

**BODILY PRACTICES, LEISURE AND RELIGION: POSSIBLE
INTERLACEMENTS**

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ABSTRACT: This research aimed to understand the interconnections between body practices, leisure and religion. Field research was carried out with a qualitative, descriptive and exploratory approach, with 22 social subjects. Semi-structured interviews and field diaries were used, and content analysis was used to assess the data. The results showed that religion exerted a significant influence on the body practices used by the Church under investigation as an instrument for aggregating and communicating leisure, in accordance with its values and gospel. Thus, religious values shaped the choice, meaning and organization of body practices and leisure experiences, which in turn became an expression of religion. Such relationships show that body, fun and faith are intertwined.

KEYWORDS: Bodily practices. Leisure. Religion.

**PRÁTICAS CORPORAIS, LAZER E RELIGIÃO: POSSÍVEIS
ENTRELAÇAMENTOS**

RESUMO: Esta pesquisa⁴ objetivou compreender os entrelaçamentos entre práticas

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corporais, lazer e religião. Recorreu-se a uma pesquisa de campo, com abordagem qualitativa, descritiva e exploratória, com 22 sujeitos sociais. Utilizou-se de entrevista semiestruturada e diário de campo e, para a apreciação dos dados, análise de conteúdo. Os resultados demonstraram que a religião exerceu influência significativa nas práticas corporais, utilizadas pela Igreja investigada, como instrumento agregador e comunicador de lazer, consoante aos seus valores e evangelho. Destarte, os valores religiosos moldaram a escolha, o significado e a organização das práticas corporais e experiências de lazer, que por sua vez, transformaram-se em expressão da religião. Tais relações evidenciam que corpo, diversão e fé estão imbricados.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Práticas corporais. Lazer. Religião.

Introduction

Body practices, understood as cultural manifestations that involve gymnastics, sports, arts, circus, recreation, exercise, dance, games, fights, among others, are associated with leisure (Lazzarotti Filho et al., 2010), which in turn have specific values, meanings, significances, feelings and emotions that reveal aspects of the society and culture in which they are embedded (Silva et al., 2009).

Body practices can be related to religion and leisure, understood as a cultural dimension characterized by the playful experience of cultural manifestations in the social space (Gomes; Elizalde, 2011). These sociocultural phenomena allow us to understand the human being and are interconnected by aspects that promote socialization, integration (Alves, 2020) and the development of ethical and moral principles in society, as shown by Camilo and Schwartz (2016), and from a historical point of view, highlighting the relationships between bodily practices, leisure and Christian religious practices.

In this regard, bodily practices and leisure can be influenced by religion and become opportunities to reinforce religious teachings and doctrines; thus, leisure is not just a neutral activity, but is frequently aligned with the principles and objectives of a

particular faith (Alves, 2020; Alves; Capi, 2017; Andrade; Schwartz; Felden, 2024; Araújo; Rojo, 2018; Gabriel; Marcellino, 2007; Silva et al., 2021).

Muscular Christianity is an example of Christian engagement with the appreciation of physical and leisure activities. This doctrine, which emerged in 19th-century England within Protestant churches, argued that participation in sports fostered the spiritual, physical, and moral development of Christians (Parker; Weir, 2012; Watson; Weir; Friend, 2005). For some religious institutions, the view of Christ as a spiritual athlete highlighted his posture as a man of action, where the body took on a moral significance (Gonçalves, 2023). Being a Christian meant caring for both the spirit and the body.

These principles motivated the creation of the Young Men's Christian Association (Watson; Weir; Friend, 2005), the first institution in the world to recognize leisure as a fundamental human need and which became a disseminator of modern sport in the 20th century (Baía; Moreno, 2019; Binfield, 1973).

Given the above, it is clear that some religious perspectives, in viewing leisure as a freedom that requires rules and standards, have aligned themselves with the ideals of recreation, understood as an activity aimed at occupying people's time in a “healthy” way. From this perspective, recreationism, the foundation of this study, is understood as one of the theoretical models of leisure and not as a religious issue; however, this model points to the religious conditioning of leisure, which refers to the influence that religious values and practices exert on how leisure is perceived, structured, and experienced (Costa, 2017; Gomes, 2004).

