UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA,
IRVINE

Forging Elite Fitness: CrossFit and the Biopolitical Imperatives of Health, Becoming, and Female Muscularity

DISSERTATION

submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in Culture and Theory

by

Anne Elizabeth Yaniga

Dissertation Committee:
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DEDICATION

To

My family of origin (Cleveland, Ohio, USA):

my mother Ann Yaniga

my father George Yaniga

my little brother, George Daniel (Danny) Yaniga

The informants of this study, my beautiful friends in fitness. Thank you for helping me.

My queer family, in the United States and around the world.

All my mentors, adoptive parents, partners, lovers, friends, family, and friends in recovery. You are too many to name here, but I hope you know that I appreciate you.

Without you this project would never have been possible. Thank You.

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Finally, I would like to thank the University of California Irvine, specifically the program in Culture and Theory and the School of the Humanities. The program in Culture and Theory, sustained by the dogged efforts of a coalition of determined, politically-conscious, visionary professors and graduate students, has given me the beautiful gift of freedom to conduct a truly problem-driven inter-disciplinary research project. The University of California Irvine and its School of the Humanities has stood by its vision as maintaining cutting-edge issue-driven inter-disciplinary research, providing me with teaching appointments that sustained my training, research, and livelihood, as well as direct financial support in the form of the Regents Fellowship and the UCI Humanities Dissertation Research grant.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Forging Elite Fitness: CrossFit and the Biopolitical Imperatives of Health, Becoming, and Female Muscularity

By

Anne Elizabeth Yaniga

Doctor of Philosophy in Culture and Theory

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Professor Victoria Bernal, Co-Chair
Professor Rodrigo Lazo, Co-Chair

This Dissertation analyzes the findings of a two-year ethnography of an American CrossFit community. CrossFit is a world-wide sport and fitness brand, with over 13,500 franchised fitness affiliates around the world and an annual sporting competition: The CrossFit Games. While CrossFit is beginning to become the subject of some ethnographic research, there has yet to be published a long-term in-depth ethnographic study of a CrossFit community and its participants. Research questions investigated how and why an increasing number of American women are seeking larger and stronger muscularity, how neoliberal discourses of health are internalized and enacted at the level of individuals and communities, and what role fitness plays within processes of subjectification under late capitalism. This study, which includes participant observation, 37 interviews, and a body-idealization survey, reveals three major findings of great significance affecting theories and embodied practices of neoliberal discourses of health, the self as a project, and ideal femininity, all within the ideological framework of Biopower (Foucault; Hardt and Negri) and the Biopolitics of neoliberal capitalism. Key findings include the following: 1) CrossFit discourses of health align with neoliberal ideologies of Healthism (Crawford) while also exceeding these ideologies, 2) the primary motivation of individual CrossFit participants is the pursuit of meaning-making and purpose through processes of perpetual becoming, self-realization and self-care via the self as a project, which is accelerated through collective effervescence (Durkheim), and 3) Female muscularity is greatly encouraged and valorized, within new limits that also enable some forms of agency and resistance.

INTRODUCTION

Imagine a group of 15-20 human beings in a mirror-less warehouse space, lifting barbells, running, climbing ropes, swinging kettlebells, jumping, and sweating together, pushing themselves through discomfort toward a higher score, together, cheering one another on. This is CrossFit. Why is it that these "ordinary" people, millions worldwide, might be so enamored by this activity, and why at this juncture in history and not until now?

This project, the culmination of five years of research, including over two years of ethnographic participant observation, interviews, and surveying, examines how Biopower works upon the bodies and minds of individuals in a Southern California CrossFit community. It is comprised of four main chapters that explore how Biopower operates in American culture via physical fitness, specifically the overwhelmingly popular fitness trend, franchise corporation/brand, and community known as CrossFit. These four chapters focus on three main conduits through which Biopower functions: 1) Neoliberal popular discourses of health and fitness, 2) Subjectivity and subject formation via perpetual becoming (the self as a project), and 3) Increasing female muscularity and the American feminine ideal (chapters 3 and 4).

