
Electronic Thesis and Dissertation Repository

8-18-2015 12:00 AM

Bulky but Still Beautiful: Representations of Healthy Femininity in the CrossFit Narrative

Cheryl Madliger, *The University of Western Ontario*

Supervisor: Michael Heine, *The University of Western Ontario*

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in Kinesiology

© Cheryl Madliger 2015

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/etd>



Part of the [Sociology of Culture Commons](#), and the [Sports Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Madliger, Cheryl, "Bulky but Still Beautiful: Representations of Healthy Femininity in the CrossFit Narrative" (2015). *Electronic Thesis and Dissertation Repository*. 3023.
<https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/etd/3023>

This Dissertation/Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by Scholarship@Western. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Thesis and Dissertation Repository by an authorized administrator of Scholarship@Western. For more information, please contact wlsadmin@uwo.ca.

Representations of Healthy Femininity in the CrossFit™ Narrative

(Thesis format: Monograph)

By

Cheryl Madliger

Graduate Program in Kinesiology

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada

© 2015 Cheryl Madliger

Abstract

Positioned in the area of feminist cultural studies, this thesis examines representations of femininity, fitness, and health in four key publications related to the fitness programs offered by the CrossFit™ Corporation. A critical discourse-analytical methodology is used to deconstruct notions of fit femininity in the CrossFit narrative. I argue that themes on femininity reflect contemporary healthist ideologies that promote concerns for health as an individual, moral responsibility, and normalize entrenched notions of the female body as a project to be managed. Drawing on the language of feminine empowerment, the CrossFit narrative constructs the ideal female body as one with increased muscularity and functional abilities, while also offering up a singular feminine ideal that reproduces ideological views sustaining unequal gender relations. An overarching dominant theme of the CrossFit narrative stipulating a need for constant improvement, anchors a discursive effect promoting continual consumption and self-monitoring of, and for, health.

Keywords: CrossFit, Gender, Femininity, Critical Discourse Analysis, Consumerism, Healthism

Table of Contents

TABLE OF CONTENTS	I
LIST OF TABLES.....	IV
LIST OF FIGURES	V
CHAPTER ONE —INTRODUCTION: THE RESEARCH ISSUE	1
1. THE CROSSFIT PHENOMENON.....	1
1.1 Doing CrossFit	4
1.2 The “Sport of Fitness”	6
2. ANALYZING DISCOURSES OF HEALTH AND (CROSS)FITNESS.....	7
2.1 Fit to Consume	7
2.2 Spaces of Discourse Production	8
3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND OBJECTIVES.....	10
ENDNOTES FOR CHAPTER ONE.....	11
CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGY AND METHODS.....	13
1. CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS.....	13
2. SCOPE OF ANALYSIS.....	15
3. CODING: DATA ANALYSIS	19
ENDNOTES FOR CHAPTER TWO.....	20
CHAPTER THREE: LITERATURE REVIEW	22
1. FEMINIST RESEARCH ON HEALTH AND THE BODY	22
2. HEALTHISM	26
3. CONSUMERISM AND COMMERCIALIZATION	28

4.	CROSSFIT.....	30
	ENDNOTES FOR CHAPTER THREE	31
CHAPTER FOUR: THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF THE CROSSFIT NARRATIVE		34
1.	CROSSFIT: CONSTRUCTING WOMEN’S SUBJECTIVITIES	35
1.1	The Women of CrossFit	35
1.2	Balance	40
1.3	“Better” for Baby	44
2.	WOMEN’S BODIES.....	53
2.1	Body Image and Eating Disorders	53
2.2	CrossFit: Saving Women from Themselves	55
2.3	‘The Fight:’ Resisting Bad Body Image	58
2.4	Form and Function	60
2.5	Sites of Re-definition	62
3.	THE CROSSFIT BODY.....	64
3.1	CrossFit and Aesthetics	64
3.2	“Building” a Body	66
3.3	“You Can Still Be a Girl and Lift Weights”	68
3.4	Strong is the New Skinny	70
3.5	Beauty and the Bulk	72
3.6	Strong and Muscular is Sexy	74
4.	ISSUES OF EQUALITY.....	78
4.1	CrossFit: On Women’s Side	78
4.2	The “F”-Word: Feminism and CrossFit	80
4.3	The Improvement Imperative	82
	ENDNOTES FOR CHAPTER FOUR.....	86

CHAPTER FIVE—CONCLUSION: DISCURSIVE EFFECTS OF THE CROSSFIT NARRATIVE	93
ENDNOTES FOR CHAPTER FIVE	102
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	103
LITERATURE REVIEW AND DISCUSSION.....	103
CROSSFIT SOURCES	106
CURRICULUM VITAE	111

List of Tables

TABLE 1: EXPLANATION OF THE CROSSFIT TERMINOLOGY	5
--------------------------------------------------------	---

List of Figures

FIGURE 1: SCHEMATIC MAP OF THE CROSSFIT 'EMPIRE': LOCALES OF NARRATIVE PRODUCTION ...	10
FIGURE 2: FRONT PAGE OF THE CROSSFIT JOURNAL, MARCH 15, 2015.....	15

Chapter One —Introduction: The Research Issue

1. The CrossFit Phenomenon

In 2013, Chloe Jonsson, a personal trainer and transgender woman, launched a lawsuit against the corporation CrossFit, Inc. seeking 2.5 million dollars in damages for what she considered discrimination. CrossFit, which styles its products as the “Sport of FitnessTM” prohibited Jonsson from participating in its official competitions arguing that the gender change disqualified her from competing. CrossFit, Inc.’s lawyer offered a legal response to the lawsuit, saying that “the fundamental, ineluctable fact is that a male competitor who has a sex reassignment procedure still has a genetic makeup that confers a physical and physiological advantage over women.”¹ This sparked debates among those involved in CrossFit and those interested in the participation of transgender athletes in sport and brought the very notion of gender to the forefront of discussions relating to CrossFit.

In the training and fitness programs developed by the CrossFit Corporation, men and women work out side by side and perform similar workouts. On CrossFit.com – the corporation’s main web site – where the company got its start and continues to publish a workout of the day, or “WOD” (See Table 1 for an explanation of some Key CrossFit terms) for followers to perform, there is no distinction between men and women’s suggested weights.² A media representative from CrossFit published a statement on CrossFit.com’s Facebook page to explain the rationale: “CrossFit.com does not usually publish female workout prescriptions. Some misinterpret this as a sign that CrossFit ignores women. In reality, CrossFit women can frequently handle the same prescription better than men. Therefore, an effective scaling should

focus on individual capacity, not assumptions or generalizations."³ Nonetheless, in CrossFit's official competitions, women are prescribed weights that are lower than men's. Most gyms use about 70% of the weight prescribed for men when suggesting weights for women to aim for.

In other ways, CrossFit, Inc. seems to test boundaries when it comes to gender norms. Last year's male and female winners of the CrossFit Games, CrossFit's annual championship of sorts, won an equal \$275,000 US for their victories—a rare instance where male and female athletes were paid equally. The opportunity to participate in a sport that emphasizes performance—in CrossFit gyms, there is a purposive absence of mirrors—provides an opportunity for women to experience their bodies and to appreciate what they are capable of. In other ways, however, CrossFit seems to be reinforcing gender norms. The absence of mirrors does not mean that CrossFit has not sustained and capitalized on women's insecurities to present itself as an appealing option for achieving an improved aesthetic or as a remedy for those bodily insecurities. In subtle ways, CrossFit reaffirms traditional notions of gender. Consider, for instance, the "Hero WODs" that honor fallen military, police, or fire service personnel—129 of 130 such tributes are dedicated to men.⁴ With a strong military following, militarism is often emphasized as an appropriate expression of masculinity. Camouflage-themed clothing and gear for men and pink-coloured options for women, assurances that CrossFit will help men put on muscle but that women should not fear becoming bulky from the activity, a "strong is the new sexy" mantra that reaffirms that exercise, for women, is a means to achieve sexual desirability and attractiveness—these are all examples of the construction of gender in CrossFit.⁵

The construction of fitness as a consumer lifestyle in the early twenty-first century is acknowledged and critiqued by many of those who study physical culture.⁶ As Smith Maguire

noted, fitness today encompasses “possessing the appropriate capacities and resources to undertake the project of the self in a competent fashion, minimizing health risks and maximizing market value.”⁷ Related to the way in which notions of fitness today “are shaped, first and foremost, by the tenets of individualization, which take identity, health, and social mobility as individual duties and responsibilities” a significant portion of today’s physical culture today is dominated by commodified options for taking up health and fitness.⁸

In this context, CrossFit, which was established as CrossFit, Inc. in 2000 and has since grown into a major corporate competitor in the consumer fitness industry, serves as a dominant site for the construction of specific health and fitness discourses.⁹ Initially, Glassman ran CrossFit as a small-scale training program in a gym he owned in California and at first, the program was associated with a simple website where daily workouts were posted and participants doing them on their own could post their results. This website still exists, though CrossFit has developed into a sprawling empire. Today, there are upwards of 10,000 affiliated CrossFit gyms, or “boxes,” as they are called by CrossFitters, on six continents, operating independently but paying a fee to use the CrossFit name.¹⁰ In an article exploring the success of what they called the “cult” of CrossFit, *Time Magazine* reported projected earnings of \$100 million dollars in 2014 for the company.¹¹

CrossFit has gained mainstream exposure, with competition coverage on ESPN, and following a major sponsoring partnership with Reebok in 2011, has grown into a mainstream, commercialized sport, training program, and lifestyle. It claims to deliver “a fitness that is, by design, broad, general, and inclusive” in order to provide the best fitness to “our terrorist hunters, skiers, mountain bike riders, and housewives.”¹² In its promotional statements, it places the highest emphasis on individual performance and the achievement of “virtuosity” or

“performing the common uncommonly well.”¹³ While CrossFit is used by many as an exercise program, it is also a sport. The training program itself is based on a combination of several modalities including weightlifting, powerlifting, metabolic conditioning, and kettlebell training, combined in a way to create workouts that are constantly varied and claim to use movements that translate into daily life, performed in a high intensity fashion. A host of products and media aimed at facilitating the consumption of CrossFit signifiers has created a sort of CrossFit lifestyle to go along with the workout, encompassing habits like eating a “Paleo diet” or training barefoot, to name a few.¹⁴ Magazines, online articles, television, books, podcasts, social media, nutritional products and supplements, apparel, equipment, certifications, and gym memberships—which typically cost more than \$100 per month—are just some of the ways in which CrossFit can be consumed. These products and options for consumption are represented in Figure 1.

1.1 Doing CrossFit

CrossFit is becoming increasingly well known as an extreme—but popular—option in the fitness marketplace. Beyond simply providing an alternative to Zumba or circuit training, CrossFit represents a cultural phenomenon (see Figure 1 for a map of its prominence as an ‘empire’ in the world of consumer fitness). As an article in the *New York Times* recently noted, CrossFit’s popularity represents “a fitness sea change” in which participants “abandon easy, convenient forms of exercise in favour of workouts grueling enough to resemble a kind of physical atonement.”¹⁵ Individuals most commonly participate in a class at a CrossFit gym, where a group of members (usually fewer than twelve) usually perform some kind of strength or skill work followed by the “WOD” that they perform together. While the classes are not formal competitions, the environment invites competitiveness. In a “WOD,” there are

prescribed, or “Rx,” weights and standards which a participant aspires to master. According to CrossFit’s manifesto, “the needs of Olympic athletes and our grandparents differ by degree not kind.”¹⁶ Using lighter weights, modifying movements (i.e. performing pushups from one’s knees), or completing fewer repetitions or sets relative to what is prescribed are ways in which CrossFit seeks to achieve “universal scalability.”¹⁷ The workouts are generally “for time”—performed as quickly as possible with the time required to finish recorded on the white board, for “as many reps as possible” (in an “AMRAP”)—with the number of repetitions or rounds of the exercise(s) performed in a defined amount of time recorded, for a maximum weight—with the weight recorded, or “every minute on the minute” (“EMOM”)—performing a certain exercise or series of exercises every minute perhaps with the weight or standard used recorded.

TERM	DEFINITION
AMRAP	“As Many Rounds/Reps As Possible”; a type of workout in which an exerciser attempts to complete as many rounds or reps of an exercise or exercises in a given amount of time
Benchmark WOD	One of several workouts CrossFit places emphasis on as ways to benchmark performance and improvement if repeated at irregular intervals as a WOD
Box	An affiliated CrossFit gym
EMOM	“Every Minute On the Minute”; a type of workout in which some exercise(s) is performed each minute
Fran	One of “The Girls;” a workout in which 21, then 15, then 9 reps of thrusters (a compound exercise that combines a clean, a front squat, and a push-press) with 95 pounds for men or 65 pounds for women and pull-ups are performed for time
Hero WOD	A workout dedicated to a fallen member of military or service personnel
No-rep	An attempt at a repetition deemed insufficient against the movement standards required
Oly	Olympic weightlifting
Pre-bok	Referring to the period of time before the sponsorship agreement before CrossFit, Inc. and Reebok (i.e. before 2011)
Rx	“As prescribed”; an amount of weight or movement standard to which individuals aspire towards
Tabata	A set of intervals where 20 seconds of work is alternated with 10 seconds of recovery eight times through
The Girls	A set of Benchmark WODs; workouts with women’s names ¹⁸
WOD	Workout of the Day

Table 1: Explanation of the CrossFit Terminology

1.2 The “Sport of Fitness”

CrossFit has grown and evolved commercially as a company, training program and sport, and as a lifestyle offering. The WOD portion of a class serves as an opportunity for competition, though just as often it is emphasized that CrossFitters compete against themselves to be better every day. Competition has been formalized though, with options that are both endorsed by CrossFit, Inc. as well as independently-run competitions. At the upper echelon of CrossFit competitions is the Reebok CrossFit Games. The (trademarked) aim of this competition is to “find the Fittest on Earth™” by testing the top 100 athletes from around the world in a series of workouts to rank them against each other and determine who is the fittest.¹⁹ The first CrossFit Games were held in 2007, long before the first CrossFit Open competition. They were hosted by Dave Castro, the current co-director of the Games, on his parents’ ranch as a sort of party.²⁰ Today, the Games have transformed into a spectacle televised on ESPN.

Beyond CrossFit, Inc.-sanctioned events, smaller scale CrossFit competitions are popular and becoming more so. Often run as one or two-day competitions with a series of workouts, CrossFit competitions range from those providing scaled workouts that are more accessible to many CrossFitters to highly competitive endeavors with large prize purses set up to attract big names in the sport. The atmosphere at these competitions ranges from friendly to fierce, with many competitions offering a team option or promoting themselves as a fun event while others target elite CrossFitters.²¹ The positioning of CrossFit as a sport is in and of itself a representational strategy. While most of the people who pay for CrossFit memberships and participate in the activity are not elite level athletes, the fact that CrossFit positions itself as a sport opens up narratives related to sport that might not apply to a simple exercise program.

2. Analyzing Discourses of Health and (Cross)Fitness

2.1 Fit to Consume

According to Smith Maguire, “participation in the fitness field is bound up with producing subjectivities that are fit to consume, in that they locate the production of meaning, identity, and relationships with others in the processes of consumption and producing bodies that are fit to be consumed by others as visual representations of an individual’s identity, social position, and subjectivity.”²² Given its popularity and the multitude of sites for CrossFit consumption, a consideration of the dominant discourses in CrossFit will yield insight into the meanings, identities, and subjectivities in contemporary physical culture. Given the sprawling CrossFit empire’s development into a cultural force (see Figure 1), the discourses circulating in CrossFit media extend beyond those related to exercise, health, and the body to affect understandings of identity determinants such as class, race, and gender. Consumption aimed at achieving a fit body can take on a disciplinary purpose whereby the act of purchasing products and services serves to reinforce gendered, race-based, and class-based notions of appropriate exercise and the ideal body.²³ As Dworkin and Wachs noted in their exploration of “body panic,” or the creation and selling of the desire for the perfect body produced by contemporary health and fitness magazines, examining dominant cultural constructions of health and the idealized body in health and fitness media gives insight into the constitution of a “privileged body.”²⁴ This body, Dworkin and Wachs argue, is always a gendered body “given the importance of sex assignment in Western culture,” though the meanings attribute to the assignment of sex as gender changes and evolves.²⁵

This thesis uses Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as a means to critically interrogate gendered representations of the specific fitness practices reproduced in CrossFit texts. Given

the normalization through discourse and the potential for certain narratives and constructions to be taken as a given—at the expense of others—this kind of analysis is necessarily interested in power and power relations. Our notions, constructed in discourse, about things like health, the body, gender, consumption, and what constitutes a “privileged body” are both shaped by and important in shaping our lives beyond the physical realm. Thus, these discourses are powerful in shaping the way we perceive ourselves, others, and the world around us. Given my interest in the ways in which these representations produce and police gender, the analysis explores the implications of these gendered representations of health and fitness in CrossFit as they relate to options for women’s identity positions.

2.2 Spaces of Discourse Production

Figure 1 shows some of the elements of the vast array of CrossFit-related locales for discourse production that the company has created. Given CrossFit’s relatively recent emergence into the world of consumer fitness, many of these locales are Internet-based. Social media, mobile phone apps, podcasts, YouTube videos, blogs, and websites associated with the sport offer sites for the constant production and reproduction of discourse. Traditional forms of media like books, magazines, television coverage and newspaper articles expand the map. In addition to these sources, CrossFit’s empire extends to include products like apparel, gear, equipment, nutritional products, supplements, and self-care items in addition to services like gym memberships, training camps, workshops, and certifications. As mentioned above, CrossFit’s specific brand of language can also be found in competitions and in the fundraising campaigns of CrossFit, Inc.

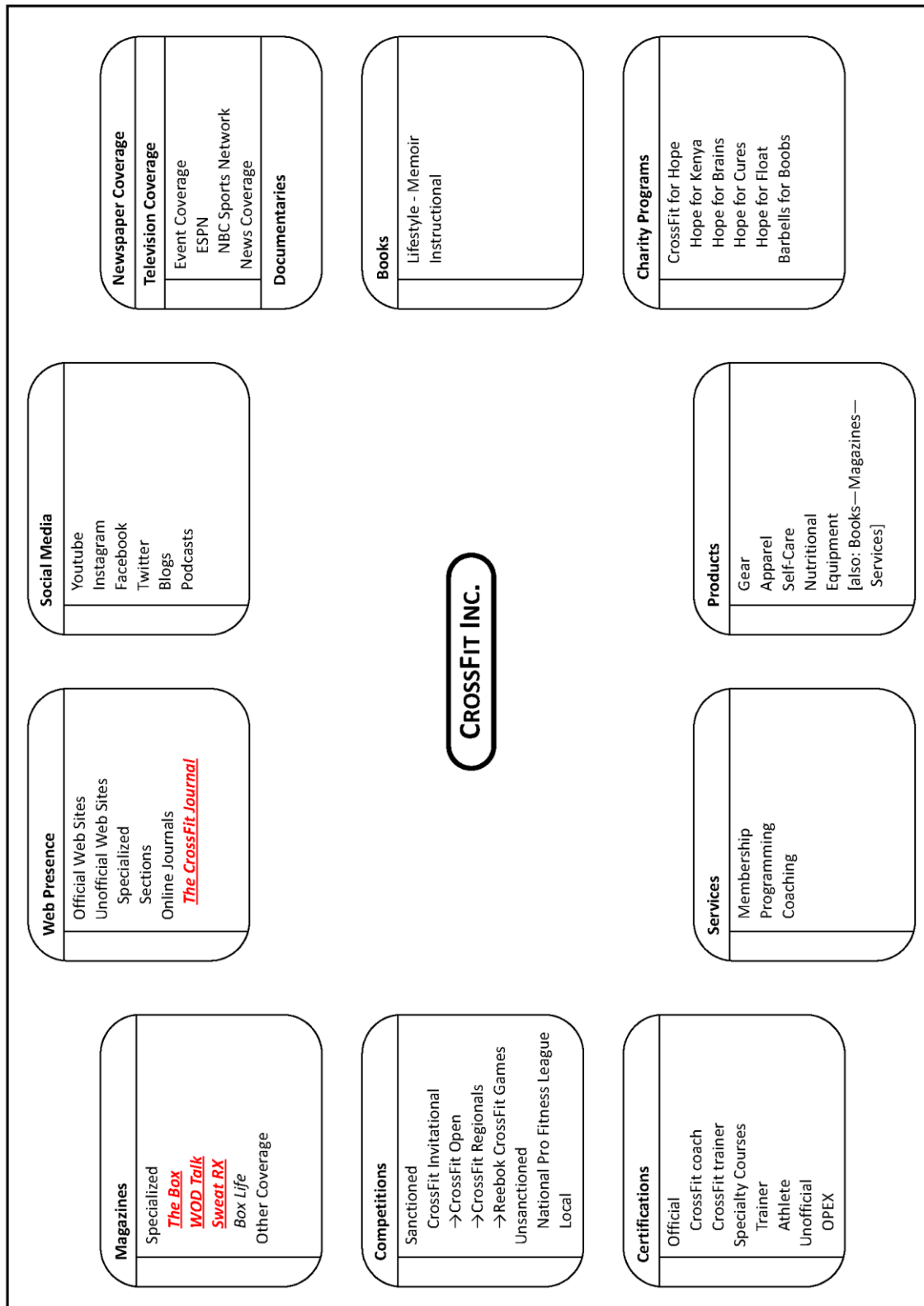


Figure 1: Schematic Map of the CrossFit ‘Empire’—Locales of Narrative Production
(underlined/red: Sources used in this study)

3. Research Questions and Objectives

This thesis is based on the premise that notions of what represents normal practices in physical culture are both shaped by and important in shaping culture beyond the physical cultural realm, affecting the way in which people act and how they are perceived in the social world. The stories told by CrossFit media, thus, also have the potential to stabilize or destabilize, to confirm or challenge, to reproduce or resist existing power relations as they relate to the body and gender—or to involve a combination of these effects. Since elements of power like “abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced and resisted by text” examining text is one way to explore social power.²⁶ In line with van Dijk’s conception of power, a group with social power is able to more or less control the acts and minds of other groups, with discourse serving as an important element in this control.²⁷ It is via discourse that our notions about ourselves as individuals—as women or as men, for example—become natural and taken-for-granted. This study is interested in those taken-for-granted truths implicit in CrossFit texts, as well as their ramifications in terms of the social world. CDA, with its primary concern in analyzing power relationships, offers an appropriate analytical tool.

My research objective is to explain the power effects of discourses and discourse structures related to gender, health, and sport in CrossFit media. Does CrossFit represent a shift towards gender equality in the physical cultural realm? While this is my primary question of interest, given CrossFit’s nature as an activity to be consumed in the form of gym memberships, merchandise, media, and spectacularized competitions, discourses implicating consumption and indeed commodification abound and intersect with discourses on gender. Given its emphasis on positioning itself as an alternative to traditional programs and its emphasis on the individual, discourses confirming neoliberal agendas are also common. Tied to its emphasis

on the individual, Crawford's notion of "healthism," which is elaborated upon in detail in the literature review included below, was useful in considerations of fitness as a personal and moral responsibility.²⁸ Any discourses that operate along these lines are not separate from those that produce and police gender, and as such they were considered in the analysis.

I used the following questions to inform my analysis:

- What notions of femininity are produced in CrossFit media?
- In what ways is the health-related discourse produced in CrossFit media gendered?
- Affecting contemporary understandings of femininity and the body, what are the power effects of these discourses?

Endnotes for Chapter One

- 1 Madison Park, "Transgender Athlete Sues CrossFit for Banning her from Competing as Female," *CNN*, March 7, 2014, <http://www.cnn.com/2014/03/07/us/transgender-lawsuit-crossfit/>
- 2 See Table 1 for an explanation of CrossFit's key terms.
- 3 CrossFit, Facebook post, November 15, 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/crossfit/posts/10152375988022676>
- 4 "CrossFit FAQ," *CrossFit.com*, <http://www.crossfit.com/cf-info/faq.html#WOD1>
- 5 Perhaps indicative of an expanded range of possibilities for women, the notion of "strong is the new skinny" celebrated by CrossFit advocates and participants replaces skinny with a new and bulked up but still largely unrealistic bodily ideal still rooted in creating a consumption imperative based on a lack amongst women.
- 6 See Shari Dworkin and Michael Messner, "Just do What?: Sport, Bodies, Gender," in *Revisioning Gender*, ed. Judith Lorber, Beth Hess, and Myra Max Ferree (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 1999), 341-364.; Shari Dworkin and Faye Linda Wachs, *Body Panic: Gender, Health, and the Selling of Fitness* (New York: New York University Press, 2009).; Shannon Jette, "Fit for Two? A Critical Discourse Analysis of Oxygen Fitness Magazine," *Sociology of Sport Journal* 23.4 (2006): 331-351.; Jennifer Smith Maguire, *Fit for Consumption* (New York: Routledge, 2008).; Pirkko Markula, "Firm but Shapely, Fit but Sexy, Strong but Thin: The Postmodern Aerobicizing Female Bodies," *Sociology of Sport Journal* 12.4 (1995): 424-453.; Kerry McGannon and John Spence, "Exploring News Media Representations of Women's Exercise and Subjectivity Through Critical Discourse Analysis," *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health* 4.1 (2012): 32-50.
- 7 Smith Maguire, *Fit for Consumption*, 190.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Glassman and his wife founded the company in 2000, though the idea for CrossFit was shaped in 1996.
- 10 "How to Affiliate," *CrossFit.com*, <http://www.crossfit.com/how-to-affiliate>. The structure of CrossFit allows gyms that wish to use the trademarked CrossFit name to pay an annual affiliate fee of \$3000 US to do so, also requiring that an applicant be at least a Level 1 Certificate holder; getting a Level 1 Certificate entails

- attending a weekend course costing \$1000. Once a gym becomes an affiliate, they require a live website and on this website must post a link to the CrossFit Journal, CrossFit's online print and video publication. Beyond this, affiliates are given no prescriptive guidelines regarding how they run their business. This approach creates a very flexible system where they can supposedly sink or swim based on their own efforts. The founder of CrossFit, Greg Glassman, has labeled himself a "rabid libertarian" who believes that the "free market" approach provides the quality control required to maintain the brand. See "CrossFit Founder Greg Glassman: I'm a Rabid Libertarian," *Reason.com*. July 22, 2013, <http://reason.com/blog/2013/07/22/video-crossfit-founder-greg-glassman-im>.
- 11 Sean Gregory, "Lift, Squat, Repeat: Inside the CrossFit Cult," *Time*, January 9, 2014, <http://time.com/4248/lift-squat-repeat-inside-the-crossfit-cult/>
 - 12 "What is CrossFit?"
 - 13 Greg Glassman, "What is Fitness?" *CrossFit Journal*, October 2002, <http://journal.crossfit.com/2002/10/what-is-fitness-by-greg-glassm.tpl>
 - 14 Kate Mooney, "Why NYC Men Are Falling (Rock) Hard for the Paleo Diet," *Observer New York*, July 24, 2014, <http://observer.com/2014/07/why-guys-have-fallen-rock-hard-for-the-paleo-diet/>; Richard Grimes, "If the Shoe Fits...", *CrossFit Journal*, April 2010, http://library.crossfit.com/premium/pdf/CFJ_Grimes_ShoeFits.pdf?e=1424186468&h=833ba996a421cc71a56f2fa088884033
 - 15 Javier Jaén, "Why Are Americans So Fascinated With Extreme Fitness?," *New York Times*, October 14, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/19/magazine/why-are-americans-so-fascinated-with-extreme-fitness.html?_r=0
 - 16 "What is CrossFit?" *CrossFit.com*, <http://www.crossfit.com/cf-info/what-crossfit.html>
 - 17 Ibid.
 - 18 Greg Glassman, the founder of CrossFit, on the decision to name the benchmark workouts after girls: "...I thought that anything that left you flat on your back, looking up at the sky and asking, 'what just happened to me?' deserved a female's name." See "Workouts," *CrossFit Prineville*, <http://crossfitprineville.com/workouts/>
 - 19 "About the Games," *CrossFit Games*, <http://games.crossfit.com/about-the-games>
 - 20 Dave Castro, "The History of the CrossFit Games," *CrossFit Journal*, July 14, 2010, <http://journal.crossfit.com/2010/07/games-history.tpl>. Castro is a former Navy SEAL who started to work at a CrossFit gym early in the evolution of the company and is today one of the most widely recognized faces associated with CrossFit.
 - 21 In my experience as a CrossFitter, I've seen "friendly" scaled competitions turn fierce when judges have "no-repped" a competitor and have seen highly competitive face-offs at the end of competitions turn friendly with one team cheering another on to their finish.
 - 22 Smith Maguire, *Fit for Consumption*, 192.
 - 23 Dworkin and Wachs, *Body Panic: Gender, Health, and the Selling of Fitness*, 52.
 - 24 Ibid., 29.
 - 25 Ibid., 29-30.
 - 26 Teun van Dijk, "What is Critical Discourse Analysis," *The Handbook of Critical Discourse Analysis* (Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 352.
 - 27 Ibid.
 - 28 Richard Crawford, "Healthism and the Medicalization of Everyday Life," *International Journal of Health Services* 10.3 (1980): 365-388.