The recreationist movement emerged in the United States in the early 20th century, arguing that play and games are essential pillars of human nature. She also

highlights that the ideals of equality and personal development can be achieved through free time, consolidating leisure as part of the American democratic ideal (Pronovost, 2011).

In the first half of the 20th century, the concept of guided recreation was adopted in Brazil, imbued with concerns about the healthy use of time and the elevation of character and spirit (Gomes, 2004; Silva et al., 2021). This can be observed from the history of the church investigated in this study, as well as from the actions and accounts observed by the social subjects.

In his discussions on muscular Christianity, Putney (2001) highlights that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (IJCSUD) was one of the pioneers in promoting physical and recreational activities among its members, by sponsoring young scouts and building facilities for these activities. Parker (1978), points out that the Church has always encouraged moments of recreation as a process of restoring the body and spirit, emphasizing joy, respect, and community in bodily practices.

IJCSUD disseminates its faith by embracing the ethos of sports, making it an integral part of its sacred space. Thus, this paper discusses the physical and leisure practices of IJCSUD, a religious community with Christian foundations and restorationist characteristics, which has a doctrine of continuous prophetic revelation and was organized in 1830, headquartered in Salt Lake City, United States, whose followers are called Latter-day Saints (IJCSUD, 2009) and, popularly, known as Mormons, due to the Book of Mormon, one of their sources of knowledge and instrument of dissemination.

In this context, it is observed that the relationships between bodily practices and religion have been the subject of investigation in Brazil, with different approaches. In

Christianity, a religion that holds widespread hegemony in Brazil, studies have problematized: religious practices in the world of sports (Damiani, 2009; Petrognani, 2019); religious bodily practices (Falcão-Fernandes; Caminha, 2017; Silva; Silva; Almeida, 2018); the influence of religious doctrines on participation in bodily practices, especially in physical education classes (Rigoni; Daolio, 2014, 2016, 2017; Rigoni; Prodócimo, 2013).

Thus arises the interest in investigating bodily practices associated with leisure in a religious context, recognizing these structures as a dimension of life and sociocultural phenomena. This reality, which has been little explored in the literature, can raise new discussions in the sociocultural field of physical education, regarding the manifestations of religiosity, investigating, empirically, its influences on experiences involving bodily practices and leisure.

The results of this study can contribute to new perspectives on these topics, helping to minimize existing gaps. When discussed in a religious context, bodily practices and leisure can generate important practical implications, bringing new dimensions to be investigated and related social transformations. Given the above, the aim of this study is to understand the interconnections between physical activities, leisure, and religion.

Methodological Approach

This is a field research study, with a qualitative, descriptive, and exploratory approach. This approach allows us to characterize the meanings of actions, values, beliefs, human relationships, and attitudes of social groups (Minayo, 2013).

The field was The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints - Stake⁵ João Pessoa Brazil, in the city of João Pessoa/PB. The research was conducted at this particular site because it is a pioneering site in the state, having been organized in 1980 and recognized as a well-established community.

In this context, authorization was obtained from the Church presidency for the field research. Among the activities carried out at the institution, mutual aid was chosen, with the aim of conducting observations and interviews. The term “mutual” suggests shared experiences and is an activity that includes physical and leisure practices in its program (IJCSUD, 2018). Therefore, this context fostered an understanding of the interconnections between bodily practices, leisure, and religion, as experienced by members of the Church.

The social subjects of the study were 22 adolescents, aged between 12 and 18 years old. The inclusion criterion was being a member of the Church who attends services and participates in physical and recreational activities at the Stake headquarters chapel. The exclusion criteria were failure to participate in any stage of the research or failure to submit the signed Informed Consent Form and Informed Assent Form.

