

POSSIBLE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN LEISURE AND CROSSFIT

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*Ana Flávia Sardinha Nascimento*<sup>1</sup>

Universidade do Estado de Santa Catarina (UDESC)

Florianópolis – SC – Brazil

<https://orcid.org/0009-0004-1057-0557>

*Maria Eduarda Tomaz Luiz*<sup>2</sup>

Universidade do Estado de Santa Catarina (UDESC)

Florianópolis – SC – Brazil

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3757-6647>

*Beatriz Freitas da Cunha*<sup>3</sup>

Universidade do Estado de Santa Catarina (UDESC)

Florianópolis – SC – Brazil

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0679-5310>

*Manoela de Sousa Correia*<sup>4</sup>

Universidade do Estado de Santa Catarina (UDESC)

Florianópolis – SC – Brazil

<https://orcid.org/0009-0001-5215-5050>

*Alcyane Marinho*<sup>5</sup>

Universidade do Estado de Santa Catarina (UDESC)

Florianópolis – SC – Brazil

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2313-4031>

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<sup>1</sup> Bachelor's Degree in Physical Education, Center for Health and Sports Sciences (CEFID), Universidade do Estado de Santa Catarina (UDESC).

<sup>2</sup> Attending the Ph.D. of the Postgraduate Program in Human Movement Sciences (PPGCMH), Center for Health and Sports Sciences (CEFID), Universidade do Estado de Santa Catarina (UDESC), with a FAPESC scholarship, member of the Leisure and Physical Activity Research Laboratory (LAPLAF).

<sup>3</sup> Attending the Master's Degree of the Postgraduate Program in Human Movement Sciences (PPGCMH), Center for Health and Sports Sciences (CEFID), Universidade do Estado de Santa Catarina (UDESC), with a CAPES scholarship, member of the Leisure and Physical Activity Research Laboratory (LAPLAF).

<sup>4</sup> Bachelor's Degree in Physical Education, Center for Health and Sports Sciences (CEFID), Universidade do Estado de Santa Catarina (UDESC). extension scholarship holder at the Leisure and Physical Activity Research Laboratory (LAPLAF/CEFID/UDESC/CNPq)

<sup>5</sup> Ph.D. in Physical Education by UNICAMP. Associate professor at Universidade do Estado de Santa Catarina (UDESC). Coordinator of the Leisure and Physical Activity Research Laboratory (LAPLAF/CEFID/UDESC/CNPq).

**ABSTRACT:** The objective of this study was to investigate the possible relationships between leisure and CrossFit based on reports from practitioners of a box in São José (SC). It is characterized as a descriptive and exploratory field study, with a qualitative approach. 20 students (13 women and seven men) participated in this research. Semi-structured interviews were carried out, data were organized with the help of Nvivo 14 software and analyzed using the content analysis technique. The analysis categories discussed were: meanings attributed to CrossFit and perceptions of leisure. From them, it was possible to verify that those investigated perceive CrossFit beyond a physical exercise related to health and quality of life, but as a leisure possibility that is associated with well-being, pleasure, fun, distraction and socialization.

**KEYWORDS:** Leisure activities. Exercise. Interpersonal relations.

### POSSÍVEIS RELAÇÕES ENTRE LAZER E CROSSFIT

**RESUMO:** O objetivo deste estudo foi investigar as possíveis relações entre o lazer e o CrossFit a partir dos relatos dos praticantes de um box em São José (SC). Caracteriza-se como um estudo de campo, descritivo e exploratório, com abordagem qualitativa. Participaram desta pesquisa 20 alunos (13 mulheres e sete homens). Foram realizadas entrevistas semiestruturadas, os dados foram organizados com o auxílio do *software* Nvivo 14 e analisados por meio da técnica de análise de conteúdo. As categorias de análise discutidas foram: significados atribuídos ao CrossFit e percepções do lazer. A partir delas, foi possível constatar que os investigados percebem o CrossFit para além de um exercício físico relacionado à saúde e qualidade de vida, mas como uma possibilidade de lazer que está associada ao bem-estar, prazer, diversão, distração e a socialização.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Atividades de lazer. Exercício Físico. Relações Interpessoais.