Biopower, a term coined by late philosopher Michel Foucault, can be understood as the force by which contemporary capitalism compels subjects to govern themselves in accordance with norms that ensure the productive momentum of large populations. In Foucault's own words, "this bio-power was without question an indispensable element in the development of capitalism; the latter would not have been possible without the controlled insertion of bodies into the machinery of production and the adjustment of the phenomena of population to economic processes." (Foucault, The History of Sexuality Volume 1 141) This productive momentum is

defined in biological (reproductive at the level of the species) economic (laboring and consuming), and ideological terms (the reproduction and maintenance of ideologies upon which the social order depends).

The context in which Biopower emerged as the primary form of power, over sovereign (power to take life) and disciplinary power (static institutional power to discipline), is called by many names, including "late capitalism," "neoliberal capitalism," and "Biopolitical capitalism." These terms refer to an economic and political revolution that reached its tipping point in the late 1970's and accelerated through to our present moment, as the world's economic organization, dominated by Western nations, shifted from static industrial Fordism[1] to a more open-flow, faster-paced, fragmented model of global capitalism. (Hardt and Negri, Empire; Commonwealth)

Biopower is essential to the operation of neoliberal or late capitalism because sovereign power (the power to take life through violence) is not economically productive, as most lives have more value as live laborers and consumers than dead. (There are exceptions to this rule-see Agamben, Arendt. Sovereign rule is still used by the police and the state, particularly against minority populations.) Disciplinary power is still in existence, utilized by institutions and often focused on containing specific social groups, such as non-whites and "deviant" populations. However disciplinary power is limited in its reach to static disciplinary institutions such as the factory, school, and prison, and therefore ill-suited to open-flow network capitalism, which requires flexible subjectivities (Hardt and Negri, Empire 327). Therefore, Biopower, operating through governmentality, which requires individuals to govern *themselves* in accordance with

[1] A system of economic organization defined by static, segmented (assembly line) factory processes in relatively isolated locales, as opposed to fluid, fragmented production dispersed around the globe. (Antonio and Bonanno)

norms, is best suited for the "new" economic system that I will most often refer to as neoliberalism or neoliberal capitalism[2].

Forces of governmentality are internalized by subjects as norms by which they feel compelled to govern themselves[3] and the direction of their lives, and serve to maintain a sense of order at the level of the individual, community, and species. (Foucault History of Sexuality Volume 1 144) Individuals experience these forces in a myriad of ways: self-discipline, will-power, empowerment, choice, independence, freedom, self-realization, self-care, personal responsibility, etc. "A normalizing society [vs a sovereign society based on brute authority] is the historical outcome of a technology of power centered on life." (Foucault History of Sexuality Volume 1 144) This dissertation is an examination of how governmentality operates as a manifestation of Biopower at the level of the individual and social group, through physical fitness, within a Southern California CrossFit community. My ethnographic results also indicate new openings in the structure of power in neoliberal capitalism, that is, opportunities for agency and resistance to Biopower, both conscious and unconscious.

Foucault pointed to sex as the primary channel for Biopower, because it is the intersection of the individual and the population, and therefore it must be a focus of intense scrutiny, simultaneously glorified and controlled, harboring the secret "truth" of the individual. (Foucault, History of Sexuality Volume 1 44*) I propose that sex no longer serves this purpose in the same way it functioned for Foucault, and that perhaps fitness does.* Fitness is a means of self-creation, via the care of the self in accordance with social norms. It does not hide some inherent "truth" of the individual, but it compels the individual to create themselves, perpetually

[2] I am using the term neoliberalism to describe the movement by governments in collaboration with corporations to impose an economic rationality (defined by rhetorics of personal responsibility, privatization, and shrinking government support) upon the global sphere through political, economic, and social maneuvers that in turn impact the production and flow of goods, ideas, and subjectivities world-wide. (Brown; Ayo)

