

# A Physical Education Agent's Moral and Ethical Responsibility for Personal Health

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## Abstract

At present, health is the phenomenon to which any science cannot claim the full research. Medicine, philosophy, psychology, pedagogy, and physical education are just a small list of disciplines claiming health as a subject for their research. Certainly, various aspects of health are taken into consideration including moral, psychological, physical and others, but as soon as the authors undertake to study certain aspects, the issue of the integrity of this phenomenon immediately arises, the interrelations and the mutual influence of some aspects on other ones. At the end of the twentieth century, an attempt was made to create such a science as valeology, the authors of which tried to develop a unified conception of health, but such grandiose objectives had not been achieved. The reason was in simple summation of health data, rather than their systematic study, the involvement of pseudo- and parascience data [15, 19-20]. However, attempts were made to philosophically comprehend health [11], a concept of personal health was developed [12], and the culture of physical health within the framework of physical education was considered [9, 13]. A person's subjective perception of both physical and mental health determines his or her attitude to life in general. To confirm this hypothesis, we conducted a study of the subjective attitude towards one's health in persons engaged in and not engaged in physical education studies and sports, as well as in physical education specialists. The results obtained are presented in this paper. On the basis of the given data, conclusions are drawn about the importance of human moral and ethical responsibility for one's own health.

**Keywords:** health, personal health, moral and ethical responsibility, physical education (PE), subjectivity.

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## INTRODUCTION

The generalized consideration of the concepts of the physical education (PE) subjectivity, moral and ethical responsibility and personal health is due to their belonging to the research field formed by contemporary anthropological issues. The relevance of this problem becomes particularly evident in the view of the predictions of the contradictions and tension of the situation that both Russian and foreign notionalists characterize as an anthropological catastrophe. Alarmist predictions about the future of human existence are not groundless. They are provoked by both current global problems and the consequences of the human mind "cheating", the latest technologies. They gave rise to the ambiguously interpreted phenomena of transhumanism and the "digital man" that evoke a wide public resonance. From transhumanists' point of view, PE aimed at strengthening, improving the harmoniously developed body, and responsibility for personal health will be taken off from the table. These will no longer be the prerogative of the PE subjectivity, which reflects personal and social activity initiating the need to improve the body, ensuring the fullness (harmony) of human existence. According to radically oriented transhumanists, the goal of human development is neohumanity. Having changed the bodily nature of man, neohumanity will become immortal. Based on the technologies of cybernetic artificial organs and systems, the transhumanistic medicine will provide technologies for transferring individual human consciousness to a non-biological substrate, *an artificial body* [8].

The current changes in many life spheres do not allow us to doubt the "fruitful experiments" of the latest technologies. They clearly demonstrate the fruitfulness of the prospects for their application in the improving *a Man*, and not cybermen. Undoubtedly, the scientifically verified possibility of creating artificial intelligence is truly dazzling. However, a man in his fullness and integrity cannot be reduced only to an infinite intellect. There is an unbreakable core, called spirituality, the faces of which are Truth, Good and Beauty. And this core has a body [2, p. 370]. Scientists believe that it is possible to improve human capabilities, to supply a man with chips, 3D organs, which will immeasurably increase intellectual, physical power, and even

beauty. But is it possible to "digitize" conscience or transfer it to an artificially created substrate? Conscientious being expresses simultaneously the essence of morality and the entire human existence. The conscientious being "is aware of the message of the Other, able to live not in for oneself, as correlated with oneself being" [17, p. 181].

The above philosophical argument serves as a theoretical and methodological justification for considering the stated issue. It accentuates the reflexive position of the PE agent, which being self-referential takes responsibility for physical development and improvement.

It is known that ancient Greeks established the interdependence of a healthy body and healthy spirit. According to Diogenes Laertius, recognizing that "there is only one good – knowledge", the great Socrates claimed the decisive role of the body in its acquisition. "He practiced physical exercises and was distinguished by good health ..., he confined such a healthy lifestyle that when Athens were plagued, he alone remained unharmed" [5, pp. 110-111]. This fruitful plot of ancient Greek culture has now acquired special relevance and significance due to the circumstances noted above, which strengthened its moral and ethical dimension.

The subject of our study is the conjoint consideration of the subjectivity of PE, personal health, moral and ethical responsibility. The theoretical and methodological hypothesis of our study consists in orienting the subject to a broad ontological perspective, which allows one to consistently accumulate the potential of theory and methods of PE, psychology and philosophical anthropology.

The leading target setting quite logically refers to the need to identify the PE subjectivity, the phenomenon of personal health, the grounds and resources capable of bearing moral and ethical responsibility and reflexively implementing it in activities. Realized in the PE system, the very being of subjectivity is a source and a carrier of activity directed both to oneself and to the outside.