A semi-structured interview guide was adopted as the data collection instrument, covering sociodemographic and general aspects of the social subjects' participation in the Church; and questions relevant to the topic studied (physical and leisure activities carried out in that location, spaces used, reasons for participation, perception of the group's behavior), since to meet the overall objective of the research it was necessary to understand how the members organize and experience the physical and leisure activities of the institution.

⁵ “Stake” refers to the organizational division of the Church, encompassing units within the institution.

An observational script, supported by a field diary, was also used, which allowed for the gathering of information about reality through gestures and behaviors (Minayo, 2013). The field diary contained information related to the subjects, as well as preliminary analyses by the researcher in the field and information that was relevant to the studied scenario.

The interviews took place during the week, at mutual meetings, and on Sundays, during breaks in church activities. Each interview lasted approximately 10 minutes, and to better capture the veracity of the participants' statements, a recording device was used, with prior authorization from the parents and/or guardians and the individuals involved.

The descriptive analysis of the data included the frequency distribution (absolute and relative) of sociodemographic aspects and those related to church participation, using Microsoft Excel.

The interview transcripts were transcribed in full, combined with observational information recorded in the field diary, and subjected to categorical content analysis, as proposed by Bardin (2016). The analysis followed three stages: a) pre-analysis, which allowed for the organization of documents and exploratory reading; b) exploration of the material, in which it was possible to make excerpts from the text, based on its rereading; c) data processing and interpretation, which allowed for the definition of the main analytical category: Structure of the bodily practices of the Church, as well as secondary ones: Body practices and reasons for participating in body practices. Finally, the subcategories, created from the discourses uttered by the subjects—types of practices; spaces and equipment; patterns; events; leisure/entertainment; socialization; and health—were interpreted and analyzed.

To preserve the identity of the social subjects, the abbreviation (E) in parentheses was used to represent the interviewees, from (E1) to (E22). The study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the University of Pernambuco, CAAE: 83446318.5.0000.5207.

Results and Discussion

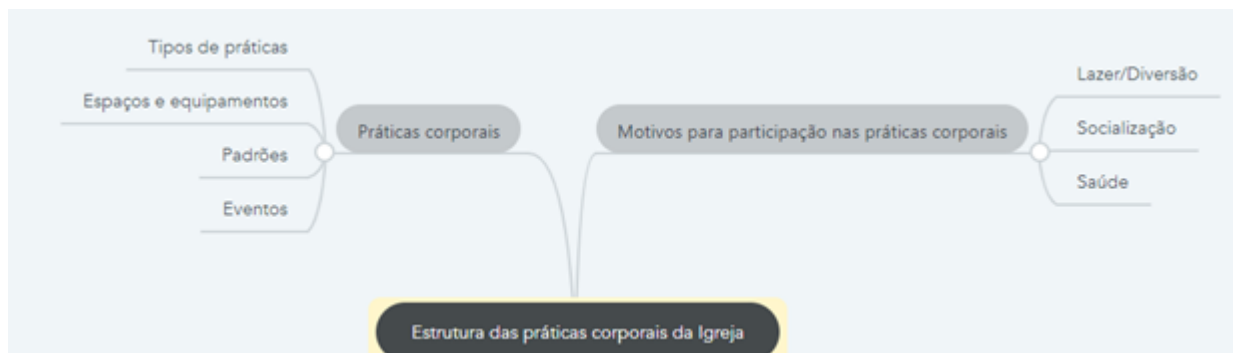
For a better understanding of the data, the results will be presented in two stages: initially, the sociodemographic profile of the study participants and aspects related to their participation in the Church will be described; then, the category “Structure of the bodily practices of the Church” will be discussed.

With regard to the descriptive analysis, 50% of the subjects were female and 50% were male. Regarding age range, 68% were between 12 and 15 years old, while 32% were between 16 and 18 years old. Regarding education level, 86% are enrolled in basic education, 10% have completed secondary education, and 4% are enrolled in higher education. Among those who were studying, 59% attended a private institution.

Regarding aspects of church participation, 18% are recent members (less than 1 year), 41% are established members (2 to 5 years), and the same percentage was attributed to generational members (participating in the Church since childhood); in addition, 77% reported that their parents are also members of the Church.

