

American Professor of Biology, Stevan J. Arnold, [3] is convinced that Fitness depends on the condition of the body determined by the genetic heritage. According to some authors, genetic baggage is likely to represent fewer variations than habit / behavior / lifestyle [10].

3. Argument of the paper

In the elaboration of the paper, we started from the hypothesis that the definition of the fitness concept is important in order to determine then the objectives of the activity based on the use of its specific means. Following the elaboration of the theoretical study, we found that there are several opinions regarding fitness, which are explained by the different perspectives of approaching the concept, by the particularities of the socio-cultural evolution of contemporary societies, by the practices and policies thought for each cultural space, determined by standards of living, standards, but also by economic, social and cultural interdependencies. In this context, we have also been interested in the perception of the term in the Romanian space.

4. Arguments to support the thesis

Starting from the concept that is derived from bodybuilding, we can defined fitness as a progress from a biological point of view that is based on improving motor skills, through exercises in tailor-made and individualized training programs, or to form athletes for performance (sports fitness), or to help achieve a beautiful and harmonious physical appearance (general fitness).

On the other hand, fitness can also be defined as a means of health maintenance, optimal physical condition, well-being, being understood as a form or physical condition.

Last but not least, he is associated with the state of health, being a means of recovering it in the event of an accident, illness or pregnancy.

Another classification, from a means point of view [3], would be:

1. *Aerobic fitness* means the ability to take oxygen from the air into the lungs, carry it with the blood and use it at the tissues level.

2. *Muscle fitness* (muscle strength) is closely related to health and quality of life.

Other authors [28] distinguish two components of physical fitness:

a) *physical fitness*, related to health: cardio-respiratory endurance, muscle strength, body composition, flexibility;

b) *physical fitness, related to abilities*: agility, balance, coordination, speed, power, reaction time..

5. Arguments to argue the thesis

The content of fitness (physical condition) and goals of optimizing physical condition:

1. The functional support of the physical condition is represented by: respiratory system, circulatory system, the cardiovascular system, bone and joint system and the muscular system.

2. The physical support of the physical condition is represented by:

• the level of development of motor and psycho-motor skills,

• the body structure: the ratio of active tissue to fatty tissue, the ratio between fast (white) and slow (red) contraction muscle fibers.

• the body harmony: the ratio between the waist and the body weight, the ratio between the body segments and the body itself, the ratio between the individual body dimensions and the social model.

In fitness training, a special emphasis is placed on: alternating muscle effort with rest, rational nutrition, a tidy lifestyle, rigorous preservation of personal hygiene.

The tests we can use to determine the parameters on which the physical condition depends [48]:

a) tests for the assessment of morphology or anatomical condition;

b) tests for the evaluation of cardiovascular and respiratory functions;

c) tests for strength and flexibility assessment;

d) tests for the evaluation of muscle speed and strength;

e) tests for the assessment of aerobic capacity..

6. Dismantling the arguments against

In the Romanian space, we consider that the meaning of fitness is synthesized by the authors Dumitru Colibaba - Evuleț, Ioan Bota [14: 101]: *"Fitness means the complete vitality of the human body, capable of achieving superior results in a certain body activity, sporting discipline or discipline*" and Constantin Adrian Dragnea and Aura Bota [18: 222]: "*Fitness is a synthesis of the ability to move. Driving qualities can be included in the broader fitness concept. It is a state of well-being that allows for vigorous action, reduces the risk of illness due to lack of movement and sets a solid foundation for performance activities*".

7. Conclusions

In conclusion, the term of fitness is very complex and a comprehensive definition cannot be accepted, but it needs to be formulated according to the perspective used by the analyst, depending on the goals set by those who practice it or manages fitness training. The definition of the fitness concept is important in order to determine then the objectives of the activity based on the use of its specific means. The fitness as a progress from a biological point of view that is based on improving motor skills, through exercises in tailor-made and individualized training programs, or to form athletes for performance (*sports fitness*), or to help achieve a beautiful and harmonious physical appearance (*general fitness*).

Basically, the specific physical exercise offers the possibility to acquire and maintain an optimal physical condition, a state of well-being, which can only have positive consequences for any person [30].

The theoretical analysis allowed us to validate the working hypothesis and to know to what extent the phenomenon is perceived correctly, with all its complexity, in the Romanian space. Practically, we find that in this space it also begins to be perceived as a lifestyle and as a pleasant and useful way of spending leisure time.

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