

“IT’S LEISURE, ALRIGHT, BUT IT’S SERIOUS”: NOTES ON LEISURE FROM THE DAILY LIFE OF A MASTER LEAGUE WOMEN’S VOLLEYBALL TEAM

*É LAZER, TUDO BEM, MAS É SÉRIO”: NOTAS SOBRE LAZER A PARTIR DO
COTIDIANO DE UMA EQUIPE MÁSTER FEMININA DE VOLEIBOL*

*“ES OCIO, ESTÁ BIEN, PERO ES EN SERIO”: NOTAS SOBRE EL OCIO A
PARTIR DEL COTIDIANO DE UN EQUIPO MÁSTER FEMENINO DE VOLEIBOL*

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Keywords:

Leisure.
Sports.
Women.
Ethnography.

Abstract: This paper provides elements for discussions on leisure (both as locus and object) resulting from an ethnographic work conducted with a group of women. It aimed at understanding how their team was sustained and remained committed to the Women’s Volleyball Master League in Porto Alegre, RS, Brazil. Firstly, we discuss the notion of time and the obligation-based logic that opposes leisure to other dimensions of daily life. Afterwards, we debate “attitudes” that take on adjectives related to seriousness. We found that daily negotiations blurred boundaries between dimensions and also placed that leisure as space/time “taken seriously”.

Palavras chave:

Lazer.
Esportes.
Mulheres.
Etnografia.

Resumo: Este trabalho traz elementos para discussões sobre o lazer (enquanto locus e objeto) que emergem de uma etnografia com um grupo de mulheres. O objetivo foi compreender como uma equipe se sustentava e se mantinha engajada à Liga Máster Feminina de Voleibol de Porto Alegre/RS. Inicialmente, discutimos sobre a noção de tempo e uma lógica de obrigações que colocam o lazer em oposição a outras dimensões do cotidiano. Após, debatemos sobre “atitudes” que assumem adjetivações ligadas à seriedade. Percebemos que as negociações cotidianas borravam fronteiras entre dimensões e, além disso, colocavam aquele lazer como um espaço/tempo “levado a sério”.

Palabras clave:

Ocio.
Deportes.
Mujeres.
Etnografía.

Resumen: Este trabajo trae elementos para discusiones sobre el ocio (en tanto locus y objeto) que emergen de una etnografía con un equipo de mujeres, cuyo objetivo fue comprender cómo ese equipo se sostenía y se mantenía vinculado a la Liga Máster Feminina de Voleibol de Porto Alegre/RS. Inicialmente, discutimos sobre la noción de tiempo y una lógica de obligaciones que coloca al ocio en oposición a otras dimensiones del cotidiano. Después, discutimos sobre ‘actitudes’ que asumen adjetivaciones ligadas a la seriedad. Percibimos que las negociaciones cotidianas borraban fronteras entre dimensiones y, además, colocaban ese ocio como un espacio/tiempo ‘tomado en serio’.

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Received on: 12-8-2014
Approved on: 6-5-2015



1 INTRODUCTION

Thinking about leisure as the locus of a study or as an object of analysis could lead to different ways to build a research and, more specifically, could define ways to look at daily lives. It is this polarization that guided the beginning of an ethnographic study with a women's master volleyball team in Porto Alegre, RS. Along the work, and in the numerous reflections that still emerge from it, definitions of "leisure" extrapolated boundaries from those women's "leisure", dismantling categories and leading us to question notions of times, spaces and attitudes.

Starting from the idea that ethnography is linked to a "science of the concrete par excellence" (FONSECA, 1999, p. 59), we began by observing the team and the League's context, mainly under the influence of an anthropological study tradition based on thick field work. The strength of authors such as Geertz (1989), Foote-White (1980), Winkin (1998), Cardoso de Oliveira (2006) as well as other ethnographies that followed a certain line of interpretation, especially those related to sports, such as the works of Stigger (2002) and the Group of Sociocultural Studies in Physical Education (*Grupo de Estudos Socioculturais em Educação Física*, GESEF/UFRGS), were crucial in that exercise of trying to "read over the shoulders" (GEERTZ, 1989, p. 321) of that group of women.

