

The Loss and Return of Body Aesthetics in Physical Education

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Abstract: Richard Shusterman's body aesthetics emphasizes the body as the starting point, and the core connotation is mainly the cultivation of body consciousness, that coincides with the essential starting point of physical education. However, the "loss" of body aesthetics has become a widespread phenomenon in the current physical education. To explore the causes and results of the "loss" of body aesthetics is attributed to the weakening of the attention of "body" caused by "championship doctrine". Therefore, the concept, objectives and methods of Physical Education are improper. The development of physical education must pay attention to the value of "body", so that body aesthetics can be "returned" to physical education. In this regard, physical education should locate "body" as a new starting point, change the current concept of physical education, physical education objectives and physical education methods, break the existing difficulties such as Championship doctrine, and realize the sound development of physical education.

1. Introduction

The corporeal engagement, as an act imbued with generative significance towards the world, forms the bedrock of societal and cultural praxis[1]. Aesthetic contemplation of the body accentuates its intrinsic value, emphasizing the vitality derived from practices originating from corporeal experiences. Meanwhile, the essence of physical education lies not solely in the attainment of outstanding athletic prowess, but rather in the cultivation of bodily resilience and vigor[2]. Presently, China stands at a crucial juncture, transitioning from a paradigm of "lifelong learning" to one rooted in "human-centric education"[3]. Given the evolving value orientations across different stages of life, it becomes imperative for reforms in physical education to judiciously incorporate advanced overseas management practices while steadfastly upholding the ethos of human-centered pedagogy. In the realm of sports governance, the United States espouses principles of "collaborative governance" and "civil autonomy", underscoring the exploration of students' intrinsic values within the domain of physical education. Similarly, China ought to prudently glean insights from sports powerhouses like the United States regarding their values and educational methodologies, placing due emphasis on the intrinsic value of students' "bodily" experiences, thereby effectuating a resurgence of corporeal aesthetics within physical education. With this backdrop, the current paper embarks upon an exploration of the core tenets of Schustermann's corporeal aesthetics, subsequently delineating the lamentable "loss" of corporeal aesthetics within contemporary physical education. It delves into a comprehensive analysis of the root causes and

ramifications of this "loss", culminating in a discourse on the "revival" of corporeal aesthetics in physical education. This discourse traverses the avenues of educational philosophy, objectives, and methodologies, elucidating the trajectory of corporeal aesthetics' resurgence within physical education.

2. The Core Tenets of Shusterman's Corporeal Aesthetics

Corporeal aesthetics, initially propounded by Richard Shusterman in the 1990s, swiftly garnered fervent acclaim within the global academic milieu, resonating with the prevailing philosophical paradigm shift towards the "corporeal turn" in aesthetic thought. Arising from personal lived experiences, corporeal aesthetics proffers diverse modalities of bodily engagement, facilitating facile integration of corporeal aesthetics into praxis, thereby effectuating ameliorative effects upon the body[4]. The underlying tenet of corporeal aesthetics avows philosophy as a tool for human aesthetic life, accentuating the pragmatic functionality of philosophical praxis and existence, delineated through several facets: firstly, a keenly perceptive and sensate body; secondly, non-verbal, experiential corporeal encounters;[5] and thirdly, a reflective corporeal consciousness. Contemporary aesthetic paradigms sanction the fusion of beauty and vitality for women; they possess the prerogative to engage in bodily training, eschewing corporeal enlargement; within sports, they assert themselves as subjects, fostering self-affirmation and, to a certain extent, emancipating themselves from the vicissitudes of their corporeal existence. [6]Shusterman contends that the contemporary epoch heralds a pivotal era for the valorization of corporeal worth, advocating for corporeal praxis that begins with the assertion of bodily value, obliterating all impediments obstructing the body's path to liberation. The genesis of physical education lies in nurturing students towards possessing robust physical constitutions, enabling them to confront life more vigorously, a notion serendipitously aligned with the advocacy of corporeal aesthetics. Consequently, physical education should prioritize the integration of corporeal aesthetic ideologies, utilizing the conception of students' corporeal value as the foundational pedagogical principle, judiciously delineating physical education objectives and methodologies, thereby effectuating the resurgence of corporeal aesthetics within physical education.