[3] Via technologies of the self (Rose, Inventing Ourselves 29)

becoming a future self. It is an intersection of ideology and the body, it serves a role in the maintenance of the productivity of the individual and the species. While it is not directly related to sexual reproduction, which was so important for Foucault, sexual reproduction may be waning in importance within western structures of power, to be replaced by optimization, which fitness surely upholds. As I argue in Chapters 1 and 2, the contemporary obsession with fitness and the self as a project is about much more than creating an aesthetically pleasing body: it is about taking action to shape one's health, future, character, and personality, which perfectly aligns with Biopolitical imperatives. Discourses of fitness compel the creation of ideal bodies and minds, productive and docile (in the meaning Foucault used this word, that is, ideally suited to the demands of power), individually responsible, "healthy" and consuming, functional and flexible and versatile. All of these qualities are necessary for Biopolitical capitalism to reach optimal productivity, and they must be produced by individuals themselves. In the contemporary United States fitness is perhaps the primary means by which to compel individuals to do so.

The body is the locus of the force of Biopower for several reasons: 1) it is, as Merleau-Ponty first theorized, the filter through which all perception and cognition must pass, housing the individual and his/her experience of subjectivity and reality, therefore it is where ideology primarily works and resides,[4] 2) The body is the raw material of capitalist production, in terms of laboring bodies, consuming bodies, docile bodies, resistant bodies, and abject bodies, and 3) control of the body via knowledge (discourses of health, science, etc.) yields integration into hegemonic discourses of power[5], and therefore those aspects of the body and embodiment that

[4] Merleau-Ponty: "The body is our general medium for having a world." (1945/ 2002:169) as it is the fore and the background to our existence." (Cited in Hansson 14)

[5] To better understand how this works, a great example would be the integration of queer bodies, now "better understood" by discourses of knowledge (science, social science, humanities), from the abject (outside the social body), into the social order (in the Western World). In simpler terms, the gay liberation movement of the 1960's, once oriented around breaking down heteronormativity and the gender binary, evolved into reinforcing both of

lie outside of human knowledge (beyond the reach of the power/knowledge "apparatus" (Foucault, Confessions of the Flesh) hold the key to resistance, agency, and freedom[6], and must be secured.

While my initial research questions were focused on understanding how and why an increasing number of American women are pursuing muscularity, I found through my analysis of this CrossFit community that Biopower is functioning at this site in at least two other ways, via discourses of health and the self as a project. CrossFit appealed to me as a venue within which to examine manifestations of Biopower because it is an extremely popular and influential health and fitness trend, to the extent that almost everyone has heard of it and/or knows someone who does it, even in suburban and rural areas in the United States, and increasingly internationally. Yet it has a reputation for being extremely difficult, dangerous, expensive, and cultish, making its prevalence and popularity somewhat surprising. It is also a site rife with neoliberal ideologies of personal responsibility and health and wellness, yet also overflowing with collective energy and hope. Perhaps most interestingly, it is one of few fitness regimens I've found that is relatively gender-blind, providing incentive (via benchmarks and scores) for women to grow bigger and more powerful, rather than simply toned and lean, which has significant implications

Figure 1 Image of the CrossFit Games, 2016. Source: The Barbell Spin

these social structures, by shifting toward a prioritization of gay marriage in the early 2000's. (The focus went from "tear down the system" to "let us be a part of the system," to the effect of excluding still stigmatized populations, such as trans people, poor queer populations, and queer people of color.)

[6] I will explore this potential in chapters 2 and 4.

for ideal American femininity, the gender binary, and the future of sexual dimorphism (the size differential between males and females).

CrossFit Background:

CrossFit is a worldwide fitness regimen started by Greg Glassman in the year 2000 in Santa Cruz, CA. The company has over 14,500 affiliate gyms worldwide as of 2018, as well as a multi-million dollar open sporting competition, the CrossFit Games, which is currently carried by CBS and CBS Sports networks, awarding 2.2 million dollars in prize money in 2016. The majority of individuals who participate in CrossFit do not make it to the games, but experience it at the level of individual gyms, otherwise known as boxes. While it is hard to gauge numbers as far as participants go, with over 14,500 gyms, with between 50 and 400 members each, adds up to over 2 million people world-wide. (CrossFit) CrossFit boxes can be found with the same density as Starbucks franchises in many areas of the United States, including Orange County, the location of this study. One motivation for this study was to understand the meteoric rise and overwhelming popularity of the CrossFit fitness brand of fitness and its associated communities,[7] a topic I explore further in Chapters 1 and 2, via an investigation of the personal motivations of this study's informants.