Chapter Two: Methodology and Methods

1. Critical Discourse Analysis

The theoretical underpinnings of CDA focus on a concern with the power effects of discourse. According to Wodak and Busch, “CDA takes a particular interest in the relationship between language and power.”¹ My analysis considers texts as representations, or those things that carry meaning, exploring the relationship between these representations and their discursive power to shape understandings of gendered physical activity practices. Discourse, as defined by Keller, “may be understood as more or less successful attempts to stabilize, at least temporarily, attributions of meaning and orders of interpretation, and thereby institutionalize a collectively binding order of knowledge in a social ensemble.”² Thus, a discourse analysis investigates the relationship between texts or practices and “the reproduction of meaning systems/orders of knowledge, the social actors involved in this, the rules and resources underlying these processes, and their consequences in social activities.”³

CDA is flexible but fits into the critical research paradigm. In this paradigm, research is aimed at critiquing and disrupting the status quo. CDA is concerned politically with the workings of power and ideologies and attempts to explore the way in which language and representation reveal these workings. My work in examining these discourses aligns itself with uncovering “the ideologies that implicitly shape people’s lives,” in the space of physical activity and health practices.⁴ As a critical researcher, though, my work goes further, creating critical consciousness and change by problematizing or “identifying a taken-for-granted phenomenon and revealing the particular social and economic processes that contribute to it.”⁵ Following Hall’s argument that

“representation is constitutive of meaning,” my analysis is interested in the meanings associated with representations of feminine health and fitness in CrossFit. Though representations may carry an array of meanings, certain interpretations become dominant. It is these dominant notions, or the “discourse structure that is temporarily produced and stabilized by specific institutional-organizational contexts” in which I am interested.⁶ CDA attempts to destabilize these naturalized meanings attributed to representations; this requires an appreciation of the contextual and constructed nature of meaning.

My subjective analysis of the media, thus, is informed by my own context and the presentation of themes in my research is not an attempt at presenting an objective truth but rather my own construction. As a researcher, I recognize my role as a participant in the construction of knowledge and social science discourses. As Keller suggests, there is a reflexivity required in discourse research that is cognizant of the researcher’s ability not to produce truth but rather to produce “statement events which are themselves part of a (social science) discourse.”⁷ In this analysis, my reading of the texts and judgment regarding which interpretations encompass dominant discourses is therefore simply one of many possible interpretations. This reading reflects my own values and context. I position myself as a twenty-six-year-old, white, able-bodied, heterosexual and middle-class female. As a fitness instructor and personal trainer who has attended CrossFit’s Level One training, I train regularly at a gym that offers competitive CrossFit, though at this time, I do not participate in the program but simply use the facility. My social positioning will affect my interpretation of the discursive elements I identify, but given my approach to research, I do not consider this a detriment. Instead, I see it as a way in which I will be uniquely positioned to interpret the dominant discourses circulating around CrossFit and women’s bodies. Critical researchers allow their values and identity to affect their research. As Ponterotto argued,

“criticalists take values a step further than constructivists in that they admittedly hope and expect their value biases to influence the research process and outcome.”⁸ I forefront my position because as Guba and Lincoln suggest, in critical work “values have pride of place” and “are seen as ineluctable in shaping inquiry outcomes.”⁹

2. Scope of Analysis

In this study, I examine a segment of both CrossFit, Inc.’s own media as well as media produced by entities not directly controlled by CrossFit, Inc. but pertaining to the sport. A combined analysis of both CrossFit-produced media as well as media that is associated with the CrossFit lifestyle is warranted as opposed to limiting my analysis to one or the other. Given the multitude of ways that CrossFit can be consumed, everything from mediated representations of events to the way in which the sport and its associated products and services are marketed is worthy of consideration. This study examines the empire of CrossFit, specifically sampling a section of North American print media produced by CrossFit, Inc. or which occupies an authoritative space within the broader CrossFit empire to explore how notions of healthy femininity are constructed.

The *CrossFit Journal* (see Figure 2), functions as a linchpin that connects several of the discourse locales within the space constituted by CrossFit. This site is linked to by each affiliate gym (as per affiliation requirements) and includes links to the fundraising, competition, certification, and other CrossFit Inc.-associated websites on its homepage. The *CrossFit Journal* serves as one of CrossFit’s key locales for the production of its dominant narrative. It is an online print, video, and audio journal published by CrossFit, Inc. as “a venue for contributing coaches, trainers, athletes, and researchers to ponder, study, debate, and define fitness and collectively advance the art and science of optimizing human performance.”¹⁰ There are free audio and video

files as well as written articles that can be downloaded.¹¹ The contributors include a variety of people including CrossFit experts, athletes and health and fitness writers; their visible positioning as experts serves to enhance the credibility of the narratives in the *CrossFit Journal*. Contributions are not paid for and must “contribute in some way to the success of CrossFit athletes in their quest for fitness,” it being understood that “pedantry is eschewed.”¹² With categories ranging from 'Nutrition' to 'Fashion' to 'Goal Setting' to 'Swimming', the *CrossFit Journal* is a cornerstone of CrossFit's representational space. Given its centrality in the empire of CrossFit (see Figure 1) and the legitimacy lent to it by virtue of its association with CrossFit, Inc., the *CrossFit Journal* is a prime location for examining discourses related to CrossFit. Each month, the *CrossFit Journal* archives its written content (i.e. omitting the audio and video content) into monthly collections that present the articles as one collective unit, somewhat like a monthly magazine. While these archives, which can be downloaded as PDF files date back to 2002, this analysis includes only those monthly archives from July 2011 until February 2015, totaling 43 collections. This starting date was chosen to coincide with the first edition of the ESPN-televised, Reebok-sponsored CrossFit Games, coinciding with the CrossFit, Inc.-Reebok sponsorship agreement which lent the corporation mainstream exposure.¹³

CROSSFIT.COM

JOURNAL | GAMES | EVENTS | KIDS | MESSAGE BOARD | STORE

CrossFit JOURNAL

LOGIN

Search CrossFit Journal

HOME
New & featured Journal content

CATEGORIES
Browse content by category

CHRONOLOGY
Browse content by publish date

START HERE
An introduction to the Journal

WHAT IS FITNESS
Our pioneering article on fitness

TRAINING GUIDE
The foundational CrossFit resource

CROSSFIT KIDS
Resources for training kids

CROSSFIT RADIO
Listen to news, profiles & views

SUBMISSIONS
Submit your own original content

Tinkering Trainers

By Andréa Maria Cecil

In Coaching, Rest Day/Theory
March 15, 2015

CrossFit coaches detail their successful and unsuccessful programming experiments in the search for measurable, observable and repeatable results.

CrossFit athletes are a skeptical bunch. They like to experiment and tinker and tweak. For Kurtis Bowler that meant messing around with strength-biased programming for his affiliate, Rainier CrossFit.

"Every year or year-and-a-half, there's an influx of newer people," said the owner of the 10-year-old gym in Washington state.

And with new people come new ideas—or old ideas made new again. Inevitably, they want to try other training methods besides the standard group programming to improve their fitness. Bowler is happy to oblige.


"I have found that the best way for them to learn that that stuff doesn't work (in improving overall fitness) is for them to give it a go."

So he steps aside, lets them have their moment and then encourages them "to look at the numbers." At the end of the day, data always wins.

"I have found that we always come back to just programming CrossFit," said Bowler, who is on CrossFit's Level 1 Seminar Staff.


Many affiliates have fiddled with programming over the years. Sometimes coaches initiated the change. Other times it was members. In either case, box owners said they came out of the experience with a renewed appreciation for Greg Glassman's original prescription.

"For the fitness that we are pursuing, every parameter within your control needs to be modulated to broaden the stimulus as much as possible," Glassman wrote in "What Is Fitness?" "Your body will only respond to an unaccustomed stressor; routine is the enemy of progress and broad adaptation. Don't... [Continue Reading](#)



Free Download
Download the [PDF article](#).

Comment
There is 1 comment on this article. [Login](#) to add your own.


 Recommend 6 people recommend this. Be the first of your friends.

« Newer Articles Older Articles »

CrossFit Radio Episode 372

By Justin Judkins

In Radio
March 14, 2015



On Episode 372 of CrossFit Radio, Justin Judkins interviewed [CrossFit Naperville](#) owner Neil Khant and multiyear CrossFit

Free Download
Download as [MP3](#).

Figure 2: Front page of the *CrossFit Journal*, March 15, 2015 (<http://www.crossfit.com>)

In addition to the *CrossFit Journal*, the analysis includes several print publications not directly produced by CrossFit, Inc. Given magazines' continued role in the production, reproduction and circulation of this specific discourse, three North American CrossFit magazines are included in my research: American titles *WOD Talk* and *The Box* in addition to Canadian publication *Sweat RX*. Magazines do not merely produce information from a neutral standpoint, but are implicated in the production and reproduction of existing notions regarding, health, the body and gender. Magazines, much as health and fitness-related websites, can be considered "guidebooks" for the way people live and specifically in relation to health, they can be seen as "carry[ing] authority related to [their] representations of expert knowledge," often providing readers with a link between the expert and the everyday.¹⁴ While some feminists argue that magazines continue to represent a key site for the construction and reconstruction of oppressive notions regarding gender, others view them as less manipulative and highlight agency on behalf of the reader to not simply consume at face value any patriarchal or oppressive ideologies they might offer up. It is my contention that magazines are a worthy point of analysis given their ability not only to construct specific notions of gender and health but also to reproduce the dominant forms of those notions in and through the subculture of CrossFit.

The three CrossFit magazines included in this analysis are available in print as well as digital format. My analysis includes only those articles included in the magazines (i.e. not those available only online or linked to via digital issues). These magazines entered into the market around the same time as the afore-mentioned sponsorship agreement between CrossFit, Inc. and Reebok came into existence: *WOD Talk*'s first issue was published in July 2011 and twenty-two issues are included in the analysis; *The Box*'s first issue came out in July 2012 and twenty issues were analyzed; *Sweat RX*'s first issue was in October 2012 and eighteen issues were considered.

As noted in Figure 1, CrossFit, Inc. has spawned an expansive empire. It would be both impossible and unnecessary to explore every locale of discourse production. Given my interest in dominant discourses regarding fit femininity, however, examining a variety of sources produced both by CrossFit, Inc., as well as those external to the corporation allows me to identify and analyze those dominant representations in the broad space encompassed by the CrossFit empire. Although an alternative approach might take into consideration only gender-specific “Women’s Only” sections of websites or articles, I have chosen to focus on those locales with discursive power by virtue of their status as related to the corporation of CrossFit, Inc. (in the case of the *CrossFit Journal*) or as legitimate sources of CrossFit-related information (in the case of magazines). The decision to delimit my analysis, omitting things like websites, blogs and social media, was strategic in that it focused my analysis to those more widely circulated sources with a sense of legitimacy in the empire of CrossFit and allowed me to delimit the scope of my project to a manageable scale. Further, in considering not only those articles targeted at women, I was able to remain open to more subtle references to gender and femininity which are all the more likely to be taken-for-granted. Combining the magazines with the *CrossFit Journal*, 103 issues/archives were considered in the analysis.

3. Coding: Data Analysis

In “reading,” CDA allowed me to use an inductive, qualitative analysis aimed at identifying themes, categories, and the discourses reproduced in CrossFit media. In the process of analysis, an open and inductive approach was used. I followed a process outlined by Keller, offered as a way to structure analysis without being prescriptive.¹⁵ After several initial readings, codes, my primary categories, were identified. My primary focus was on the type of world created in the texts and the

socially constructed version of reality created within them. I typed coded regions, giving each a number and then placing these numbers into a chart whereby the way in which they formed themes could be explored. I included notes with the chart as a means of explaining the codes and as themes became more apparent, I started to explain them in a separate document, transferring the coded regions into that explanatory document. I used a separate research log to help me expand on my thoughts regarding the text segments, codes, and broader themes, and to explore how my codes and themes were interrelated and how they related to my research questions. Throughout my analysis, I did my best to remain open to the emergence of new ideas. Though I focused mainly on gender and femininity, I coded for other categories that emerged to stay open to the possibility of interconnectedness between seemingly unrelated themes. Bowen refers to data analysis as a “constant comparative process” and suggests that the ongoing comparison of themes, codes, and data points is important in presenting trustworthy research.¹⁶ I shared my work periodically with my supervisor, Michael Heine, who lacks insider knowledge regarding CrossFit but specializes in CDA. He was able to introduce alternative questions and interpretations. Discussions with him were also a chance for me to examine the ethical component of my work, which did not require a formal ethics review but did require that I be honest and open about my interpretive process, my critical orientation to the research, and my own position relative to my work.

Endnotes for Chapter Two

¹ Ruth Wodak and Brigitta Busch, “Approaches to Media Texts,” *The SAGE Handbook of Media Studies* (New York: SAGE Publications, 2004), 108.

² Reiner Keller, *Doing Discourse Research* (New York: SAGE Publications, 2013), 2.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Christine Carpenter and Melinda Suto, *Qualitative Research for Occupational and Physical Therapists*, (Oxford: Blackwell 2008), 24.

⁵ Ibid.

- ⁶ Keller, *Doing Discourse Research*, 3.
- ⁷ Ibid., 70.
- ⁸ Joseph Ponterotto, "Qualitative Research in Counseling Psychology: A Primer on Research Paradigms and Philosophy of Science," *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 52.2, 132.
- ⁹ Egon Guba and Yvonna Lincoln, "Competing Paradigms in Qualitative Research," in *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, ed. Norman Denzin (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 1994), 115.
- ¹⁰ "Submission Guidelines," *CrossFit Journal*, <http://journal.crossfit.com/submission-guidelines.tpl>
- ¹¹ These make up some of CrossFit's YouTube channel content.
- ¹² "Submission Guidelines."
- ¹³ Some of the earliest participants of CrossFit refer to the era before CrossFit, Inc. and Reebok were associated as "Pre-bok" CrossFit, often with a sense of nostalgia.
- ¹⁴ Stephanie C. Roy, "'Taking Charge of Your Health': Discourses of Responsibility in English-Canadian Women's Magazines," *Sociology of Health & Illness* 30.3 (2008): 464; Robin Bunton, "Popular Health, Advanced Liberalism, and *Good Housekeeping Magazine*," in *Foucault, Health and Medicine* ed. Robin Bunton and Alan Petersen (London: Routledge, 1997): 232.
- ¹⁵ Keller, *Doing Discourse Research*, 70.
- ¹⁶ Glenn Bowen, "Naturalistic Inquiry and the Saturation Concept," *Qualitative Research* 8.1 (2008): 139.

Chapter Three: Literature Review

1. Feminist Research on Health and the Body

Feminist analyses of the female body, media, and fitness within physical culture, for a long time, focused mostly on the objectification and trivialization of women's bodies through representation. These analyses often emphasized the way in which physically active and strong women, presenting a challenge to traditional "emphasized femininity," or the kind of femininity that Connell characterized as positioning women as physically inferior to men, docile, weak, and concerned with increasing their heterosexual appeal, tended to be absent or trivialized in media.¹ Many of the scholars who have critically interrogated discourses on femininity as they relate to health and fitness discuss a traditional emphasis on attaining normative ideals of thinness and/or attractiveness, labeling this emphasis a means by which women's behaviour is constrained.² Spitzack, in her exploration of the discourse on female weight reduction, demonstrates the taken-for-granted link between feminine health, beauty, and liberation, arguing that women's bodies are constructed in such a way that links "the healthy look" with self-esteem, self-confidence, and what is considered the feminine ideal of the day. As she argues, "the bodies of women are seen to require careful attention, unceasing examination," which in turn can leave the association of (unhealthy) things like excessive dieting or self-monitoring and "health" unquestioned.³ Like Spitzack's position, many researchers demonstrate the way in which fitness discourses encourage disciplined bodies, perhaps implicating female exercisers unknowingly in processes of their own domination.⁴ Theberge characterized the "feminization of the fitness movement" in the form of a focus on sexual attractiveness and appeal as representative of women's "continued oppression through the sexualization of physical activity."⁵ According to some scholars, claims about feminine

empowerment through physical activity, thanks to the linking of exercise with improved aesthetics, are illusory and mask increasing control of women's bodies.⁶ Markula uses the Foucauldian notion of the Panopticon, "a model prison whose circular design leaves all inmates in their individual cells permanently visible for the invisible supervisor in the centre tower" where discipline comes from the "awareness of power" rather than a supervisor's actual presence, to describe the way in which "women are so occupied with obtaining the healthy look that they do not have time to wonder why they are doing it."⁷ In taking individual responsibility to control their bodies through aerobics or dieting, women work towards an ideal set by society, not themselves, Markula argues, implicating even those women who seem to have achieved the ideal—and its associated self-esteem—as part of a power arrangement whereby women are continually oppressed by the powerful in society.⁸ Cahn referred to the way in which "under the rubric of health and physical enjoyment, [women] endure grueling exercise routines and punishing diets that do not liberate as much as regulate the female body to fit an ideal most women have little voice in creating and little success in attaining."⁹

In the 1990s, in a climate of ever-increasing female participation in physical activity and as corporations began to capitalize on the association of sport with women's health and self-esteem, the female athlete emerged as a new cultural ideal. According to Heywood and Dworkin, "athleticism as fashion" became popular in the early 1990s.¹⁰ The creation of a new ideal image in the form of a "trained, determined, self-reliant female athlete, the chick who can "do it for herself," who gets beyond all the old gender stereotypes and does whatever she pleases," they say, relied on "a clever mixture of liberal feminist and American individualist ideals."¹¹ The female athlete as a cultural icon has been celebrated as a progressive move away from thin normative ideals. Corporations have capitalized on this kind of "popular feminism" that many scholars discuss and

critique.¹² Nike, one of these capitalizing corporations, has been the site of insightful work into the ways in which feminine empowerment via athleticism cannot simply be considered progress.

Cole and Hribar argue that “Nike appeals to a discourse that judges as unnatural those practices that alter the natural body and apparently falsely represent the self” in favour of “a more authentic, internal self that can be realized through exercise,” contending that the “celebrity feminist” position Nike has taken promotes bodily work and consumption as a means for stabilizing identity as an empowered woman.¹³ Dworkin and Messner problematize this notion of empowerment, arguing that “the danger in contemporary reductionist understandings of empowerment as being synonymous with the development of one’s body is that concentrating on toning muscles can easily transfer energies—especially those of women privileged by class and race—away from collective organizing to change institutions that disadvantage all women, but especially those who are poor, working class, and racially disadvantaged.”¹⁴ According to them, “individual women’s agency expressed as identification with consumerism is a reproductive agency that firmly situates women’s actions and bodies within the structural gender order that oppresses them.”¹⁵

Beyond these critiques of the linking of the female athlete as a cultural icon with popular feminisms, research on the athletic female body founded on the premise that the body represents a sort of text itself has explored the signification attributed to the female form, especially those bodies that seem to transcend appropriate gender prescriptions.¹⁶ According to Heywood, who explores the cultural significance of female bodybuilders, “muscular women challenge traditional ideas that associate women in general with physical weakness and incompetence, femininity with diminutiveness and childishness, and the female body with softness.”¹⁷ Heywood argues that these muscular female bodybuilders call “attention to assumptions about women and weakness and incompetence by building a body that says otherwise,” rife with contradictory cultural meanings

that make the reduction of femininity to a particular and natural, unchangeable thing impossible.¹⁸ Assuming that, as Weitz argues, “throughout history, ideas about the nature of women’s bodies have played a dramatic role in either challenging or reinforcing power relationships between men and women,” those women who challenge ideas about the nature of women’s bodies—like bodybuilders—are thus part of a political struggle.¹⁹ Explorations of bodybuilding, while demonstrating the transgressive potential of the sport, also point towards the way in which female bodybuilders typically emphasize other “feminine” aspects of their appearance.²⁰ In some ways, namely their muscularity, these women represent a challenge to traditional notions of femininity. In others, like their commitment to traditional feminine “beauty” evidenced in their clothing and makeup, they conform. Outside of bodybuilding, Dworkin explored the way in which ideals of emphasized femininity affect women who pursue strength in the physical domain.²¹ These women “do gender,” holding themselves back in the weight room to “carefully negotiate the upper limits of their muscle gains,” careful not to become too muscular or athletic to call their femininity into question.²² Cahn explored this “contradictory relationship between athleticism and womanhood,” highlighting twentieth century requirements for female athletes to be perceived as both attractive and heterosexual.²³ Cahn argued that the emphasis on a female athlete’s feminine attractiveness and sexual charm implied that “athleticism remained a manly trait.”²⁴ As such, female athletes required “personal strategies to resolve the tension between their love of sport and the cultural condemnation of “mannish” or “tomboyish” athletes”—strategies like emphasizing femininity through dress, demeanor, and interests outside of sport.²⁵ Messner referred to the “dynamic tension between traditional prescriptions for femininity and the image presented by active, strong, even muscular women” and discussed the way in which a female athlete’s “attempting to be viewed as

feminine involves accepting behavioural and physical restrictions that make it difficult to view one's self, much less to be viewed by others, as equal with men.”²⁶

2. Healthism

The same panoptic power arrangement Markula discussed in regards to women who self-monitor and take responsibility for working on their bodies has been used to describe the way in which individuals in contemporary society are part of a power arrangement that encourages them to take individual responsibility for their health in order to present themselves as a moral citizen. White, Young, and Gillett referred to a “new era of health consciousness” in the late twentieth century, referring to the way in which “the idea of health has shifted from something that is viewed as the result of luck or biological inheritance to something that is largely achieved through personal volition.”²⁷ Crawford first called this conceptualization of health as an active status achieved via personal volition “healthism” in 1980, claiming that health had come to represent a moral issue with a lack of health associated with “moral laxity.”²⁸ Health, in this context, is understood as the effect of ‘good’ personal choices whose qualities position the individual as a moral citizen. In this climate, what signifies health and thus morality takes on particular importance. The focus on the individual however, is considered problematic. As White, Young, and Gillett note that healthism as an ideology “tends to place responsibility for body vigilance solely on the individual, and deflects attention away from the social and cultural conditions which shape and control health.”²⁹ As Smith-Maguire argues, “the delegation of responsibility for health to the individual is deeply problematic: health is perceived as a personal problem of choices and motivation, despite fundamentally social and structural causes of illness and attitudes towards health.”³⁰

Rose links the ways in which people have taken responsibility for themselves in not just health but other areas of their lives to the emergence of a neoliberal approach to governance.³¹ The increasing emphasis on self-regulation and individual responsibility assigned to health, according to Rose, presents a “means by which individuals may be made responsible for their individual choices...through the shaping of a lifestyle according to grammars of living that are widely disseminated, yet do not depend upon political calculations and strategies for their rationales or their techniques.”³² Crawford likewise, discusses “healthism” and labels health as a meaningful social practice, arguing “individual responsibility for health has become a model of and a model for the neoliberal restructuring of American society.”³³ The focus on monitoring and analyzing one’s own lifestyle choices is part of a broader shift in how individuals approach themselves, identified by Giddens as the “self as a project.”³⁴ This individualization is a driving force in contemporary society, pushing trends like the one towards demedicalization, which reformulated expert authority as assistance and encouraged people to become their own health experts. Left as consumers responsible for managing their own health, Smith-Maguire says, “individuals...are not left to their own devices to discover themselves, but are inundated with assistance and advice from a whole range of traditional health experts and their new, commercial counterparts: commercials and talk shows, news programs, and self-help books” that “mobilize individuals to examine, know, and act upon themselves in certain ways.”³⁵ In today’s technologically advanced society, there are a host of new options to add to the list of ways to manage oneself: wristbands that track activity and sleep, budgeting apps that track spending and saving, chips to put in running shoes to monitor pace and distance—to keep track of oneself electronically and automatically has never been easier.