Regarding the analysis of the category “Structure of bodily practices”, the data will be presented in diagram form (figure 1) and within the discussions themselves.

Figure 1: Structure of the bodily practices of the Church.



Source: Research data, 2024.

Church Body Practices

The setting for the body practices of IJCSUD takes place at Mutual, a gathering for young people that promotes experiences related to spiritual, social, physical, and intellectual development (IJCSUD, 2018). Organized by the Youth Committee, the event usually takes place once a week and includes three main parts.

The opening session includes the singing of a hymn, a prayer, and a reflection on the annual theme, providing young people with the opportunity to showcase their talents and share testimonies. This moment concludes with the reading of the scriptures⁶. In the second part, which takes up most of the meeting, the young people participate in activities aligned with their interests. Options may include, in addition to physical activities, movie screenings, painting, drawing, and cooking.

According to Holbrook (1975), Mormons are guided to seek balance in their activities, prioritizing the fulfillment of their religious responsibilities and duties before engaging in other activities. The third part is the closing prayer followed by a snack, a gathering for the participants.

⁶In addition to the Bible, IJCSUD recognizes other scriptures (Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and Pearl of Great Price), also considering the inspired words of the prophets (IJCSUD, 2009).

In the context of physical activities promoted by the Church, the participants highlighted activities such as futsal, basketball, volleyball, games, table tennis, dance, and theater. They also mentioned the influence of leaders in carrying out some of these practices, which may be related to the institution's Missionary Program. In this program, men and women are sent on missions to different countries with the goal of teaching the gospel (IJCSUD, 2009). During these missions, they share their culture with the communities, including through sports.

According to Davis (2018) and Brambaugh and Embry (2009), between 1911 and 1964, physical practices were used by IJCSUD as a proselytizing tool in several countries through the Missionary Sports Program. This initiative contributed significantly to the spread of sports.

Most LDS church chapels have a sports court or soccer field and a cultural hall. Brigham Young, the second prophet and leader of the Church, encouraged the construction of these facilities with the goal of providing moments of friendship, respect, unity, testimony, and personal growth. In addition, it sought to attract young people from the community to learn about the institution and the gospel (Widstoe, 1954).

Physical practices, associated with religious principles, seem to act as integrators between the Church and the community, contributing to providing young people with this refuge, a place available for learning, serving as an alternative to less desirable environments. Regarding this, interviewee 21 comments: “[...] in the beginning I would go to play soccer, at the invitation of my friends, but as people welcomed me well and I started learning various things, I liked it and got baptized, and I am officially from here”.

When leisure is considered as a pedagogical mechanism for evangelism, it becomes clear that it functions as a means of distracting people from their obligations, while simultaneously sparking the interest of those who were distant from their beliefs.

Furthermore, leisure can be a decisive factor in choosing a religion, since when the activities offered by a religious group are enjoyable, creative, and fun, people tend to feel more motivated to participate (Alves, 2020). Alves and Capi (2017) emphasize that leisure can be understood as a structure that attracts and involves people in communities, promoting closeness and contributing to various forms of coexistence and expression.

Regarding the physical structure, the chapel of the church under investigation has a sports court and a cultural hall, a large space intended for activities such as cinema, dance and theater, and according to the subjects, it is also used for playing table tennis. IJCSUD encourages young people to sing, dance, and participate in activities as a form of leisure, highlighting dance as one of the Church's earliest social practices, supported as good physical exercise (Holbrook, 1975).

The Church provides materials such as balls, goalposts, basketball hoops, volleyball nets, ping-pong tables and rackets for carrying out the activities. Bodily practices are integral to the identity of the Church and can be extended to other spaces.

Church standards dictate that bodily practices should be directed toward edifying behaviors, promoting experiences that strengthen the witness of the gospel. It was observed that individual practice tends to reflect what is advocated collectively.

For some interviewees, religiosity was demonstrated by attitudes during practices. It is noteworthy that most young people are established members and participate in the Church alongside their families, which seems to foster organization

and commitment to following and teaching religious principles and standards.