3. Loss of Corporeal Aesthetics in Physical Education

The loss of corporeal aesthetics within physical education has become a pervasive phenomenon, with contemporary physical education no longer prioritizing students' physical health concerns. Instead, it is guided by detrimental values such as "win-at-all-costs" mentality, diverting the trajectory of physical education. Only by delving into the root causes of the loss of corporeal aesthetics within physical education from its inception can we better discern the path towards its revival.

3.1 Root Causes of the Loss of Corporeal Aesthetics in Physical Education

The primary root cause of the loss of corporeal aesthetics in physical education lies in the deficiency of foundational value recognition concerning the body within physical education. It overlooks the fundamental purpose of physical education, which is the cultivation of students' physical well-being, while disproportionately emphasizing the pursuit of athletic skills. This can be further elucidated across three distinct dimensions:

3.1.1 Philosophical Dimension of Physical Education

Philosophical underpinnings in physical education encapsulate the value pursuits imbued and

formed throughout prolonged engagement in physical education praxis. These philosophical underpinnings wield profound influence on the long-term development of physical education. However, a prevailing phenomenon in contemporary physical education is the emphasis on "results over spirit," gravely influenced by the ethos of "win-at-all-costs", leading physical education astray from its authentic purpose, rendering it incapable of fulfilling its educational function. Within physical education, educators adopt a didactic approach to imparting athletic skills to students, yet fail to acknowledge students as vibrant and diverse individuals, neglecting their subjectivity within the realm of physical education[7]. Corporeal aesthetics in physical education possess a dual nature, manifested not only in outward physical forms but also in intrinsic motivations. Presently, the emphasis in physical education is disproportionately placed on external manifestations of corporeal aesthetics, overly cultivating students' muscularity and physical movements, even to the extent of emphasizing sartorial displays during practical exercises. However, this neglects the crucial intrinsic motivational aspects of corporeal aesthetics, failing to provide students with enriching experiences in physical activities and nurturing their emotional attachment to sports. Physical education should not confine itself solely to enhancing students' athletic prowess; rather, it should wholeheartedly value students' intrinsic emotional engagement in physical activities. Only through such an approach can physical education truly embody corporeal aesthetics.

3.1.2 Dimension of Physical Education Objectives

At the core of sports lies the pursuit of physical excellence, epitomized by the Olympic spirit's ethos of "faster, higher, stronger," embodying the enhancement and improvement of the physique. [8]The ultimate goal for students engaging in physical activities is to realize holistic development and freedom, positioning physical education on par with traditional intellectual education within the educational framework. Throughout the process of individual holistic development, the mind and body are intrinsically unified, with the body serving as the material foundation of the intellect. [9]Research by McGowan RJ indicates a positive correlation between physical health and students' academic performance, highlighting the benefits of maintaining students' physical well-being for enhancing their academic achievements. [10]However, in contemporary education, intellectual education predominates while other facets of education languish in a position of relative weakness. It has become somewhat of a jest to ponder the whereabouts of physical education teachers in primary schools, with physical education classes often supplanted by other subjects. In the educational milieu, the body is merely perceived as a tool to regulate students' intellectual development, failing to recognize the intrinsic significance of physical education. The establishment of physical education in schools aims to facilitate students' comprehensive development; however, due to the covert status of the "body" within educational activities, inadequate attention is given to the body, resulting in a significant deviation from the objectives of physical education, making it challenging for students as individuals to achieve harmony between their internal and external physical aspects.