Figure 2 A typical CrossFit Box and also the field site for this project. Source: Commissioned Photo by Juan Busciglio

[7] Thanks to Victoria Bernal for attention to this idea.

According to CrossFit's official website: "Glassman, CrossFit's Founder and CEO, was the first person in history to define fitness in a meaningful, measurable way: increased work capacity across broad time and modal domains. He then created a program specifically designed to improve fitness and health." (What is CrossFit) In official parlance, "CrossFit is constantly varied functional movements performed at high intensity. All CrossFit workouts are based on functional movements, and these movements reflect the best aspects of gymnastics, weightlifting, running, rowing and more." (CrossFit) Workouts are performed at high intensity, in a community or group context and results are tracked on a whiteboard that is in public view, so that athletes can compare their results to those of others and their past scores, if they track them. Workouts of the day are referred to as WOD's, and conducting a workout at the recommended weight and skill level is considered doing it "as prescribed," or "Rx'D", a reference to Glassman's belief that exercise is the best medicine. Glassman's professed intention is to prepare participants for the varied conditions of daily living, the expected and the unexpected, by continuously mixing up the exercises and lengths of workouts: "The program prepares trainees for any physical contingency—not only for the unknown but for the unknowable, too. Our specialty is not specializing." (What is CrossFit) I explore the obvious references to neoliberal values, such as flexibility, personal responsibility, competition, perpetual becoming (improvement), etc., throughout the following chapters.

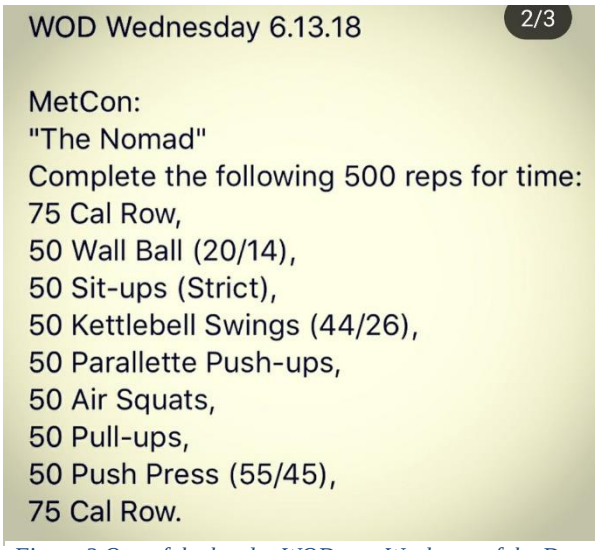

Figure 3 One of the harder WODs, or Workouts of the Day. Source: CrossFit X Instagram.

Although CrossFit has a reputation for being too difficult for beginners, it is built into the philosophy of the sport that all workouts are scalable to the individual by weight, intensity, or movement technique: “The needs of Olympic athletes and our grandparents differ by degree, not kind.” (What is CrossFit) However, despite CrossFit’s skill accessibility, and a diversity of participants in terms of age, skill-level, and fitness level, it still has a reputation for being an extreme form of fitness. This is due to the high intensity of the group workouts, which are publicly recorded for time, reps, and/or highest weight lifted. This gives a sense of urgency and competition to the workouts that encourage participants to push past their perceived limits, even when they do not intend to. In fact, if you were to visit a local CrossFit community, you might witness many people writhing around on the floor in pain after certain workouts and professing their love for the experience shortly thereafter.

My original design for this project sought to answer the following questions: How and why are an increasing number of American women seeking larger and stronger muscularity? How prevalent is this “trend” of increased muscularity for women? How do women who seek increased muscularity negotiate their strength and muscularity within their female identities and their femininity, particularly considering the fact that female muscularity is historically contradictory to ideal American femininity? What is the limit of “allowable” female muscularity within CrossFit culture, compared to American popular culture?