3. Consumerism and Commercialization

In the context of healthism, Crawford says, “the pursuit of health...has become one of the more salient practices of contemporary life, commanding enormous social resources, infusing every major institutional field and generating an expansive professionalization and commercialization, along with attendant goods, services and knowledge.”³⁶ The consumption of these goods, services, and knowledge is based on an inextricable link between health, identity, and consumption.³⁷ Focused on the body, consumption in the name of health becomes an element in the project of self-management. As Smith-Maguire says, in consumer culture, “our bodies are reflected back to us through the lens of products and services, and consumption is promoted as the primary arena in which we are to make and remake our bodies.”³⁸ This notion of making and remaking our bodies is important; a self-managing subject is required to continually remake their body in the pursuit of health. According to Smith Maguire, “this involves an assessment of oneself as lacking (a general acknowledgement of the need to work on oneself), the identification of specific problems to be addressed, and the deployment of endorsed practices and strategies for the correction of such problems.”³⁹ The “endless process of marketplace definition” that Dworkin and Wachs use to describe the process by which individuals self-construct and display their bodies as objects, relies on a consumer who sees “his or her body as an alien object that must be constantly managed through consumption to preserve position and identity.”⁴⁰

Markula’s work on women’s Body Image Distortion in fitness magazine discourse examined the way in which magazines, which tend to promote a single and unrealistic bodily ideal for women, use reporting on body dissatisfaction as a commercial strategy.⁴¹ Through the problematization of women’s relationship with their bodies, the magazines are then able to position themselves as capable of remedying the problem, although the suggestions that they make for

women to work through their issues rely on the individual, not on the system that perpetuates the dissatisfaction by publishing the unrealistic ideals (including themselves). Instead of a shift in the images, magazines “counsel women on how to strengthen their unstable feminine minds and ignore the perfect bodies in their pages.”⁴² This kind of individualizing responsibility for controlling one’s consumption is part of what Bordo, in her writing on the construction of anorexia, characterizes as a contradiction in advanced consumer capitalism between the need to desire and consume boundlessly while also needing to cultivate a work ethic, repressing our desires and producing.⁴³ Bordo uses bulimia as an example that “embodies the unstable double bind of consumer capitalism,” involving both “the extreme development of the hunger for unrestrained consumption” exhibited in bingeing and the “requirement that we sober up” exhibited in the vomiting, purging, and exercising associated with the condition.⁴⁴ Markula refers to this double bind of wanting and repressing, desiring and self-managing as the “consume-but-control contradiction.”⁴⁵ To convince us to consume, magazines, for instance, must convince us that we need their advice, the products advertised on their pages, etc. Similarly, in order to be convinced to consume those products related to fitness and health, we must be convinced that we are somehow flawed, lacking, or at risk. Heywood refers to the problem presented by “consumer culture and its needs to produce subjects willing to work on themselves continually, to see themselves as lacking and able to empower themselves only through more self-work” as part of what has led her personally, along with so many others, to exhaustion in trying to prove themselves.⁴⁶ Because it would bring the businesses that rely on our continual self-work to a halt, Heywood says that individuals will never be granted “the right to simply exist.”⁴⁷

4. CrossFit

Given CrossFit's relatively new emergence into the field of consumer fitness, it has not been the focus of much scholarly attention, especially from researchers in the field of cultural studies. Knapp examined 2166 photos in the *CrossFit Journal* using a content analysis approach to consider the relative amounts of coverage given to male and female athletes, the representations' relation to ideal femininity and hegemonic masculinity, and whether or not the introduction of the CrossFit Games has affected these representations, concluding that gender roles are both reinforced and resisted in the photographs in different ways.⁴⁸ Other researchers have focused on CrossFit as a cultural phenomenon at conferences or in their theses: Evans-Grimm and Gearhart used collaborative ethnographic fieldwork to explore the identity of CrossFitters;⁴⁹ Dawson compared CrossFit to a cult and used Susie Scott's notion of "reinventive institutions" to analyze CrossFit as a means by which people attempt to find and cultivate a "perfect self;"⁵⁰ Kuhn used participant observation to ethnographically explore CrossFit, comparing CrossFitters to the "Grahamites" who historically were followers of Sylvester Graham, a health reformer, with both groups aiming to move closer to physical and/or moral perfection;⁵¹ Couture theorized CrossFit as an "implicitly feminist" practice involving what he considered "embodied activism;"⁵² MacMillan considered the link between CrossFit as one of three commercial ventures that he considered linked to "asketism," or a different kind of pleasure than we typically are permitted to have.⁵³ While these scholars have offered insight into the cultural phenomenon of CrossFit, they have done so with alternative methods of inquiry to answer different questions. Knapp's work on the *CrossFit Journal*, with a research interest similar to my own, considered only the photographic representations and used several quantitative comparisons in order to consider what I think needs to be explored in a more qualitative manner. Adding a textual analysis that goes beyond only the

CrossFit coverage produced by the corporation itself to understand the ways in which the commercialization and expansion of the program might offer up different representations and discourse, is an important way to add to this emerging body of knowledge on CrossFit as a cultural phenomenon.

Endnotes for Chapter Three

- ¹ Raewyn Connell, *Gender and Power* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), 183.
- ² Markula, "Firm but Shapely, Fit but Sexy, Strong but Thin."
- ³ Carole Spitzack, *Confessing Excess: Women and the Politics of Reduction* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 3.
- ⁴ See Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture and the Body*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Markula, "Firm But Shapely, Fit but Sexy, Strong but Thin."; Spitzack, *Confessing Excess.*; Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth*, (New York: Vintage, 1980).
- ⁵ Nancy Theberge, "Sport and Women's Empowerment," *Women's Studies International Forum* 10.4 (1987): 389.
- ⁶ See Helen Lenskyj, *Out of Bounds: Women, Sport and Sexuality* (Toronto: The Women's Press, 1986).; Markula, "Firm but Shapely, Fit but Sexy, Strong but Thin."; Spitzack, *Confessing Excess.*; Theberge, "Sport and Women's Empowerment."
- ⁷ Markula, "Firm but Shapely, Fit but Sexy, Strong but Thin," 449.
- ⁸ Ibid.
- ⁹ Susan Cahn, *Coming on Strong: Gender and Sexuality in Twentieth-Century Women's Sport* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 275.
- ¹⁰ Leslie Heywood and Shari Dworkin, *Built to Win: The Female Athlete as Cultural Icon* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 2.
- ¹¹ Ibid., 3.
- ¹² See Cheryl Cole and Amy Hribar, "Celebrity Feminism: Nike Style Post-Fordism, Transcendence, and Consumer Power," *Sociology of Sport Journal* 12.4 (1995): 347-369; Dworkin and Messner, "Just do What?: Sport, Bodies, Gender."
- ¹³ Cole and Hribar, "Celebrity Feminism: Nike Style Post-Fordism, Transcendence, and Consumer Power," 352.
- ¹⁴ Dworkin and Messner, "Just do What?: Sport, Bodies, Gender," 22.
- ¹⁵ Ibid., 21.
- ¹⁶ See Leslie Heywood, *Bodymakers: A Cultural Anatomy of Women's Bodybuilding* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1998).; Shelly McGrath and Ruth Chananie-Hill, "'Big Freaky-Looking Women': Normalizing Gender Transgression Through Bodybuilding," *Sociology of Sport Journal* 26.2 (2010), 235-254.
- ¹⁷ Heywood, *Bodymakers*, 9.
- ¹⁸ Ibid., 12.
- ¹⁹ Rose Weitz, "A History of Women's Bodies," in *The Politics of Women's Bodies: Sexuality, Appearance, and Behaviour*, eds. Rose Weitz and Samantha Kwan (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 4.
- ²⁰ See Leslee Fisher, "Building One's Self Up," in *Building Bodies* ed. Pamela Moore (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1997): 135-161.; Heywood, *Bodymakers.*; McGrath and Chananie-Hill, "'Big Freaky-Looking Women'."; Chris Shilling and Tanya Bunsell, "The Female Bodybuilder as a Gender Outlaw," *Qualitative Research in Sport and Exercise* 1.2 (2009): 141-159.

- ²¹ Shari Dworkin, "Holding Back: Negotiating a Glass Ceiling on Women's Muscular Strength," *Sociological Perspectives* 44.3 (2001): 333-350.
- ²² Dworkin, "Holding Back," 347.
- ²³ Cahn, *Coming on Strong*, 4.
- ²⁴ Ibid., 5.
- ²⁵ Ibid.
- ²⁶ Michael Messner, "Sport and Male Domination: The Female Athlete as Contested Ideological Terrain," *Sociology of Sport Journal* 5.3 (1988): 203.
- ²⁷ Philip White, Kevin Young, and James Gillett, "Bodywork as a Moral Imperative: Some Critical Notes on Health and Fitness," *Loisir et Société* 18.1 (1995): 159.
- ²⁸ Crawford, "Healthism and the Medicalization of Everyday Life," 369.
- ²⁹ White, Young, and Gillett, "Bodywork as a Moral Imperative," 160.
- ³⁰ Smith-Maguire, *Fit for Consumption*, 47.
- ³¹ Nikolas Rose, "Governing "Advanced" Liberal Democracies," in *The Anthropology of the State: A Reader*, eds. Aradhana Sharma and Anil Gupta (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 158.
- ³² Ibid., 158.
- ³³ Robert Crawford, "Health as a Meaningful Social Practice," *Health* 10.4 (2006): 419.
- ³⁴ Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Identity in the Late Modern Age* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 32.
- ³⁵ Smith-Maguire, *Fit for Consumption*, 48.
- ³⁶ Crawford, "Health as a Meaningful Social Practice," 404.
- ³⁷ See Bunton, "Popular Health, Advanced Liberalism and *Good Housekeeping*."; Dworkin and Wachs, *Body Panic*; Smith-Maguire, *Fit For Consumption*.
- ³⁸ Smith-Maguire, *Fit For Consumption*, 20.
- ³⁹ Ibid., 125-126.
- ⁴⁰ Dworkin and Wachs, *Body Panic*, 10.
- ⁴¹ Pirkko Markula, "Beyond the Perfect Body: Women's Body Image Distortion in Fitness Magazine Discourse," *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 25.2 (2001): 158-179.
- ⁴² Markula, "Beyond the Perfect Body," 167.
- ⁴³ Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture and the Body*, 199.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid., 201.
- ⁴⁵ Markula, "Beyond the Perfect Body," 168.
- ⁴⁶ Heywood, *Bodymakers*, 190-191.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid.
- ⁴⁸ Bobbi Knapp, "Gender Representation in the *CrossFit Journal*: A Content Analysis," *Sport in Society*, November 20 2014, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17430437.2014.982544>
- ⁴⁹ Geoffrey Evans-Grimm and Rebecca Gearhart, "The CrossFit Coup D'Etat: A look at a Dynamic New Lifestyle Combating Modern Lethargy," (poster, The John Wesley Powell Student Research Conference, Bloomington, IL, April 10, 2010). Abstract available at http://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2536&context=jwprc&sei-redir=1&referer=https%3A%2F%2Fscholar.google.ca%2Fscholar%3Fq%3Dcrossfit%2Bsociology%26btnG%3D%26hl%3Den%26as_sdt%3D0%252C5#search=%22crossfit%20sociology%22
- ⁵⁰ Marchelle Dawson, "'Fitter, Faster, Stronger, Better': CrossFit as a Reinventive Institution," (presentation, XVIII International Sociological Association World Congress of Sociology, Yokohama, Japan, July 13 – 19, 2014). Abstract available at http://www.researchgate.net/publication/268107996_%27Fitter_Faster_Stronger_Better%27_Crossfit_as_a_Reinventive_Institution
- ⁵¹ Steven Kuhn. "The Culture of CrossFit: A Lifestyle Prescription for Optimal Health and Fitness." Senior thesis, Illinois State University, 2013. Available online at <http://ir.library.illinoisstate.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1004&context=sta>

- ⁵² Jesse Couture, “Consuming CrossFit: Neoliberal Subjectivity, Sport, and Implicit Feminism” (presentation, North American Society for the Sociology of Sport Annual Conference, Portland, OR, November 5-8), 2014). Abstract available at <http://www.nasss.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/NASSS-Portland-Abstracts-2014.pdf>
- ⁵³ Blake MacMillan, “CrossFit, Five Fingers & Red Bull: An Asketic Style of Athletic Skill” presentation, North American Society for the Sociology of Sport Annual Conference, Portland, OR, November 5-8), 2014. Abstract available at <http://www.nasss.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/NASSS-Portland-Abstracts-2014.pdf>

Chapter Four: Thematic Analysis of the CrossFit Narrative

CrossFit produces subjectivities that, to use Smith-Maguire's terms, are "fit to consume," locating the production of subjectivity (meaning, identity, relationships) in the processes of consumption.¹ Given the way in which much of health and fitness media discourse includes a gendered element, it is not surprising that CrossFit offers up subjectivities related not only to health and fitness, but also to femininity. Representations in the texts analyzed function to construct particular forms of fit femininity, normalizing certain elements of feminine existence while rendering invisible others. Regular columns such as "Ladies Rx" as well as pieces introducing themselves as targeted specifically at female readers tended to focus on topics related to body image, motherhood or pregnancy, or to other defined "women's issues" which I will elaborate upon below. These, in combination with a narrative carried throughout them about the need to constantly improve oneself, construct the female body and femininity in a particular way that advocates for continual consumption in the pursuit of health, fitness, and the elusive target of "better." As it relates to women, this notion of "better" can be applied to the ability to fulfill social expectations (e.g. motherhood), women's bodies (e.g. to be healthier, fitter, a better vessel for one's baby), or to just about any pursuit a woman might have, leaving women always in need for more self-work and more consumption in the name of continual improvement.

1. CrossFit: Constructing Women's Subjectivities

1.1 The Women of CrossFit

A narrative emphasizing constant improvement through CrossFit programs suggests that women in particular can be made better through participation, specifically in regards to their relationships with others. According to this narrative, CrossFit has the potential to improve women's abilities to meet gendered social expectations (e.g. to be better mothers, sisters, daughters, friends, girlfriends, 'vessels' for babies). The ways in which women can use CrossFit to optimize themselves in this regard hint at notions of what an ideal woman can and ought to do. From an article in *Sweat Rx* promoting CrossFit as a means to help women take "life as it comes, triumphing over day-to-day challenges from piles of dirty laundry, to cranky children, to difficult bosses" to those that offer up CrossFit as a means to be a better mother, we are offered a glimpse into the contemporary construction of femininity.²

Characteristic of this motif is the celebration of "Spartan Sisters," women who leave the CrossFit box "better, fitter, stronger": "She is taking care of the most important person in her life—herself. She is better able to care for her family, friends, work and community."³ The woman who takes better care of herself through CrossFit does so to be more capable of her caretaking duties: "...CrossFit makes me calmer, happier, and more patient with my children. I feel better about myself and can be better to those around me."⁴ Again and again, women are quoted in reference to how CrossFit has been the source of personal improvement: "CrossFit has made me a better mom and wife...I'm a better person because of CrossFit."⁵ These improvements reproduce women's social responsibilities and draw on the acceptance of these gender-based roles to offer up CrossFit as a means by which women can better fulfill them.

There is often an element of sacrifice or selfishness involved in being a mother and a CrossFitter, either in the name of CrossFit or in the name of one's motherly duties. One CrossFit Games athlete and mother is quoted as saying, "My kids definitely come first. If one of them gets sick, then obviously CrossFit gets thrown out the window. I simply can't be as selfish as other athletes when I'm a mom."⁶ Being a mom, for this competitor, means that "she can't devote her life to her training," and the way in which to do so is framed as selfish indicates the way gendered expectations around a woman's motherly duties are part of the construction of femininity in the texts.⁷ For female CrossFitters of a less competitive level, taking the time to participate in CrossFit is framed as part of their duty to be the best mothers they can be. Here, the emphasis remains on fulfilling their gendered social expectations with their sacrifice as a mother or selfishness as a woman measured against the reassurance that the time away from familial, motherly or domestic duties is worth it for all the benefits that apply to those very duties.

In descriptions of CrossFitting mothers' days, a common feature of articles about women, schedules filled with structure are offered up as testament to their dedication and sacrifice. Like the 5am wake up call that allows one woman to pack her kids' lunches before her first training session of the day, the busy-ness of the women's days who manage to make CrossFit part of their lives implies that to do so involves sacrifice:

I usually wake up around 6-7 a.m., have breakfast, and go for my first training session. If I don't coach the noon class at Abattoir CrossFit Plateau, I'll have lunch and catch up on some work/sleep/reading/errands, then have a second training session followed by more coaching in the evenings. I'm lucky enough to coach as a living, which allows me to have a very flexible schedule around my training schedule. I keep in touch with family the same way everyone does and I get to spend as much time as I can with them. They are my greatest support group and I love them very much.⁸

My kids go to schools in different towns, so I get up and get them up at 6 every day [and we're off to] Starbuck's imMEDiately (Americano for me, breakfast for them!). Then I drive the kids for 1½ hours to their schools, I train at the gym for a couple of hours, prep/cook dinner for later, drive another hour to pick up the kids,

coach a kids' class at CFNE, [have] dinner at 6:15 sharp every night, [play] street hockey or basketball with the kids before showers-reading-snuggle time—lights out at 9; day done.⁹

The sacrifice here is that of the women's time and freedom, not of their roles as mothers or wives. One participant talks about being "conflicted to be away from Taj [her baby]" but realized, "I needed that time for myself to be a better mother."¹⁰ When it comes to leaving one's familial duties to do CrossFit, according to this narrative, though "you may feel guilty at first, you'll be a better parent for it."¹¹ Taking care of one's body through CrossFit becomes not only justifiable but a duty that women fulfill in order to be the best mothers that they can:

I own this body, and every day I do my very best to keep it as healthy and as strong as it can be. So go ahead and make fun of me if I won't eat that cookie or if I insist on fitting in a workout before we go out Friday night. Because of these life choices, I will continue to be the mom who does flips off the diving board. I will high-five my kids as we run past each other while doing a WOD. I will race them up the stairs to their rooms to read with them before bed. And I will certainly be the mom who remembers who I am and what I stand for ... or I will die trying.¹²

Beyond performance or simply health, the self-monitoring, dieting, and bodywork engendered by CrossFit, in this theme, is work that one can do to make oneself a better mother. While a woman who takes time to go to the gym in pursuit of improving her body might be criticized for being selfish or perhaps vain, a woman who builds up her strength in a CrossFit box is different—she is doing it to be a stronger mother who can be around longer for her family:

All five women agreed: taking the time to focus on your own health will increase the total time you have with your family. "If you make fitness a priority, you'll be around longer for your kids," says Christine Brousseau. "You'll have more energy, feel better about yourself, and be a better parent. It's the best antidepressant on the market!"¹³

Pursuing fitness and health as a means of bettering oneself for their family gains a sort of approval. CrossFit thus becomes a means for women to better meet gendered social expectations, namely motherhood and caregiving. Adding to the list of goals to aim for—health, performance,

appearance—“better mother” is yet another identity offered up via participation in CrossFit, appealing to the masses:

The women of CrossFit, unlike Annie [Oakley] and Danica [Patrick], aren't looking to compete head to head with men. Like all athletes, they find their fiercest competitor within. But they still bear the children, and—to a greater extent than men—cook the meals, oversee the household, and run the gauntlet of other family and livelihood challenges that could easily sap the energy of the fainthearted. The strongest among them continue to prove that they know how to keep body and soul together, inside and outside the box.¹⁴

Simply accepting these womanly requirements—children, meals, household, the “gauntlet” of family and livelihood challenges—and adding CrossFit and its associated self-management onto the list, optimizing oneself as the type of woman who takes on these tasks becomes yet another item in that “gauntlet.”

Given the emphasis on relating to others, it is not surprising that women are also expected to serve as role models and to set good examples for their own children and others'. One high-level CrossFit mother talks about how taking time for oneself as a mother is really about giving your children a gift:

Making time for yourself not only makes you a more patient and happy mom, but it teaches your children that you have a life that matters, too. I am proud that my son has a well-developed notion that it's not only normal for a woman to be strong and fit, it's also pretty cool.¹⁵

Along the same lines, CrossFit is represented as an opportunity for women to lead by example. A strong woman who wants to set a good example for her kids ought to take the time to CrossFit as a way of “showing our mini CrossFitters that health and fitness—and above all confidence and self-love—are critical for longevity and quality of life.”¹⁶ One article features a CrossFit participant who, “as a mom to a teenage daughter and stepson...hopes to encourage strength not only in women but also in our next generation,” offering that “by eating clean and training regularly, moms are setting an example for their kids.”¹⁷ A teacher in another article talks about

being a role model for her students, wanting them to see her as “a positive female figure, a working mom who’s fit and who takes time to take care of herself.”¹⁸ Reiterating that younger generations particularly need *female* role models, this idea of setting a good example as a woman rearticulates that women need self-care, but mostly because it makes them better able to take care of those around them.

References to boyfriends or husbands, families or future plans for them, and the way in which elite female CrossFit competitors find “balance,” which I will argue defines a requirement unique to women, serves to sustain existing notions of femininity. Profiles of elite female competitors, though noting and celebrating the way in which the women of CrossFit reject gendered stereotypes when it comes to their physical capabilities, tend to construct femininity in a way that reiterates traditional gender roles. These women, as groundbreaking as the articles may represent them to be, are still both literally within a (CrossFit) box and a box when it comes to social expectations. Often, descriptions of women’s love lives and their domestic responsibilities are highlighted with considerable emphasis placed on their abilities to maintain (heterosexual) relationships. Consider the profile of Lindsey Valenzuela, a Games competitor:

She spends an average of three hours a day commuting.

“I don’t mind the time on the way to go to the gym because I can think. It’s my alone time,” she says. But the drive home is harder for this self-professed homebody. When she’s tired and wants to be on the couch with her dogs and her husband, it’s a long road. “I know I’ll have plenty of time for that. I’m trying to enjoy the moment.”

A lot has changed in the eight years since Valenzuela and [her husband] Aresenio met as students at Cal-Lutheran University, a private liberal arts school in Thousand Oaks, Calif. ... Through all of the changes in lifestyle that accompany career switches and the commitment necessary to elite athleticism, Valenzuela says the marriage has worked because, “We’re each other’s best friend. Our relationship has become that much stronger because we’ve seen each other at our weakest and best. Without his support I wouldn’t be able to do it.”¹⁹

Further, Valenzuela adds, “Starting a family is one of my biggest aspirations. I want to stay involved in CrossFit and show my kids what I can do.”²⁰ Another top athlete, Camille Leblanc-Bazinet, who “has competitive ambitions outside of CrossFit—namely the 2016 Olympics [for weightlifting],” is described as having another “overriding goal...to start a family, a desire that stems from her small-town upbringing.”²¹ To be successful at CrossFit is one thing, but the women who are celebrated by the articles tend to balance their athletic prowess with the fulfillment of what is expected of them as women, thanks to their gender. The emphasis on the private lives of the women of CrossFit serves to trivialize their athleticism while continuing with a tendency in representations of female athletes to privilege images of heterosexual women who conform to dictates of hegemonic femininity.

1.2 Balance

Beyond taking care of others, which is associated with being a mother and a woman, women are also uniquely required to maintain the concept of “balance.” While the idea of needing to balance one’s home life with their work life and their athletic pursuits is something that all CrossFitters would logically need to address, articles about the topic squarely locate it as a female concern. Regardless of their level of CrossFit ability, this is presented as an issue that female CrossFitters across the board can relate to. CrossFit is represented not only as something which must be incorporated into balance but also as a means for helping women achieve balance:

As a woman, mother, wife, and certified CrossFit coach at Reebok CrossFit Firepower in Ontario, I fight this battle alongside my sisters. After having three children and weighing 215 pounds, I felt like a has-been; I had tried every workout under the sun in an attempt to regain fitness and balance my life, all to no avail. Then I found CrossFit. The sport has enabled me to find and maintain that elusive yet critical, balance.²²

Another example suggests that balance is most important to the non-elite women of CrossFit, suggesting that the women who balance CrossFit with “normal” lives are those who represent “the real women of CrossFit”:

So, who are the real women of CrossFit? They have careers and families and try to stay healthy and fit in any way they can. They show up at 5 a.m. because that’s when they can fit it in. They don’t spend hours a day in the box, but they work just as hard. They are more concerned with being healthy and physically able to play with their kids than setting a PR every WOD. These are the women who show their friends and families what healthy living looks like, and what it means to take care of one’s body and push it to new levels. ... They love CrossFit because it is fast and gets the job done in time to accommodate all other responsibilities.²³

The pursuit of such balance in itself can be a source of inner turmoil, because “today’s mothers, athletes and entrepreneurs...wage a war within [them]selves, fighting to create a sense of balance among the many roles we play... feel[ing] forced to choose between nurturing [their] family, [their] career, and [them]selves.”²⁴ However it is characterized, the achievement of such balance—or perhaps more accurately, struggling to find and maintain balance—is associated with being a woman. Banding women together, balance becomes something towards women can collectively struggle. This narrative normalizes the assumption that women do not have enough time and cannot possibly fulfill all of their required duties or roles as a woman, especially without the efficient methods provided by CrossFit.

In the face of this normalized struggle, the narrative offers examples of women who manage to make it work, with a significant portion of these examples being elite CrossFitters. Profiles of women like Val Voboril, who is described as having “a lot going on in her life—other than being one of the top CrossFit athletes in the world” as “a mother, a wife, and a full-time fourth-grade teacher [who] doesn’t have hours to spend at the gym” universalize the need for balancing one’s workouts with one’s life: “Most CrossFit athletes don’t aspire to compete in the Games, but many

people struggle to balance work, family life and fitness.”²⁵ Charity Vale, likewise, a second-place CrossFit Games finisher is profiled as illustrative of the way in which women who do not use their busy lives as excuses, but find ways to train and compete at elite levels, are held in high esteem: “Charity Vale...said the demands of training, having four children and owning a gym with her husband, Jeff, are difficult. Her children range in age from four months to 10-and-a-half-years-old, but being a mother didn’t stop her from taking second place in the 2009 CrossFit Games.”²⁶ Often, high-level female competitors share their day-to-day routines, reminding women that anyone and everyone can—and should—make time for CrossFit:

... [Annie] Sakamoto is ready to go. She trains five days per week, reserving the weekends for family time. On Saturdays, she loves to go to the beach. Life in between is pretty routine, and she likes it that way. Sakamoto is up by 5 a.m. most mornings to get the day started. She prepares for the kids’ lunches and breakfast-to-go for herself (usually chicken sausages) before running out the door to hit the gym for 6:30 a.m., and coaches clients and classes and trains herself all morning. By noon, it’s lunchtime, then errand and computer/work time, all before she meets the kids and her nanny at home around 2:30 p.m. She then puts her “mom” hat back on and runs the kids to gymnastics, dance class, T-ball or clay class. The crew returns home around 5 p.m. for diner. The family eats a balanced meal together of protein (chicken, red meat, pork and fish) paired with potatoes, sweet potatoes, or rice and an assortment of veggies, followed by homework, family time (games, hot tub, etc.), then bed. After the kids are down by 8 p.m., Sakamoto is not far behind them.²⁷

Descriptions like this and like those highlighted in the previous section, offering images of how women successfully balance CrossFit with responsibilities of their familial and professional spaces, paint a picture of busy, highly-regimented lives. That such balance does not come easy—and that it requires constant work—is part of what makes these women’s examples so illustrative. These elite CrossFitters have to work hard to “juggle it all,” but a “priority check every couple of weeks” makes it possible to meet all of their chores while still salvaging “some quality time together” with their families.²⁸ Paradoxically, balance becomes another state towards which

women must continually work, with no defined end-point beyond the conclusion of each day, invariably offered in the texts as a meaningful respite.

A similar point emerges from a profile of Angie Pye, another well-known Games competitor. Here, the poster woman anchors the message assuring the common CrossFit mother that “you don’t have to stop having goals and dreams of your own just because you’re a mom.”²⁹ The celebrated woman in this narrative is the one who is capable of both fulfilling what is socially expected of her according to her gender as well as a CrossFit regime. That the highest level female athletes can manage to find time for CrossFit and their families and careers serves to suggest that there are “no excuses” when it comes to finding the time, money, or energy to take up CrossFit as a woman.

The success of elite female CrossFit athletes in managing extremely tight daily schedules grounds a “no excuses” narrative targeted at less elite women who construct their lives around a less demanding, and therefore time-consuming, training routine. For them, as the near reproachful tone of the following article implies, there are no excuses when it comes to adhering to a CrossFit-centred discipline:

Too busy. Too old. Too late. The list of reasons to put off fitness is long. And as the demands of career and family increase, the list only grows longer. The five women featured here know this well. They are: a research biologist and single mother of 3 teenagers, a mobility fitness instructor and mother of 3 young children, a paramedic and mother of 4 boys, a gym owner and “mother” to over 150 members.