3.1.3 Dimension of Physical Education Methods

Corporeal aesthetics not only accentuates physical sculpting but also emphasizes experiential engagement, aspiring to fulfill spiritual contentment. In structuralism, this phenomenon is elucidated as "differance," where traces of differences and interval relations exist among system elements, inevitably engendering mutually reinforcing impacts. In the realm of physical practice, there exists a reciprocal relationship between experiential sensation and physical sculpting. However, within physical education, educators are often influenced by the ethos of "win-at-all-costs," placing undue emphasis on certain metrics of students' physical performance,

such as changes in physique or enhancements in physical fitness, while neglecting students' experiential aspects such as fatigue and enjoyment during physical education activities. Sensory experience is a pivotal component of practicing corporeal aesthetics; without it, physical educators cannot provide comprehensive evaluations of students' physical sculpting, nor can they effectively guide the process of teaching by adopting targeted training methods, disregarding students' interests and preferences. Physical educators must recognize that students must also experience sensory engagement during the process of physical sculpting; it should not be reduced merely to the assessment of outcomes post-physical training or even specific achievements in certain competitions or improvements in certain physical fitness indicators.◦

3.2 Consequences of the Loss of Corporeal Aesthetics in Physical Education

The deleterious impacts stemming from the prolonged loss of corporeal aesthetics within physical education are undeniable, as evidenced by the external manifestations of the "three major deficits" exhibited by students in physical education: firstly, a lack of bodily awareness; secondly, a dearth of bodily autonomy; and thirdly, a deficiency in bodily experience.

3.2.1 Lack of Bodily Awareness among Students

The crux of physical education lies in fostering students' bodily awareness, whereby the process should entail students' attentiveness to the bodily sensations engendered during practical activities, enabling them to maneuver their bodies more adeptly. Sensation forms the foundation of bodily awareness, yet students often lack bodily awareness while engaging in physical activities, leading to significant deviations in their proprioceptive behaviors. This not only impedes students from acquiring physical skills taught by physical educators but also predisposes them to bodily stiffness due to distorted movements, thereby compromising their physical and mental well-being, which unequivocally contradicts the original intent behind instituting physical education in schools. Under the traditional paradigm of physical education, educators tend to prioritize students' outward bodily performances while entirely disregarding the emotional intricacies entwined within students' participation in physical activities. A vital component of bodily experience in physical activities is the release of emotional engagement by the active subjects. However, due to students' lack of bodily awareness, the primal intrinsic sensory experiences remain elusive during physical activities, rendering the activities mere formalities, thereby hindering students from eliciting genuine emotional responses.

3.2.2 Lack of Bodily Autonomy among Students

Under the pervasive influence of exam-oriented education, physical education has long been marginalized, inundated by the dominance of knowledge-centric educational ideologies. Consequently, the body has become ensnared within the confines of the educational system, reduced to a mere symbol of competition, devoid of recognition by educational practitioners. Students find themselves burdened by academic demands, rendering their bodies mere instruments to serve academic competition, thus forfeiting their autonomy. School physical education, which should serve as a pivotal platform for students to engage in free bodily activities, bears the crucial mission of fostering lifelong sporting values and enhancing students' enthusiasm for participating in physical activities. However, the obfuscation of the body has engendered the emergence of detrimental educational phenomena, such as the prevalence of prioritizing intellectual education over moral education. The domination of subjects like language, mathematics, and foreign languages encroaches upon the time allocated for physical education classes, transforming the

classroom into a metaphorical prison of four white walls, confining not the heart but the body itself. Prolonged confinement inevitably leads to the erosion of bodily autonomy among students, culminating in the gradual waning of interest in physical activities until eventual disengagement.

3.2.3 Students' Lack of Bodily Experience

Corporeal aesthetics posits that the body serves as a crucial vehicle for physical education, with physical education being a vital instrument for bodily refinement. Bodily refinement should not merely revolve around optimizing various physiological indicators but should, more importantly, prioritize the pursuit of holistic mind-body integration. However, due to the severe lack of recognition of physical education's status and the pervasive influence of "win-at-all-costs" mentality, physical education has long been relegated to a tool for imparting athletic skills to students. Educators, in their instructional practices, have failed to emphasize students' emotional experiences during physical activities, thereby hampering physical education from realizing its true educational potential. If student education seeks to achieve mind-body integration, it must necessarily bridge the gap between bodily presence and knowledge formation, effectuating a "bodily-first, mind-follows" approach. However, the current educational paradigm lacks firsthand bodily experiences for students, leaving their "bodies" and "minds" in a state of dissociation. The absence of firsthand bodily experiences in physical activities constitutes a critical deficit in students' inner spiritual freedom. Consequently, students remain oblivious to the joys inherent in physical activities, and they struggle to cultivate emotional engagement during sports competitions.