During 13 months of fieldwork, we systematically followed a team that we started to call Moinhos.¹ During observations, always participant and followed by records in field diaries, we found out that the group included approximately² 15 women aged 32-65. This age range was directly related to the participation of the group in the Women's Volleyball Master League, an independent organization that included 12 teams from Porto Alegre's metropolitan area, Lajeado and Caxias do Sul.

Even if placed within participants' dimension of leisure, the requirements for women to belong to the League included: a commitment to participate in the games on the last Saturday of each month (March-December); paying registration and referee fees; being availability to negotiate "their" time for competitions and friendly matches. It should be noted that those "efforts" were part of staying in a master championship recognized as "high level" by people who circulated in that sporting context.

Moinhos had some appointments in its daily schedule, some of which were "on the court" while other were related to dinners, parties and celebrations. The meetings we included in "court routine" were related to practice sessions, tournaments and friendly matches. At those moments, there were negotiations about the meaning of each element belonging to volleyball and particularly on what was expected from a "good training section", a "good coach", a "good player" and a "good match".

The maintenance of the group also depended on social events such as dinners, parties and meetings that were part not only of a complementary "beyond match" logic, but were also embedded in the logic of each of those women's daily lives.

¹ We use pseudonyms for teams and individuals mentioned in the work.

² We could not define an exact number of participants because during research we found certain turnover of some players between teams of the League, there were injuries that took certain people away and certain particular situations determined other absences.

It was in the course of that experience and ethnographic practice³ (MAGNANI, 2009) that discussions about leisure stood out in field work itself. This definition within the study took place especially after a situation witnessed in a training day when one of the team’s members, in a conversation with the whole group, seemed to reaffirm a limit by saying that the volleyball they practiced “[was] leisure, alright, but it [was] serious “(DC⁴, November 16, 2010). It should be noted that this happened without any challenge to her from other members of the group.

While that statement seemed not to sound “strange” at all for Moinhos players’, it was not “familiar” to us. At that time, we recalled certain views of leisure that see seriousness as a contradiction in a space/time that so far seemed to be a place of freedom, playfulness, free choice, and joyful participation.⁵ That was how field research prompted our search for a discussion on leisure as a dimension in those women’s lives that was also “taken seriously”.

Together with that specific research situation, initially characterized by immersion in the “leisure” of a team of women master volleyball players, we found a question about “leisure” and its conceptualizations. Thus, we ceased to establish polarizations or to dialogue with them and began thinking about how the daily practices of that group went beyond concepts that provided boundaries between times and spaces.

For this reason, our discussion will focus on reflections from works that already address tensions about “seriousness” and provide clues about commitments, investments and dedications that are also among the daily practices of “common people”⁶ dedicated to sport in their leisure. In the first topic of this paper – in dialogue with empirical works – we discuss the outlines of the notion of time and the logic of obligations that would distinguish leisure from other daily spheres. In the second topic, we will discuss the attitudes that assume adjectives different from those linked to ideas of playfulness and game, tensioned by issues related to skills, requirements and performances that were needed to sustain that group of women.

In this constant dialogue between locus and object, we intend to keep looking at leisure not as a dimension of life “in brackets”, but as part of the complexity of daily life (STIGGER, 2009). During research and in debates still on the agenda, we chose to approach the issue “with people”, seeking constant dialogue with their practices and meanings.

2 LEISURE BEYOND BRACKETS

In Brazil, the marks of a historical process in leisure studies undergird the definitions of leisure in different logics of opposition,⁷ which are still in evidence. In the wake of those discussions, we would conceive leisure as opposed to “obligations to work”, meaning time distinct from “family obligations” and guided by a diverse range of classifications that end up placing it as a dimension of life in brackets.

3 The methodological definitions of this research are followed not only by a choice for certain tools (participant observation, field diaries, and interviews). Above all, they characterized an interpretative effort and were also fed by notions of “ethnographic practice” and “ethnographic experience” (MAGNANI, 2009, p. 136). The former refers to contact strategies, records, systematization, notes, observations and all that can be programmed in research and which dialogues with the unpredictability of the experience of doing ethnography, whose contact with other representations offers us the possibility of finding previously unforeseen clues.

4 Field diary.

5 These notions often appear in the literature on leisure in the context of Brazilian Physical Education, such as Gaelzer (1979); Camargo (1989); Gomes (2004a); Marcellino (2008).