These diverse women have more in common than just busy lives; they’re all over 40 and they all make fitness a priority through CrossFit. The reasons not to, they insist, are just excuses.³⁰

Reasons are represented as “excuses” that require a remedy, and that is to “make the daily choice to put their health first.”³¹ According to this narrative, there is not a reason in the world that a woman should not be doing CrossFit, or having the body associated with it: “There is *no excuse*

or reason to put off the journey toward a higher quality of life and an amazing body; CrossFit is for everyone, regardless of age, heredity, or fitness level. I truly believe any woman can achieve their goals...!”³² These references suggest that women can achieve a balance of these things—a career, a family, an “amazing body”—if they simply so choose. To draw on Crawford’s notion of healthism discussed in the introduction, this is demonstrative of the way in which health in contemporary society is conceptualized as the result of individual choices.³³ The notion of “no excuses” in these CrossFit articles reiterates that health is a matter of personal choice and responsibility and contributes to the association of healthiness with morality with those not choosing CrossFit represented as inferior. This individualization obscures constraints women might face which are beyond their control and is carried throughout the CrossFit narrative. Further, the construction of the individual as always in need of improvement relies upon the notion of this improvement being a matter of choice; one must view one’s health as an ongoing project for which one is ultimately responsible in order to continually consume in the name of being a better mother, more balanced, or improved in some way.

1.3 “Better” for Baby

The narrative on CrossFit as a means to improve oneself extends to women’s experiences with their pregnant bodies, presenting an opportunity for women to do a “better” job with the process of becoming a mother (i.e. of serving as a “vessel” for their babies, of preparing themselves for labour). The pregnant body signifies a woman who is about to become a mother, an important element in the construction of ideal femininity, though it also represents an affront to a woman’s “normal” bodily state. Despite constructing close ties between femininity and motherhood, the actual process of becoming a mother—being pregnant, delivering the baby—is represented as something requiring intervention. Women, impelled to self-manage and monitor their bodies, can

use CrossFit as a means to better take care of themselves and their unborn babies. Though it could be argued that bringing a baby into the world represents one of a woman's most "natural" abilities, instead, pregnancy is represented in the CrossFit narrative as an abnormality. This constructs the pregnant body as in need of intervention and extra attention aimed at managing the condition of pregnancy. While historically, the construction of the pregnant body as "at risk" tended to present exercise as dangerous, today, the abnormality of the pregnant body is something which exercise can help address.

Today, women are not only encouraged to maintain exercise programs but may even be required to do so. While the intensity at which a woman can safely exert herself during pregnancy might remain controversial, exercise has become a necessity. Instead of moving away from the construction of the pregnant body as requiring special attention or intervention, the intervention has simply changed—from rest to activity, with activity represented as a necessary component of a pregnancy for a woman who wants to be the best mother than she can be. Positioned as "pioneer CrossFit moms," the women who "refuse to give up [their] training regimes" are credited with "creating an incredible opportunity to collect evidence about high-intensity functional training," helping to determine how to ideally exercise as a pregnant woman.³⁴ According to an article entitled "CrossFit Training During Pregnancy and Motherhood: A New Scientific Frontier," these women demonstrate that resistance training is "necessary."³⁵ According to the texts, their dedication to working out is helping not just themselves and their babies, but also the field of science:

So, as it is with the development of our understanding of the area of high-intensity and resistance/power training during pregnancy, what scientists like myself will depend upon are the results from women who simply refuse to give up their "resistance training" programs during their pregnancy and show, one by one, that resistance training and total-fitness training during pregnancy are safe, necessary and offer unique benefits to the growing baby. Furthermore, it may be beneficial

for women to train for pregnancy, labor and motherhood. In fact, there may be a strong argument for developing this kind of “fitness” during the perinatal time period.”³⁶

Beyond being required to exercise, women are required to monitor that exercise and ensure for themselves that they are doing what is best for themselves and their unborn babies. Questions about what is appropriate remain unanswered. This controversy over what is appropriate, paired with the requirement to exercise nonetheless, creates what Jette refers to as “a tension that pregnant women must negotiate.”³⁷

Tensions for a pregnant woman are many, with questions surrounding what type and intensity of exercise is best, whose advice is trustworthy, and how to handle one’s pregnancy abilities (or in-abilities). The narrative on pregnancy and CrossFit involves a discussion of women’s anxieties over not being able to perform at their usual level, positioning the pregnant body as a problem, a condition afflicting the women and keeping them from being their best:

Wagner said the difference in lung capacity [during pregnancy] affected her the most.

“If anyone is curious how it feels, here you go: work out with a bag over your head for nine months with just a pinhole of air to breath through. That’s what it feels like,” she said. “Then, for the last four months, strap on a weight vest all day and dissect your abs straight down the middle about three inches wide, and have at it.”³⁸

A former CrossFit Games competitor described feeling “defeated” because she had to slow down and use lighter weights while she was carrying her baby.³⁹ The threat posed by the pregnant body in regards to women’s capabilities is compounded with the challenge of possessing a body that does not fit with prescriptions regarding the appearance of ideal female body. As Dworkin and Wachs, in their analysis of fitness media aimed at pregnant exercisers offer, pregnancy can bring tension given that “exactly at the moment when a woman’s body is accomplishing a highly valued route to femininity, she is least likely to be viewed as aesthetically ideal.”⁴⁰

In the CrossFit texts, pregnancy represents not so much a natural part of being a woman but a temporary condition that poses a challenge to concepts of ideal femininity. Unable to work at the height of her abilities or to make continual improvement, the CrossFitting pregnant woman must instead take temporary pride in her ability to take control of her body to yield a healthy baby and to have a perfect pregnancy. Emphasizing the woman's role as a "vessel" for an unborn child takes some of the pressure to appear aesthetically ideal or to perform at a high level, which is important in the performance-focused environment of CrossFit, off of the woman, refocusing requirements on her ability to bear (healthy) children: "Don't get hung up on losing all the gains you've made. Instead, stay committed to building up the strongest, healthiest vessel for your growing baby."⁴¹ Reflecting scholarly work noting the way that that "contemporary fitness discourse advocates training for the physical demands of labor" and that "the idea that appropriate exercise will help the mother-to-be overcome the difficulties (both physical and emotional) of pregnancy and make labor easier" is commonplace today, CrossFit's narrative positions it as a means by which women can best prepare themselves for the births of their babies.⁴² Articles cite studies which suggest "exercise during pregnancy delivers significant benefits...including a reduction in weight gain, less pregnancy-associated discomfort, prevention of pregnancy-induced complications, shorter labour, and even a quicker recovery."⁴³ The narrative includes testimonials from women who explain how CrossFit helped them through their pregnancies, like one who "credits CrossFit and maintaining a healthy lifestyle for her "perfect" pregnancy."⁴⁴

This perfection includes aspects like staying healthy but also emphasizes concerns over unwanted weight gain. CrossFit is identified not only as a means to control such weight gain but is also associated with a faster return to one's pre-pregnancy body: "Doing CrossFit before, during, and after pregnancy has given me the body that has everyone wanting to know how I did it."⁴⁵ The

need to accelerate the recovery of the pregnant body to the pre-pregnancy condition further identifies the pregnant body as a problem. Women are encouraged to stamp out any evidence of their pregnant selves in favour of returning to the bodies they once had, the ideal body that CrossFit women aspire to. As Dworkin and Wachs noted in reference to this emphasis on getting back to one's former body, "regaining control of the unruly pregnant form is normalized in pursuit of an openly stated central goal: to return to one's former size."⁴⁶

The benefits of continued CrossFitting for the pregnant woman are important, but emphasis is also placed on the benefits to the baby or to his or her arrival. As one quote suggests, taking care of oneself during pregnancy is a gift that a woman can give to her future child:

I really believe that pregnancy is the MOST important time in a woman's life to be fit and healthy; it's your ONLY chance to take advantage of the fact that the way you live your life directly affects the health and development of your baby. ... While nine months can feel like 59 months sometimes, it's really a very short period of time that you have to completely dial it all in. And the prize, a healthy baby that is born that far ahead of the curve, is worth gold.⁴⁷

Another CrossFit advocate offered, "The best thing I could have done for myself—and more importantly for my son—was to continue to CrossFit during my pregnancy."⁴⁸ Women speak specifically about the way that focusing on the benefits to their unborn children helps them to negotiate tension caused by not being able to perform at their pre-pregnancy levels: "Despite eliminating or modifying many of the regular CrossFit exercises, I knew that working out was helping me maintain my strength, and that it was good for my baby, too."⁴⁹ Continuing to work out provides benefits at the time of delivery for both the woman and the baby, which makes these pregnant CrossFitters a source of inspiration:

...maybe pregnant women who want to keep exercising are actually inspiring and capable. Perhaps they're strong as hell, and perhaps keeping strength up for the pregnancy will mean better preparation for the rigors of labor and the mental and physical battles of sleep-deprived new motherhood. Perhaps it's likely that doing

CrossFit through pregnancy...is actually very good for both pregnant women and their babies.⁵⁰

Thinking of these benefits is what some women say kept them pushing through their pregnancies, events to be overcome, like the woman who said, “On days when the workout kicked my ass (and there were plenty of those), I told myself over and over that I would need the endurance during labor and post-partum recovery, and that the workouts would help my baby handle the rigors of labor better.”⁵¹ CrossFitters are represented as particularly well-suited to the task of bringing a baby into the world:

...as CrossFitters, our pelvic floor muscles are well developed from all the squatting and related movements we do, which is ideal in preparing for labor! Mentally, CrossFit makes you tough, knowing that you can push those boundaries and do more than you think you can. That attitude while pregnant and then while in labor made the whole experience easier for me.⁵²

Labour preparation is of key concern and CrossFit is offered up as instrumental in readying women for their baby’s arrival, with exercise providing “prep for labour, thanks to a higher stamina and conditioned muscles.”⁵³

The improved stamina and better-conditioned muscles provided by CrossFit, and their usefulness when it comes to labour, is part of a narrative that connects notions of pregnancy and labour to language of CrossFit workouts or competitions. Titles and headings like “Nine Month WOD,” “Nine Month Workout,” and “Giving Birth for Time” compare pregnancy and labour to CrossFit workouts or competitions.⁵⁴ This conceptualization is indicated by a question posing the problem of pregnancy in the language of CrossFit training, also identifying it as a responsibility: “What type of training program would best prepare a woman for the demands of pregnancy, labor and postpartum responsibilities?”⁵⁵ With pregnancy and the delivery of the baby framed as athletic endeavours, CrossFit becomes not just a pre-natal exercise option but also a means—and in these

texts, the best means—by which a woman can “train” in anticipation of the demands of becoming a mother:

If pregnancy, labor and postpartum were athletic events (I think this is where we lobby for a new definition of “triathlete”) and I were a coach for these events, I would want to know what training program would help my athletes perform at their best yet would not cause injury or harm. When elite athletes prepare for their respective competitions, their training programs are designed around the physical demands of the event: their training focuses sharply on the components of fitness they need to develop in order to win or succeed.⁵⁶

The importance of this preparation is underscored in numerous articles. The pregnant reader is directly advised to equate pregnancy with training: “You are now training for the most important event of your life—the delivery of your baby.”⁵⁷ Another reader noted that the CrossFit approach “really” helped her in labour, making it “super fast...just like a workout.”⁵⁸ Such efficiency in pregnancy is attributable to a “workout only CrossFit could design,” constructing the pregnancy experience as a somewhat bleak experience for a performance-driven athlete: “Start with an empty vest. For every week that goes by, add one-quarter to one pound to the vest. Continue adding weight for eight months. Do not stop the workout but modify if necessary. This is not for time. Going faster will get you nowhere. 3-2-1-Go!”⁵⁹ Dworkin and Wachs referred to the use of these athletic analogies as strategic deployments that “normalize fitness as necessary for the ‘big event’ of delivery.”⁶⁰ Women have been delivering babies for as long as we’ve been around, but it is this need to “optimize” the process with the help of CrossFit which adds yet another element of self-management to our lives as women.

In general, women who continue CrossFit training through their pregnancy are represented as a special and admirable group of women, reiterating the importance of staying fit through the pregnancy condition. One article in *The CrossFit Journal* emphasizes that “women who exercise and continue to do CrossFit maintain their superiority,” indicating not only the importance

attributed to managing one's pregnant body but also to the "simply astonishing" state of physical superiority accomplished through a CrossFit exercise regime.⁶¹ With this superiority comes a sort of authority lent to women who have CrossFitted through their pregnancies, by virtue of their experience. The narrative invokes the "firsthand experience" of Heather Bergeron, a CrossFit coach who maintained her CrossFit training throughout her pregnancy, elevating her to status worthy of disseminating advice based on experience and persistence: "she...even complet[ed] a workout in the early stages of labour."⁶² The authority of such an experience-based narrative can even call into question the authority of the medical establishment in offering guidance to pregnant women. Some of the women featured in the articles describe going against their doctors' advice:

Jolie Gentry, from CrossFit Oakland in Oakland, Calif., said her doctor told her not to lift more than 25 lb.

"I literally started to laugh," said the woman who won the first CrossFit Games back in 2007. "I had a second visit with a nurse practitioner who said that was dated info and the new standard is not more than 50 lb."

Gentry said she was not discouraged by that advice. She continued with her training as usual. At 21 weeks, she back-squatted up to 200 lb. At almost eight months, Gentry said she performed Grace⁶³ as prescribed, and she snatched almost every week until the eighth month. "The best advice I received was from a couple of ladies from CrossFit Central: just listen to your body because nobody knows it better and you will know when to stop if something does not feel right," Gentry said.⁶⁴

Women can receive reliable advice from sources holding CrossFit authority, making it even possible to contradict direct medical advice about the impossibility of completing a pregnancy to full term. One source successfully accomplished this, thanks to adherence to a CrossFit training regime, as a result of which she "felt energetic and strong all nine months."⁶⁵ A sort of CrossFit-authorized-knowledge allows women to "know" their bodies in a superior way: "I know what my body can handle better than [my doctor] does, and I don't see any reason for him to offer me advice that I'm not going to follow."⁶⁶ The narrative assigns women a deeply personal responsibility for their health.

While in the past the medical field, it has been argued, pathologized the pregnant body as “at risk,” with these constructions lending the medical profession increased control over women’s bodies, the control exerted over women’s bodies is clearly complex.⁶⁷ The way in which the women in these CrossFit texts independently decide to take control of their own pregnant bodies through their fitness practices is reflective of the pervasiveness of healthism. That these women desire so strongly to continue placing their health as a priority, participating in practices they associate with health (including CrossFitting) even against a doctor’s recommendations, illustrates the extent of the healthist ideology and the way in which the narrative and associated control in CrossFit offers a departure from the traditional forms of control via medicalization. However, the shifting of the narrative to favouring non-medical sources of authority still constructs pregnant body as something to be managed. While the narrative may indeed shift away from the medicalization of the pregnant body, the problematization and the associated need for (self-)management is reproduced by the CrossFit narrative and is still part of a complex set of power relations implicated in the control of women’s bodies. Here, the pregnant body remains a condition that must be dealt with, though the remedy for the “problem” of the pregnant form is increasingly consumption-based. As Jette noted, this positions the pregnant body woman as “a consumer who may enter the marketplace to seek out and pay for expert advice in order to self-manage risk or achieve a toned or fit body.”⁶⁸ Advice in articles not unlike those included in this analysis are what Jette considers “part of the apparatus in the disciplining of the pregnant body...promoting feminine bodily norms (the disciplining of the feminine body), both requiring self-surveillance and regulation in order that a woman may be “fit” for motherhood.”⁶⁹ The representation of pregnancy as a condition to be managed via consumption is necessarily implicated in the construction of femininity. Targeting female readership with discussions regarding how to handle their

pregnancies contributes to a continued marking of the female body as ‘other,’ a body requiring management and, in the case of these CrossFit texts, the continued consumption of CrossFit and its associated offerings in the name of an “optimal” pregnancy.

2. Women’s Bodies

2.1 Body Image and Eating Disorders

In addition to articles targeted specifically at female readership offering advice regarding life balance and pregnancy, a group of articles about body image targeted at women contributes to a narrative that normalizes women’s collective struggles with body image. To be a woman is to struggle with one’s relationship with their body, according to the narrative: “If you are female, chances are you’ve been on a diet, or shall we say ‘diets.’”⁷⁰ These articles construct body image issues as a central concern for women, evidenced with statistics that demonstrate their widespread significance. Statistics on “the media’s effect on body image” are offered, citing “a survey of girls 9 and 10 years old” which found that “40% have tried to lose weight” and another “study report[ing] that at age thirteen, 53% of American girls are “unhappy with their bodies”,” a statistic that “grows to 78% by the time the girls reach seventeen.”⁷¹ Eating disorder statistics are also included, warning readers that “an estimated one thousand women die each year of anorexia nervosa” and that “as many as one in ten college women suffer from a clinical or nearly clinical eating disorder.”⁷² Of the eight million or more people cited as having an eating disorder in the US, “90% are women,” it is pointed out.⁷³ These statistics strengthen the narrative as seemingly neutral depictions of the state of things for women, lending them a particular truth value. Further, they position body image and eating disorders as female woes and normalize bodily discontent as an almost expected element of female existence. One article’s assertion that “CrossFit...is highly

beneficial to both men and women, but also helps improve women with their self-image” is testament to the way in which self-image and body image issues are relegated to women.⁷⁴

Not only the feminine nature of this body image problem, but also its link to widespread eating disorders is the focus of much of the discourse on body image and CrossFit:

As women we have a lot of pressure to conform to what society declares as beauty. ... Growing up as a chubby kid I never felt like I was skinny enough to be loved. I have struggled with body image since I can remember. Even when I lost 30lbs in High School, I still felt like the chubby girl. In middle school, high school, and in the early part of college I experimented with bulimia, anorexia and a lot of unhealthy extreme diets and diet pills. I was obsessed with getting skinny.⁷⁵

Story after story of women who have struggled with their body image or an associated manifestation in an eating disorder are offered up. This contributes to the normalization of a troubled relationship between women and their bodies as well as the association of these body image issues with eating disorders. Consider the story of Danielle Siddell, who, “like so many college-aged women, ...fell prey to an unhealthy assessment—and subsequent treatment—of her body.”⁷⁶ Eating disorders are often described as the result of the pursuit of the ideal of the thin body image, as was the case for a former athlete who, following the end of her collegiate swimming career, wound up with an eating disorder as a result of her desire to achieve the aesthetics of a ‘super model’: “Rather than desiring a strong physique to perform as an athlete, I associated beauty with the waify super model looks that is coveted by millions of Americans. My desire to achieve this svelte body type led to a full-blown eating disorder over a 3-year time period.”⁷⁷ Similar stories highlight the dangerous nature of wanting to fit a thin ideal:

In high school, when I really got into working out, my goal was always to get ‘skinny’. I purposely avoided lifting anything heavier than five pounds so I wouldn’t bulk up; I did at least an hour of cardio a day, cut calories, and kept a food diary. Obsessing over the numbers on the scale was inextricably linked to the glorious and unattainable ‘skinny’.⁷⁸

Even Camille Leblanc-Bazinet, the winner of the 2014 CrossFit Games, is quoted as saying, “I struggled a lot with my weight when I was younger. I was anorexic at a point because I wanted to look like what was supposed to be a “pretty girl” (a ridiculous standard of our society).”⁷⁹ Regardless of athletic ability, these women’s troubled views of their bodies link women together, serving to universalize body image problems to an issue concerning all women by virtue of their gender.

That eating disorders come from women’s “unrealistic desire to achieve an unachievable body type” identifies them as a disorder for which women themselves are ultimately responsible.⁸⁰ This is reiterated in references to the way in which “even the fit and athletic suffer from *self-destructive* ideas about body image.”⁸¹ In their all-pervasiveness, “eating disorders come in a rainbow of flavors, each with its own distinct recipe,” with that recipe designated as: “a big heap of *self-hatred*, add a dash of perfectionism, and sprinkle with insecurity, and you’ve got the basic ingredients for *self-destruction*.”⁸² The representation of eating disorders as something that people, or more specifically that *women*, inflict on themselves locates the issue and the responsibility for addressing it with each and every woman. Their representation as the extension of body image dissatisfaction left unaddressed contributes to the construction of bodily discontent as a condition requiring intervention. Thus at risk for an eating disorder, a woman who struggles with acceptance of her body has the impetus to view her troubled body image as a problem in and of itself requiring intervention.

2.2 CrossFit: Saving Women from Themselves

Unsurprisingly, perhaps, the presentation of this widespread body image issue amongst women, and its associated eating disorder risk, is paired with the assertion that CrossFit can provide an intervention. Examples of women who have overcome eating disorders thanks to

CrossFit speak to its ability to spark a shift in women's thoughts about themselves, allowing them to take responsibility for their behaviour. A laxative abuser in one article says, "At 25 years, I found the cure: CrossFit. It took a long time, but I think it was worth the wait."⁸³ Similarly, a CrossFit gym owner tells her story of how she "struggled with anorexia and compulsive running for 10 years before she discovered CrossFit."⁸⁴ Another woman describes how her "journey from being bulimic and weak to strong, healthy, and confident was forever altered when I discovered CrossFit and came to know its immense value" with CrossFit's "inherent standards, structure, and order" as perfectly suited to ground her in her recovery.⁸⁵ For one woman who struggled with an eating disorder following growing up in dancing, where a thin body was valued, CrossFit offered a space where "for the first time in her life, people ogled her muscular legs with admiration, not disgust."⁸⁶ In this way, the introduction to CrossFit is marked as a sort of turning-point or epiphany for women who struggle with their bodies. Beyond the world of CrossFit, it is implied, women will be left prey to their own body image issues and constantly at risk of developing an eating disorder.

According to the narrative, exposure to CrossFit enlightens women, who can then take control of their body image and cure any associated ills. As one woman who cited CrossFit as part of her eating disorder recovery suggested, it is one's thinking that needs to change: "My mentality totally shifted. ...I could eat food again and realize it's good for me because it's going to make me stronger. And to get this rush of killing a workout makes you feel so positive, like you can conquer anything."⁸⁷ These testimonials rely on the representation of eating disorders as the manifestation of body image issues and as things over which women have conscious control, like one woman who cited CrossFit as essential in her eating disorder recovery exemplified: "I've learned that if I want to continue being the best I can be I need to be fueling my body appropriately. I cannot fall

back into poor behaviors that lead to an eating disorder.”⁸⁸ Like the woman who said, “I had to get out of my mindset of eating less to get faster. I had to totally change the way I looked at food, working out, and body image,” women are ultimately responsible for fixing themselves, with CrossFit representing a viable remedy.⁸⁹ Suffering from pain that is self-inflicted, the woman who is deficient in her thinking or behaviours can address her deficiencies using CrossFit. It is women who must change their *self*-image, and CrossFit is offered up as the missing piece to help them do so. “CrossFit: Helping Women Change Their Self-Image,” is an article dedicated to the activity’s remedial, transformative potential.⁹⁰

The responsibility of accepting one’s body adds yet another task to women’s obligations for self-management. Consider the assertion that “CrossFit has helped many women overcome a negative body image.”⁹¹ According to the narrative on body image discomfort, it is the pursuit of what one article calls “female perfection,” or “the constant pressure that we, as women, seem to put on ourselves: pressure to be perfectly successful at our careers, our families, our relationships with others, our appearance, at everything all at once” that needs to be addressed.⁹² This involves a process of changing one’s thoughts about oneself and battling what one article refers to as an “inner critic” that one article says holds women back:

It says, “You’re only pretty when you are thin, you’re too muscular already, your legs aren’t lean and feminine, your tummy sticks out.” The attacks on my physique can snowball into feelings of unworthiness and a reason not to reach for new heights. Most of us have these inner critics that try to protect us from getting hurt by keeping us small.”⁹³

From this perspective, women’s inner voices and inner selves are represented as needing intervention—usually without reference to the social and cultural issues contributing to the context where this bodily discontent is so widespread.

In this way, narratives in CrossFit reproduce an attitude of self-blame identified by feminist researchers such as Dworkin and Wachs: “[W]omen do not frequently critique larger cultural norms as problematic; rather, many self-blame and internalize a sense of private bodily failure” and then go to work fixing and managing this perceived bodily lack.⁹⁴ That the misery of hating one’s body is represented as coming simply from the way that a woman *chooses* to view herself implies that the solution likewise only requires a simple shift on her part. The representation of these body image concerns and eating disorders in the CrossFit narrative positions what really constitutes a social issue as a personal matter that is best addressed on an individual level. That women struggle is not problematized so much as individual womens’ behaviours, thoughts and their bodies. Rather than an addressing the broader issue or the cultural conditions that sustain it, the individualized and pathologized (especially in the case of eating disorders) woman’s habits and thinking patterns become the problem, and the remedy is provided by CrossFit.

2.3 ‘The Fight:’ Resisting Bad Body Image

Even when there is reference to the problematic conditions that might perpetuate eating disorders or body dissatisfaction (e.g., as produced by the media), the role of CrossFit’s narrative itself as part of the problem is obscured. Instead, the narrative on these bodily issues is positioned as intervening on the side of the reader, as an ally in ‘the fight.’ Women’s self-perceptions are the enemy here and become the target of the intervention:

There’s a huge and virtually invisible community of women who have been affected in a very negative way by the “skinny ideal” for women that’s ubiquitous in the mainstream media.

Even many women who LOVE to be strong and muscular have a deep-seated resistance to being who they want to be because of the incessant assault of the images the mainstream is hitting us with. In some cases, the resistance isn’t even conscious. It’s a subtle, nagging, something-or-other that’s just below the surface. It’s not really loud, but it’s just enough to keep some women from living up to the strength and training potential they truly desire for themselves.⁹⁵

It comes down again to the individual woman, this time her ability to resist the “evil, evil brainwashing media” that produces “thousands of advertisements every day telling us how to look younger, sexier; telling us what we need to buy to have better hair and teeth; how to lose weight, have softer skin, fuller lips, stronger nails, bigger breasts....”⁹⁶ Recognizing the difficulty in this task and how “it’s tough not to occasionally get distracted by body image issues when the media force feeds it to you in hundreds of way, thousands of times a day, asphyxiating your subconscious mind and yourself (sic) worth, compelling you to be an obedient American consumer,” it is nonetheless up to the individual to use their strong minds to fix the problem. CrossFit, of course, will help, because “at the end of the day CrossFit is just as good at strengthening our minds as it is at strengthening our bodies.”⁹⁷

Dworkin and Wachs refer to the way in which magazines “simultaneously extolling and critiquing participation in consumer culture” serve to reinvigorate and critique the negative aspects of consumer culture at the same time.⁹⁸ In this way, they may “seem resistant, when they are generally reproductive of dominant cultural norms.”⁹⁹ As Markula noted in her work on women’s Body Image Distortion in fitness magazine discourse, magazines will report on body dissatisfaction at the same time as they promote a single and unrealistic bodily ideal for women, ultimately using this reporting as a commercial strategy. By establishing the widespread discontent that women share when it comes to their bodies and problematizing this issue, a remedy can then be offered up by the magazines.¹⁰⁰ In the case of the CrossFit texts, this remedy is generally CrossFit and the purported shift in perspective that follows a woman’s initiation into the activity. This is an individualized remedy whereby women’s mental resolve and perceptions become the target of the intervention, rather than a solution aimed at understanding why women are so discontented when it comes to their physical selves. Beyond this problematic reorienting of what

is a cultural and social issue into an individualized need, this creates a context where the magazines are free to continue to publish images that narrowly construct an ideal female body.