Respondents highlight:

I think everyone in the group collaborates a lot. Of course, there's always a little argument or two during the games because everyone likes to win, but when that happens, we go talk and try to resolve it. This is for having fun (E6).

[...] I've been in the church for five years now, so I understand perfectly what to do and what not to do. For example: a person who isn't very involved in the church and uses profanity outside comes here and does the same thing, but when there's no leader around, we try to organize things. In futsal, whoever does these things gets suspended for a while (E11).

Here it was possible to observe interconnections between religion and bodily practices, since the institution's standards provide guidance to strengthen and direct its members, regarding which interviewee 17 mentions: “[...] everything we do here has to be respectful and virtuous”. According to the Church Administration Manual:

Church activities should be inspiring and highlight things that are virtuous, lovely, of good report, or praiseworthy. The activities cannot include anything that is immoral or suggestive, or that makes evil seem acceptable and normal. Leaders should ensure that all leisure activities are consistent with the teachings of the Savior (IJCSUD, 2018, p. 10). 122).

Physical activities enable participation, integration, and the development of skills, enhancing the adaptive process of those involved. In general, young people argue that it is not permitted to use profanity, encourage fights, bullying, excessive competition, or practices that include choreography, music, and clothing that are not consistent with the Church. In this way, the institution defends bodily practices from the point of view of meaning-making and advises that they transmit values common to those it believes in.

In this context, Silva *et al.* (2021) highlight that leisure activities, mediated by the intervention of the church, are considered by the faithful themselves as genuine and

“healthy” that transcend secular leisure, since these practices are often created or adapted by the church and experienced by people of the same faith.

Patterns regarding bodily practices associated with leisure, established in religious education, were found in the study by Saneto and Anjos (2007), who, based on interviews with Christian religious leaders, identified that some churches do not encourage the participation of the faithful in sensual and carnival dances, capoeira, activities involving candomblé and violent sports, as well as disapproving of the use of clothing that leaves the body excessively exposed.

Other studies, conducted with Christian believers, show practices recognized as not guided by the church, such as dancing, cycling (Rigoni; Prodócimo, 2013); practicing capoeira and even engaging in high-performance sports competitions (Rigoni; Daolio, 2016). Furthermore, a study (Santos; Goellner, 2014) in a religious educational institution identified that religion can also reject certain physical practices in physical education classes (fighting and dancing), which are considered practices that do not align with the institution's principles.

Simultaneously, Rigoni and Daolio (2016) emphasize that religious education presents discussions about permitted and inadvisable bodily practices, with the body as a guiding aspect for this discussion. It is identified that the aforementioned studies show concerns about the morality of the body, as well as the discouraged practices that place it in situations of excessive exposure, sensuality, or that incite violence.

It is worth noting that leisure activities mediated by religious institutions are not permanent and may change as society transforms, but always with the caveat of adhering to religious principles and edifying the participants (Roscoche, 2016). Such

activities carry prescriptions about what is permitted or prohibited, reflecting norms of morality and conduct.

Therefore, it is clear that, through religious education, bodily experiences and moments of fun are designed and shaped according to the institution's normative formats. In this sense, Gabriel and Marcellino (2007) highlight that religion exerts a decisive influence on the way leisure manifests itself. It not only shapes leisure activities, but can also create alternatives that are recognized as leisure by the individuals involved.

Regarding events related to physical activities and leisure, IJCSUD has a significant history. After World War II, the Church organized sporting tournaments at its headquarters, with the participation of members and guests from various countries, restricted to boys and adult men, while women contributed to the organization (Embry, 2009).

The author points out that these tournaments had both spiritual and social objectives, providing an opportunity to introduce the Church to new participants, keep members involved, and foster the development of talents. However, with the international expansion of the Church, other areas became priorities, and the tournaments were discontinued in 1971. Currently, sporting events in the Church take place at the local or regional level, such as the Youth Olympics and Camps, events highlighted by social actors.