6 When we speak of “ordinary people” we are referring to the notion that guided the work of Stigger (2002) when he studied sport in particular situations, experienced by people who are far from the spotlight of high performance but who choose to include sports in their daily lives and particularly in their ways of life.

7 To understand the historical development of the field of studies of leisure, see Gomes (2003) and Gomes and Melo (2003).

These polarizations between leisure and “obligations toward work” were crucial in the work of Dumazedier (1976),⁸ an author who has not only influenced the formation of a field of studies in Brazil but is still present in works whose topic and/or locus of study are leisure. In his works, supported on research with workers in the manufacturing industry, Dumazedier (1976) defines leisure as:

A set of occupations to which individuals can dedicate themselves voluntarily, to rest, to have fun, to recreate and to entertain themselves or even to develop their disinterested information or education, their voluntary social participation or their free creative skills after liberating themselves from or getting rid of professional, family and social obligations (DUMAZEDIER, 1976, p. 34).

According to this view, leisure would be surrounded by a logic that opposes daily obligations, especially when related to work, family and social obligations. Moreover, the author found that leisure plays three main roles: “a) resting; b) fun, recreation and entertainment; c) development” (DUMAZEDIER 1976, p. 32).

When thinking about that concept, we have no doubts that Moinhos’ members’ choice to get involved with sport and particularly with volleyball is somehow crossed by rest, fun and personal development. However, that practice not only served to gain energy after work, but it also meant involvement in a network of interaction in which sport – and even the physical fatigue of each game and training section⁹ – made sense and was accompanied by commitments and also very close to their family obligations.

It was not uncommon to find women in league matches using part of their time to be involved in organizing each round of the championship. Joana’s work stood out among them for being the League’s General Coordinator. In addition to fieldwork observations, it was during the interview that we could promptly resume the topic of the work logic that could be involved in her activity:

[We began the conversation like this: “I always see you highly involved with the organization of the League...”] Yes, but it’s not work, it’s pleasure. It’s something I like. We are always like this, talking, telling stories, and that involves me, I’m always meeting people (JOANA, 2012).

Joana’s words stress that by and large the League does not mean work, but we have to consider that she was in charge of organizing all the rounds and she recurrently took certain decisions on the dynamics of the championships. In addition, she was in charge of hiring and paying referees and had to “manage” the prizes for final winners. Just as she invested her time in preparing weekend games and organizing her own team, it was in that space that she also worked with marketing of women’s garments.

As Joana knew what to sell, she had built a network for marketing her products, since it was not uncommon to find people looking for her to “take a look at her clothes”. The development of that informal commercial network was not a special case, because in the daily life of gyms we found people selling cosmetics, women’s clothing, sports shoes, knee pads and volleyballs, training material – even high-heeled shoes were near the court, which seemed to have no relationship with sports.

8 The work of Joffre Dumazedier (1976; 1979), whose original research proposal dates back from the 1950s, was extremely important for building studies and systematic reflections on leisure. His research offered outlines and held discussions on a sphere of social life that until then had been placed on the margins of academic debate.

9 This issue could be discussed after Elias and Dunning (1992), when they argue that sports leisure are bound not to relaxation in the sense of resting, but to seeking a kind of pleasant tension. If it were relaxation of tensions as resting, according to Elias and Dunning (1992, p. 141), “it would be better to go to bed than going [...] to a football game”.

We can find these relationships blurring separation between work and leisure in research by Myskiw, Mariante Neto and Stigger (2010). The authors showed that in the outskirts football circuit in Porto Alegre, RS, “workers of the outskirts” knew the context and therefore knew how to exercise their activities in the most profitable way; they occupied field spaces and especially their surroundings to obtain and/or increase their income. In addition to the referee team, vendors, photographers, waste pickers, journalists and carriers were involved in outskirts football. All of them did their professional activities and organized their trade while living football and being part of a space/time recognized as a leisure environment.

During carnival we also find situations as the one reported above. In a work about the “Samba City” in Rio de Janeiro, Blass (2008) realized that the carnival atmosphere was able to aggregate the experiences of revelers while they were the very workers who built sets, making costumes and a consumer market and professional activities that were also significant for the continuity of that leisure space/time.