2.4 Form and Function

In extension of the theme framing CrossFit as a means by which women can change their self image and address body image issues, the texts suggest that CrossFit's transformative potential lies in the way in which it re-orientates a participant's focus: "CrossFit's training style minimizes the primary goal of working out to look good and it creates an emphasis on becoming fit and healthy."¹⁰¹ As one woman offers, "through CrossFit, our focus shifts from what our body looks like to what it can do" and "with the change from form to function comes a change in how we see our body."¹⁰² The functional focus is offered up as an alternative to goals that emphasize aesthetics, which are characterized as holding women back with dieting and excessive cardio exercise. According to the texts, the shift from focusing on "function instead of form" can have such an impact on women "because growing up female there seems to be a primary focus on how we look, rather than how smart or strong or creative we are. If we don't "look good," we often feel lacking."¹⁰³ Instead, the use of CrossFit to build "a body that can work hard and play hard now and as we get older" suggests that having a functional body is important.¹⁰⁴

Particularly for women previously caught up in the pursuit of thinness or a smaller body, CrossFit offers an opportunity. Women talk about a kind of empowerment that comes from giving up their obsessions with the scale or the number on their clothing labels in favour of focusing on the number on the clock or representing their maximal lifts on the whiteboard.¹⁰⁵ As one woman says, "experiencing our body fully as we max a lift or push the limits of intensity is 10 times more rewarding than fitting in size 4 jeans," demonstrative of the way in which functional goals are represented as superior to aesthetic ones.¹⁰⁶ The functional emphasis is framed as revolutionary

for women, as indicated by the example of a personal trainer who shares her story of finding salvation in CrossFit:

I was lost. I wanted so bad to have the six-pack abs that I saw in the magazines. I felt like a scam, there I was coaching others on how to live happy and healthy and I was dying inside.
Flash-forward a few years...I hear about CrossFit. ... For the first time in my adult life I was proud of my body. My hands were torn, my legs were bruised and I was so proud of what my body could accomplish. In an instant my idea of my body image changed. I no longer saw my body for what it physically looked like, I saw it for the first time as an amazing machine that could accomplish great things. I was happy.¹⁰⁷

The transformative potential of this shift is reiterated in many stories, including that of a teacher who CrossFit “taught...to love PRs more than pants size, ending the war” by helping her see her body as capable of CrossFit feats: “Your body is meant to do things. It’s not just meant to hold clothing or to look a certain way.”¹⁰⁸ No longer trying to achieve the perfect body, women describe this shift to focusing on functional performance as motivating, like one woman who changed her goals as a result of starting CrossFit:

“I used to think the only goal that mattered was on the scale,” she said. “What I love about CrossFit is that you will never master it. Even Annie Thorisdottir and Rich Froning can lift more weight,” Lesinski said.
So Lesinski made some new goals that had nothing to do with her weight. She started working on achieving 100 unbroken double-unders and a muscle-up and began the New Year with renewed focus and optimism.¹⁰⁹

Marking this functionality focus as unique to CrossFit implies that CrossFit is superiorly positioned to help women address issues with their self-image through participation. However, the presentation of this goal of a perfectly functional body, which as the previous quote suggests is not something even the elite performers of CrossFit realize, plays into the construction of the body as in constant need of work. While subjectively offered up as motivating and even liberating, the normalization of body-work and the legitimization of a dedicated CrossFit regime in the name of this functional body associated with this narrative may lead women to continue to view their bodies

as lacking. Just as they might if they were in pursuit of the elusive ideal aesthetic body, this can sustain existing power relations that keep women focused on their bodies and participating in a system designed to make them feel inadequate.

2.5 Sites of Re-definition

With the marking of CrossFit as alternative in regards to how it encourages women to relate to their bodies comes the representation of the activity as a site of re-definition. The idea that “once we know we can’t un-know: we know that it’s not our dress size or our weight that is most important”¹¹⁰ implies that women who take up CrossFit and choose functional performance goals are smarter and better off than the less informed women being duped by the regular players in the fitness industry. Articles like “CrossFit Women Rewrite the Rules: The New Definition of Fitness” claim that “CrossFit has redefined ‘fit.’”¹¹¹ The appeal to women, according to the texts, comes from the way in which other players in the fitness industry do women a disservice: “Women embrace CrossFit because it blows traditional ideas of fitness for women out of the water: Forget “toning” your abs, cardio machines, counting calories and the other garbage that has been fed to you your whole life.”¹¹² Women who have found CrossFit are represented as distinct, with different goals and concerns representing a departure from old and outdated ways of thinking. “CrossFit Girls Kick Ass” offers up an example of this “redefinition”:

What a far cry from what I used to be. I wanted to be thin; now I proudly show off the definition lines in my shoulders and abs. I wanted the pounds to decrease on the scale, now I gladly watch them increase on the bar. I exercised out of desperation, now I crave the feeling of a sub 5 minute Fran. I ate for comfort, now I eat for fuel. I did Zumba, aerobics, cardio machines, and wasted my time; now I’m a CrossFitter. I thought sweat was gross: now I bask in hard-earned sweat angels. I was limited; now I’m unstoppable. ...
This is my new definition and my perspective of what a beautiful, healthy, capable woman should be. I’ve been permanently rewired and never plan to go back.¹¹³

CrossFit is positioned as an empowering option in the world of health and fitness, especially in comparisons made to traditional modes of thinking in the industry. For women, CrossFit is a departure from disempowering messages: “After being raised to believe we are the weaker sex, one by one, CrossFit women are showing how laughable and outdated the old adage really is.”¹¹⁴ Here, CrossFit is offered up as an ally in women’s collective fight against what is described as an otherwise oppressive industry:

Women are raised in a world that dictates what it means to be “fit”: skinny, calorie counting and 5 pound barbells dominate women’s health magazines and proclaim that “skinny is sexy,” strength is masculine and weight lifting will make you bulky. Besides this obviously unhealthy attitude of what it means for women to be fit and healthy, this mantra places the utmost value on body image. Women are led to believe that looking thin is the end goal of exercise and sports. 2012 has seen a veritable explosion of media coverage for CrossFit, marking the mainstream emergence of the sport and fuelling the notion that there are other options in the world of women’s fitness. For too long, we have been misled down a path of backward thinking, flooded with ideas about fitness and health that serve to work against us.¹¹⁵

Articles celebrate the way that despite being “traditionally saddled with the weaker sex moniker, [CrossFit] women move weight around at levels that far exceed even their own body weight and do it repeatedly.”¹¹⁶ Tied to “a renewed sense of confidence,” CrossFit becomes an instrument not only in women’s physical self-management but also in their pursuit of confidence and an improved status in the social world.¹¹⁷ In line with this narrative on empowerment, CrossFit media offer a critical take on the way “that ‘fitness’ has been used as a marketing term to sell products to women, to keep us buying into the next fad and sending us on a perpetual quest for the unattainable.”¹¹⁸ Here, CrossFit is framed as alternative and as an opportunity for women to find empowerment and freedom from constraints placed on them by virtue of their gender, through consumption. This positioning of CrossFit as an alternative and as interested in progressive social aims will be revisited in later themes and in the conclusion of this paper.

3. The CrossFit Body

3.1 CrossFit and Aesthetics

Paradoxical to the framing of CrossFit as a departure from oppressive and aesthetic-focused exercise regimes, articles offer reassurance to readers regarding the aesthetic appeals of CrossFitters' bodies. References to the ways in which CrossFit will affect participants' physical forms are both subtle and overt. Titles like "CrossFit: Your Passport to a Hot Body" and testimonials celebrating "the aesthetic benefits of CrossFit" firmly link CrossFit not just to a changed appearance but importantly to an improved appearance.¹¹⁹ In one article proclaiming that "it seems that Hollywood has drunk the KoolAid and can't get enough," celebrities who "manage to squeeze in CrossFit WODs to stay healthy and have killer physiques" are included as shining examples of what CrossFit can do for one's appearance.¹²⁰ An article promoting CrossFit for firefighters urges workers to use CrossFit to "best achieve the necessary physical requirements on the job...not to mention, look good for the calendar."¹²¹ Testimonials from CrossFitters, like one who says, "What kept me incredibly motivated was the change I saw in my own body really quickly," position aesthetics as important in conjunction with CrossFit's many other purported benefits.¹²²

Obscured by assertions that it is its performance emphasis that makes CrossFit unique, references to its fit with conventional modes of providing a means by which individuals can shape their bodies are reinserted. Consider this excerpt demonstrating that while it is not about appearance in CrossFit, it is about appearance:

In CrossFit, we maintain that we are driven solely by performance. We aim to get stronger, faster, better. We suggest the Zone diet, not because it will make you look lean, but because it will enhance your performance and make you feel better from the inside out. We brag that we don't even have mirrors in our box, because ultimately, even though CrossFit does in fact make you look great, the real

pleasure is in increased performance a general sense of confidence, balance, and well-being.¹²³

Here, emphasizing functionality, though celebrated as being part of a departure from the pursuit of the ideal body, represents part of means to improve one's appearance because "by focusing on function rather than form, miracles can happen."¹²⁴ These "miracles" are not the purported shifts in women's self-image but take the form of changes in physical appearance: "We begin to see our physical bodies change without having to focus on changing them."¹²⁵ Stories of frustrated bodybuilders who have plateaued, like the woman who tried to develop her shoulders for years without any success before "they finally got bigger doing CrossFit" demonstrate the way in which, at the end of the day, aesthetics are still of utmost importance: "I stepped away from being aesthetically focused, and in the end, I got the aesthetic result I wanted. In focusing on performance, the looks thing fell into place."¹²⁶

Even though the shift to valuing function more than form is described as a "paradigm shift," it actually reinserts the reference to the advantageous effects of exercise for appearance, creating individuals who "are happier, more confident, and look and feel better."¹²⁷ Akin to what scholar Carole Spitzack refers to as the "anti-diet" or the way in which the construction of dieting as a futile endeavor can simultaneously promote the practice, the eschewing of focusing on one's appearance as damning and as reason to take up performance-focused CrossFit, coupled with these simultaneous reassurances that CrossFit will help women achieve an improved appearance, functions to represent appearance as ultimately still important while allowing CrossFit to offer itself as a seemingly liberating option.¹²⁸ In exercise discourse, the link between physical activity and a changed appearance is strong and taken-for-granted. Simply considering the phrase "getting in shape" that so many people use in reference to a number of things, from starting an exercise program to going on a diet, is demonstrative of this inextricable link. Considering their bodies as

objects to be continually worked upon, chipping away at and molding into certain forms or shapes, women's physical selves represent ongoing projects. CrossFit, as concerned with building functional bodies as it may be, does not depart from the discourse linking exercise to changes in physical appearance so commonplace in today's society.

3.2 “Building” a Body

The fixing of the association between exercise and an improved appearance facilitates the linkage of changes in an individual's appearance with that individual's hard work. Like one article that references the kind of “dedication” that you can see in CrossFit competitors, an appearance suggesting that one does CrossFit is associated with knowing “that you worked your ass off for that ass!”¹²⁹ In one article that describes CrossFit's effects on appearance overtly, the assertion that participants earn their physiques is made:

CrossFit builds tough. Athletes train themselves to run faster, lift heavier, and push further—it shows in their physique. Deeply layered musculature sculpted into broad, curving planes demonstrates the versatile and unique physical gifts of the CrossFit training program. Across the board, in the body of every CrossFit competitor, we can see their dedication just by looking.¹³⁰

Viewed in this light, personal volition becomes a key ingredient in the achievement of a fit and ideal physique. The way in which CrossFit affects women's bodies in particular is the topic of much writing in CrossFit texts. Perhaps paradoxically, given the way in which women are encouraged to free themselves from the pursuit of the ideal physique by shifting their focus onto their physical abilities, women describe their new-found CrossFit bodies with admiration. They often cite a rejection of the thin ideal in favour of what CrossFit has to offer, which is still the achievement of an ideal body:

...I finally got it through my thick head that being health and stick thin just didn't work for me. For the first time in my life, I stopped caring about being thin. Funniest part? This is the leanest and healthiest I've ever been.

The fat melted off from all of the weightlifting. My twig arms, once bony and lifeless, showed smoothness and definition and now hold 155 pounds overhead while I squat. I have a butt. A nice, perky, strong, smooth, round, cute little butt. And my thighs, my dreaded thighs have been my Achilles heel my whole life. I always thought they were too fat, then they shrunk and simultaneously got stronger. My back is now chiseled, my waist and hips are thinner, and I have abs. Abs!¹³¹

In articles about learning to love one's body, like "Loving Myself: Accepting My CrossFit Body," the acceptance of a CrossFitter's body implies the rejection of competing, conventional notions: "Skinny girls look good in clothes. Fit girls look good naked."¹³² 'Loving' one's body therefore requires changing it and building it up in CrossFit fashion:

My back, shoulders, arms: They are muscular for the first time in 25 years. Strong and solid. My shoulders are round. My triceps can be seen through my shirt. My lats are long and broad.
My boobs: They've shrunk. A lot. They are practically non-existent. ... My legs: They are huge. They've always been huge. 10,000 squats has made my butt rounder and my legs tighter, but never smaller. They are solid as an oak.¹³³

CrossFit produces bodies worthy of acceptance, but bodies that do not visually indicate the hard work and effort invested in their production are left outside of conformation. Women must view themselves as projects realized through their own body work, and undertake their own body-shaping in order to create the acceptable, strong body. Here, lacking an ideal body becomes symptomatic of not trying hard enough or of failing to dedicate oneself to the pursuit of the aesthetically-pleasing CrossFit form. In today's culture, where individuals are expected to take personal responsibility for their health, the association of a fit-looking body with health and one's personal effort creates a situation where it is easy to imply that those whose bodies do not match the ideal are deficient. With more effort, it follows, these people would look more like the images presented in the media that signify health and well-being. Given the cultural value placed on health and the appearance of health, this can stigmatize and marginalize those with bodies not offering the apparent visuality of the healthy body while simultaneously stimulating participation and

consumption aimed at achieving a body which serves as a visual signifier of one's dedication to their health.

3.3 “You Can Still Be a Girl and Lift Weights”

Given the framing of exercise as a means to transform one's body, the visual results of that transformation—the muscularity normally understood as masculine—have to be acknowledged in the CrossFit narrative. Considerable narrative effort is put into reassuring female readers that being strong, that is, the strong female body type associated with the strength developed in CrossFit, is in fact acceptable. Acknowledging that strength and weightlifting are normally understood as male domains, one article reassures women that “doing CrossFit doesn't have to mean giving up your femininity.”¹³⁴ Female readers potentially concerned with becoming too masculine as they gain muscle and participate in CrossFit are comforted: “You can still be a girl and lift weights. You can still be a lady and do a power clean. CrossFit women are beautiful.”¹³⁵

It makes sense that women will be concerned with just how muscular or big (neither indicators of conventional femininity) they can become while retaining their femininity. The CrossFit narrative bundles these concerns in references to fears about bulking up, arguing them away as ‘myths.’ The fear of bulking up, though common enough that one gym owner says, “If I had a nickel for every woman who said she didn't want to “bulk up” lifting weights, I'd be rich,” is represented as a myth and a silly fear that “keeps too many women out of the gym, the weight room, and away from CrossFit.”¹³⁶ The average female CrossFit participant can rest easy because “even professional female bodybuilders have trouble putting on more than five pounds of muscle in a year.”¹³⁷ Women's “irrational fear that lifting a weight will magically give them arms like Popeye, or [that] squatting will give them a big butt and thighs” are framed as misinformed.¹³⁸

Many articles label these associations as myths, arguing that women will get “stronger, not bigger” and “faster, not bulkier” through CrossFit participation, allowing them to retain their femininity.¹³⁹

Beyond the fear of bulking up, a fear of losing another distinguishing visual feature of femininity—i.e. breast size—through CrossFit, comes up in the texts. As with bulkiness, these fears are also represented as misguided and are attributed to women’s lack of understanding of the CrossFit culture:

Now, chances are, the woman worrying about waning breast size isn’t yet absorbed in the “strong is sexy” CrossFit culture that treats torn, callused hands as a badge of honour and emphasizes the importance of a great front rack position above, well, a great rack. She probably doesn’t know how empowering it can feel to throw a loaded bar overhead using her own hard-earned strength and watch as it subsequently crashes to the ground. Maybe she worries about losing breast size because she can’t see the big picture. Maybe once she feels empowered by her amazingly capable body, she won’t care if her breasts are voluptuous, average sized, or itty bitty.¹⁴⁰

Women who fear being bulky or losing their femininity become the recipients of not only these reassurances, but also of more forceful modes of encouraging them to stop worrying about the issue. For example, a trainer talks about his amusement when women talk about “getting too bulky...which they often do while eating a donut or drinking a Frappuccino covered in whipped cream” and replies with a stab: “So you’re concerned that some squats and box jumps will make you bulky but you’re completely okay with that donut?”¹⁴¹ In a similar vein, another article challenges women not to be afraid of muscle development as unattractive, with those who avoid it labeled as “just afraid they could never really look that way, no matter how hard they tried.”¹⁴² The article suggests that for women afraid of compromising their femininity by gaining muscle, “rejecting muscle as ‘unattractive’ is just the subconscious’ way of providing excuses when we are too afraid to try.”¹⁴³

As was the case with body image concerns, the narrative locates the problem in women's problematic thoughts about themselves and their individual actions. What is more, any bulkiness that a CrossFitter might develop is reframed as an indication of strength and fitness, in distinction from other forms of excess bulk that a woman might carry. Therefore, "CrossFit women do not look like bodybuilders, they look like athletes," and the theme of bulking up thus represents size as problematic on the one hand, and as an indicator of functional health, on the other; according to this view, "I'll take muscle bulk over fat bulk any day" reiterates that very specific bodily requirements remain intact when it comes to women's bodies and their acceptability.¹⁴⁴

3.4 Strong is the New Skinny

In the CrossFit texts, the muscular female body is offered up as the new ideal, not only preferable to fat but also to the thin body type that CrossFitters are urged to reject. Articles like "Just Weight: Who Needs Skinny When You Can Be Strong" and "My CrossFit Revolution: Strong is the New Skinny" reiterate that when it comes to ideal bodies, strong is superior to skinny.¹⁴⁵ Again and again, women are reassured that "strong is healthy, and wanting to be skinny isn't always a healthy outlook."¹⁴⁶ Advice from Leblanc-Bazinet, always celebrated for her beauty, advocates for an understanding of health no longer associated with skinny but with being strong: "If you are not feeling good about yourself because you want to be skinny, I've been there and done that and it is not worth it. I would tell my teenage self to stop worrying about the scale and start putting on some healthy muscles."¹⁴⁷ According to CrossFitters, "a strong, athletic body is a healthier body image than the 'heroin chic' look of the skinny print and runway models."¹⁴⁸ Thus it was CrossFit that sparked one woman's shift away from wanting to "be that frail, waify girl" to wanting to "throw down" in the workouts and to perform the CrossFit workouts "Rx."¹⁴⁹ One CrossFitter, a parent, urges other parents to "teach [their] sons what it means to be strong young

men, and teach [their] daughters to be stronger and more real than those sickly waifs in the magazines.”¹⁵⁰

In their critique of thinness, these texts suggest a departure from a narrative that has for a long time been considered as a means to literally keep women small, although in contemporary culture, this thin and waifish body type has generally been accepted as out of reach for many women. CrossFit’s recasting of this theme to “strong is the new skinny” instead positions CrossFit as a new means of women’s and girls’ empowerment. Leblanc-Bazinet is the visual expression of this claim, being described as “at the vanguard of a new perception of women’s bodies,” and being called “the poster girl for the oft-repeated phrase ‘strong is the new skinny’.”¹⁵¹ Criticisms of the “powerful mass-media imagery that overemphasizes thinness as a health ideal” are paired with celebrations of blogs and social media groups that promote the “strong is the new skinny” mentality.¹⁵² CrossFit replaces skinny with strong, or as one article notes, “CrossFit confronts the media’s portrayal of impossibly skinny models as the template for health and desire.”¹⁵³

However, positioning the bulked up (CrossFit) female body as a new ideal does nothing to address the problems created by positioning one particular body type as an ideal. It simply shifts a narrow definition of the desirable female body as thin to a similarly constrained new space of acceptability, the bulky, muscular body. It is now women who are perhaps “naturally” thin who are criticized, called “sickly,” and encouraged to work out and bulk up. In both cases, however, the effects of this narrative reiterate the problematic notion that, with enough effort, women can simply earn their bodies, expending the personal power and responsibility to shape them to match the shifting ideal of the day.¹⁵⁴ Criticizing thinness and criticizing normative thinness are different things, and while the CrossFit narrative targets the former, appearing to be on the side of women who have been constrained by an oppressive ideal of thinness, it does nothing to challenge the way

in which women's bodily appearance is held as an important signifier in contemporary culture in the first place. Rather than addressing the broader issue—that women are expected to ensure, through bodywork and personal volition, that their bodies fit within the realm of what is defined as “feminine” and attractive—the narrative reproduces the status quo when it comes to the policing of women's bodies to conform to certain aesthetic ideals. Although the celebration of female muscularity and the physique associated with strength may very well mark a shift in contemporary constructions of the ideal female body, the change has been just that: a shift. Now marginalizing the “skinny” female body, the ideal body continues to occupy a narrow and specifically-defined spaced on the continuum of female bodies.

3.5 Beauty and the Bulk

That the ideal body shape offered up by CrossFit is not defined as thin or skinny but involves a measure of muscularity does not mean that the parameters on women's body size are not defined. The narrative tends to implicitly position a smaller, though muscular, body as a better body through references to lean muscle and improved body composition as common goals, thereby suggesting that while increasing one's weight via gaining muscle mass is acceptable, one's body ought to remain at a certain level of leanness. The references to improving or optimizing body composition indicate that body size matters negatively when it can be attributed to fat or obesity. There is a distinction made between “fat” bulk and the kind of muscle bulk now identified as sexy in the CrossFit narrative. “Weight doesn't mean anything,” as one article notes, because “you can be super heavy but also be lean and pretty as hell,” indicating that being lean and being pretty both matter, and that leanness mediates bulk where fatness does not.¹⁵⁵ Lean bodies remain small and keep women from associating muscle with taking up too much space. Scholar Lupton has argued that “women have been encouraged in contemporary western societies to take up as little space as

possible.”¹⁵⁶ Though referring to fat women’s larger bodies, considering Lupton’s idea that “largeness of the body is seen as unfeminine” especially if it challenges the norm of the woman as “dainty, weak, and fragile,” the emphasis in the CrossFit narrative on the way in which a CrossFit-trained body still fits within the cultural sanctions regarding women’s bodies, is important. CrossFit’s narrative legitimizes the correct – athletic and lean and otherwise feminine – form of bulk.

Profiles of elite female CrossFitters that showcase their abilities also tend to reiterate the ways in which they maintain their femininity—either through a small body size or other markers of hegemonic femininity. For example, CrossFit competitor Bianca Blair’s profile highlights both her athletic accomplishments—she “power cleaned and jerked 200 pounds, thrusted 185 pounds, front squatted 260 pounds, and back squatted 310 pounds,”—as well as reassures readers that these abilities do not compromise her ability to retain a feminine appearance.¹⁵⁷ In the case of Blair, a focus on her self-presentation implies that while her ability might challenge notions of what a woman ought to be or do, she is still womanly: “A self-professed girly-girl, Blair enjoys making her own outfits for competitions, often adding flowers and bows to her athletic wear and even donning a tutu from time to time. “I enjoy using my creative side, and I love my outfits,” she says. “When I ran track in high school, our motto was “If you look good, you perform good.””¹⁵⁸ Other women’s abilities, like those of Christmas Abbot, who “can snatch 140lbs, clean and jerk 170lbs, squat 225lbs and deadlift 225lbs,” are included alongside celebration of the fact that she is “tiny:” “At 5’3” and a light 115 pounds, Christmas Abbott’s size belies her power.”¹⁵⁹ Lauren Fisher, another top CrossFit competitor, is celebrated for beating out women who “weigh nearly 20 and 30 pounds more,” calling her biggest strength that “I’m really strong for my size.”¹⁶⁰ Though the ideal female body may have shifted to a more muscular one, this continued emphasis on smallness,

leanness, and emphasized femininity lends evidence to the ways in which, as noted previously, that ideal remains narrowly defined.

3.6 Strong and Muscular is Sexy

The defining of CrossFit-associated muscle as acceptably feminine is coupled with reassurances that CrossFit can assist women in their pursuit of attractiveness. References in the texts to the bodies of elite female CrossFitters frame strong and muscular feminine forms as both beautiful and sexually attractive. One article urges people to address women's concerns about bulking up by displaying photos of the top female CrossFitters and asking the (rhetorical for a CrossFit adherent) question: "Is there a woman in any gym in the country who would not want to look like they look or perform like they perform?"¹⁶¹ Another article asserts that "the squatting in CrossFit is known for developing a well-shaped rear," and focuses on helping the women of CrossFit find jeans to fit their "hard-earned CrossFit boot[ies]" in order "to show off [their] hard-earned muscles."¹⁶² This is indicative of the way in which the muscularity associated with being a female CrossFitter is framed as something women should take pride in—and that their appearance is important. A similar theme is visually presented in the exercises in an article entitled "Look Like a Beauty, Train Like a Beast."¹⁶³ Demonstrated by a woman in underwear and a sports bra, this article features exercises aimed at changing one's body by understanding it as a work of art, a sculpture: "The prowler is one of the best ways to sculpt the hips and thighs."¹⁶⁴ Any emphasis on performance or health or liberating women from the pursuit of an ideal appearance are absent, with the implication being that a woman should train in order to beautify her body.

Even in articles that reiterate the performance focus of CrossFit, like one that says that "everyone starts to exercise to have a better body...eventually, aesthetics and superficial muscle become secondary and increased work capacity takes over," the take-away is that, "boy, I tell you,

if you are stronger of course you are gonna look hotter.”¹⁶⁵ The benefits to women’s sexual desirability are highlighted, without overtly making these benefits the goal: “‘Sexy’ is not the end goal of a CrossFit athlete. It’s more like a pleasant side effect.”¹⁶⁶ Being strong and being fit, while arguably not resulting in any particular physical appearance, is nonetheless associated with beauty and sexual attractiveness. Strong is repositioned as sexy, as the perception of male spectators at the CrossFit Games, who had never heard of CrossFit before indicates:

One young man says to his friend: “I can’t believe how hot those girls are out there. I didn’t even know which one to look at.”

His friend replies: “Seriously. I’ve been pitching a tent in the stands all day. I couldn’t even get up to go to the bathroom.”