The Olympics are held annually and include sports such as futsal, basketball, volleyball, athletics, swimming, dodgeball, chess, and checkers, taking place at the church and a sports club in the city. It is important to note that guests may participate, provided they reside within the stake boundaries and agree to follow Church standards,

which emphasize participation and do not award prizes or trophies, thus promoting teamwork and good sportsmanship. In this context, it is possible to identify interconnections between religion and bodily practices, since one phenomenon shapes the other and the environment is modified.

The individuals point out that the event involves young people, also sparking the interest of those who do not usually participate in weekly physical activities, as interviewee 4 points out: “[...] when the Olympics are near we play more often to train, people get excited about this moment” (E4). And interviewee 22: “Our Olympics only happen once a year, it could happen more often because we become more united when we have these kinds of physical activities” (E22).

As for the camp, the program includes sports competitions and games, prayers, praise and worship, and talks. In the study by Gabriel and Vieira (2001), conducted in a Christian religious institution, camping was identified as a leisure activity that coincides with religious values, being considered an important moment in the motivational aspect of the learning acquired at the church. It is understood that through these events, the church provides different ways for members to interact, revealing a relevant concern for the use of activities that contribute to social, emotional, religious, and moral development.

Leisure activities organized by religious institutions, such as retreats, camps, or sports tournaments, are often structured to promote moral values, community living, and the strengthening of faith. These activities offer a unique leisure space where physical practices are reinterpreted to align with religious principles, creating a “safe” and “healthy” environment according to the precepts of faith.

It is believed, therefore, that experiencing activities based on participation and fun, as highlighted in the IJCSUD, can influence positive feelings and sensations, as well as awaken the need for responsible involvement and mutual respect. These results corroborate the study by Araújo and Rojo (2018), who investigated recreational activities carried out at religious events and identified that these activities, which involve pleasure and joy, can strengthen bonds of friendship and provide relief for the lives of social subjects, due to the fact that they are disconnecting from the rush of daily life and socializing in a place that awakens affective aspects.

Reasons for Participating in Physical Activities

Regarding the reasons for participating in the Church's physical activities, it was identified that the responses from the subjects were related to leisure/fun, socialization, and health.

It is recognized that physical activities are forms of leisure and play, and it has been observed that the aforementioned leisure is associated with feelings of pleasure, relaxation, and spontaneity during the experience of physical activities. In general, the Church's physical practices are governed by a playful and recreational mindset that takes the place of performance, as we can observe in the statement of interviewee 17: “I like to play volleyball with the people here at Church for the fun we have, it's cool, it's a good energy with friends” (E17). Interviewee 14 emphasizes:

[...] I notice that people become more relaxed and at ease when they are doing physical activities. I think that if you met them on the street they would be more closed off, which is what I see with some people here, but during physical activities they can be who they are (E14).

We agree with Parker's (1978) position, which argues that, through play activities, religion can promote well-being, a sense of joy, communion, and the

strengthening of faith. In this sense, physical activities, leisure, and religion intertwine in the pursuit of personal well-being, enhancing integration. In this regard, the author highlights the participation of the IJCSUD in recreational activities:

[...] Mormons strongly advocate the practice of physical exercise and wholesome recreation and from the beginning have placed great value on play and joy, while at the same time rejecting the religious pessimism and overly strict laws of the Puritan tradition (Parker, 1978, p. 10). 126).

In this respect, the prophet Brigham Young was one of the important influencers and through sermons and actions taught that recreational activities are essential for well-being, not necessarily being religious principles, but that they should be part of the life of a religious individual (Holbrook, 1975; Widstoe, 1954). The prophet encouraged participation in physical practices, arguing that physical health leads to emotional and spiritual health.

My mental work is as intense as that of a man trying to maintain his balance on a log being carried downstream; that's why I appreciate these diversions: they allow me the privilege of momentarily forgetting my chores and moving around a bit, so that my body can exercise and my mind can rest. Why? So that it may gain new energy, be renewed and enlivened, gain life and breath, so that my mind may not be exhausted (Widstoe, 1954, p. 242).