Based on these situations, we will discuss a certain “obligation logic” that guides concepts that intend to define what should be only part of work while placing leisure as a distinct category, far from those “obligations”. This polarized definition eventually stiffens the concept and drives it apart from the daily lives of people who were part of the work discussed in this article.

By relating these studies, we show that the boundaries between work and leisure, and especially the opposition between these two dimensions, can be dissolved according to each context. However, even if distinctions become blurred and/or are included in the logic of certain social dynamics, times and spaces remain and are recognized as “resting”. Moreover, we observed that the distinction between contexts based on an idea of “obligation” also dissolves when we speak of family relations.

By attending the gymnasiums where the League’s competitions took place, we often found children that while inventing their games in the stands, watched their mothers participating in the games. Although there was a rule¹⁰ seeking to avoid the presence of children within the game space, the presence of some children of players walking around the courts was common. Below, we describe one of those situations:

[Saturday with a Championship round]. The delay in returning from a timeout request draws attention. With the exception of one player, all others were already in their positions. When looking for the woman who “was not in court”, I eventually found her changing the clothes of her daughter who was standing on the bench by the side of the court. She quickly changed the girl’s blouse and straightened her jacket, and only when the girl was ready did she return to the game. I did not hear any comment about that situation, either from other players, coach or referee on what would be a situation for punishment because of the delay in resuming the match (DC, April 30, 2011).

Through this excerpt, we seek to show that family obligations (helping the woman’s daughter to change) and the requirements that were part of sport (the mother/player needed to return to the court) lived side by side in the League. That situation was similar to what happened with Duda, one of Moinhos’s players who took her child to all championships. In those two cases, we found no impediment or disagreement by the other participants (players, referees, organizers). Besides, it was not uncommon to see those women planning their families’ activities according to the league’s schedule and thus adjusting “their lives” to the events of the League.

¹⁰ Decided in a meeting of the teams.

Seeking to debate with Dumazedier and guided by the idea of the complexity of social dynamics, Gomes (2004a) also criticizes those formulations and says that polarizations no longer make sense today, but without presenting empirical data. Seeking a distance from statements that build these polarizations/generalizations, we look at what people do and especially how the limits of “leisure time”, theoretically constructed in relation to “obligations”, do explain those daily practices meant as “leisure”.

Offering other clues to understand leisure, Marcellino (2002; 2008) sought a relationship between those subdivisions of social life and presented an understanding of leisure that combined two aspects: one related to “time” and the other linked to “attitude”. The first definition would be intended to delimitate aspects of the time when people engage with their practices, which could be considered “time available” free from obligations, especially with regard to work. The other notion is linked to subjects’ “attitude” toward activities they choose for that “time available”. Based on those notions, Marcellino defines leisure as:

Culture – understood in its broader sense – experienced (practiced or enjoyed) in the ‘time available’. The important aspect as a defining trait is the ‘disinterested’ character of that experience. No other reward is sought, at least fundamentally, than the satisfaction generated by the situation (MARCELLINO, 2002, p. 31).

Considering the scope of this text, we did not focus on the very discussion of the concept of culture, but we should say that this ethnographic research was founded on a semiotic concept of culture whose proposal interweaves social dynamics to a network of meanings that is formed by individuals and that are also formed by the same network (GEERTZ, 1989). In this sense, we understand leisure as one of several dimensions of life, placed in a network of symbolic references that are formed by and from individuals who work in those contexts. This notion is different from understanding culture “in its broadest sense” (MARCELLINO, 2002, p. 31), which does not seem to explain much because it ignores behaviors, symbols, institutions and daily processes that are peculiar to distinct leisure time/spaces.

By being with the team on a systematic basis, we also realized that the leisure of those women operated with mixtures and dispute” “of” and “over” times, which were far from the idea of availability that is present in Marcellino’s (2002) definition. In several situations, the notion of time would extrapolate and be simultaneous to spheres, contexts, situations, and the League’ members knew how to negotiate their choices involving family, work, time off, appointments, including “other demands” within leisure. Thus, the differences between that leisure and work and family “obligations” did not define it in advance, but they engendered that space/time in which players “lived” volleyball.