4. Return of Corporeal Aesthetics in Physical Education

The resurgence of corporeal aesthetics in physical education has emerged as an inevitable trend, as the development of physical education under the paradigm of competitive sports has strayed considerably from its original intent. Admittedly, competitive sports education does not inherently err, but it is founded on the pursuit of bodily values. Thus, delving into the essence of the "return" and exploring the pathway for its realization is imperative for the resurgence of corporeal aesthetics.

4.1 The Essence of the Return of Corporeal Aesthetics

For the resurgence of corporeal aesthetics to materialize, it is essential to ascertain its fundamental principles and explore how to actualize its return fundamentally. Only then can the specific pathways for the return of corporeal aesthetics be identified. It is proposed that an investigation should encompass three dimensions: the status of bodily agency, firsthand bodily experiences, and the allure of corporeal aesthetics.

4.1.1 Reinstating the Status of Bodily Agency

Attention within physical education should not be confined to viewing the body merely as a "machine" or "flesh and matter" but should rather acknowledge it as the linchpin of all physical education activities [11]. In these activities, the body should occupy a central position. The relationship between the body and physical education should be symbiotic, where the body serves as the foundation for the survival of physical education, while physical education, in turn, imparts guidance to the body. Achieving harmony between the mind and body in physical education hinges on respecting the primacy of bodily agency. Physical education should acknowledge the value of the body, ceasing to regard it merely as a tool for intellectual development but genuinely facilitating students' holistic development. As the body gradually becomes "unveiled," physical education will inevitably shift from its initial focus on teaching athletic skills to body shaping. With corporeal

aesthetics infused into physical education like lifeblood, it leads the resurgence of corporeal aesthetics, aiding educational entities in better appreciating the value of the body and achieving true mind-body integration. Guided by corporeal aesthetics, physical education transcends its materialistic utilitarianism, emphasizing bodily practices, ultimately circling back to the body itself, which encapsulates the ultimate pursuit of physical education. Thus, the reinstatement of bodily agency constitutes a fundamental aspect of corporeal aesthetics.

4.1.2 The Return of Firsthand Bodily Experiences

If physical education were likened to an engineer, then the body would be a piece of art sculpted by them. However, "teaching a person to fish is better than giving them fish," implying that the role of physical education should not merely be confined to helping students understand the value of the body deeply. It should also aid them in learning how to transform their bodies autonomously, achieving "mind-body integration" through "experiencing it firsthand." The process of physical education is a journey for students to accumulate firsthand experiences with their bodies. They need to master the physical skills taught by teachers through the practice of their bodies and the feelings within. The process of students learning physical skills can be divided into three stages: first, the generalization stage, during which students' "body" and "mind" are completely separated, and they must continuously use their bodies to imitate without possessing bodily freedom of will; second, the differentiation stage, where students' bodies have acquired certain experiences through imitation and reaction in the generalization stage, enabling them to perform coherent physical actions during sports activities; third, the freedom stage, which can be explained by the theory of "embodiment," achieving the unity of "brain-body-environment," where students' "mind-body" integration can fully perceive the beauty of sports movements[12]. Through experiencing these three stages, students will gradually extend bodily freedom of will to spiritual freedom in sports and perceive the sublime beauty of sports. Thus, the return of firsthand bodily experiences is also a fundamental aspect of corporeal aesthetics.