## METHODS

**Table 1. Subjects (n = 185)**

Distribution	Athletes (n = 62)		Students (n = 80)		Coaches (n = 43)	
	Titles (n = 32)	Ranks (n = 30)	Athletes (n = 40)	Nonathletes (n = 40)	Experience up to 5 years (n = 20)	Experience over 5 years (n = 23)
<b>male</b>	20	16	24	22	12	13
<b>female</b>	12	14	16	18	8	10

For the formation of subjectivity in PE and sports, we studied three categories of people of both sexes (Table 1): athletes aged 16-18, students of PE and not PE higher educational institutions, as well as coaches with different work experience. On the one hand, the categories were formed from the point of view of scientific research and representation of subjects in different "roles" in relation to PE and sport. On the other hand, they were formed taking into account the features of the formation of subjectivity in ontogenesis. In ontogenesis, there are only prerequisites to the formation of subjectivity up to the high school age. Also, this age range (the study was attended by people aged 16-54) allows tracing the formation of subjectivity in the system of the PE and sports from the beginning of the sports career and to the onset of 'acme' in the coaching profession, which is believed to come after 10-15 years of professional activity in the psychological science.

The category of athletes included persons engaged in sports at the level of athletic titles and at the level of the standards of the Candidate for Master of Sports and Master of Sports. Distinguishing two subgroups among athletes, on the one hand, we separated people engaged in PE for health purposes, on the other hand, determined the degree of giftedness and interest in the sporting result. The second group of persons who took part in the study were students of higher educational institutions. Here we also singled out people doing and not doing sports. We were interested in the conjugate influence of sports and receiving the specialized vocational education. Therefore, the PE university students with sports achievements, starting with the athlete titles, were referred to the subgroup of athletes. The subgroup of "nonathletes" included students studying in not PE higher educational institutions of Khabarovsk and not engaged in sports (without athlete ranks and titles).

To solve the issue of determining the subjective attitude to their physical and mental health, we used the SF-36 technique [1].

## RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Personal health is a concept beyond the only medical scope. It characterizes a special kind of qualitative certainty, indissoluble unity, the interdependence of a healthy body and a healthy spirit. "Personal health is an integral, dynamic, integrative personality characteristic that manifests itself in subjective well-being within the framework of its membership in a certain sociocultural and professional community" [12, p. 22]. The subjective well-being is considered as an integral dynamic system of subjective personal attitude to various aspects of one's life, which depends on the type of professional activity, the features of its organization, work conditions, organizational culture, and the skill stage as an indicator of the maturity level of a specialist and his or her professionalism [12]. The subjective well-being is considered in the context of the professional path due to the age category being studied, mainly students of higher professional institutions, as well as professionals with different experience of work. However, it is not difficult to assume that the subjective well-being is connected with the leading activity (D.B. Elkonin), and if we focus on the student age, then this activity is educational and professional [7]. On the one hand, the personal health is a concept, the analogs of which in the framework of our study are

"personal potential", "personal maturity", "vitality". On the other hand, personal health also reflects both physical health and one's responsibility for one's physical health.

Caring for a reliable, physically strong body is a manifestation of healthy goal-oriented rationality. In this case, in contrast to the close concept of "individuality", a person as "an agent of progress" (M. Bakhtin) has a special activity embodied in the personal structure. Responsibility is an essential characteristic of an individual. A person rests the full responsibility upon him- or herself and not only for him- or herself, but also for the other persons, it is free, not forced by anyone. Proceeding from the logic of the explication of the declared issue, it is important to emphasize that responsibility is also manifested in the means, ways that a person chooses to save and strengthen the health that is necessary not only for him or her but also for those whom he or she "tamed", with whom he or she creates and shares the social being, which indicates his or her moral and ethical position. It is known that the personality is not born; it is due to the unceasing force, meaningful purposefulness. A consciously strong-willed principle initiating physical perfection activates perseverance, restraint, prevents giving up, and helps to overcome difficulties, sometimes laziness in PE. In this activity, the substantial personal components and stimuli of physical activity are organically linked, through which PE appears as a sphere of morality. The responsibilities, which are meaningful as the existential, freely assumed for physical health promotion and have become a life strategy, have both conceptual arguments and empirical evidence based on our studies.

We designate the term of "a PE agent" as a result of a person's mastering of the value potential of PE and sports and the development of the subjectivity in this sphere. PE as a part of the social culture provides a wide potential for the realization of human subjectivity, and the demand for this potential will expand depending on the immersion of a person in PE through the actual educational (at the university) and professional (coaching) activities. Different PE elements are cognitive, activity and motivational-value components, which in general reflect the data of the psychological science on the structure of subjectivity: intellectual, emotional and volitional components [6]. Thus, we can approach the issue of the influence of PE on the human spirit, comparing the development of human subjectivity and the development of the PE potential.