Friend replies: “No shit, dude. I’ve never seen hotter asses in my life. We should start this CrossFit shit.”¹⁶⁷

In more than one article, the assertion that “skinny girls look good in clothes. Fit girls look good naked,” reminds women that looking good is important, especially as it relates to their sexual desirability and attractiveness—which is perhaps even more important.¹⁶⁸ According to one male author:

I love strong women. I always have. Sure, they look great and muscles on women are sexy, but there’s more. There’s something inside a strong woman. Something that drives her to be strong, to train in a stereotypically “male” environment and to drive herself to finish workouts that some women wouldn’t even start. And whatever that “something” is, it radiates out from her and that makes her sexy.¹⁶⁹

Another gym owner made it clear that “skinny fat is no longer attractive,” saying that “I now am more attracted to a woman who has some muscle. I would rather have a girl who is larger and more fit than a skinny fat girl, who only looks good in her clothes that hold it all together.”¹⁷⁰ Women describe being reassured by such male approval, like the woman who was comforted by her boyfriend: “He told me I looked good, and pretty, and I got reassurance from him and others that it was ok to be big, and to have muscles.”¹⁷¹

The emphasis on beauty and heterosexual physical attractiveness in these CrossFit texts serves to reinforce the gendered requirement placed on women to pursue beauty. Naomi Wolf's explanation of "the beauty myth," whereby beauty becomes something that "women must want to embody" and "men must want to possess women who embody" can help to explain the problematic nature of claiming that broadening definitions of feminine beauty to encompass strength marks an empowering shift for women.¹⁷² The celebrations of CrossFit's power to redefine beauty are thus illustrative of a continued emphasis on women's ability to meet the cultural requirement of beauty and to ensure their sex appeal. As Wolf offers, "the qualities that a given period calls beautiful in women are merely symbols of the female behavior that the period considers desirable."¹⁷³ The beauty myth, she says, is "always actually prescribing behavior and not appearance," fitting perfectly with descriptions of the kind of beauty CrossFit participation affords women.¹⁷⁴ Statements about beauty in the CrossFit texts suggest that "being strong is beautiful and not everyone is going to look the same," and celebrate those who "inspire other women to embrace the beauty and power of their physical strength," sustaining a focus on women's beauty even as it works to construct itself as a departure from traditional notions of beauty.¹⁷⁵ Just as Markula's research on aerobics suggested that "the potentially liberating impulses" in that activity had "been turned to serve the masculine ideology by cementing the effects of exercise with an improved appearance," the narrative of framing strong as beautiful—and of CrossFit as the route to both—is worth critically considering.¹⁷⁶ Markula's assertion that "rather than being free, women are prisoners of more detailed regulations of beauty," applies here.¹⁷⁷

Now that notions of beauty have been recalibrated to encompass strength, women in the articles talk about the way their lives have changed: "I've always been athletic, but never able to embrace and appreciate my athletic build. CrossFit has helped me to own that and embrace who I am both

inside and out. CrossFit has irrevocably changed my life. Strong is beautiful. Today I can finally say, ‘I love my body’.”¹⁷⁸ Because of the cultural importance placed on being beautiful as a woman, it is necessary for athleticism, muscle, physical power, strength, and all the things associated with being a woman of CrossFit to be framed as beautiful in order to be desirable to women as consumers of fitness offerings. Time after time, we hear women talk about how “CrossFit has changed my perception of beauty tremendously,” and about how it can help provide a “more rounded notion of beauty.”¹⁷⁹ An article entitled “Strength + Beauty” argues that “CrossFit ladies represent a special breed of athlete,” adding that “these beautiful women are capable of unbelievable feats of athleticism—women whose beauty is enhanced by their strength, determination, and resolve.”¹⁸⁰ Beauty is important, no doubt. According to Leblanc-Bazinet, whose beauty is often forefronted with references to her appearance—“angel-faced” and “camera-friendly” with “the face of a Maybelline cover girl,” to name a few examples—girls ought to “stop worrying about their weight and start looking at what is really beautiful—being a strong and confident woman.”¹⁸¹ Over and over, the articles talk about how “CrossFit is slowly redefining beauty for women in particular.”¹⁸²

CrossFit’s definition of beauty might be different than what women are used to, but it does nothing to challenge the strength of the notion that women should be beautiful. Although Wolf wrote her book nearly 25 years ago, and although she focused on the ‘beauty myth’ as backlash against the empowerment of women following the women’s movement of the previous decades, the objectifying effects of basing women’s identity on understandings of beauty endure. Just as it was then, “the beauty myth is harmful and pompous and grave because so much, too much depends on it.”¹⁸³ That women can only access strength and power when it is defined as beautiful indicates that these qualities are still outside the realm of what culture defines as feminine. According to the

CrossFit narrative, a certain level of strength might outweigh one's beauty, reiterating that there are confines on just how far a woman can take her strength without compromising her status as beautiful, as is expressed in, "Beauty & Strength in Balance."¹⁸⁴ Strength remains in the realm of masculinity, requiring women to negotiate this territory with care and to ensure that they remain beautiful and therefore feminine. Strong women, even in such a pro-strength context as CrossFit media, are still marked as trailblazers, different from what normally constitutes being a woman. Women who "have rejected that there are limits on the physical abilities of women and explored the amazing feats of strength and agility that their bodies are capable of" are still anomalies.¹⁸⁵ So, *when will the day come when a woman can simply be strong without needing to qualify this strength as beautiful? When will a woman using her body and appreciating its abilities become the norm rather than the exception?*

4. Issues of Equality

4.1 CrossFit: On Women's Side

Just as earlier themes have involved the positioning of CrossFit as an ally in women's fight against "backward thinking" about women in the health and fitness industry, CrossFit is represented as an advocate for gender equality in sport.¹⁸⁶ As Reebok's trademarked "Sport of FitnessTM," representations of CrossFit as a sport emphasize its positioning of gender as one that advocates on women's behalf. Discussions in the articles about the way which "people still associate sports with gender and...talk of boys playing 'girly sports' or girls playing 'boys' sports'" position gender equality in sport as a pressing issue.¹⁸⁷ Though the narrative acknowledges progress in the realm of women's sport, work by sport sociologists Messner and Cooky (whose work incidentally informs my own) is cited to point out persistent gender inequalities in sport, with

Messner quoted as concluding, “It’s really gotten so much better. But, at the same time, it’s far from equal and there’s still quite a long way to go.”¹⁸⁸ The use of academic voices reinforces the assertion that there is what one article refers to as an “abysmal” gap between men and women in sport.¹⁸⁹

Offered up as an alternative to other sports, CrossFit is represented as unique in its approach to gender equality. Evidence of CrossFit’s equalizing approach includes examples like the equal airtime given to women and men at the CrossFit Games.¹⁹⁰ Similarly, the way in which “at the Games, men and women compete in practically identical events and sometimes side by side” and that “top female finishers receive the same amount of prize money as top male finishers” are celebrated.¹⁹¹ While granted these celebrations are warranted, they are also ways ways of promoting CrossFit as an alternative to the rest of the sports world:

...Chances are good that even today, when you think of the word “athlete,” your initial vision isn’t of someone with a baby in tow or a penchant for knitting. Female athletes are still more likely than men to juggle responsibilities of home and family along with their athletic pursuits, and the word “fairer” is only beginning to be an apt expression of the way women athletes are paid in comparison to men. (Just five years ago, in 2007—the same year that CrossFit held its inaugural Games—the Wimbledon tennis tournament finally resolved to pay equal purses to winners of both sexes.).¹⁹²

CrossFit’s founder, Greg Glassman, is applauded for his efforts in regards to gender equality and is quoted as saying, “CrossFit is as close to leveling the field as we can.”¹⁹³ That “in CrossFit.com programming, women are not told to do less work than men “is also offered as testament of CrossFit’s dedication to giving women the chance to “choose what to lift, and many can beat male counterparts using the same loads.”¹⁹⁴ Responding to criticisms that CrossFit.com ought to prescribe lower weights for female participants, Glassman makes it clear that his choice was intentional, arguing that criticism of his approach “presumes women need weight prescribed for them.” He adds: “Let them figure it out. My girls are so fuckin’ smart.”¹⁹⁵ Instead of

distinguishing women from men, the narrative suggests that women can excel when they are not held back by expectations associated with their gender:

Certainly, CrossFit Founder and CEO Greg Glassman didn't underestimate the capabilities of female athletes when he designed the program. Women perform workouts alongside men at affiliates around the world. In the Games, some of the workouts are identical for men and women. Sometimes, the women beat the men in head-to-head competitions.¹⁹⁶

The narrative includes a consideration of some of the obstacles rooted in pre-existing notions of gendered behaviour which persist and sustain inequality, attributing these not to the fault of CrossFit but to women's failing. The dearth of female coaches at the elite level of CrossFit is attributed to the fact that "females aren't as willing to promote themselves," a key consideration in making themselves known in the world of CrossFit coaching.¹⁹⁷ Such reticence, in CrossFit's view, extends beyond the space of sport: "[As women] we hold ourselves back in ways both big and small, by lacking self-confidence, by not raising our hands, and by pulling back when we should be leaning in."¹⁹⁸ The perpetuation of the gender gap is attributed to failing women, who thus have to change their own ways. Here, CrossFit's position as pro-equality is protected through the framing of persistent inequality as the result of women's failures.

4.2 The "F"-Word: Feminism and CrossFit

As I argued above, the CrossFit narrative foregrounds women who take charge of their physicality and body image in the CrossFit gym, and it similarly focuses on women who take responsibility for making change on an individual level when it comes to gender issues. Such an approach towards change even occupies the term feminism itself. According to this empowerment narrative, "the word 'feminist' has been...bastardized" by "overreaching" feminists who "want more than just equality for women" and "alienate the male gender" in the process.¹⁹⁹ Instead of being part of the "woman cult" of "bra-burning, man-hating women who disapprove of heels and

makeup,” female CrossFitters are represented as part of a different shift to a more equal world.²⁰⁰ By virtue of having joined CrossFit, where membership appears to offer only an individualistic approach to tackling gender issues and a do-it-yourself approach when it comes to empowerment, women can identify themselves as advocates for gender equality without labeling themselves feminists.

Instead of seeking shared intervention, women can effect change as individuals by participating in CrossFit activities. In this way, CrossFit claims to challenge the status quo:

Gender stereotypes are still very much alive and well in our mainstream society, but the CrossFit woman’s “strong” mentality is persistently chipping away at them. Change is happening, however slow it may be. By constantly reinforcing with photo or video evidence that women lifting weights and doing pull-ups are, in fact, worthy of a spot on the sliding scale of femininity, we are changing the culture we live in.²⁰¹

Women who engage the CrossFit narrative thus are different—they “outright refuse to accept the dainty and polite gender role they’ve been assigned, preferring instead to grunt their way through 80 pull-ups, clench their teeth lifting three times their own body weight, and break a serious sweat finishing a 400-metre sprint in less than a minute and a half.”²⁰² They, unlike women who do not do CrossFit, have access to a special kind of empowerment:

We female CrossFitters do pushups, not Pilates. “We take pride in our community that pushes us to our limits and offers support along the road to our goals. We revel in learning new skills each time we set foot inside the box, and love the feeling of lifting that barbell loaded with seriously heavy weights that the magazines said we shouldn’t lift. We eat the calories our muscular bodies crave. We grow stronger and more empowered with each rep.”²⁰³

While I would not argue about the existence of a gap between men and women in sport and while I applaud CrossFit for paying its male and female winners the same amount of money and for providing women with a greater amount of media coverage, suggesting that a social issue like gender inequality is best remedied through CrossFit and especially through its associated

individual action without addressing sport and society and the conditions which sustain the inequality simplifies an exceedingly complicated issue. As noted in the introduction, in the 1990s, corporations began to draw on the female athlete as a cultural ideal to sell products and services to women under the guise of feminine empowerment. With the ideal woman representing one “who gets beyond all the old gender stereotypes and does whatever she pleases,” these CrossFit trailblazers can be considered perfect reconstructions of the “trained, determined, self-reliant female athlete” offered up in these campaigns.²⁰⁴ Scholars have discussed the capitalization on this image in the name of the selling of a kind of “popular feminism” as problematic, diverting attention away from collective efforts aimed at affecting institutions and structures that affect all women to instead affect only those with the access to the consumption-based empowerment.²⁰⁵ Further, the way in which the empowerment available via CrossFit sustains the framing of “women’s agency expressed as identification with consumerism” serves to maintain women’s position in an oppressive gender structure.²⁰⁶

4.3 The Improvement Imperative

Throughout the themes presented above, an ongoing narrative constructs individuals as in need of constant improvement. According to this narrative, individuals are not living up to their full potential. Women are thus presented with the suggestion that they must constantly be putting effort into being “better,” encouraging ongoing self-assessment and the deeming of oneself as lacking and in need of intervention. According to this narrative, CrossFit is at its essence about constantly seeking improvement and is thus particularly useful in regards to achieving this necessary self-work. As one article in *The CrossFit Journal* says, “The desire to improve and seek perfection drives CrossFit.”²⁰⁷ This desire is unrelenting, encompassing an overarching theme in the texts—the improvement imperative.

Whether focused on performance, health, one's body more generally, or life outside of the gym, this improvement imperative normalizes a constant search for improvement. "Optimizing" the self becomes the method, requiring continual self-work-based in the understanding of the body as an ongoing project. Goals are essential, monitoring keeps you on track in the pursuit of improvement, and individuals are required to dedicate themselves to being better than their former selves, which are thus deemed deficient. The inevitability of this constant pursuit of improvement is posited as ostensibly inevitable 'human nature' efficacious "since the beginning of time":

I truly believe in my heart of hearts it's just ingrained in us as humans to push the limits and find new boundaries for ourselves. Since the beginning of time, man has behaved in this manner, and somewhere in all of us that fire still burns, albeit some feel it more than others, but it's still in there. ... There burns a fire in each of us, it is up to us to embrace that very real, very personal struggle and allow it to transform us into what we are meant to become...our fullest potential.²⁰⁸

CrossFit is offered up as the most efficient way in which individuals can pursue this notion of personal optimization. Workouts are seen as ways to improve oneself, as one article offers: "Every time I say yes to a workout, I am choosing to re-create who I am. I am choosing to move myself forward toward flourishing."²⁰⁹ CrossFit is seen as a means to transform not only the physical aspects of a person, but also goes "a step further: forging elite lives and making people better."²¹⁰ This betterment is described as "exactly what CrossFit is: giving your best—not just once but every day and in everything."²¹¹ The way that "CrossFit...is more than exercise" and how "CrossFit not only brings improved fitness but also creates improved people" are reiterated over and over again.²¹²

Several articles talk about how these improvements via CrossFit are tied to an improved character or to the virtue developed through participation:

[Aristotle]'s overall point is that when we "train"—physically, morally, intellectually—(and, indeed, when we don't), we are molding not just our bodies or behaviors, but also our very characters, and in doing so, we are cultivating a

core set of virtues that either enable or hinder our ability to flourish as human beings.

I have come to see that CrossFit—all of it: its nutritional focus, mental rigor, physical pursuit, community spirit and more—manifests Aristotle’s principles. CrossFit is not just a workout with a physical goal. It is also, and maybe even primarily, about cultivating a set of character traits that can enable a person to flourish in all aspects of life.²¹³

Emily Beers, in a later *CrossFit Journal* article, makes a similar point, from the more applied, practical perspective of the focused participant:

Character comes from adversity, and fitness is developed the same way. ... Things that go uphill have to be pushed. It has taught me that there are no bad lessons or workouts—just really hard ones. If I want to be stronger, I have to lift heavier weights. If I want to learn how to manage my time better, I take on a second job. If I want to be a better CrossFit athlete, I have to train the things I dislike. If I want to learn how to love with greater capacity, I need to have some children. Strength comes from struggle.²¹⁴

The implication here is that to participate in CrossFit—or not to, for that matter—carries with it a moral significance. CrossFit is offered up as much more than a physical pursuit, perhaps less about the body and more about character at the end of the day: “CrossFit’s tests of “fitness” are really, at their root, meant to test—and cultivate—a stoic character.”²¹⁵ Those who do not take up CrossFit are characterized as weak of character: “The workouts require so much effort that people of weak character just don’t want to do them.”²¹⁶ The stoicism and the willingness to do something as challenging as CrossFit is what sets CrossFitters apart, but this is exactly what makes people better for doing it:

CrossFit isn’t universally attractive because it isn’t easy. But what a way to share that anything worth achieving comes with a substantial sacrifice and commitment at the hands of blood, sweat, tears and bodily fluids. Its discipline, accountability, and achievement radiate out into every other endeavor in life. Its mental training—training for life—that literally makes better people....²¹⁷

The character available to people via CrossFit is required in order to live one’s best life, or as one article says, “to be one’s best self, thrive, and vibrantly inhabit the world.”²¹⁸ Readers are

instructed that what happens “in the gym is often a reflection of what happens in the outside world,” given CrossFit’s emphasis on “virtuosity,” or what it defines as “performing the common uncommonly well.”²¹⁹ The use of language like “character” and “virtuosity” point to the moral significance assigned to CrossFit participation and its associated self-mastery.

As a way of demonstrating CrossFit’s potential to transform individuals beyond the physical, story after story of people who have taken up CrossFit and benefitted in a myriad of ways are included. Those specific to body image or motherhood have already informed the development of these earlier themes, but the broader inclusion of testimonials on CrossFit’s potential in relation to everything from improving one’s sex life to passing the SATs serves to reinforce the notion that anything we do in our lives, we can do better.²²⁰ These testimonials, wide-ranging in terms of the topics which they frame CrossFit as capable of positively affecting, function together to lend discursive power to the notion that CrossFit can help women with their body image woes, their roles as mothers, their pregnancy concerns, their appearance, and so on. It is so taken-for-granted that CrossFit can improve one’s life—whatever that life might entail—that it becomes easier to take-for-granted its power of it to empower women without questioning, for example, the CrossFit definition of an empowered woman. Further, the way in which problems to be remedied are offered up as such—things in need of intervention—encourages individuals to assess themselves as lacking and in need of intervention.

Faced with these self-identified issues requiring intervention, individuals are stimulated to consume. Always requiring improvement, this creates a context where individuals are perpetually prompted to consume by an inescapable requirement to be better. This affects both men and women, but sets an important stage upon which no woman is ever considered good enough—beautiful enough, accepting of her body enough, loving enough, competitive enough, strong

enough, etc. That one can always improve, in a way, encourages a continual assessment of oneself as lacking. A woman asking herself, *Am I fit?* may very well deem herself to be so. However, *I can be fitter!* suggests that she ought to not only continue on with her current consumption but also up the ante, seeking out that ever elusive ‘better’: “you can do this for the rest of your life; there are always ways to improve!”²²¹ Framed as inspiring, that “absolute mastery of CrossFit is simply unattainable even by the best” is celebrated as a way to “keep you continually motivated and engaged.”²²²

Considered critically, framing this ideal of “better” in a motivational narrative is the capitalist dream, ensuring that individuals will, no matter where they stand, continue to deem themselves in need of improvement and associated consumption. As one improves, “better” is never reached but shifts ahead of the individual. “Better” is like a carrot one dangles in front of someone to lure them forward, but this carrot can never be delivered as it is by definition unattainable. While people would likely respond negatively to being told outright that they are not good enough and will never be good enough, calling them to greatness and assuring them that they are full of untapped and unlimited potential frames the need for improvement and its associated consumption as positive.

Endnotes for Chapter Four

1 Smith Maguire, *Fit for Consumption*, 192.

2 Kim Turley-Smith, “Modern Warrior Women,” *Sweat Rx*, March/April 2013, 83.

3 Ibid.

4 Julie Olson, “The CrossFit Life: It’s Mom’s Turn,” *CrossFit Journal*, May 2012, http://library.crossfit.com/free/pdf/CFJ_CFLife_Mom_Olson.pdf.

5 Emily Beers, “All in the Same Room,” *CrossFit Journal*, November 2011, http://library.crossfit.com/free/pdf/CFJ_CFLife_Mom_Olson.pdf

6 Emily Beers, “In Search of a Programming God,” *CrossFit Journal*, December 2011, http://library.crossfit.com/free/pdf/CFJ_Programming_Beers.pdf

7 Ibid.

8 Bonnie Lynch, “Knit One, Curl Two: How the Women of CrossFit are Made,” *Sweat Rx*, Summer 2012, 62.

- ⁹ Ibid.
- ¹⁰ Stephanie Kewin, "The Uncomfortable Truth," *Sweat Rx*, February/March 2014, 55.
- ¹¹ Ibid., 56.
- ¹² Molly Godby, "A Fight to Remember," *CrossFit Journal*, April 2012, http://library.crossfit.com/free/pdf/CFJ_Alzheimers_Godby_April12.pdf
- ¹³ Jennifer Young, "40+ Superwomen: CrossFit Fountain of Youth," *Sweat Rx*, November/December 2012, 49.
- ¹⁴ Lynch, "Knit One, Curl Two," 62.
- ¹⁵ Kewin, "The Uncomfortable Truth," 56.
- ¹⁶ Ibid.
- ¹⁷ Stephanie Kewin, "Stronger, Faster, Master: Joyanne Cooper Inspires the Masses," *Sweat Rx*, January/February 2015, 46.
- ¹⁸ Andréa Maria Cecil, "Adrift—Then Came CrossFit," *CrossFit Journal*, August 2011, http://library.crossfit.com/premium/pdf/CFJ_Adrift_Cecil_July11.pdf?e=1436923862&h=3baec8d86cad2b0d52cb41ad6b898419
- ¹⁹ Skye Pratt Epperson, "Returning to the Throwdown," *WOD Talk*, January/February 2014, 36.
- ²⁰ Ibid.
- ²¹ Judy Sutter, "Remember this Face," *The Box*, October/November 2012, 31.
- ²² Turley-Smith, "Modern Warrior Women," 82.
- ²³ Jamie Dalferes, "FitFitters," *WOD Talk*, January/February 2015, 45.
- ²⁴ Turley-Smith, "Modern Warrior Women," 81.
- ²⁵ Hilary Achauer, "Need for Speed," *CrossFit Journal*, November 2014, http://library.crossfit.com/free/pdf/CFJ_2014_10_Intensity_Achauer2.pdf
- ²⁶ Megan Mitchell and Allison Scahill, "Motherhood and CrossFit," *CrossFit Journal*, November 2011, http://library.crossfit.com/free/pdf/CFJ_Moms_Scahill_Nov2011.pdf.
- ²⁷ Lauryn Lax, "Annie Sakamoto," *WOD Talk*, September/October 2014, 39.
- ²⁸ Lauryn Lax, "Lindsey Smith: Keeping Training in Perspective and Having a Blast Along the Way," *WOD Talk*, March/April 2013, 29.
- ²⁹ Beers, "In Search of a Programming God," 8.
- ³⁰ Young, "40+ Superwomen," 49.
- ³¹ Ibid.
- ³² Jennifer Dadigan, "What CrossFit Has Done For Me," *WOD Talk*, May 2012, 24 (emphasis added).
- ³³ Crawford, "Healthism and the Medicalization of Everyday Life."
- ³⁴ Cooker Perkins and Hanna Dewalt, "CrossFit Training During Pregnancy and Motherhood: A New Scientific Frontier," *CrossFit Journal*, September 2011, http://library.crossfit.com/free/pdf/CFJ_Pregnant_Perkins.pdf
- ³⁵ Ibid.
- ³⁶ Ibid, 3.
- ³⁷ Jette, "Fit for Two," 346.
- ³⁸ Mitchell and Scahill, "Motherhood and CrossFit," 3.
- ³⁹ Ibid.
- ⁴⁰ Shari Dworkin and Faye Linda Wachs, "'Getting Your Body Back:' Postindustrial Fit Motherhood in *Shape Fit Pregnancy Magazine*," *Gender & Society* 18.5 (2004), 611.
- ⁴¹ Ibid.
- ⁴² Dworkin and Wachs, "Getting Your Body Back," 615; Jette, "Fit for Two," 340.
- ⁴³ Rose, "Pregnancy & CrossFit," 29.
- ⁴⁴ Mitchell and Scahill, "Motherhood and CrossFit," 4.
- ⁴⁵ Dadigan, "What CrossFit Has Done For Me," 24.
- ⁴⁶ Dworkin and Wachs, "Getting Your Body Back," 617.
- ⁴⁷ Rose, "Pregnancy & CrossFit," 29.

- ⁴⁸ Catherine Cochran, "CrossFitting Through Pregnancy," *CrossFit Journal*, December 2012, http://library.crossfit.com/premium/pdf/CFJ_2012_Pregnant_FINAL2.pdf?e=1436924170&h=81e7dc5b176d9807e107d5a985b71640
- ⁴⁹ Bayley Lawrence, "Nine-Month WOD," *CrossFit Journal*, April 2012, http://library.crossfit.com/free/pdf/CFJ_Lawrence_Pregnant2012.pdf
- ⁵⁰ Kristin Auger, "Baby on Board," *CrossFit Journal*, May 2014, http://library.crossfit.com/free/pdf/CFJ_2014_04_Pregnancy_Auger2.pdf
- ⁵¹ Lawrence, "Nine-Month WOD," 3.
- ⁵² Skye Pratt Epperson, "Irrepressible Annie," *WOD Talk*, July/August 2013, 45.
- ⁵³ "CrossFit is My Sanity," *Sweat Rx*, February/March 2014, 40.
- ⁵⁴ Lawrence, "Nine Month WOD," 1; Auger, "Baby on Board," 10; Cochran, "CrossFitting Through Pregnancy."
- ⁵⁵ Perkins and Dewalt, "CrossFit Training During Pregnancy and Motherhood," 3.
- ⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.
- ⁵⁷ "CrossFit is My Sanity," 40.
- ⁵⁸ Mitchell and Schaill, "Motherhood and CrossFit," 4.
- ⁵⁹ Lawrence, "Nine Month WOD," 1.
- ⁶⁰ Dworkin and Wachs, "Getting Your Body Back," 616.
- ⁶¹ Auger, "Baby on Board," 10; Perkins and Dewalt, "CrossFit Training During Pregnancy and Motherhood," 1.
- ⁶² Rose, "Pregnancy & CrossFit," 29..
- ⁶³ "Grace" is a "benchmark WOD," or a workout that CrossFitters repeat periodically to gauge their progress, which involves 30 clean and jerks performed "for time" (e.g. as quickly as possible with the time required recorded) at a "prescribed" weight of 135 pounds for men or 95 pounds for women.
- ⁶⁴ Mitchell and Schaill, "Motherhood and CrossFit," 3.
- ⁶⁵ Hilary Achauer, "The CrossFit Life: Bouncing Back," *CrossFit Journal*, March 2012, http://library.crossfit.com/free/pdf/CFJ_BouncingBack_Achauer2.pdf
- ⁶⁶ *Ibid.*
- ⁶⁷ Dworkin and Wachs, "Getting Your Body Back."; Jette, "Fit For Two."
- ⁶⁸ Jette, "Fit for Two," 347.
- ⁶⁹ *Ibid.*
- ⁷⁰ Stephanie Vincent, "Not Just Another Diet: A Q&A With the Ladies of Paleo," *WOD Talk*, January/February 2013, 60.
- ⁷¹ Sarah Lipton, "Just Weight: Who Needs Skinny When You Can Be Strong?," *Sweat Rx*, January/February 2013, 27.
- ⁷² *Ibid.*
- ⁷³ *Ibid.*
- ⁷⁴ Joan Jennings, "Strong is the New Skinny," *WOD Talk*, September 2011, 24.
- ⁷⁵ Melissa Gonzalez, "Living Our Own Versions of 'As Prescribed:' The Effects of Function Over Form on CrossFit Women," *WOD Talk*, May 2012, 38.
- ⁷⁶ Skye Pratt Epperson, "Fired Up: Danielle Sidell," *WOD Talk*, January/February 2015, 37.
- ⁷⁷ Bree Edwards and Carleen Lessard, "Learning to Love My Body," *WOD Talk* July/August 2012, 32.
- ⁷⁸ Lipton, "Just Weight," 26.
- ⁷⁹ Stephanie Kewin, "Face of An Angel, Kip of a WODKilla," *Sweat Rx*, July/August 2013, 51.
- ⁸⁰ Edwards and Lessard, "Learning to Love My Body," 32 ().
- ⁸¹ "General Physical Preparedness: More than Muscle Deep," *Sweat Rx*, December/January 2014, 33 (emphasis added).
- ⁸² Andrea Logan, "The Best Medicine," *WOD Talk*, May/June 2014, 55 (emphasis added).
- ⁸³ Megan Grant, "Once Upon a Laxative," *WOD Talk*, March/April 2015, 25.
- ⁸⁴ Brittney Saline, "Coach, Counselor, or Both?," *CrossFit Journal*, December 2014, http://library.crossfit.com/free/pdf/CFJ_2014_10_Counselor_Saline_3.pdf.
- ⁸⁵ Logan, "The Best Medicine," 55.