4.1.3 The Return of the Allure of Corporeal Aesthetics

The body serves as a bridge for humans to perceive and practice beauty, enabling them to capture and comprehend the expressions of beauty in the world through bodily power. The foundation of sports activities lies in the body, which expresses the beauty of movement through the body. The original intention of conducting physical education is to achieve students' comprehensive development, and beauty is an indispensable part of human survival and development. However, in the current physical education activities, the lack of comprehensive recognition of the value of the body implies the neglect of understanding, discovering, and creating beauty at its ultimate source. Without the manifestation of the allure of corporeal aesthetics, physical education activities lose their vitality. Therefore, physical education must enable students to autonomously form an understanding of the body and utilize it for perception, experience the beauty of movement, comprehend, and release inner emotions. As for the current purpose of physical education, the pursuit of competitive sports can also be achieved, albeit with a change in value orientation, where aesthetics becomes the guiding value of physical education. Physical education will promote the comprehensive improvement of the body and mind of the subject through competition, thus advancing competitive sports along the historical chain of human-material-human evolution. Hence,[13] the return of the allure of corporeal aesthetics is also a fundamental aspect of corporeal aesthetics.

4.2 The Path of Corporeal Aesthetic "Return"

Physical education must achieve the integration of students' "body and mind," which can be explained using the theory of embodiment. The phenomenon of embodiment in physical education does not involve a dichotomy between body and mind or a polarization from body to spirit. The embodied body is not merely a collection of localized sensory experiences but rather an upward elevation of the integrated experiential domain, expanding and extending the domain of "existence" in a manner of "being there." [14]The relationship between "body" and "mind" in physical education is not one of opposition but rather dynamic integration; the "body" is the outward manifestation of the "mind," and the "mind" is the inwardness of the "body." The development of physical education has gradually shifted towards human-centered education, and the pursuit of the value of the body has become the call of the current era, making the return of corporeal aesthetics inevitable.

Based on the exploration of the foundation of the return of corporeal aesthetics, the path of the return of corporeal aesthetics in physical education, addressing the root causes of the loss of corporeal aesthetics in physical education, is proposed from three aspects: conceptual transformation, goal reconstruction, and innovative methods.

4.2.1 Transformation of Physical Education Concepts

The concept of physical education serves as the blueprint for school physical education, representing the distilled experience of long-term physical education practices and guiding the future development of physical education. School physical education has always advocated "health first," but in actual teaching processes, the teaching concept of student physical and mental health is not consistently integrated into all aspects, making it difficult for students to achieve true physical and mental health. In essence, the teaching concept of "health first" is consistent with the core viewpoint of corporeal aesthetics. However, the fundamental difference lies in the vague nature of the implementation of the concept of physical education, often being mere slogans without substance. Therefore, to achieve the return of corporeal aesthetics in physical education, it is necessary to refine the concept of physical education from both macro and micro perspectives. At the macro level, school physical education must adhere to the teaching concepts of "health first" and "human-centered education," with physical education teachers emphasizing the effective implementation of teaching concepts in the teaching process and guiding teaching development through teaching concepts. At the micro level, school physical education must respect the students' subjective status in physical education activities, aiming to unearth the value of students' bodies and cultivate students' sense of physicality to achieve personalized development in educational concepts. However, whether from the macro or micro level, it is essential to ensure that the teaching concept is genuinely implemented.

The concept of physical education, as a guiding beacon for the development of physical education, must achieve the skillful integration of corporeal aesthetics, guiding students to pay more attention to the beauty of the body through progressive teaching methods, enabling students to autonomously discover, perceive, and appreciate physical beauty. The skillful integration of corporeal aesthetics into the concept of physical education can enhance the integrity of the concept system of physical education, truly aligning the concept system of physical education with the advocated concept of "comprehensive development" in the current educational system. In conclusion, the return of corporeal aesthetics must transform the current concept of physical education.