During this first topic, we discussed leisure definitions based on polarizations, which end up – theoretically – defining it and leaving it far from the daily lives of ordinary people, like a time/space in brackets. Therefore, in addition to dialoguing with those benchmarks, we propose to consider leisure as something that is “good for thinking” (MAGNANI, 2000, p. 23) about the very dynamics of social life, especially when we are with that group of women who seemed to include leisure in daily negotiations that blur boundaries between different dimensions of daily experience.

We will now resume a discussion about a notion of “attitude” that is also fundamental to understand leisure. It is linked to satisfaction, freedom of choice, lack of commitment and seemingly “disinterested” playful ideals.

3 HOW ABOUT WHEN ONE IS ALSO INTERESTED IN SERIOUSNESS?

The actions or attitudes of members of the team included certain freedom in their choice of that space/time and a sport experience related to play and fun. Their words somehow contained the idea that volleyball was only an excuse to be in that network of sociability. These notions sustain certain representation of leisure intertwined with a view of playfulness¹¹ and attitude in their individual character of accomplishment, satisfaction, freedom of choice and – perhaps – even a constructive critical stance towards reality (GAELZER, 1979; MARCELLINO, 2008).

However, there were other situations where actions became distant from those representations that ended up defining – even theoretically – what should happen in leisure spaces/times. Initially, those tensions were perceived because, to continue fieldwork, it was necessary to be “in the court” and recognize that, in order to remain in Moinhos, one had to “perform in court” and/or to know how to “be out of court”.

In this sense, a notion of seriousness linked to productivity coexisted with the playful nature in that context. Sports performance came as a mediator for participations in the team because it not only defined the researcher’s permanence in the field, but also repeatedly circulated between evaluations of whom they would invite to play. Therefore, it became a significant reference for identifying “good players” for Moinhos. By and large, the idea of who “has enough playing level” was connected with a “knowing how to play” recognized in the volleyball scene and, particularly, with knowing how to play in the league.

What we identify as “knowing how to play” appeared clearly during an interview with Rafaela. As we talked about a possible profile of players for Moinhos, I asked her about whom she would invite to join the team. Her brief answer was: “First that the person was nice and played well. I wouldn’t invite someone who didn’t play well because I want to win; losing all the time frustrates me” (RAFAELA, 2012).

Although match results had different meanings within the team, the notion of sports performance also crossed the speech of women who had belonged to the group for over a decade, especially when referring to whom they would invite to play at Moinhos. During a conversation, Vivi settled the matter about the invitation to be made to a new member by relating the candidate’s possible acceptance and her potential performance in volleyball. While Vivi saw that the number of people was decreasing every training section, she said: “We have to see if she’s worth it” (DC, March 15, 2012). Thus, that “know-how”, recognized as “appropriate” to participate in the team not only mediated the invitations but also permeated evaluations for continuing with the group. The following excerpt helps in the debate:

When we were leaving the practice, when we were already on the street in front of the gym, I was near Sandra and Ellen. As they talked about the discussion that took place during practice, I see Marta – who was already leaving the parking lot – stop her car and come to where we were. Disagreements during practice caused the two to talk again. Sandra, who was visibly irritated with Marta’s performance, asked her? “Do you think you have physical and emotional conditions to be here? I no longer have them” (DC, April 14, 2011).

11 In this research we did not focus on debating the concept of playfulness. We refer to this notion that is common in leisure studies based on an idea of fruition of emotions intertwined with ways of “playing with oneself, with the other and with the context” (GOMES, 2004b, p. 145) in a “not serious way” and based on conceptions of freedom, fun and relaxation.

This dialogue showed us that the idea of belonging was also crossed by issues related to performance “in court” and, moreover, it was on the group’s agenda of daily discussions. We also realized that the seriousness with which sport performance was treated ended up defining women’s exclusion from team, which we described in the field diary excerpt below:

[During a discussion at the end of a practice session] Ana said that: “Only those with good level can play, not everyone can be accepted to play here. From now on no one else enters, we can’t be worrying about these things, we have many problems” [referring to the injuries of some players that reduced the number of people for practice]. While they all spoke at the same time, exchanging opinions on what was happening [a player who left], I hear Leila comment: “I warned you that this would happen, we decided to ask her to leave and no one said anything, and so this happened. It’s impossible! She disrupts the practice”. [...] In the car, going to a restaurant, she continued the conversation with the following statement: “It’s leisure, alright, but it’s serious, it’s got a competitive purpose, everyone there has been an athlete, in her own way, but they were athletes” (DC, November 16, 2010).