- ⁸⁶ Brittney Saline, "Fit to Teach," *CrossFit Journal*, January 2015, http://library.crossfit.com/free/pdf/CFJ_2014_08_Teacher_Saline5.pdf
- ⁸⁷ Ibid.
- ⁸⁸ Lessard and Edwards, "Learning to Love My Body," 33.
- ⁸⁹ Epperson, "Fired Up," 38.
- ⁹⁰ Parisjat Banomyong Umscheid, "CrossFit: Helping Women Change Their Self-Image," *WOD Talk*, January/February 2015.
- ⁹¹ Ibid., 55.
- ⁹² Stephanie Vincent, "Moving Past Female Perfection in the Gym and in Our Lives," *WOD Talk*, September/October 2012, 46.
- ⁹³ Cory Schifano, "My CrossFit Revolution: Strong is the New Skinny," *WOD Talk*, March/April 2013, 62.
- ⁹⁴ Dworkin and Wachs, "Getting Your Body Back," 612.
- ⁹⁵ Adam Farrah, "Strong is the New Skinny: Evolution of a Community," *WOD Talk*, August 2011, 50.
- ⁹⁶ "General Physical Preparedness," 33.
- ⁹⁷ Ibid.
- ⁹⁸ Dworkin and Wachs, *Body Panic*, 175.
- ⁹⁹ Ibid.
- ¹⁰⁰ Markula, "Beyond the Perfect Body."
- ¹⁰¹ Jennings, "Strong is the New Skinny," 24.
- ¹⁰² Gonzalez, "The Effects of Function Over Form," 31.
- ¹⁰³ Ibid.
- ¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 32.
- ¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 31.
- ¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 32.
- ¹⁰⁷ "Fashletics (Live, Love, Lift)," *WOD Talk*, May 2012, 38-39.
- ¹⁰⁸ Saline, "Fit to Teach."
- ¹⁰⁹ Hilary Achauer, "The CrossFit Life: Breaking the Cycle," *CrossFit Journal*, December 2012, http://library.crossfit.com/free/pdf/CFJ_Breaking2_Achauer_FINAL2.pdf
- ¹¹⁰ Vincent, "The Effects of Form Over Function," 32.
- ¹¹¹ "CrossFit Women Rewrite the Rules: The New Definition of Fitness," *Sweat Rx*, Summer 2012, 35.
- ¹¹² Ibid.
- ¹¹³ Caroline Wolf, "CrossFit Girls Kick Ass: A Force to Be Reckoned With," *Sweat Rx*, Summer 2012, 96.
- ¹¹⁴ Michelle Caldaroni, "CrossFit Women Rewrite the Rules: The New Definition of Fitness," *Sweat Rx*, Summer 2012, 41.
- ¹¹⁵ Ibid., 61.
- ¹¹⁶ "Look Like a Beauty, Train Like a Beast," *Sweat Rx*, February/March 2014, 70.
- ¹¹⁷ Ibid.
- ¹¹⁸ Caldaroni, "CrossFit Women Rewrite the Rules," 58.
- ¹¹⁹ Josh Briggs, "CrossFit: Your Passport to a Hot Body," *Sweat Rx*, Fall 2011, 41; Young, "40+ Superwomen," 50.
- ¹²⁰ "StarFit: Celebs Take in the WODs," *Sweat Rx*, November/December 2014, 48.
- ¹²¹ Ainslie Kehler, "Fire Fighter Fitness: CrossFit as a Training Tool," *Sweat Rx*, May/June 2013, 77.
- ¹²² Hilary Achauer, "Long May You Run...and Lift," *CrossFit Journal*, January 2015, http://library.crossfit.com/free/pdf/CFJ_2014_11_Longevity_Achauer2.pdf
- ¹²³ "General Physical Preparedness," 33.
- ¹²⁴ Gonzalez, "The Effects of Function Over Form," 31.
- ¹²⁵ Ibid.
- ¹²⁶ Mike Carlson, "CrossFit Faces: Allison Moyer," *The Box*, November 2014, 58.
- ¹²⁷ Gonzalez, "The Effects of Function Over Form," 31.
- ¹²⁸ Spitzack, *Confessing Excess*, 8

- ¹²⁹ Young, “40+ Superwomen,” 50.
- ¹³⁰ Jamie Shane, “Josh Bridges: Mentally Tough,” *Sweat Rx*, September/October 2014, 56.
- ¹³¹ Grant, “Once Upon a Laxative,” 25.
- ¹³² “Loving Myself: Accepting My CrossFit Body,” *Sweat Rx*, January/February 2014, 34.
- ¹³³ Ibid.
- ¹³⁴ Angela Rose, “Power Incarnate,” *Sweat Rx*, September/October 2014, 40.
- ¹³⁵ Ibid.
- ¹³⁶ Turley-Smith, “Modern Warrior Women,” 83.
- ¹³⁷ Schifano, “My CrossFit Revolution,” 63.
- ¹³⁸ Diane Zuri, “Why Don’t People CrossFit?,” *WOD Talk*, March/April 2014, 24.
- ¹³⁹ Sam Farina, “CrossFit: Separating Fact From Fiction,” *WOD Talk*, July 2011, 31.
- ¹⁴⁰ Stephanie Kewin, “Why Size Matters: CrossFit Challenges Stereotypes,” *Sweat Rx*, October/November 2013, 36.
- ¹⁴¹ Zuri, “Why Don’t People CrossFit?,” 23.
- ¹⁴² “Weigh In: Fear of the Bulk,” *Sweat Rx*, March/April 2013, 14.
- ¹⁴³ Ibid.
- ¹⁴⁴ Jennings, “Strong is the New Skinny,” 24; “Weigh In,” 14.
- ¹⁴⁵ Lipton, “Just Weight,” 26; Schifano, “My CrossFit Revolution,” 62.
- ¹⁴⁶ Saline, “Fit to Teach.”
- ¹⁴⁷ Umscheid, “CrossFit: Helping Women Change Their Self-Image,” 57.
- ¹⁴⁸ Jennings, “Strong is the New Skinny,” 25.
- ¹⁴⁹ Lessard and Edwards, “Learning to Love My Body,” 32.
- ¹⁵⁰ Eric Johnson, “The CrossFit Life: Intensity in Action,” *CrossFit Journal*, November 2012, http://library.crossfit.com/premium/pdf/CFJ_CFLife_Intensity_Johnson_FINAL.pdf?e=1436925565&h=74dc725659ad2a79f4cf625ef0874072
- ¹⁵¹ Mike Carlson, “The View From the Top,” *The Box*, December 2014, 36.
- ¹⁵² Alyssa Ross, “Calling all Sisters,” *CrossFit Journal*, September 2011, http://library.crossfit.com/premium/pdf/CFJ_Ross_CallingSisters.pdf?e=1436925653&h=53f314a8d345751f7f1da734fed86800
- ¹⁵³ Stacy McCann, “Taking it to the People,” *CrossFit Journal*, October 2011, http://library.crossfit.com/premium/pdf/CFJ_Obesity_McCannOct2011.pdf?e=1436925698&h=7b5c628a25192d1ee8a803f782f29979
- ¹⁵⁴ Johnson, “The CrossFit Life: Intensity in Action.”
- ¹⁵⁵ Carlson, “The View From the Top,” 36.
- ¹⁵⁶ Deborah Lupton, *Fat*, New York: Routledge (2013), 61.
- ¹⁵⁷ Rose, “Power Incarnate,” 40.
- ¹⁵⁸ Ibid.
- ¹⁵⁹ Jamie Shane, “12 Days of Christmas Abbott: Unwrapping the Gifts of CrossFit,” *Sweat Rx*, November/December 2014, 54.
- ¹⁶⁰ Lindsey Berra, “The Fisher Queen,” *The Box*, November 2014, 30.
- ¹⁶¹ Bob LeFavi, “CrossFit On Its Own,” *The Box*, March/April 2013, 24.
- ¹⁶² Hilary Achauer, “Fit for the Fittest,” *CrossFit Journal*, March 2014, http://library.crossfit.com/free/pdf/CFJ_02_2014_Denim_Achauer2.pdf
- ¹⁶³ “Look Like a Beauty, Train Like a Beast,” 70.
- ¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 71.
- ¹⁶⁵ E.M. Burton, “You Were Saying...with Jasmine Danker,” *CrossFit Journal*, March 2012, http://library.crossfit.com/premium/pdf/CFJ_Profile5_Burton_March2012.pdf?e=1436925822&h=9a69d20c1cec432ab6b84aef91d4d706
- ¹⁶⁶ Caldaroni, “CrossFit Women Rewrite the Rules,” 39.

- ¹⁶⁷ Emily Beers, "Outside the Games Bubble," *CrossFit Journal*, July 2011, http://library.crossfit.com/free/pdf/CFJ_Games2011Day2_Beers.pdf
- ¹⁶⁸ Zuri, "Why Don't People CrossFit?," 24.
- ¹⁶⁹ Jennings, "Strong is the New Skinny," 51.
- ¹⁷⁰ Emily Beers, "When Murph Met Cindy," *CrossFit Journal*, October 2011, http://library.crossfit.com/premium/pdf/CJ_Dating_Beers_Oct11.pdf?e=1436926056&h=258e603b84a1b1b3141daaa44ccbddd8
- ¹⁷¹ Epperson, "Fired Up," 37.
- ¹⁷² Wolf, *The Beauty Myth*, 12.
- ¹⁷³ Ibid., 14.
- ¹⁷⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁷⁵ Umscheid, "CrossFit: Helping Women Change Their Self-Image," 57; Angela Rose, "Maria Nahri: Beauty and Strength in Balance," *Sweat Rx*, Summer 2012, 31.
- ¹⁷⁶ Markula, "Firm but Shapely, Fit but Sexy, Strong but Thin," 448.
- ¹⁷⁷ Ibid.
- ¹⁷⁸ Edwards and Lessard, "Learning to Love My Body," 33.
- ¹⁷⁹ "Weigh In," 14; Mairead Walsh, "Camille LeBlanc-Bazinet," *Sweat Rx*, Winter 2011, 30.
- ¹⁸⁰ Fred Antwi, "Strength + Beauty," *Sweat Rx*, Summer 2012, 6.
- ¹⁸¹ Kewin, "Face of an Angel," 51. Carlson, "The View From the Top," 36.
- ¹⁸² McCann, "Taking it the People," 11.
- ¹⁸³ Wolf, *The Beauty Myth*, 290.
- ¹⁸⁴ Rose, "Maria Nahri," 31.
- ¹⁸⁵ Caldaroni, "CrossFit Women Rewrite the Rules," 58.
- ¹⁸⁶ Caldaroni, "CrossFit Women Rewrite the Rules," 61.
- ¹⁸⁷ Andréa Maria Cecil, "A Mandate and an Opportunity," *CrossFit Journal*, July 2013, http://library.crossfit.com/free/pdf/06_2013_Women2_Cecil_FINAL3.pdf
- ¹⁸⁸ Andréa Maria Cecil, "Women's Wait," *CrossFit Journal*, July 2013, http://library.crossfit.com/free/pdf/06_2013_Women1_Cecil_FINAL4.pdf
- ¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 6.
- ¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 7.
- ¹⁹¹ Cecil, "A Mandate and an Opportunity."
- ¹⁹² Lynch, "Knit One, Curl Two," 64.
- ¹⁹³ Cecil, "A Mandate and an Opportunity."
- ¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 3; Hilary Achauer, "The F-Word," *CrossFit Journal*, April 2014, http://library.crossfit.com/free/pdf/CFJ_03_2014_Feminism_Achauer3.pdf
- ¹⁹⁵ Cecil, "A Mandate and an Opportunity."
- ¹⁹⁶ Maureen O'Hagan, "Coach," *CrossFit Journal*, October 2014,
- ¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 4.
- ¹⁹⁸ Ibid.
- ¹⁹⁹ Achauer, "The F-Word."
- ²⁰⁰ Ibid.
- ²⁰¹ Kewin, "Why Size Matters," 38.
- ²⁰² Eryn Kirkwood, "Challenge the Status Quo: Grow a Badass Beard," *Sweat Rx*, September/October 2014, 47.
- ²⁰³ Caldaroni, "CrossFit Women Rewrite the Rules," 38.
- ²⁰⁴ Dworkin and Messner, "Just do What?: Sport, Bodies, Gender," 22.
- ²⁰⁵ Cole and Hribar, "Celebrity Feminism: Nike Style Post-Fordism, Transcendence, and Consumer Power,"; Dworkin and Messner, "Just do What?: Sport, Bodies, Gender."
- ²⁰⁶ Dworkin and Messner, "Just do What?: Sport, Bodies, Gender," 21.

- ²⁰⁷ Mike Warkentin, "Virtuosity: A Call for Submissions," *CrossFit Journal*, September 2014, http://library.crossfit.com/free/pdf/CFJ_2014_09_VirtuositySubmissions_Warkentin.pdf
- ²⁰⁸ Cesa Ortiz, "Inner Struggle," *WOD Talk*, July 2011, 23.
- ²⁰⁹ Jane Drexler, "Aristotle in a Box," *CrossFit Journal*, February 2013, http://library.crossfit.com/free/pdf/CFJ_Aristotle_Drexler_FINAL2.pdf
- ²¹⁰ Rick Randolph, "Applied Fitness: CrossFit Defense," *CrossFit Journal*, October 2012, http://library.crossfit.com/free/pdf/CFJ_Defense_Randolph_FINAL3.pdf
- ²¹¹ Dennis Lesniak, "The CrossFit Life: Confessions of a Reformed CrossFit Hater," *CrossFit Journal*, July 2012, <http://www.crossfiteengineered.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Confessions-of-a-Reformed-CrossFit-Hater.pdf>
- ²¹² Peter Egyed, "The Ground and the Fury," *CrossFit Journal*, February 2015, http://library.crossfit.com/free/pdf/CFJ_15_01_Fury_Cecil.pdf; Mike Warkentin, "The CrossFit SAT-Prep Program," *CrossFit Journal*, October 2012, http://library.crossfit.com/free/pdf/CFJ_SAT_Glassman_3.pdf
- ²¹³ Drexler, "Aristotle in a Box."
- ²¹⁴ Emily Beers, "All For One," *CrossFit Journal*, July 2012, http://library.crossfit.com/free/pdf/CFJ_Patterson_Beers.pdf
- ²¹⁵ Jane Drexler, "The Greek and the Games," *CrossFit Journal*, February 2014, http://library.crossfit.com/free/pdf/CFJ_2014_02_Stoicism_Drexler.pdf
- ²¹⁶ Emily Beers, "Emotions in Motion," *CrossFit Journal*, August 2014, http://library.crossfit.com/free/pdf/CFJ_2014_08_Games_Beers_3.pdf
- ²¹⁷ Jamie Shane, "Greg Glassman: Most Powerful Man in Fitness," *Sweat Rx*, January/February 2015, 53.
- ²¹⁸ Drexler, "Aristotle in a Box."
- ²¹⁹ Liz Wolfe, Lee Knight, and Steve Liberati, "More than the Street: A Steve's Club Story," *CrossFit Journal*, August 2012, http://library.crossfit.com/free/pdf/CFJ_CFLife_Steve_Wolfe.pdf; Warkentin, "Virtuosity."
- ²²⁰ Anka Radakovich, "Survey Says...Sex!," *CrossFit Journal*, August 2012, http://library.crossfit.com/free/pdf/CFJ_SexSurvey_Radakovich.pdf; Warkentin, "The CrossFit SAT-Prep Program."
- ²²¹ Dawn Fletcher, "Improve Your Mindset: Improve Your Performance and Life," *Sweat Rx*, November/December 2014, 30.
- ²²² Chris Cavallerano, "CrossFit Transference," *CrossFit Journal*, November 2012, http://library.crossfit.com/free/pdf/CFJ_Transference_Cavallerano_November2012.pdf

Chapter Five—Conclusion: Discursive Effects of the CrossFit Narrative

In a broader cultural context, this discourse analysis demonstrates the continued commodification of health and fitness in light of a shifting representation of femininity and the ideal feminine body. The themes outlined in the previous chapters explore these shifting notions and explain CrossFit's notions of femininity and the healthy female body, considering critically some of the implications of these constructions. In this conclusion, I will further my critical discussion to more fully address my research objective of explaining the power effects of these discourses and discourse structures. It is here where the way in which the discourses on health, fitness and femininity reflected in these themes function together can be considered with an interest in the associated power relations. Affecting options for women's identity positions, the construction of a femininity and the female body in the CrossFit texts has the potential to shape the way women perceive themselves and the world around them, shaping their lives far beyond the physical realm. Linked together by the improvement imperative, the themes presented in this paper serve to privilege certain forms of subjectivity related to gender at the expense of others.

Socially, themes regarding CrossFit's ability to shape women into "better" versions of themselves who are more capable of being and becoming mothers and negotiating the feminine requirement of balance reflect current assumptions about women's roles in society. Motherhood and domestic responsibilities remain highlighted as appropriate forms of femininity, with a focus on even elite female CrossFitters' private lives downplaying their athletic achievements but

providing reassurance regarding their abilities to fulfill gendered and heterosexual social requirements.

The themes that offer CrossFit up as a means of addressing a faulty body image serve not to address the factors that might drive women's bodily concerns, but rather problematize these concerns, presenting another issue with which women must deal with on an individual basis. The framing of eating disorders as the manifestation of body image issues creates a sense of women being "at risk" if they do not address their thoughts. Individualizing responsibility, the ideological factors that might drive a high rate of bodily anxiety amongst women are left unaddressed. That women should aspire to be beautiful does not become the target of intervention, just women's individual thoughts about themselves. In this way, this seemingly empowering discourse is actually a reproduction of the oppressive "beauty myth" that unquestioningly associates femininity with beauty.

The themes that are related to CrossFit's ability to build strong, beautiful, and functional bodies that are superior to those that do not participate in the activity are reproductive of more of the discourses in contemporary health and fitness that can work against women. Though the strong feminine ideal seems to be in contradiction to the "weak" aspect of "emphasized femininity" that Connell referred to, elements like women's physical inferiority to men, concern with increasing one's heterosexual appeal, and docility also characteristic of this kind of femininity are reproduced rather than challenged by the CrossFit narrative on femininity.¹ Rather than opening up new forms of subjectivity for women, this reiterates that an acceptable woman is one that strives to be beautiful and to retain her markers of hegemonic femininity. Similarly, the notion that beauty has been "redefined" to encompass a strong body does not mark a change in the way in which beauty is narrowly defined; instead, the ideal female body now requires a certain level of muscularity

paired with a concomitant rejection of “skinny.” Women’s bodies will continue to be measured against narrow confines of what is deemed appropriate femininity, with certain bodies privileged while others are rejected. This exercise as beautification discourse must also be considered in combination with the narrative offering CrossFit up as a means to resolve women’s body image issues and to shift their understanding of their bodies. Paired with a continued emphasis on exercise as a means to achieve an improved aesthetic, it is easy to recognize what Markula suggested, that this “focus on women’s psychological well-being disguises increased attention to women’s appearance and makes a deeper obsession with the body possible.”²

Themes regarding equality strengthen the notion that women’s empowerment lies in their bodily practices, further directing women’s attentions onto their bodies. While not downplaying the potential for bodily empowerment, the narratives in CrossFit privilege individualistic approaches at the expense of other options. While offering up CrossFit as a means to empowerment might not be problematic in and of itself, doing so at the expense of other forms of activism through the representation of earlier forms of feminism as outdated serves to further orient women’s concerns onto their own bodies and can downplay the potential for challenging institutions and structures that sustain gender inequality.

All of these themes and narratives are tied together by the improvement imperative. As Heywood noted, consumer culture requires “subjects willing to work on themselves continually, to see themselves as lacking and able to empower themselves only through more self-work.”³ The improvement imperative positions subjects as constantly lacking, normalizing consumption in the name of bettering oneself. Given the association of a fit body with morality, reproduced especially in articles referencing the way in which CrossFit forges character, this consumption in the name of self-improvement transcends the body and can be aimed at shaping one’s self more generally.

For women, the improvement imperative applies to all of the aspects of femininity reflected in the themes; the message is that anything a woman does, she can do better—and CrossFit can help. That the list of areas defined as “women’s issues” is lengthy and specific reiterates the way in which women’s lives and their bodies are in particular need of self-management. From the unruly pregnant body to women’s problematic body image, femininity, according to the texts, carries with it the necessity of self-management.

At this point, I would like to address a question I posed in the introduction to this thesis: *Does CrossFit represent a shift toward gender equality in the physical cultural realm?* Through my analysis and the themes presented, I hope that I have at least partially demonstrated the way in which this is a difficult question to answer with a simple yes or no. For the women whose testimonials suggest that CrossFit has empowered them, their subjective reality suggests *yes*. However, considered in a broader cultural context, it becomes murkier. Consider, for example, the way that the association of strength with beauty may in fact make a woman feel strong, and therefore beautiful, and empowered. However, this must be tempered with the way in which this reifies appropriate femininity as necessarily encompassing beauty, which might factor into a continued objectification of women and their bodies. The individualistic and bodily-based empowerment offered up via CrossFit can be considered a form of “popular feminism,” which has been criticized for transferring energies “away from collective organizing to change institutions” and onto women’s individual bodies.⁴ In line with other critical feminist researchers who have explored the way in which “multinational fitness campaigns have successfully sold anxieties about bodily lack through women through the commodification of ideologies of feminist empowerment...in a larger climate of declining social activism and dissipating social movements,” it is important to be cautious of acritically praising feminism based on bodily practices.⁵

The way in which the CrossFit texts contribute to the meritocratic ideology pervasive in relation to health and fitness in contemporary society, particularly in combination with the narrative on constantly seeking improvement, sustains consumption in the name of an improved body. If one takes a step back from the assumption that individuals “get what they put in” when it comes to exercise and their associated appearance or health, the commercial benefits and the power implications of sustaining these meritocratic ideas regarding the body become clearer. Those who do not fit cultural prescriptions for the ideal, healthy body will consider this lacking assessment as evidence of their own need to try harder, especially given the pervasiveness of the ideology of healthism. In today’s commercialized world of health and fitness, this translates into the need to be a better consumer. Given the way in which the ideal female body of CrossFit, though offering a departure from ideals emphasizing normative thinness, remains narrowly defined, one is unlikely to ever deem their bodies sufficient. With the addition of the improvement imperative, ideal femininity has built within it a need to consume in the name of one’s constant self-betterment. Certain bodies will never fit a cultural prescription for what appears healthy while others can engage in what are arguably unhealthy practices whilst retaining a fit or healthy look. That people consider health an area of their lives where they have control is not a bad thing, as certainly their habits matter. Overestimating the extent of this control or totalizing it, though easy to do in a society where the ideology of healthism rules, serves to drive consumption aimed at achieving the fit or healthy ideal offered up as within volitional reach.

Here it is useful to consider the implications regarding power relations of the narratives. Through the analysis, it seems apparent that Foucault’s panoptic power arrangement that Markula referred to in her work on aerobics operates similarly in regards to CrossFit. Healthist narratives and those encouraging constant self-assessment and the pursuit of “better” in the CrossFit texts

encourage women to take responsibility for the controlling of their bodies and of their selves. This feeds into a panoptic power arrangement with women taking control of themselves and their bodies whilst the source of the power encouraging them to do so remains hidden.⁶ Paired with the framing of the desire to improve as natural, women can simply continue to assess themselves as lacking and to engage in consumption aimed at addressing this lack. In this way, these narratives function to further sustain women's focus on their bodies through self-surveillance, management, and discipline.

Given the immense emancipatory potential possible from participation in physical activity, a site where women can shift their understanding of their bodies, the goal of this research is not to criticize women for taking up physical activity. Regardless of whether their initial goal was to improve their appearance or if they engage in practices that seem contradictory, blaming women for their participation is not the same as holding them responsible. However, one must critically consider the way in which health and fitness discourse can compromise women's health. For example, when the effects of exercise are seen as primarily aesthetic, its other benefits—from improving mental, physical, and emotional health to providing a venue for empowerment and liberation—can be missed. In this regard, a woman unable to reach the bodily ideal may thus miss out on these benefits. As Bordo suggests, this kind of research need not deny the health and other benefits of diet, exercise, and body management. In line with her position, viewing “our bodies as a site of struggle, where we must *work* to keep our daily practices in the service of resistance to gender domination, not in the service of docility and gender normalization” provides an alternative way to resist damaging and limiting discourses without denying women the benefits afforded by pursuing health.⁷

Thus, CrossFit's emphasis on performance and functional health need not be dismissed as universally disempowering, but must be considered with a critical consideration regarding its ramifications. The idea of shifting one's conception of the body from an object to more of an instrument, or what Scott-Dixon refers to as "from being to doing," may indeed present an opportunity for empowerment for which CrossFit is ideally suited. However, one might ask, *is the goal of better performance or functional health used to normalize and legitimize the same things that have been labeled elements of the control of women's bodies in the past (e.g. restrictive dieting, obsessive exercise)?* CrossFit gyms, with their absence of mirrors, may be a perfect arena for women to depart from the notion of using exercise as a means to improve their appearance. The narratives on feminine empowerment explored in the themes, however, demonstrate the way in which this kind of potential can be turned to serve capitalism and to sustain disempowering representations of the female body. Dixon's research focused on women's experiences in speed-strength and power-based sports (some of which are components of CrossFit, specifically including Olympic weightlifting, powerlifting, heavy events) and concluded that these sports provide "a possible model for articulating a feminist politics of empowerment through activity that is not dependent on negatively disciplining the body nor achieving thinness/leanness."⁸ In light of the themes presented above, it is clear that despite CrossFit's potential to serve as a possible model, the encouragement of bodily discipline and the emphasis on its potential to help women pursue an acceptable body composition and sexual attractiveness serve to turn some of these potentially liberating impulses against women. As White, Young, and Gillett suggest, the commodification of fitness can change a potentially emancipatory practice into a potential site of control and regulation of women's bodies.⁹ Dworkin and Wachs refer to the kind of power available to women via their

self-presentation as complicated, offering them “limited access to power by becoming the right kind of object.”¹⁰

From a broader perspective, the themes presented in this paper are reflective of a trend in the physical cultural realm that goes far beyond CrossFit and even beyond gender issues. As Atencio, Beal, and Yochim said in their exploration of race and gender in urban skating, in today’s neoliberal climate, sports which are “seemingly nonconformist and oppositional to the dominant logics of neoliberalism actually frame idealized identities that are highly consumerist.”¹¹ They argue that in this context, “individualistic capitalist practices emerge that contradict social welfare and equality” even as the sports work to promote themselves as socially progressive.¹² I argue that this is similar to the way in which CrossFit’s alternative positioning and advocacy for gender equality can be contradictory, sustaining some of the factors which perpetuate gender inequality. As Atencio, Beal, and Yochim note, contradictions emerge when these kinds of issue-focused branding strategies, “operating within highly neo-liberal economic conditions and aimed at generating profit, attempt to speak to entrenched and complex social issues.”¹³ A critical analysis in the physical cultural realm today must consider themes in the context of neoliberalism, or what Hursh and Henderson characterize as an “economic climate of transnational capitalism characterized by the privileging of deregulated markets,” emphasizing the role of individuals to pursue their own economic self-interests as a means to ensure economic growth.¹⁴ Considering these themes within a neoliberal context that structures contemporary gender relations, one must critically question the way in which the individualistic notions offered up contradict the progressive goal of gender equality, diminishing the importance of structural intervention aimed at transforming long-standing institutions that sustain inequality. While certainly not all bad, even though the media’s promotion of CrossFit advances the ideal of gender equality, it ultimately, at

the same time, participates in an industry that currently relies upon gender inequality to generate its profits.