Aspects related to socialization were also reported by the subjects, highlighting the building of friendships and group interaction. Since physical activities provide meaningful experiences through sociability, being intense in the time and space in which they take place, in the church they are imbued with educational aspects that foster closeness and complicity among young people.

The Church is seen by participants not only as a religious institution, but also as a space for integration. Bodily practices, which serve as tools for establishing and strengthening social relationships, have the ability to unite people and are perceived as moments of celebration of encounter and reaffirmation of the feeling of belonging to the community.

Alves and Carvalho (2010) also emphasize that bodily practices favor this relational movement, both individually and in interactions with others, giving new meaning to social bonds, which we can identify in the statements of the social subjects in this study when they were asked about their participation in the bodily practices of the Church.

Interviewee 6 emphasizes: “I participate to socialize with people, exchange ideas, and get together with friends. I enjoy the camaraderie among friends and playing sports with people we like, cool people”. Interviewee 14 “[...] church is the only place where I feel like I have friends, seeing my friends is simply the greatest joy and motivation I could have, and here we can develop better social skills and have fun too.

The subjects also reported motivations related to maintaining health, highlighting the benefits of physical activity and recognizing its importance in promoting health and preventing disease. Most young people admitted to exercising in various locations outside of church: school, clubs, gyms, parks, and the beach, seeking to be physically active and satisfy their desires. The IJCSUD influences members to engage in activities that promote health and physical fitness, individually or with family and friends (IJCSUD, 2018). Regarding this, the individuals report:

[...] I have a lot of energy, so I'm up for any kind of fun, I like challenges. I participate in physical activities here and abroad to have good physical development and to avoid health problems in the future, I think that's important (E13).

I participate for health reasons, because the word of wisdom teaches us to take care of our bodies, and it's not forbidden to have a little fun in doing so. We exercise to improve our health, the bishop says that practicing sports is always good, it improves the body and the quality of life (E15).

[...] I'll tell you that I love, love doing physical activity, playing soccer is what I like most and always have liked, and it makes me feel great. I play sports because it's good to be in a good place with our bodies and for health reasons, right?! (E19).

Religious belief was identified as a favorable factor for physical activity, since

the subjects demonstrated in their discourse a valuing of the body, highlighting health as a religious duty and the importance of the proper functioning of the body for spiritual life. The IJCSUD offers teachings on healthy living, addressing health-related topics based on scripture. It was observed that learning is one of the fundamental pillars of the Church, which still offers a library, materials, classes, and reading sessions.

The “Word of Wisdom”, mentioned by one of the interviewees, is a Church scripture that covers body care, such as adopting a balanced diet, abstaining from harmful substances, and encouraging a physically active life (IJCSUD, 2013). It is thus evident that religion can act as an influence in promoting and maintaining health by recommending habits considered healthy.

In this regard, the literature shows that religious institutions, based on their sacred scriptures, guide bodily care such as the practice of physical activity, since the body is considered a sacred temple (Donnelly et al., 2018; Shuval et al., 2008), and church leaders have a strong presence in the consolidation of these teachings.

In leisure-related experiences, it is possible to identify the strengthening of bonds between participants, promoting communion, coexistence, mutual help, and the exchange of experiences. The true purpose and goal is to connect thoughts and build bonds between those who share the same faith, follow biblical commandments, and relate leisure activities to contexts and texts from the Scriptures.

These moments are marked by concern for others, by bearing witness to life, and by a balance between rest and fun (Alves, 2020). Finally, reflecting on practices that connect leisure and religion as a reduction of both spheres does not correspond to how they are perceived by the subjects directly involved.

In light of the discussions, it is clear that physical and leisure activities play a fundamental role in shaping values and behaviors in religious contexts, as they provide experiences that strengthen spirituality, a sense of belonging, and promote the development of the individual in various skills and ethical principles shared among members of the religious institution.