Just as “knowing to play” was necessary according to what was established in the team, “knowing how to play in the league” was necessary as well. This second “knowledge”, built in reciprocity to the first one, was perceived from the moment that Duda, a new player, joined the team and after a few games, she said: “I can’t relax, I can’t play like this” (DC, September 24, 2011). Months later, in a conversation after a match, Duda said: “I need someone to irritate me in court; I can’t play in this calm” (DC, December 11, 2011).

Duda’s words taught us that some “knowledge” in that context was not related only to volleyball, but it was a specific knowledge that was “at play”, requiring certain performance and also defining participation. After Duda’s first practice sessions, there were recurrent speeches related to her actions as a player in the team: “She’s very funny, very crazy”; “She’s really energetic”; “She’s nuts”.

On the group’s daily life, some strategies were constructed so that the actions and behaviors, in the game or out of it, remained within what was expected. The use of expressions like “no ball player in here” was recurrent in contrast to “let’s play right” or “we’ll play seriously”, because, as I heard in an interview, “those who don’t adapt will leave **naturally** or Moinhos will draw them out” (TAÍS, 2012, emphasis added).

To some extent, these discussions on performance under “sports leisure” are already part of some studies seeking to understand sport as choice and systematic practice in fields, gyms and squares in the urban environment. In Stigger’s (1997) work, the issue was among the analyses of what the author called “movement of football veterans”. Among groups of veteran men who gathered around football, those attending the Ararigbóia Park on Saturday mornings, performance in matches and the importance given to results were decisive for one to be accepted in the group. Moreover, those notions became part of the characteristics of the group, which only accepted players with performances that helped their teams win matches. In that Ararigbóia group, the time of competition seemed to demand more seriousness in a coexistence that oscillated between serious and not serious (STIGGER, 1997).

That view, focused on the game and the notion of sports performance, was also in the work of Myskiw, Pacheco and Freitas (2011), where discussions referred to the Summer Championship of the Ararigbóia League – the Veterans category – in Porto Alegre, RS. The competition was recognized in the context of outskirts football as a space for “good football”

that gathered good players and teams from different places of the city or the metropolitan area. In that context, “saying it’s only fun if taken seriously is not inconsistent or contradictory, on the contrary, it corresponds to the expectations of people involved in the Summer Championship” (MYSKIWI; PACHECO; FREITAS, 2011, p. 3).

It is worth noting that this idea of sports performance, productivity, requirement “in” and/or “of” leisure becomes a contradiction when we focus on a representation of leisure related only to its libertarian, playful, uncommitted character, which treats any form of productivity under a negative light. In that group of women, “playing seriously” and “playing well” were among the most entertaining subjects, as well as living and laughing “in” and “out” of the court.

The text states that in order to play for Moinhos one had to have a volleyball level consistent with what the team expected from each player. The issue dialogues with a specific set of skills, knowledge and experience to circulate and take a place in this context.¹² Although the notion was significant to understand how these women experienced volleyball, seriousness was not focused only on those notions involving forms of play.

Seriousness in leisure also crossed the commitments that each woman assumed with the group. To join Moinhos, they had to be aware that, one Saturday a month the team played in the League and every week there would be practice sessions in which they would have to “sweat their shirts”. We emphasize that absences were allowed, but there would have to be an explanation accepted by the group that, in turn, usually insisted in negotiating. This idea of committing to the group was part of the operating logic of *Caídos na Praia*, a group of football practitioners studied by Stigger (2002). Even if there was no requirement for sports performance there, members had to commit to the group in which attendance to routines and schedules for Sunday games was specially important for incorporating a new member or identifying a “good participant”.

Just as commitment was something valued under the team’s logic, the notion of seriousness was also part of those women’s investment in the group. To play in the League, they had to pay the registration fee for the championship, since “quality” referees, gymnasiums in “good condition” and CBV-approved material were necessary. The team negotiated financial investment in a coach recognized not only in the volleyball scene, but also particularly among the group’s leaders.