4.2.2 Reconstruction of Physical Education Goals

Physical education should be effectively divided into two major components: one is physical activity, and the other is character cultivation, which is no different from education in essence, both having clear objectives. Regarding the long-term goals of physical education, its ultimate development objective should be the comprehensive development of students, while concerning short-term goals of physical education, its focus should be on assisting students in achieving physical and mental health. There exists a complementary relationship between the two, with short-term goals serving long-term objectives. In the developmental stages of lifelong physical education, the role of physical education is to help students establish a lifelong perspective on physical activities and achieve their comprehensive development. Among them, aesthetics is a crucial aspect, as a beautiful body serves as an essential foundation for students' comprehensive development. The fundamental existence of humans lies in their physicality; without the body, there is no person. Of course, here the mention of "body" does not refer merely to the physical body but rather to the integrated subject of body and mind. The short-term goal of physical education is to help students develop healthy bodies and minds from the perspective of their physical value, enabling them to have the foundation to pursue the fulfillment of life's meaning. Meanwhile, the long-term goal of physical education is to cultivate individuals rich in physical spirit from both physical and mental perspectives.

Beauty is the sensory representation of all fundamental forces, and ideally, beauty should be harmonious, requiring the harmonious unity of the individual's inner and outer aspects, as well as the harmonious unity of the individual with society, based on the individual's diverse characteristics and their penetrability and diffusivity(As shown in Table 1). The goal system of physical education should be hierarchical, acting on each individual student through a step-by-step process of inculcation. A hierarchical system of physical education goals helps students perceive beauty in physical activities and fosters their awareness of beauty. In the construction process, it is imperative to start with the foundation of corporeal aesthetics, elucidating mysteries for students within beauty.

Table 1: Design of Hierarchical Physical Education Goal System

Goal Specification	Objective Refinement
Cultivate Physical Beauty	1. Understand Physical Beauty
	2. Clarify the Basic Tasks of Aesthetic Education
	3. Establish Aesthetic Concepts
Cultivate Spiritual Beauty	1. Cultivate Character Beauty
	2. Achieve Physical and Mental Harmony
Cultivate Athletic Beauty	1. Research and Develop Aesthetic Sports
	2. Participate in Aesthetic Education Practice Activities

4.2.3 Innovation in Physical Education Approaches

A series of reforms are needed in physical education, which is an integral part of quality education. [15]Innovating physical education approaches is a crucial pathway to realizing the resurgence of physical aesthetics and directly contributes to achieving students' holistic development. Physical education instruction entails an open process of students' cognition, experience, and free perception of physical activities, guided by teaching philosophies and directed by educational objectives, aiming for the comprehensive and harmonious integration of physical education and character development, teacher-student relationships, and emotions and cognition in physical education. Therefore, physical education must inspire students' ability to perceive physical beauty through innovative educational approaches and enhance their appreciation of beauty through

practical activities.

Teachers in physical education must foster the correct aesthetic awareness of the body and tailor physical education accordingly to create a conducive environment for students to appreciate physical beauty. This can be achieved through various means: firstly, leveraging modern teaching technologies appropriately. In physical education, displaying videos of sports events showcasing physical beauty and complementing them with narratives of athletes' emotional stories can help students understand the genuine emotional expressions behind athletes' performances; secondly, adopting student-oriented teaching methods. Upholding the students' position as the primary focus, appropriate teaching methods such as flipped classrooms should be selected to actively engage students, thereby promoting their physical and mental well-being; thirdly, enhancing students' emotional experiences. Through group competitions, students can cultivate noble qualities such as teamwork and perseverance, freely expressing their joys and sorrows during firsthand experiences, thereby enabling them to autonomously delve into the realm of aesthetic education.

5. Conclusion

Physical aesthetics emphasizes the dual nature of the body, encompassing not only the external manifestations valued in current physical education but also the internal shaping overlooked by many. As physical education transitions into the "human-centered education" stage, the call for the resurgence of physical aesthetics grows stronger. The trajectory of physical education development inevitably follows the path of "human-material-human," and the resurgence of physical aesthetics is an inevitability. A comprehensive examination of the current phenomenon of the loss of physical aesthetics in physical education reveals its roots in the neglect of the value of the body. The resurgence of physical aesthetics will rekindle people's appreciation for the value of the body, a transformation that must be achieved through the introduction of physical beauty.

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