### Introduction

CrossFit has become one of the most well-known training methods today (SIMPSON *et al.*, 2017). This is because it differs from conventional training methods, as it is based on functional exercises that are constantly varied, preventing the activity from becoming monotonous (GLASSMAN, 2007). According to CrossFit's official website, there are "boxes"—dedicated CrossFit training facilities—at more than 14,000 locations across 155 countries, with over five million athletes (CROSSFIT, 2023). Additionally, some gyms adopt the methodology without officially using the brand. The discipline was created in the 1990s in California and systematized by Greg Glassman, a

former gymnast. However, it was only in 2000 that CrossFit was officially registered as a trademark (DA SILVA *et al.*, 2021).

The methodology behind CrossFit is empirical and is built upon the three most important pillars of any fitness program: safety, effectiveness, and efficiency (GLASSMAN, 2007). This training method aims to develop ten physical capacities: cardiorespiratory endurance, muscular endurance, strength, power, speed, coordination, flexibility, agility, balance, and accuracy, all of which contribute to improved physical fitness (GLASSMAN, 2007).

The method is structured around participants completing the Workouts of the Day (WODs), which consist of varied functional exercises, making the practice adaptable and inclusive for all skill levels (SIMPSON *et al.*, 2017). Typically, workouts follow a similar structure, beginning with a dynamic warm-up, followed by a technical segment. In this phase, the coach demonstrates the correct execution of specific movements, which may include functional exercises (using external equipment or body weight alone), gymnastics movements (such as ring and bar exercises), or weightlifting movements (GLASSMAN, 2007).

After receiving instructions, participants spend individualized time practicing each movement and receive corrections and feedback from the coach (SIMPSON *et al.*, 2017). WODs usually take place at the end of the class, with different movement variations assigned each day. Additionally, CrossFit has a competitive modality at local, regional, and global levels, with its premier event, The CrossFit Games, established in 2007 to determine “the fittest person on Earth” (CROSSFIT, 2023).

Thus, CrossFit proves to be a promising training methodology within the realm of physical exercise, as it offers potential benefits for both physical health and overall well-being. Furthermore, CrossFit is considered a highly social activity, as participants

are encouraged to build a sense of community through the intensity of the WODs (GLASSMAN, 2007). Practitioners are, for example, encouraged to introduce themselves to newcomers, socialize after classes, and support each other in their pursuit of progress and self-improvement. According to Pickett *et al.* (2016), while the training is designed to be intense and challenging, inclusivity remains a core characteristic of the practice.

In this study, leisure is understood based on the writings of Gomes (2004) and Marcellino (2012), who argue that leisure is a product of culture and a universal right. Silva *et al.* (2011) and Marcellino (2012) highlight the importance of leisure as an outcome of contemporary society, capable of driving moral and cultural change through the experiences and values fostered during leisure time. Leisure, therefore, provides individuals with various opportunities to engage in enjoyable activities. This diversity enables a sense of positive well-being, offering experiences that align with the unique characteristics of each person (MANSFIELD; DAYKIN; KAY, 2020).

Thus, this study starts from these considerations and focuses on the physical-sporting and social interests of leisure (as advocated by Dumazedier in 1980). The experiences offered by this cultural content are related to sports practices and all activities related to movement and physical exercise (MARCELLINO, 2003; STUCCHI, 1997). In this context, gyms are recognized as specific leisure equipment and have been constantly occupying space in society, as pointed out some time ago by Marcellino (2003). Despite being different from a conventional gym, the CrossFit box can be considered a specific micro equipment, as it prioritizes physical-sporting and social leisure content (MARCELLINO, 2003).

CrossFit, characterized as a social leisure activity, is legitimate because it is carried out collectively, and can provide participants with the benefits of sociability and

a sense of community, which increases adherence to exercise (HEINRICH *et al.*, 2017). Given the above, it is worth highlighting that published studies on leisure and CrossFit are scarce, although some obtain evidence that among participants, there is a common sense of satisfaction and motivation (CLAUDINO *et al.*, 2018; HEUER, 2019). Therefore, new studies are needed to identify CrossFit as a leisure possibility, becoming an ally in the promotion of physical exercise. Therefore, the objective of this study was to investigate the possible relationships between leisure and CrossFit based on the reports of practitioners at a box in São José (SC).