As shown by the analysis of literary sources [9, 14], in the PE and sports system the subjectivity is manifested at the level of the three components of PE: bodybuilding, health lifestyle and motor activity, and sports education. Sports education is now understood as a specific result of human activity and ways of transforming person's physical and spiritual potential by mastering the values of coaching and competitive activity, the goal of which is the high sporting achievement. The structure of values of the sports culture manifests itself in the form of health, harmonious development, vitality, and stamina [10, p. 32].

In accordance with the objectives of the study, we examined the subjective attitude to the physical and mental health of people involved in sports activities, studying at the sports university, in comparison with the students of not PE higher education institutions, as well as coaches who acted as a link

between the PE and sports values and a child who came to play sports, and as a bearer of these values.

It is empirically confirmed that subjectivity in the PE and sports system is a core of a person's structure, the manifestation of which is a conscious active attitude to one's physical and mental health, which ultimately reflects on the level of physical training. Here, according to the logic of our study, we present the results obtained with the SF-36 technique [1].

We begin our examination of the results from its first scale: Physical Functioning (PF) reflecting the extent to which the physical state limits the performance of physical exercises. The subjects did not reveal low indicators indicating that the physical activity of a person was significantly limited by the state of his or her health. The indicators over 90 points were observed in nine subgroups among twelve subgroups under consideration. The results less than 90 points were observed in the subgroups of female athletes with athlete titles, students-nonathletes and coaches with a work experience of up to five years. A significant difference in the subgroups was found among female athletes with sports titles and ranks; and this indicator was higher for girls with athlete titles. We explain this by the fact that high sports performance is achieved by investing a lot of physical effort; and doing everyday physical activities can be excessive in full sports fit. A significant difference ( $P < 0.05$ ) was also observed between men and women in the subgroup of students who were nonathletes, and this indicator was higher for women. Perhaps this was due to a sample of subjects, since we specifically selected young men who were not engaged in sports. Unexpected differences in the subgroups of male coaches with different work experience most likely were due to the inadequacy of the sample.

Considering Role-Physical Functioning (RP), it can be noted that all the values were lower than the first scale. The highest rates were observed in students-athletes. The significant difference ( $P < 0.05$ ) was observed in all the subgroups that we selected in favor of those with higher level of sporting achievements. On the contrary, in a subgroup of coaches, longer work experience was associated with lower scores on this scale. Since this scale reflects the influence of the physical state on everyday RP (work, performing daily duties), it is quite natural that people who support higher level of physical activity can more easily cope with everyday affairs. In the subgroups between men and women there were no reliable connections. So, on the basis of gender, the indicators of this scale did not differ.

The Bodily Pain (BP) index and its impact on the ability to engage in daily activities, including household chores and everyday routines outside the home, showed high values for none of the subjects. There was no significant difference within the subgroups that we identified. Attention was paid to the indicators of coaches with experience over 5 years, which was quite natural in connection with age.

General Health (GH) indicators reflect person's assessment of his or her health state at the moment. The subjective assessment of one's health reflects its physical and mental components. However, attention was drawn to the fact of low ratings on this indicator for other scales. The average arithmetic values were slightly more than half of the ideal responds; in two female subgroups and in the male subgroup of students - nonathletes there were even less than half of the ideal responds. First of all, it is necessary to note the features of scoring on this scale and to point out the fact that in other studies conducted by us on more significant samples of subjects [3], it is very rare to find responds equal to one hundred points.

Analyzing the indicators of this scale, it is also necessary to note the significant difference in the subgroups allocated both in comparison of men and women, and in comparison of the subgroups of athletes, students and coaches ( $p < 0.05$ ). According to this scale, there was clear dynamics of

decreasing the indicator for all the groups that were singled out. In the subgroup of athletes, the higher the level of sporting achievements of both boys and girls was, the higher was the GH scale. In a subgroup of students, the PE students, both boys and girls, had also significantly higher GH indicator than students of not PE higher education institutions who were not engaged in sports. There was very interesting trend in this subgroup: in girls, whom we did not classify as athletes, the average value for this indicator was significantly higher than in the young men of this subgroup. This trend was similar to the RP scale, and we could also assume that it was more natural for young men to engage in special motor activity. In the subgroup of coaches, the age trend was more evident, which was expressed in the fact that the more the work experience and the higher the age were, the lower the indicator of the general health state was. This trend was observed in both men and women. However, speaking about the age dynamics, it could be said that male coaches in this indicator significantly outstripped both not PE higher education students and athletes, which confirmed the positive impact of physical activity on maintaining the level of subjective well-being throughout life. Women had a slightly different tendency: the indicators of female coaches having less than five years of work experience exceed ( $p < 0.05$ ) those of female students of not PE higher education institutions and of girls engaged in sports at the level of sports titles; then this indicator decreased. It is difficult to interpret this fact unequivocally; one can only assume that subjective assessment of the GH state in women can be associated with reproductive activity. However, more detailed studies are needed to prove this hypothesis.