However, as my ethnographic research progressed, I uncovered new research questions: Why is it that a sport that involves so much pain and suffering is so popular? How do neoliberal discourses of health operate at the level of individuals and communities? What role does fitness play in the subjectification process under late capitalism? I believe I was successful in answering most of these questions in the pages that follow.

Methods:

Methods[8] for this work included over two years of reflexive participant observation within a Southern California CrossFit community, an online survey containing questions interrogating demographic characteristics, individual motivations and experience, and an image-based section evaluating body ideals (36 responses), as well as audio-recorded interviews (37 total, varying in length between 5 minutes and 50 minutes).

The data collection methodology for this project finds its foundation in the disciplines of Anthropology and Sociology, in that it is an ethnography, and more specifically, an embodied, experiential, reflexive ethnography. Ethnography is a method of studying a society or culture that takes place at the level of individual communities, by placing the ethnographer within the community to observe them and gather information for analysis. (Spradley; Bernard) The purpose of ethnographic research is to gather information about a community for the sake of knowledge for its own sake, often to make extrapolations about larger social and cultural processes. A successful ethnography to me is a study that can help humanity better understand its own processes, motivations, and present and future orientation, so that we may be more informed and therefore empowered to create a better future. In the case of this ethnography, it is my hope that considering its results, we may better understand how Biopower works in us and through us, compelling us to be certain types of beings, while also opening up spaces for us to be more.

The ethnographer will typically "embed" themself in the community, observing, surveying, participating, interviewing, and collecting information about the subjects and their context: their customs, language, values, practices, dress, beliefs, etc. Historically, the

[8] This study was approved by the University of California Institutional Review Board, to protect human subjects from potential harm. (HS#2017-3391) All informant names included herein are pseudonyms, as is the name of the CrossFit Box/Community.

ethnographic process has been characterized by a process of "othering" the culture the ethnographer studies, seeing them and their culture as objects of study from the outside, and different, from the ethnographer. (Trouillot 3, 27-28) In fact, maintaining some critical distance as an outsider looking in upon an object of study was considered good ethnographic practice for most of the 20th century, despite its clear problematics, now visible in hindsight. (Trouillot)

However, over the course of the last thirty years what used to be termed "going native," or becoming a part of the community at the deepest level of individual identification, has become increasingly acceptable within the disciplines of anthropology and sociology. (Bolin and Granskog 10-11) One reason for this is that it somewhat pushes against the practice of "othering" or objectifying those studied, which long had the effect of reinforcing western-centric and white supremacist interpretations of "other" cultures. Reflexive ethnography mitigates this to some degree, in that the ethnographer undergoes the process of becoming those studied, therefore the self/other dichotomy fades in part, and the ethnographer is enabled to present results as a subject of study themselves. However, one of the shortcomings of this approach is that it runs the risk of coloring the interpretations of the social scientist, literally placing them in a subjective, rather than objective, position. "Being whom one studies creates a dynamic tension in which the ethnographer slides in and out of being his or her own collaborator, both as participant and observer." (Bolin and Granskog 13) I address how I mitigated this challenge below.

This project qualifies as a reflexive ethnography, in that I became a part of the community I studied, to the deepest level of my personal identification, and therefore I myself am an object of my own study. I also consider this an experiential ethnography because the role of my embodied experience through this process was of great significance: it is an ethnography of a sport and fitness community, and the physical challenges and changes I experienced greatly

informed my understanding of my research subjects, as well as my successful integration into the community. Bolin and Granskog express my intentions in their description of "experiential" ethnography as "the totality of an experience that does not just privilege the visual, the observed, and the verbal, but the kinesthetic and the somatic bodily experience of the activity as well. As the process of fieldwork unfolds, the experiential ethnographer is prepared for an analytical contextualization on multiple levels and through layers of knowledge," (12) including embodied knowledge. For more specific information on my ethnographic methodology, such as participant observation, interview methods and questions, and a full view of the online survey, please refer to the Appendix.