This research contributes to a larger body of research on the effects of consumerism and commodification in health and fitness. My research was limited in terms of the number and type of media I analyzed, with magazines representing only a small section of the CrossFit empire. While this does not represent a weakness in CDA, other forms of media, particularly social media, might offer deeper insight into the production and reproduction of discourses regarding femininity, health, and fitness in CrossFit. Blogs, individual athletes' social media pages, and CrossFit gyms' websites, for example, might serve as texts to be considered in a similar fashion as I did. Further, an examination of media not specifically focused on CrossFit (e.g. newspapers, more general health and fitness magazines) could also offer a relevant extension of my work. Another important area of research would involve exploring the construction of masculinity and the male body. Beyond gender, in my research, several themes sparked my interest and might serve as fruitful starting points for subsequent work; themes regarding militarization, the framing of the "fat" body, and the many technologies (e.g. trackers, apps, wearable technology) that one can use in the management of the body. In line with the work of scholars who have contributed to critical literature concerning what is taken for granted in women's exercise and fitness promotion, this paper can contribute towards the resistance of damaging dominant discourses that reinforce existing gender relations under the guise of feminine power in physical culture. Examining the ways in which media representations of activity is implicated in the production of femininity and the pursuit of the ideal body, as this paper has done in regards to CrossFit in North American publications, is important because it alerts us to the taken for granted and assumed truths circulating in contemporary health and fitness discourse.

Endnotes for Chapter Five

- ¹ Raewyn Connell, *Gender and Power* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), 183.
- ² Markula, "Firm But Shapely, Fit but Sexy, Strong but Thin," 449.
- ³ Heywood, *Bodymakers*, 190-191.
- ⁴ Dworkin and Messner, "Just do What?: Sport, Bodies, Gender," 22.
- ⁵ Dworkin and Wachs, *Body Panic*, 109.
- ⁶ Markula, "Firm But Shapely, Fit but Sexy, Strong but Thin," 449.
- ⁷ Bordo, *Unbearable Weight*, 184.
- ⁸ Krista Scott-Dixon, "Big Girls Don't Cry: Fitness, Fatness, and the Production of Feminist Knowledge," *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 25.1 (2008), 27.
- ⁹ White, Young, and Gillett, "Bodywork as a Moral Imperative."
- ¹⁰ Dworkin and Wachs, *Body Panic*, 175.
- ¹¹ Matthew Atencio, Becky Beal, and Emily Chivers Yochim, "It Ain't Just Black Kids and White Kids: The Representation and Reproduction of Authentic "Skurban" Masculinities," *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 30.2 (2013), 157.
- ¹² Ibid.
- ¹³ Ibid.
- ¹⁴ David Hursh and Joe Henderson, "Contesting Global Neoliberalism and Creating Alternative Futures," *Discourse*, 32.2 (2011), 174-175.

Bibliography

Literature Review and Discussion

“About the Games.” *CrossFit Games*. <http://games.crossfit.com/about-the-games>.

Atencio, Matthew, Beal, Becky, and Chivers Yochim, Emily. “It Ain’t Just Black Kids and White Kids: The Representation and Reproduction of Authentic “Skurban” Masculinities.” *Sociology of Sport Journal* 30, no. 2 (2013): 153-172.

Bordo, Susan. *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture and the Body*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.

Bowen, Glenn. “Naturalistic Inquiry and the Saturation Concept,” *Qualitative Research* 8, no. 1 (2008): 137-152.

Bunton, Robin. “Popular Health, Advanced Liberalism, and *Good Housekeeping Magazine*,” in *Foucault, Health and Medicine*, edited by Robin Bunton and Alan Petersen, 223-247. London: Routledge, 1997.

Busch, Brigitta, and Wodak, Ruth. “Approaches to Media Texts,” in *The SAGE Handbook of Media Studies*. New York: SAGE Publications, 2004: 105-123.

Cahn, Susan. *Coming on Strong: Gender and Sexuality in Twentieth-Century Women’s Sport*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995.

Carpenter, Christine, and Suto, Melinda. *Qualitative Research for Occupational and Physical Therapists*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2008.

Castro, Dave. “The History of the CrossFit Games.” *CrossFit Journal*. July 2010, <http://journal.crossfit.com/2010/07/games-history.tpl>.

Cole, Cheryl, and Hribar, Amy. “Celebrity Feminism: Nike Style Post-Fordism, Transcendence, and Consumer Power.” *Sociology of Sport Journal* 12, no. 4 (1995): 347-369.

Connell, Raewyn. *Gender and Power*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987.

Couture, Jesse. “Consuming CrossFit: Neoliberal Subjectivity, Sport, and Implicit Feminism” Presentation at the North American Society for the Sociology of Sport Annual Conference, Portland, OR, November 5-8, 2014.

Crawford, Richard. “Healthism and the Medicalization of Everyday Life,” *International Journal of Health Services* 10, no. 3 (1980): 365-388.

Crawford, Robert. “Health as a Meaningful Social Practice.” *Health* 10, no. 4 (2006): 401-420.

CrossFit. Facebook post. November 15, 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/crossfit/posts/10152375988022676>.

“CrossFit FAQ.” *CrossFit.com*. <http://www.crossfit.com/cf-info/faq.html#WOD1>.

“CrossFit Founder Greg Glassman: I’m a Rabid Libertarian.” *Reason.com*. July 22, 2013, <http://reason.com/blog/2013/07/22/video-crossfit-founder-greg-glassman-im>.

- Dawson, Marchelle. “‘Fitter, Faster, Stronger, Better’: CrossFit as a Reinventive Institution.” Presentation at the XVIII International Sociological Association World Congress of Sociology, Yokohama, Japan, July 13 – 19, 2014.
- Dworkin, Shari. “Holding Back: Negotiating a Glass Ceiling on Women’s Muscular Strength.” *Sociological Perspectives* 44, no. 3 (2001): 333-350.
- Dworkin, Shari, and Messner, Michael, “Just do What?: Sport, Bodies, Gender,” in *Revisioning Gender*, edited by Judith Lorber, Beth Hess, and Myra Max Ferree, 341-364. Thousands Oaks: SAGE Publications, 1999.
- Dworkin, Shari, and Wachs, Faye Linda. “‘Getting Your Body Back.’ Postindustrial Fit Motherhood in *Shape Fit Pregnancy Magazine*.” *Gender & Society* 18, no. 5 (2004): 610-624.
- Dworkin, Shari, and Wachs, Faye Linda. *Body Panic: Gender, Health, and the Selling of Fitness*. New York: New York University Press, 2009.
- Evans-Grimm, Geoffrey, and Gearhart, Rebecca. “The CrossFit Coup D’Etat: A look at a Dynamic New Lifestyle Combating Modern Lethargy.” Poster at the John Wesley Powell Student Research Conference, Bloomington, IL, April 10, 2010.
- Fisher, Leslee. “Building One’s Self Up,” in *Building Bodies*, edited by Pamela Moore, 135-161. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1997.
- Giddens, Anthony. *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Identity in the Late Modern Age*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991.
- Gillet, James, White, Philip, and Young, Kevin. “Bodywork as a Moral Imperative: Some Critical Notes on Health and Fitness,” *Leisure and Society* 18, no. 1 (1995): 159-182.
- Glassman, Greg. “What is Fitness?” *CrossFit Journal*, October 2002, <http://journal.crossfit.com/2002/10/what-is-fitness-by-greg-glassm.tpl>.
- Gregory, Sean. “Lift, Squat, Repeat: Inside the CrossFit Cult.” *Time*. January 9, 2014, <http://time.com/4248/lift-squat-repeat-inside-the-crossfit-cult/>.
- Grimes, Richard. “If the Shoe Fits...,” *CrossFit Journal*. April 2010, http://library.crossfit.com/premium/pdf/CFJ_Grimes_ShoeFits.pdf?e=1424186468&h=833ba996a421cc71a56f2fa088884033.
- Guba, Egon, and Lincoln, Yvonna. “Competing Paradigms in Qualitative Research,” in *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, edited by Norman Denzin, 105-117. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 1994.
- Henderson, Joe, and Hursh, David. “Contesting Global Neoliberalism and Creating Alternative Futures.” *Discourse* 32, no. 2 (2011): 171-185.
- Heywood, Leslie and Dworkin, Shari. *Built to Win: The Female Athlete as Cultural Icon*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003.
- Heywood, Leslie. *Bodybuilders: A Cultural Anatomy of Women’s Bodybuilding*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1998.
- Jaén, Javier. “Why Are Americans So Fascinated With Extreme Fitness?” *New York Times*. October 14, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/19/magazine/why-are-americans-so-fascinated-with-extreme-fitness.html?_r=0.

- Jette, Shannon. "Fit for Two? A Critical Discourse Analysis of Oxygen Fitness Magazine," *Sociology of Sport Journal* 23, no. 4 (2006): 331-351.
- Keller, Reiner. *Doing Discourse Research*. New York: SAGE Publications, 2013.
- Knapp, Bobbi Knapp. "Gender Representation in the *CrossFit Journal*: A Content Analysis." *Sport in Society*, November 20 2014, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17430437.2014.982544>.
- Kuhn, Steven. "The Culture of CrossFit: A Lifestyle Prescription for Optimal Health and Fitness." Senior thesis, Illinois State University, 2013.
- Lenskyj, Helen. *Out of Bounds: Women, Sport and Sexuality*. Toronto: The Women's Press, 1986.
- Lupton, Deborah. *Fat*. New York: Routledge, 2013.
- MacMillan, Blake. "CrossFit, Five Fingers & Red Bull: An Asketic Style of Athletic Skill." Presentation at the North American Society for the Sociology of Sport Annual Conference, Portland, OR, November 5-8, 2014.
- Markula, Pirkko. "Beyond the Perfect Body: Women's Body Image Distortion in Fitness Magazine Discourse." *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 25, no. 2 (2001): 158-179.
- . "Firm but Shapely, Fit but Sexy, Strong but Thin: The Postmodern Aerobicizing Female Bodies," *Sociology of Sport Journal* 12, no. 4 (1995): 424-453.
- McGannon, Kerry, and Spence, John. "Exploring News Media Representations of Women's Exercise and Subjectivity Through Critical Discourse Analysis," *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health* 4, no. 1 (2012): 32-50.
- McGrath, Shelly, and Chananie-Hill, Ruth. "'Big Freaky-Looking Women': Normalizing Gender Transgression Through Bodybuilding." *Sociology of Sport Journal* 26, no. 2 (2010): 235-254.
- Messner, Michael. "Sports and Male Domination: The Female Athlete as Contested Ideological Terrain," *Sociology of Sport Journal* 5, no. 3 (1988): 197-211.
- Mooney, Kate. "Why NYC Men Are Falling (Rock) Hard for the Paleo Diet." *Observer New York*. July 24, 2014, <http://observer.com/2014/07/why-guys-have-fallen-rock-hard-for-the-paleo-diet/>.
- Park, Madison. "Transgender Athlete Sues CrossFit for Banning her from Competing as Female." *CNN*. March 7, 2014, <http://www.cnn.com/2014/03/07/us/transgender-lawsuit-crossfit/>.
- Ponterotto, Joseph. "Qualitative Research in Counseling Psychology: A Primer on Research Paradigms and Philosophy of Science." *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 52, no. 2 (2005): 126-136.
- Rose, Nikolas. "Governing 'Advanced' Liberal Democracies," in *The Anthropology of the State: A Reader*, edited by Aradhana Sharma and Anil Gupta, 144-162. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006.
- Roy, Stephanie. "'Taking Charge of Your Health': Discourses of Responsibility in English-Canadian Women's Magazines." *Sociology of Health & Illness* 30, no. 3 (2008): 463-477.
- Scott-Dixon, Krista. "Big Girls Don't Cry: Fitness, Fatness, and the Production of Feminist Knowledge." *Sociology of Sport Journal* 25, no. 1 (2008): 22-47.

Shilling, Chris and Bunsell, Tanya. "The Female Bodybuilder as a Gender Outlaw." *Qualitative Research in Sport and Exercise* 1, no. 2 (2009): 141-159.

Smith Maguire, Jennifer. *Fit for Consumption*. New York: Routledge, 2008.

Spitzack, Carole. *Confessing Excess: Women and the Politics of Reduction*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990.

Theberge, Nancy. "Sport and Women's Empowerment," *Women's Studies International Forum* 10, no. 4 (1987): 387-393.

van Dijk, Teun. "What is Critical Discourse Analysis." *The Handbook of Critical Discourse Analysis*. Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 2001.

Weitz, Rose. "A History of Women's Bodies," in *The Politics of Women's Bodies: Sexuality, Appearance, and Behaviour*, edited by Rose Weitz and Samantha Kwan, 127-134. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014.

Wolf, Naomi. *The Beauty Myth*, New York: Vintage, 1980.

CrossFit Sources

Achauer, Hilary. "Fit for the Fittest." *CrossFit Journal*, March 2014,
http://library.crossfit.com/free/pdf/CFJ_02_2014_Denim_Achauer2.pdf.

———. "Long May You Run...and Lift." *CrossFit Journal*, January 2015,
http://library.crossfit.com/free/pdf/CFJ_2014_11_Longevity_Achauer2.pdf.

———. "Need for Speed." *CrossFit Journal*, November 2014,
http://library.crossfit.com/free/pdf/CFJ_2014_10_Intensity_Achauer2.pdf.

———. "The CrossFit Life: Bouncing Back." *CrossFit Journal*, March 2012,
http://library.crossfit.com/free/pdf/CFJ_BouncingBack_Achauer2.pdf.

———. "The CrossFit Life: Breaking the Cycle." *CrossFit Journal*, December 2012,
http://library.crossfit.com/free/pdf/CFJ_Breaking2_Achauer_FINAL2.pdf.

———. "The F-Word." *CrossFit Journal*, April 2014,
http://library.crossfit.com/free/pdf/CFJ_03_2014_Feminism_Achauer3.pdf.

Antwi, Fred. "Strength + Beauty." *Sweat Rx*, Summer 2012.

Auger, Kristin. "Baby on Board." *CrossFit Journal*, May 2014,
http://library.crossfit.com/free/pdf/CFJ_2014_04_Pregnancy_Auger2.pdf.

Beers, Emily. "All For One." *CrossFit Journal*, July 2012.
http://library.crossfit.com/free/pdf/CFJ_Patterson_Beers.pdf.

———. "All in the Same Room." *CrossFit Journal*, November 2011.
http://library.crossfit.com/free/pdf/CFJ_Taranis_Beers.pdf.

———. "Emotions in Motion." *CrossFit Journal*, August 2014.
http://library.crossfit.com/free/pdf/CFJ_2014_08_Games_Beers_3.pdf.

———. “In Search of a Programming God,” *CrossFit Journal*, December 2011.
http://library.crossfit.com/free/pdf/CFJ_Programming_Beers.pdf.

———. “Outside the Games Bubble.” *CrossFit Journal*, July 2011,
http://library.crossfit.com/free/pdf/CFJ_Games2011Day2_Beers.pdf.

———. “When Murph Met Cindy,” *CrossFit Journal*, October 2011,
http://library.crossfit.com/premium/pdf/CJ_Dating_Beers_Oct11.pdf?e=1436926056&h=258e603b84a1b1b3141daaa44ccbbdd8.

Berra, Lindsey. “The Fisher Queen.” *The Box*, November 2014.

Briggs, Josh. “CrossFit: Your Passport to a Hot Body.” *Sweat Rx*, Fall 2011. 41

Burton, E.M.. “You Were Saying...with Jasmine Danker.” *CrossFit Journal*, March 2012,
http://library.crossfit.com/premium/pdf/CFJ_Profile5_Burton_March2012.pdf?e=1436925822&h=9a69d20c1cec432ab6b84aef91d4d706.

Caldaroni, Michelle. “CrossFit Women Rewrite the Rules: The New Definition of Fitness.” *Sweat Rx*, Summer 2012.

Carlson, Mike. “CrossFit Faces: Allison Moyer.” *The Box*, November 2014.

———. “The View From the Top.” *The Box*, December 2014.

Cavallerano, Chris. “CrossFit Transference.” *CrossFit Journal*, November 2012,
http://library.crossfit.com/free/pdf/CFJ_Transference_Cavallerano_November2012.pdf.

Cecil, Andréa Maria. “A Mandate and an Opportunity.” *CrossFit Journal*, July 2013,
http://library.crossfit.com/free/pdf/06_2013_Women2_Cecil_FINAL3.pdf.

———. “Adrift—Then Came CrossFit.” *CrossFit Journal*, August 2011,
http://library.crossfit.com/premium/pdf/CFJ_Adrift_Cecil_July11.pdf?e=1436923862&h=3baec8d86cad2b0d52cb41ad6b898419.

———. “Women’s Wait.” *CrossFit Journal*, July 2013,
http://library.crossfit.com/free/pdf/06_2013_Women1_Cecil_FINAL4.pdf.

Cochan, Catherine. “CrossFitting Through Pregnancy.” *CrossFit Journal*, December 2012,
http://library.crossfit.com/premium/pdf/CFJ_2012_Pregnant_FINAL2.pdf?e=1436924170&h=81e7dc5b176d9807e107d5a985b71640.

“CrossFit is My Sanity.” *Sweat Rx*, February/March 2014.

“CrossFit Women Rewrite the Rules: The New Definition of Fitness.” *Sweat Rx*, Summer 2012.

Dadigan, Jennifer. “What CrossFit Has Done For Me.” *WOD Talk*, May 2012.

Dalferes, Jamie. “FitFitters.” *WOD Talk*, January/February 2015.

Drexler, Jane. “Aristotle in a Box,” *CrossFit Journal*, February 2013,
http://library.crossfit.com/free/pdf/CFJ_Aristotle_Drexler_FINAL2.pdf.

———. “The Greek and the Games.” *CrossFit Journal*, February 2014.
http://library.crossfit.com/free/pdf/CFJ_2014_02_Stoicism_Drexler.pdf.

Edwards, Bree, and Lessard, Carleen. “Learning to Love My Body.” *WOD Talk* July/August 2012.

Egyed, Peter. "The Ground and the Fury." *CrossFit Journal*, February 2015, http://library.crossfit.com/free/pdf/CFJ_15_01_Fury_Cecil.pdf.

Farina, Sam. "CrossFit: Separating Fact From Fiction." *WOD Talk*, July 2011.

Farrah, Adam. "Strong is the New Skinny: Evolution of a Community." *WOD Talk*, August 2011.

"Fashletics (Live, Love, Lift)." *WOD Talk*, May 2012.

Fletcher, Dawn. "Improve Your Mindset: Improve Your Performance and Life." *Sweat Rx*, November/December 2014.

"General Physical Preparedness: More than Muscle Deep." *Sweat Rx*, December/January 2014.

Godby, Molly. "A Fight to Remember." *CrossFit Journal*, April 2012, http://library.crossfit.com/free/pdf/CFJ_Alzheimers_Godby_April12.pdf.

Gonzalez, Melissa. "Living Our Own Versions of 'As Prescribed': The Effects of Function Over Form on CrossFit Women." *WOD Talk*, May 2012.

Grant, Megan. "Once Upon a Laxative." *WOD Talk*, March/April 2015.

"How to Affiliate." *CrossFit.com*. <http://www.crossfit.com/how-to-affiliate>.

Jennings, Joan. "Strong is the New Skinny." *WOD Talk*, September 2011.

Johnson, Eric. "The CrossFit Life: Intensity in Action." *CrossFit Journal*, November 2012, http://library.crossfit.com/premium/pdf/CFJ_CFLife_Intensity_Johnson_FINAL.pdf?e=1436925565&h=74dc725659ad2a79f4cf625ef0874072.

Kehler, Ainslie. "Fire Fighter Fitness: CrossFit as a Training Tool." *Sweat Rx*, May/June 2013.

Kewin, Stephanie. "Face of An Angel, Kip of a WODKilla." *Sweat Rx*, July/August 2013.

———. "Stronger, Faster, Master: Joyanne Cooper Inspires the Masses." *Sweat Rx*, January/February 2015.

———. "The Uncomfortable Truth." *Sweat Rx*, February/March 2014.

———. "Why Size Matters: CrossFit Challenges Stereotypes." *Sweat Rx*, October/November 2013.

Kirkwood, Eryn. "Challenge the Status Quo: Grow a Badass Beard." *Sweat Rx*, September/October 2014.

Knight, Lee, Liberati, Steve, and Wolfe, Liz. "More than the Street: A Steve's Club Story." *CrossFit Journal*, August 2012, http://library.crossfit.com/free/pdf/CFJ_CFLife_Steve_Wolfe.pdf.

Lawrence, Bayley. "Nine-Month WOD." *CrossFit Journal*, April 2012, http://library.crossfit.com/free/pdf/CFJ_Lawrence_Pregnant2012.pdf.

Lax, Lauryn. "Lindsey Smith: Keeping Training in Perspective and Having a Blast Along the Way." *WOD Talk*, March/April 2013.

———. "Annie Sakamoto." *WOD Talk*, September/October 2014.

LeFavi, Bob. "CrossFit On Its Own." *The Box*, March/April 2013.

Lesniak, Dennis. "The CrossFit Life: Confessions of a Reformed CrossFit Hater." *CrossFit Journal*, July 2012, <http://www.crossfitengineered.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Confessions-of-a-Reformed-CrossFit-Hater.pdf>.

Lipton, Sarah. "Just Weight: Who Needs Skinny When You Can Be Strong?" *Sweat Rx*, January/February 2013.

Logan, Andrea. "The Best Medicine." *WOD Talk*, May/June 2014.

"Look Like a Beauty, Train Like a Beast." *Sweat Rx*, February/March 2014.

"Loving Myself: Accepting My CrossFit Body." *Sweat Rx*, January/February 2014.

Lynch, Bonnie. "Knit One, Curl Two: How the Women of CrossFit are Made," *Sweat Rx*, Summer 2012.

McCann, Stacy. "Taking it to the People." *CrossFit Journal*, October 2011, http://library.crossfit.com/premium/pdf/CFJ_Obesity_McCannOct2011.pdf?e=1436925698&h=7b5c628a25192d1ee8a803f782f29979.

Mitchell, Megan, and Scahill, Allison, "Motherhood and CrossFit." *CrossFit Journal*, November 2011, http://library.crossfit.com/free/pdf/CFJ_Moms_Scahill_Nov2011.pdf.

Olson, Julie. "The CrossFit Life: It's Mom's Turn." *CrossFit Journal*, May 2012, http://library.crossfit.com/free/pdf/CFJ_CFLife_Mom_Olson.pdf.

Ortiz, Cesa. "Inner Struggle." *WOD Talk*, July 2011.

Perkins, Cooker, and Dewalt, Hanna, "CrossFit Training During Pregnancy and Motherhood: A New Scientific Frontier." *CrossFit Journal*, September 2011, http://library.crossfit.com/free/pdf/CFJ_Pregnant_Perkins.pdf.

Pratt Epperson, Skye. "Fired Up: Danielle Sidell." *WOD Talk*, January/February 2015.

———. "Irrepressible Annie." *WOD Talk*, July/August 2013.

———. "Returning to the Throwdown." *WOD Talk*, January/February 2014.

Radakovich, Anka. "Survey Says...Sex!" *CrossFit Journal*, August 2012, http://library.crossfit.com/free/pdf/CFJ_SexSurvey_Radakovich.pdf.

Randolph, Rick. "Applied Fitness: CrossFit Defense." *CrossFit Journal*, October 2012, http://library.crossfit.com/free/pdf/CFJ_Defense_Randolph_FINAL3.pdf.

Rose, Angela. "Maria Nahri: Beauty and Strength in Balance." *Sweat Rx*, Summer 2012.

———. "Power Incarnate." *Sweat Rx*, September/October 2014.

Ross, Alyssa. "Calling all Sisters." *CrossFit Journal*, September 2011, http://library.crossfit.com/premium/pdf/CFJ_Ross_CallingSisters.pdf?e=1436925653&h=53f314a8d345751f7f1da734fed86800.

Saline, Brittney, "Fit to Teach." *CrossFit Journal*, January 2015, http://library.crossfit.com/free/pdf/CFJ_2014_08_Teacher_Saline5.pdf.

———. "Coach, Counselor, or Both?" *CrossFit Journal*, December 2014, http://library.crossfit.com/free/pdf/CFJ_2014_10_Counselor_Saline_3.pdf.

Schifano, Cory. "My CrossFit Revolution: Strong is the New Skinny." *WOD Talk*, March/April 2013.

Shane, Jamie. "12 Days of Christmas Abbott: Unwrapping the Gifts of CrossFit." *Sweat Rx*, November/December 2014.

———. "Greg Glassman: Most Powerful Man in Fitness." *Sweat Rx*, January/February 2015.

———. "Josh Bridges: Mentally Tough." *Sweat Rx*, September/October 2014.

"StarFit: Celebs Take in the WODs." *Sweat Rx*, November/December 2014.

"Submission Guidelines." *CrossFit Journal*. <http://journal.crossfit.com/submission-guidelines.tpl>.

Sutter, Judy. "Remember this Face." *The Box*, October/November 2012.

Turley-Smith, Kim. "Modern Warrior Women." *Sweat Rx*, March/April 2013.

Umscheid, Parisjat Banomyong. "CrossFit: Helping Women Change Their Self-Image." *WOD Talk*, January/February 2015.

Vincent, Stephanie. "Moving Past Female Perfection in the Gym and in Our Lives." *WOD Talk*, September/October 2012.

———. "Not Just Another Diet: A Q&A With the Ladies of Paleo." *WOD Talk*, January/February 2013.

Walsh, Mairead. "Camille LeBlanc-Bazinet." *Sweat Rx*, Winter 2011.

Warkentin, Mike. "The CrossFit SAT-Prep Program." *CrossFit Journal*, October 2012. http://library.crossfit.com/free/pdf/CFJ_SAT_Glassman_3.pdf.

———. "Virtuosity: A Call for Submissions." *CrossFit Journal*, September 2014, http://library.crossfit.com/free/pdf/CFJ_2014_09_VirtuositySubmissions_Warkentin.pdf.

"What is CrossFit?" *CrossFit.com*. <http://www.crossfit.com/cf-info/what-crossfit.html>.

Wolf, Caroline. "CrossFit Girls Kick Ass: A Force to Be Reckoned With." *Sweat Rx*, Summer 2012.

"Workouts." *CrossFit Prineville*. <http://crossfitprineville.com/workouts/>. "Weigh In: Fear of the Bulk." *Sweat Rx*, March/April 2013.

Young, Jennifer. "40+ Superwomen: CrossFit Fountain of Youth." *Sweat Rx*, November/December 2012.

Zuri, Diane. "Why Don't People CrossFit?" *WOD Talk*, March/April 2014.

Curriculum Vitae

Name: Cheryl S. Madliger

Post-secondary Education and Degrees: Western University
London, Ontario, Canada
2007-2012 B.A. Honours Specialization, Kinesiology

Honours and Awards: Dean's Honor List
2008, 2009, 2010

Western Graduate Research Scholarship
2013-2015

Joseph-Armand Bombardier Canada Graduate Scholarship
– Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC)
2014-2015

Western University Kinesiology Travel Award
2014

North American Society for Sport History Roberta Park Award
2014

Related Work Experience: Research Assistant
Western University
2014