Considering the Vitality (VT) scale, where the responds with high points mean feeling full of energy and power, or, conversely, exhausted; it can be noted that there were significant differences in the subgroup of students, both boys and girls. And athletes exceeded nonathletes by more than 10%. In all of the subgroups, women also had a clear tendency to show more physical activity affecting life activity. Not reliable difference could be revealed only in the subgroup of coaches with different work experience.

Social Functioning (SF) is determined by the degree to which the physical or emotional state limits social activity (communication). The studied subgroups revealed the most significant differences in comparison with other scales in the subgroup of athletes. The results of male athletes, who had achieved sports titles, exceeded the indicators of athletes, who performed only the standards for sports titles, by 20 points. Girls had a similar tendency -17.1 points. The results of athlete students exceeded the indicators of students who did not go in for sports by 16.2 points ( $P < 0.05$ ). A subgroup of coaches, regardless of gender and age, also surpassed athletes and nonathletes in this indicator. That is, the professional activity of a coach in conjunction with physical training and sports allows them to maintain high Social Functioning regardless of age.

The Role-Emotional (RE) state reflects the assessment of the degree to which the emotional state interferes with the performance of work, including large time expenditure, a decrease in the amount of work, a decrease in its quality, etc.

Mental Health (MH) characterizes the mood, the presence of depression and anxiety, a general indicator of positive emotions. According to this scale, sports people also significantly exceeded those who were not engaged in sports.

## CONCLUSION

In general, the study showed the specific impact of sports and the level of results achieved, as well as professional activities in the PE and sports system on the self-relationship to the physical and mental components of health. The most significant difference was found in the SF-36 scales such as Social



Functioning, Role-Emotional Functioning, which confirmed the empirical hypothesis of the study on revealing the essential psychological characteristics of the emerging subjectivity in the system "athlete – student – coach", expressed in certain indicators of standard psychological tests (in particular SF-36), which contributed to the forecast of the success of their activities.

The deployment logic of this paper issue is also determined by the existing separation of the concepts of ethics, decency, and morality in philosophy. At the level of ordinary consciousness, they are often used as synonyms characterizing real behavior that corresponds to the generally accepted norms and principles of a correct good life. Up-to-date theoretical and philosophical analytics differentiates the phenomena of ethics, decency, and morality. We take a distinction as a methodological reference that allows differentiating the natural, direct affirmation and reflexive position of a person who realizes *his or her* life strategy, but is inevitably involved in public relationships.

As Hegel noted, the Athenians before Socrates were moral people, and due to him they became decent. This means that, unlike morality, decency presupposes the creation of good not by inspiration directly, but consciously [4]. Hence the ethical rationalism of Socrates, which focuses on the separation and awareness of good and evil. According to Yu. Habermas, ethical issues are "correlated with the telos of my life", while the morally-obligatory maxim becomes real, if it is able to claim "universality in the perspective of all whom it concerns" [16, pp.14, 16].

The specifics and character of moral and ethical responsibility are determined by the complexity of the PE system and have a meaningful difference depending on the level of their manifestation: existential, cultural-symbolic, and institutional [18, pp. 20-24].

The actual behavior of a PE agent necessarily requires his or her self-referencing in the form of comprehension of the goal and significance of his or her involvement in this cultural activity. The awareness of the obligation of physical improvement determines the ethical component of this intention. Since ethics specializes in forms of existential self-understanding, the meaning of PE becomes an ethically conscious ethical guide. It is freely accepted by the agent in order to improve physically in accordance with the capabilities and moral and ethical intentions, to strengthen health in the name of a good life, both personal and connected with other people.

The manifestation of PE at the existential level is realized due to exemplary creations of creative physical activity. Cultural samples of a perfect body in harmony with the spirit are known from antiquity. The significance of these cultural samples does not fade; on the contrary, it illuminates even brighter and initiates versatile theoretical and experimental activity. Based on the previous world experience, critically comprehending its results, modern researchers intensively and fruitfully reveal the parameters and criteria of a physically perfect and healthy body; and, what is especially important, they search for effective ways, methods and means for following the samples. We carried out this study proceeding from a clear perspective of a PE agent's understanding the moral and ethical responsibility in the formation of a physically strong and healthy person.

Our study showed that in preserving the integrity and completeness of human existence, a future that is problematic both in the horizon of the latest technologies and in the quagmire of old obstacles that deprive prospects, physical perfection that strengthens personal health has not an equivalent substitute, which convinces us of the significance and effectiveness of moral and ethical responsibility in this cultural activity.

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