## **Methodology**

This research, the result of a final course work in Physical Education, is configured as a field study, of a descriptive and exploratory nature, with a qualitative approach. Field studies are characterized by direct observation of a specific group and through interviews, which aim to capture their interpretations and understandings about the group they are part of (GIL, 2010). Descriptive research, according to Gil (2010), studies the characteristics of a given group or population, as well as examining possible relationships between variables. Exploratory studies are more flexible and offer greater familiarity with the problem, analyzing the different aspects intrinsic to the phenomenon studied (GIL, 2010). The qualitative approach, in turn, cannot be quantified, it is related to meanings, experiences and understandings about the social world, investigating the nature of the phenomenon (MINAYO, 2012).

This study is part of a research project sent to the Ethics and Research Committee with Human Beings of the State University of Santa Catarina, which was approved under opinion No. 5.766.919, following the ethical precepts of Resolution 510/16 of the National Health Council on research with human beings. It is worth

noting that the person responsible for the institution under investigation signed the Declaration of Knowledge and Agreement of the Institutions Involved. In addition, all study participants voluntarily agreed to participate in the study and signed an Informed Consent Form, as well as a Consent Form for Photographs, Videos and Recordings. These, in turn, are identified in this study through fictitious names, chosen by themselves (Table 1), in order to preserve their identities.

As an inclusion criterion, participants needed to train at least three times a week. In turn, practicing CrossFit for less than one year was the exclusion criterion. These criteria are justified, as with this time it is believed that practitioners have more knowledge and experience about the sport, being better able to answer questions. Thus, the interviewees had between one and six years of practice with the sport. Of these, 13 are women and seven are men, aged between 23 and 48 years, as specified in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Characterization of participants.

Fictitious Name	Gender	Age (years)	Practice time
Alexia	Female	48	4 years old
Jennifer	Female	31	1 year and 6 months
Louise	Female	31	2 years and 3 months
Theo	Male	35	5 years old
Fernando	Male	32	5 years old
Panda	Male	34	6 years
Helena	Female	33	2 years
German	Male	40	4 years old
Maycon	Male	31	5 years old
Zé	Male	35	1 year and 6 months
Rose	Female	35	4 years and 6 months
Kyky	Female	25	4 years old
Rangel	Male	37	4 years and 6 months
Paula	Female	26	4 years old
Fernanda	Female	30	6 years
Bianca	Female	45	4 years old
Rebecca	Female	33	2 years
Julia	Female	45	2 years
Laís	Female	23	1 year and 2 months
Dinho	Male	35	2 years

**Source:** own authorship (2023).

A semi-structured interview was conducted with 20 CrossFit students in a box located in the city of São José (SC). To this end, as highlighted by Minayo (2012), the semi-structured interview consists of collecting information through pre-prepared questions about one or more specific contents, thus being able to talk about the topic without being limited to pre-prepared questions.

To this end, a semi-structured interview script was constructed specifically for the development of this study with the aim of guiding and supporting the interviewer.

The aforementioned script was composed of questions involving the research theme and the characterization of the participants, such as: fictitious name, sex, age and time practicing the sport (Table 1). The questions were divided into three thematic axes. The first concerns CrossFit as a modality (its meaning, the reasons that led to practicing it, as well as what motivated people to continue practicing it, the role of the community and feelings surrounding the practice). Subsequently, questions regarding the understanding of leisure were asked. Finally, the question was asked about the possible relationships between leisure and CrossFit, aiming to understand whether CrossFit can be configured as a leisure possibility.

The interviews took place in the CrossFit box where the participants practice the sport. Initially, an invitation was sent to the WhatsApp group of box students, containing the main information about the study. Those who were interested in participating voluntarily should express their interest so that it would be possible to contact them individually. Therefore, the interviews were scheduled in advance according to the availability of each participant. These, in turn, were carried out during class breaks, in a private room, and lasted an average of 10 minutes. All interviews were recorded using a cell phone recorder and later transcribed in full by the main researcher, with a view to reducing transcription bias (HALCOMB; DAVIDSON, 2006). The total transcription time was approximately 20 hours.