The study results corroborate the research of Lima and Góis Junior (2018) and Werle and Metzler (2010), highlighting the relationship between Christian faith and bodily and leisure practices in religious contexts. There is a clear intentionality on the part of institutions in promoting these social activities, recognized as instruments for the development of values proclaimed by religion, such as discipline, self-control, good conduct, compliance with norms and rules, as well as the pursuit of occupying free time with activities considered edifying.

Thus, it is understood that the IJCSUD is favorably positioned towards the potential of physical and recreational activities in the spiritual, social, physical, and intellectual development of its members. These practices encourage organization, obedience, mutual respect, overcoming challenges, character building, sportsmanship, and positive attitudes, in addition to contributing to the maintenance of health. All of this intertwines with the spread of faith, Christian testimonies, and the construction of a religious identity, proving especially effective for young people, who tend to learn and engage through play.

Conclusions

It was identified that the physical practices promoted by the Church encompass various elements of body culture, highlighting the institution's care in the construction

and maintenance of its facilities, the availability of equipment, and the organization of events that provide positive experiences.

Young people are the primary audience for experiences involving physical activities within church spaces. These practices are conducted according to Church standards and used both as a form of recreation and evangelism, generally aligned with the values, principles, and beliefs of that institution. They involve moments of fun and socialization, but within a context that reinforces faith and religious morality.

In general, it was observed that in addition to promoting religious knowledge, the church can act as a space for cultural formation. And physical activities emerge as a means by which this institution can invest, promoting leisure in accordance with its theological-religious principles. Such moments are valued by their participants and recognized as “healthy” and “edifying”, since they avoid behaviors that could be considered contrary to faith, such as alcohol consumption, parties with non-Christian music, or other practices that could be seen as promoting excess or immorality.

Thus, physical and leisure activities are seen as a way to combine fun with the experience of spirituality and religiosity, strengthening communion among members, creating an environment of socialization that fosters faith, a sense of belonging, and interpersonal relationships, as well as stimulating a critical view of health-related behaviors. It was observed that the institution under investigation, through its physical and theoretical structure, values and encourages a physically active life, arguing that spiritual life is intimately linked to the discipline of the body.

It was found that physical activities and leisure not only influence the religious expression of the faithful, but religiosity also exerts an influence on these practices. It is understood, therefore, that religion plays an important role in the formation of the

individual, influencing the construction of their character, beliefs, values, customs, and actions, including bodily expressions and leisure activities.

Finally, the study pointed to interconnections between physical activities, leisure, and religion. These interconnections highlight how the body, entertainment, and faith are traversed by social, cultural, and symbolic dynamics that transform the way individuals live and attribute meaning to their experiences. They also reveal opportunities to reflect on issues such as control, freedom, inclusion, and the relationship between the sacred and the everyday.

It is worth noting that this study does not encompass a critical evaluation of the church's doctrinal framework regarding bodily practices, which are seen as a terrain of symbolic dispute, where the use of the body in leisure is assessed in light of religious precepts. However, emphasis is placed on the description and understanding of the practices and their association with leisure and their importance in the lives of social subjects.

Discussions from this perspective were not perceived as restrictive, but rather as beneficial, since following a religion can encourage self-care, maintaining health, developing various skills, and shaping values and behaviors. That being said, the intertwining of physical activities, leisure, and religion is rich and diverse, influencing how individuals experience these practices, connect with their community, and express spirituality.

Therefore, the study data have practical implications for Physical Education, as they show that religion directly influences participation in physical and leisure activities. The church under investigation, through these practices, promotes an environment conducive to adopting a healthy lifestyle and, by addressing topics related

to the body and health, offers a welcoming, non-judgmental space that encourages the well-being of young people.

Furthermore, for the professional field of Physical Education, the results advocate for a sensitive and inclusive approach that takes into account the sociocultural and religious influences on how people understand and relate to the body and movement, implying humanized and meaningful experiences.

It is therefore suggested that further research be conducted to explore different perspectives on the influence of religion on bodily practices in the context of leisure in contemporary society. Furthermore, it is recommended that new approaches be considered in the training of Physical Education professionals, taking into account aspects related to religiosity.

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