

# Gyms: Grounded Theory

## Grounded Theory

Each actor's needs and restrictions were not necessarily well understood by the other actors. Policies are handed down from administrators to gym managers, gym staff, gym-goers and fitness instructors respectively; these latter actors were frustrated or discouraged because their needs to exercise and create spaces to exercise were not being met and/or ideas not heard. This communications gap accounted largely for the discontent in AOERC and the fitness community, even though actors shared a similar core motivation: keeping students/themselves safe and well during COVID-19.

[Google Jamboard](#)

## Sub-Theories: Fitness Instructor

Self perceived technical fluency was a significant barrier for moving classes online. Instructors who were not confident with their technical skills felt hesitant to transition to virtual classes; however, after they were guided through technical setup, instructors *were* able to manage rather complex filming/recording tech, and succeed at what they feel confident doing: building supportive communities during times of uncertainty and isolation. Interestingly, instructors fondest COVID memories occurred outside of fitness class, when classmates socialized on other communications platforms.

- **Key Insight:** Beyond teaching proper form, instructors need to understand each of their students bodies and restrictions to ensure their safety. One instructor confessed she would not start a new class online and only felt comfortable going virtual with students that she had already known for years. One instructor who was leading a new class felt anxious in her ability to keep students safe.
- **Key Insight:** Self-perceived technical fluency was a large barrier to teaching online classes. Not identifying as an “electronics person” almost prevented one instructor from transitioning classes online, due to the technical complexity of virtual fitness (Zoom, filming equipment, audio equipment, sound-mixing, etc.). One instructor felt grateful and relieved when a friend helped set up her virtual fitness class; this enabled her to work on what she was passionate about: fostering a supportive fitness community.
- **Key Insight:** Fitness instructors describe group exercise (yoga especially) as a place for connection, community-building, and catharsis. Because students are not physically present, appear in small boxes, and are often muted, it has been a struggle to build/maintain interpersonal connections during virtual classes. Many of one instructor's most heartwarming post-Covid “yoga memories” actually occurred *outside* of class, when students chit-chatted and caught up with each other.

## Sub-Theories: Gym-goer

Gym-goers feel confident in making time-limited reservations to go to the gym, but find many difficulties with using the gym due to the lack of locker rooms and effective ways of keeping track of time. They were frustrated by AOERC's previous 24-hour booking policy, which was susceptible to Stanford flaking culture and led to unused gym spaces. This leads us to believe that there is a lack of communication between gym administration and the gym-goers.

- **Key Insight:** For a person to make a reservation, it was as simple as going online and booking a time slot; gym-goers felt satisfied with this experience. There are also day-of appointments, so a person can have a last minute reservation at the gym.
- **Key Insight:** Gym-goers found themselves having to wear their gym clothing underneath their street clothing because there were no locker rooms. In fact, some gym-goers would put on their street clothes over their wet swimming clothes because there was nowhere to change. Gym-goers not only felt slightly uncomfortable wearing their gym clothing underneath their street clothing, but also experienced great discomfort wearing wet clothes underneath their street clothes.
- **Key Insight:** Although the lifeguards and gym staff kept track of the time for the gym-goers, it was often hard to hear when time was up. As a result, gym-goers would just keep track of time themselves.
- **Key Insight:** Gyms-goers preferred booking shortly before their slot (versus 24hr prior) because of their continuously changing schedules. They frustratingly recalled pools having empty lanes when people had to book 24hr prior and attributed this to Stanford flaking culture. They mentioned being upset when they walked past the pool with no pool reservation only to see empty pool lanes.

## Sub-Theories: Gym Staff

Gym staff feel a sense of duty and pride towards keeping their gyms open and safe, and do a lot of research in order to keep it that way, despite the complexities of navigating county and university policies. Staff also feel a sense of conflict over the pandemic's emphasis on technology use and want to find ways to get students excited and connected to the natural world and physical activity.

- **Key Insight:** Gym staff actually have to create or revise policies on their own and are not instructed by the university on what their policies should look like. As a result, they might do extensive COVID-19 research and preparation to create policies to ensure safety within their gyms, but feel confused about where to look to in order to get approval for their policies or initiatives.
- **Key Insight:** Gym staff are very committed to the enrichment of their students and are unwilling to close the gyms, even for safety reasons. As a result, they are always thinking of newer and more effective ways to provide for students in a safe way.
- **Key Insight:** COVID has brought the staff together by uniting them through research projects and also through the general goal of keeping gyms safe. One staff member

mentioned how he was thankful for the more frequent meetings and how he was able to form relationships with others on the staff that he probably would not have been able to otherwise.

- **Key Insight:** Gym staff have very complicated feelings about how the pandemic seems to be orienting them towards using more and more technology. They want to encourage less screen usage and more interaction with the natural world and others, however with the pandemic, it is often unsafe to go outside and interact as one might before, thus resulting in necessary technology usage for classes, hanging out, and more. As a result, they are advocating for ways to emphasize connection to the natural world and others during COVID. For example, one staff member mentioned how they are making instructional videos for students on packing a backpack and other related topics so people can feel equipped to adventure on their own.

## Sub-Theories: Administration

The Recreation and wellness administration is left out when making policies at Stanford, which ends up being unfairly restrictive and senseless in many cases. During sudden policy changes, the most difficult task is staffing, communication, and reservation. Virtual fitness will continue, and the Rec & wellness centers are great hubs for communication and collaborations with other campus partners.

- **Key Insight:** The administration feels left out and unheard while making campus wide decisions; the policies end up being unfairly restrictive towards recreation and wellness activities. For ex, wearing masks at intensive in-person group fitness classes, even though the students are more than 15 ft apart in an open field.
- **Key Insight:** Rec and well centers are a hub for the whole Stanford community. It is a great department for communication and collaboration beyond recreation, especially for health and wellness.
- **Key Insight:** When there's a policy change, cleaning and hygiene is the easy part. Most of the time is spent in bringing the staff on-site, training them, changing the reservation system, and informing the community.
- **Key Insight:** According to trends, some activities will continue to be virtual even after the pandemic; virtual fitness is a part of life now, and a huge convenience to many people.
- **Key Insight:** There are many inconsistencies in the rules being implemented in the county and at Stanford, and some of them don't make a lot of sense when it comes to fitness; many Stanford students think that Rec & Well is being deliberately restrictive, whereas they just have to follow the orders. For example, hoops have been removed from basketball courts at Stanford, while people are playing basketball at Palo Alto parks without any problems.