The data were organized in NVivo software, version 14. This is a tool to assist qualitative studies, a computational resource that allows data to be stored and organized. The data collected in this research were analyzed using Bardin's (2010) content analysis technique. This technique is a set of communication analysis techniques, carried out systematically, which is divided into three phases: pre-analysis, exploration of the material and treatment, inference and interpretation of the data (BARDIN, 2010). To



this end, the results will be presented in two categories of analysis defined a priori, aiming to respond to the objective of this study, namely: “Meanings attributed to CrossFit” and “Perceptions of leisure”.

### **Meanings Assigned to CrossFit**

It was observed that the meanings attributed by students to the practice of CrossFit were related to health and quality of life, physical and mental well-being, friendship and community, stress relief, physical exercise, and leisure. The following statements exemplify these findings:

CrossFit, beyond just physical exercise, is an hour of the day that I dedicate to myself, for self-care, to feel better, and to be surrounded by people I enjoy spending time with. (Rosa, 4 years and 6 months of practice).

CrossFit, besides improving physical fitness, is also a relief for my mind. Today, I do CrossFit to de-stress from daily life and work. And, of course, to achieve better health and a much longer life expectancy. (Kyky, 4 years of practice).

For me, CrossFit is a place where I have significantly improved my physical and mental health, and today, it is part of my leisure. (Dinho, 2 years of practice).

When analyzing the meanings attributed to CrossFit, participants' accounts revealed that they primarily perceive it as an exercise linked to health improvement and physical conditioning. That is, aspects related to health and quality of life were prominent in their statements, demonstrating both awareness and concern for their physical well-being, as well as a vision for a better life expectancy. According to Heinrich et al. (2014), CrossFit and other high-intensity physical activities are essential for public health as they incorporate both aerobic and muscle-strengthening exercises, aligning with current physical activity recommendations. Beyond these aspects, CrossFit was also directly associated with health promotion, such as reducing the impact of chronic diseases. This is exemplified in the statement of Alexia:

For me, CrossFit means health. Since I found out I was pre-diabetic, I sought out physical exercise, and the one that suited me best was CrossFit. (Alexia, 4 years of practice).

Studies show that exercise is linked to various long-term health benefits, including the potential to reduce mortality rates from cancer and chronic diseases, improve movement-related functions, and lower the incidence of cardiovascular diseases and diabetes (FRIEDENRICH *et al.*, 2016; KOKKINOS, 2012; MACERA; HOOTMAN; SNIEZEK, 2003; REINER *et al.*, 2013).

Additionally, physical exercise can also positively impact psychological factors such as stress, anxiety, and depression (ASMUNDSON *et al.*, 2013; JOSEFSSON; LINDWALL; ARCHER, 2014; WARBURTON; BREDIN, 2006). Therefore, it is important to highlight that these psychological factors were also evident in the participants' statements, as many associated the practice with anxiety relief and stress management. Jennifer and Laís illustrate these reflections: Jennifer and Laís illustrate these reflections:

[...] It's the activity that makes the most sense, because I get here and don't think about anything. It's a dynamic exercise, there's no time to think about things on the street, we just focus on the exercise. And today, for me, it's also about mental health, because it works a lot on my anxiety. The weeks when I'm not feeling well, when I'm more anxious, are the weeks when I can't train (Jennifer, 1 year and 6 months of practice).

It's a question of mental and physical health. [...] My anxiety used to be very high and over time, with the frequency of CrossFit, it decreased. Today I feel like a calmer person (Laís, 1 year and 2 months).

Friendship and community were important words mentioned, which refer to CrossFit as a place of refuge, to socialize and de-stress from the routine, bringing feelings of belonging and well-being. According to Baptista and Brandão (2023), although the results and improvements are individual, to achieve the objectives, the means are collective actions and interactions. Sociability in CrossFit is present through motivations, in the way of relating, interacting and acting socially in groups (SIMMEL,

2006; CAVALCANTI, 2016). Therefore, in this context of social interactions, CrossFit is not just a physical exercise, it goes beyond training, considering that practitioners create a feeling of belonging to a community (BAPTISTA; BRANDÃO, 2023). In the CrossFit box, interactions occur all the time between practitioners, inside and outside of training, allowing them to influence and be influenced (BAILEY, BENSON; BRUNER, 2017). The results of the present study reinforce these aspects, as illustrated by Rosa and Fernanda:

Today, I think it's a development role, they are people who share the same ideas, they are people who normally have the same self-care synergies. For me, today, CrossFit plays several important roles beyond physical exercise (Rosa, 4 years and 6 months of practice).