In addition to those financial matters, being a member of Moinhos demanded certain dedication and body investment in the activity. Body aches were also common in practice sessions and matches: Ana said she “played only on medication” (DC, October 14, 2010); practice sessions on Mondays after the championship rounds were canceled beforehand because they “needed to recover their bodies” (DC, May 2, 2011); during a trip, Roberta joked that “only those who are not in pain should play today. Well, nobody’s gonna play, then!” (DC, December 10, 2011). These are some examples from which it is possible to think that body effort was intertwined with the seriousness of getting involved with that way to experience sport. The team knew how to deal with the absence of some player who was in the “medical department”; those women knew how to live with their pains, they knew their limits, and transcending them was part of their choices for that pleasure.

¹² Pacheco (2012) relates these notions with the work of Stebbins (2008). The author develops a theoretical formulation called Serious Leisure Perspective, whose purpose is to identify different ways of experiencing leisure, especially those that require special skills, knowledge and experience.

Based on those various commitments, requirements and investments, we seek to bring different issues to the debate, which are part of the seriousness in leisure for a group of women. Such engagement with pleasure and particularly sport seems to be one of the ways to maintain a level of tension and excitement that pervades the choices for certain spaces and times. These notions are considered by Elias and Dunning (1992, p. 143) as a “common denominator” between the practices meant as leisure, although those practices distinguish themselves from each other, because in each context there is a particular level of tension-excitement. According to the authors, these activities represent a sphere of life that would offer people a high chance to experience a pleasant stimulation of emotions and “fun excitement that can be experienced in public, shared with others and enjoyed with social approval and good conscience” (ELIAS; DUNNING, 1992, p. 151).

Seriousness seemed to make sense for those women. However, such statement in that context was far from the idea of productivity that “oppresses”, of sports performance that ignores the ability to manage that very notion by people or the commitment that would endanger the libertarian character of leisure. Just as “playing well” and “playing with those who play well” were part of pleasant stimulation of emotions, commitment to the group and investments in that way of experiencing sport were also part of the search for optimal levels of tension and excitement and could not be seen as part of a “disinterested act”.

In addition to these analyzes, we can look at the “acts” from Pierre Bourdieu’s perspective. In the wake of this author’s debates, we are led to consider that social agents’ actions are part and at the same time are the result of a social game. Therefore, they are not disinterested, but rather linked to certain provisions incorporated by individuals in “their” social space (BOURDIEU, 2005). This discussion would deserve more attention, which cannot be done within the limits and scope of this text, but we emphasize that the actions and directions that are part of leisure spaces and times are not disconnected from other spheres of social life. They do not have ends in themselves; rather, they become part of a complex dynamics of daily life that allows different adjectives – serious, playful, productive, effective, free – to be ascribed to the same time and space of leisure.

4 FINAL REMARKS

This ethnographic study focused on construction and solution of numerous questions among which leisure gained prominence. During the work, we sought to establish debates between what people did in their leisure spaces and times – particularly those involving sports – with the concepts that offered the contours and limits on that same theme. This dialogue was linked to research questions that surrounded the idea of understanding how that group was sustained over the years and how this was linked with the fact that they remained in the League. Furthermore, we were interested in knowing how they kept engaged in that space/time recognized as “a pleasure that was taken seriously”.

In this work we sought to take leisure out of a, “in-bracket” that sometimes puts it in another pole or disconnects it from notions that characterize the peculiarity of the dimension of work or family responsibilities. In 1979, Lenea Gaelzer already pointed out authors who said that “there is no absolute boundary between play and work” (MARINHO, 1956 cited by GAELZER 1979, p. 51). We started to think about leisure along those lines – no longer looking

for outlines and differences between “obligations” from certain domains – which are also theoretically constructed – but understanding it as a time/space formed by the people who are simultaneously formed on it.

It was because we focused on that way of understanding research itself, in a constant coming and going of reflections with people and listening to what they have to teach us about “their leisure”, that this dimension of life could be seen in its whole diversity. In this context, productivity, sports performance, seriousness, commitments, interests and investments entered the scene and were relativized. This did not happen so that these notions could replace game, disengagement, fun, development, an idea of playful, but rather because they provide clues about how people experience something that for them is meant as “leisure” and that helped us to dialogue with some concepts “of leisure” that permeate this area of study.

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