It's a community where everyone is very close, we are like a family. I made great friends in CrossFit, friends that I interact with every day [...] (Fernanda, 6 years of practice).

The feelings and emotions surrounding the practice are interesting to mention, as they are related to the results mentioned above. Participants were asked about what they felt while practicing the sport. “Challenge” and “satisfaction” were mentioned equally often, being mentioned six times by participants. The feeling of happiness comes next, mentioned five times, followed by the feeling of motivation, mentioned four times. These terms have a close relationship with leisure, as we will discuss below.

### **Perceptions of Leisure**

When asked about their understanding of leisure, it was possible to observe that participants' perceptions of this phenomenon are similar in several aspects. Each person's perceptions were selected based on what was most prominent in their statements. The aspects that appeared most frequently in the accounts were those that relate leisure to well-being, pleasure, relaxation, unwinding, activities unrelated to the work environment, and socialization. As pointed out by Fernanda and Theo:

Leisure is doing things that make me feel good and at ease. It's when I can truly enjoy my day and spend time with people I like. (Fernanda, 6 years of practice).

Leisure is an activity that you can detach from your fixed commitments. Even if you enjoy your job, there is always a part that is stressful or tedious. Leisure helps you in other areas of your life—you feel more relaxed, less stressed, and, most importantly, you sleep better. (Theo, 5 years of practice).

As highlighted by Dumazedier (1980), leisure is freely chosen, seeking a state of satisfaction that involves feelings of well-being and pleasure. However, it is important to note that leisure is not limited to this definition alone. Marcellino (2007) advocates for a broader understanding of leisure as a cultural practice, carried out in available time, aimed solely at achieving satisfaction after a given situation, emphasizing the importance of both social and personal development.

According to the practitioners' responses regarding their perceptions of leisure, though less frequently mentioned, some also associate leisure with socialization, linking it to quality time spent with friends and family. This, in turn, involves social development through interpersonal interactions. The points raised earlier by Marcellino (2007) correlate with aspects of leisure perceptions found in participants' responses, which encompass well-being, pleasure, relaxation, and sociability. This is exemplified by one of the interviewees:

Leisure is being with friends, often chatting and seeking relaxation [...] (German, 4 years of practice).

It was also possible to observe that practitioners disconnect leisure from routine and the work environment, linking it to activities or moments of escape and rest from obligations. This is in line with the relationships established in contemporary society which, due to social conditions, end up centralizing their lives on work and, consequently, end up using leisure as compensation for frustrations, being linked again to feelings of pleasure and relaxation (WERNECK, 1998). In this way, the need for

leisure and work to be in harmony is highlighted, so that leisure is not seen only as a deserved reward after a long period of work (DA SILVA; SILVA, 2012).

It was highlighted that the activities unrelated to work, which were mentioned as leisure by the practitioners, were directly related to the physical-sporting contents of leisure, spontaneously mentioning CrossFit as their leisure option, without having yet been asked whether CrossFit would be configured as such. Kyky illustrates these findings:

Leisure for me is when I can have time for myself, whether it's alone or doing something with friends, and it's a way of not thinking about work. Being able to have that presence and have fun, and CrossFit does that really well in my life. (Kyky, 4 years of practice).

In this sense, CrossFit was also presented as a space that can provide moments of leisure, linked to positive feelings and well-being. These feelings were related to both the physical body and mental health, such as the feeling of relaxation after training (through the release of endorphins), as well as mental health, where they release all stress, forgetting problems and focusing on self-care. Mansfield, Dayken and Kay (2020) point out that leisure practices provide pleasant experiences and feelings of well-being. This is because there are several leisure opportunities that can accommodate the characteristics and individualities of each person, whether through activities or experiences that they enjoy most.

According to the reports discussed previously, we can see that leisure is seen as influenced by a functionalist character by the participants, as the majority cited leisure as rest and well-being, considering it as a time of compensation, a time of rest unrelated to work. According to Da Silva e Silva (2012), for leisure to be seen as critical and creative, it is necessary to know the different possibilities that the area offers, contributing to social and personal development, not limiting leisure to rest and fun. The following reports demonstrate these results:

It is very much a form of leisure, especially with regard to social interaction. If I had to just train and leave, maybe leisure wouldn't be the biggest point. But it is, because whenever you de-stress physically, you win mentally (Theo, 5 years of practice).

Crossfit is my leisure and refuge, I come here to talk, to escape from everyday life, stress and work (Fernanda, 6 years of practice).

CrossFit is leisure, we prioritize it, we want to be here, it's a feeling that is not an obligation, but a real desire to be here (Rosa, 4 years and 6 months).

Although practitioners' conceptions of leisure are limited - in relation to contributions in moral and cultural order (MARCELLINO, 2012) - participants' speeches evidenced their understanding through the possibilities of social interactions, escape from reality, de-stressing and non-obligation. Such aspects also appeared in the meanings attributed to CrossFit, thus, it is possible to relate the perceptions of leisure with the meanings attributed to CrossFit by practitioners, as they are related to the same aspects of leisure. Furthermore, when asked whether CrossFit would be considered a form of leisure, all participants stated that they consider the sport to be their main source of leisure. Panda and Rebeca illustrate these findings:

Today, if you ask most people who already practice CrossFit what it is, they will answer that it is a moment of leisure. Because, for example, we spend eight hours a day working, stressed, nervous, anxious and when you get here, you have your friends, you have that WOD (workout of the day), where you can run, play and compete. This is all leisure! (Panda, 6 years of practice).

My main source of leisure is my training. It even guides my other leisure activities, sometimes I consider whether I really want to go out, have a drink, because tomorrow I have training. It really is the first on my leisure list, and then the rest comes (Rebeca, 3 years of practice).

The study by Eli, Dos Santos and Marinho (2016), which investigated the perceptions of leisure by bodybuilders at a gym in São José (SC), presents its results in line with the findings of the present study. The authors demonstrate bodybuilding as a leisure possibility in the context of a gym. The results of both studies, with regard to the participants' perceptions and feelings associated with leisure and the sport, were the same: pleasure, well-being and relaxation. Furthermore, these studies highlight the

disconnection of the modalities (bodybuilding and CrossFit) from work and routine, also highlighting the possibility of socialization.

### **Final Considerations**

The perceptions presented by CrossFit practitioners show that everyone understands CrossFit as a possibility for leisure and not just as an exercise aimed at aesthetic purposes. Its relationship was perceived as a means of socialization, relaxation, fun, pleasure, and an escape from obligations.

Social interactions were very present in the reports, and thus, it was possible to identify that most practitioners joined or continue in CrossFit because of the community. Therefore, CrossFit stands out from other types of physical exercise due to its high degree of socialization during the workouts. Classes are held in groups, with constant communication and interaction. This aligns with some aspects of leisure, reshaping and highlighting its relevance in the social development aspects within the CrossFit environment.

Thus, CrossFit, as a form of leisure, can provide interaction among peers, as well as feelings of belonging, pleasure, well-being, and personal satisfaction. However, this practice is not immune to conflicts and frustrations arising, for example, from the immediacy of seeking aesthetic results or technical comparisons with those who have been practicing longer. Considering that, as a form of leisure, CrossFit is permeated by contradictions and tensions.

Finally, the importance of this study for advancements in the field of Physical Education is highlighted, as there are few studies directly relating CrossFit to leisure, opening possibilities for knowledge and deeper understanding about the CrossFit

modality. Therefore, future studies are suggested to broaden the investigated context, as well as the social actors involved.

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#### **Address of the Authors:**

Ana Flávia Sardenha Nascimento  
Electronic Mail: anaflaviaa\_s2@hotmail.com

Maria Eduarda Tomaz Luiz  
Electronic Mail: maria\_e.t.l@hotmail.com

Beatriz Freitas da Cunha  
Electronic Mail: beatrizfreitascunh@gmail.com

Manoela de Sousa Correia  
Electronic Mail: manoelacorreiaef@gmail.com

Alcyane Marinho  
Electronic Mail: alcyane.marinho@hotmail.com