The analysis aspects of this research are built upon the traditions of Critical Theory, Cultural Studies, Anthropology, Sociology, Gender and Sexuality Studies, Kinesiology, Embodiment Studies, Biology, and the interdisciplinary field of Sport and Society. My position as a researcher within the Culture and Theory Program at the University of California Irvine has granted me the rare privilege of conducting a truly interdisciplinary project from start to finish, and I have treasured the generous guidance of advisers, readers, and the literature representing multiple traditions and fields of inquiry. It has long been a dream of mine to design and execute a research project that utilizes multiple lenses and perspectives to answer a driving question, solve a significant social problem (or at least draw attention to it), and show a way forward toward increased human agency and freedom. It is my hope that the diversity of theoretical lenses that inform this project serve to be one of its strengths. For a traditional review of the literature that informs this work, please refer to each of the chapters, as they each contain their own literature foundation.

I also hold an ethical imperative to create work that is useful and accessible to a wider audience. I do not believe I was completely successful in either of those aims, in that I often fall into the use of academic jargon, and sometimes fail to explain the connection between theoretical analysis and its real-world application. However, I attempted to remedy this by creating footnotes that define the most obscure terms and concepts in simple terms, with examples. My future work, if I have the opportunity to make this dissertation into a book, I hope will remedy this problem in a much more thorough manner by defining terms and providing examples in-text, and by more clearly explaining the real-world utility of each of my findings.

The Field Site

This CrossFit community, one of 28 within a 10-mile radius of my residence in Orange County, California, was the friendliest and most diverse I came across in my preliminary fieldwork. After trying several different CrossFit "boxes," including one located two miles down the road that I observed for three months, I chose my final field location based on diversity, friendliness and openness, the cooperation of the owners, and the mission of the business/culture. I made this decision because I felt at the time that I would have a hard time gathering the information I needed if I felt like a perpetual outsider, a feeling exacerbated by the fact that in early 2016 I was completely new to CrossFit and 50 pounds overweight. My experience of conducting participant observation for three months at the other box taught me that there is quite a bit of difference between CrossFit communities, and that if I were to motivate myself to show up 3-5 times a week for grueling 1-1.5 hour sessions, for over two years, I would need to at the very least feel welcomed and supported to some degree. The community at CrossFit X made me feel both of these things, and over the course of this research they became like family to me.

The fact that I became a fully integrated member of the community I studied, and a subject of this research, is by no means a detriment to this work. In fact, I believe it was an asset, as I was able to track my own progressive integration into the community on multiple levels, granting me further insight into my research questions. Emotionally, which was perhaps the biggest transition for me, I went from feeling anxious and introverted before every workout, afraid of the physical pain and the social stretching ahead, to being happy to get in my car and point it toward the gym. I grew to feel like walking into CrossFit X was like walking into a favorite bar, with eager friends waiting to chat and say hi. It was interesting to observe this transition in retrospect, as it informed my understanding of the interviews that form the basis of Chapter 2, which analyzes processes of becoming and self-care as coalescing into a trajectory of hope.

As the months flew by, I also watched my values and approach shift; I started out self-punishing, which shifted to being ego-driven and focused on scores and results, before finally settling into a true enjoyment of the social and physical aspects of each moment (with some lingering ego-driven days). In terms of my integration into the community, I was able to observe how my own attitudes, values, dress, speech, and personal goals changed in response to those around me, and how the reinforcement I received from others also shifted in tone. My weight loss of over 50 pounds played a significant role in the momentum and direction of this integration, as I noticed more and more people admiring my hard work and results, which prompted them to approach me and accept me, and eventually, to invest themselves in my success. I found it quite interesting to observe and compare how I was treated in the beginning vs the end, going from an overweight, unskilled beginner who struggled to finish workouts, to a lean, muscular athlete, often scoring in the top three in workouts. I believe the responses I

gathered at various points in the timeline of this project varied in relation to perceptions of my perceived skills, integration, and aesthetic, something I hope to elaborate upon in future work.

The embodied nature of my experience made me capable of truly knowing what it was my informants were trying to express to me, whether it be their references to pain, inertia, joy, empowerment, anxiety, or simply their struggles with different movements and exercises. I believe that by becoming a true member of this community I have a much better understanding of what it is this study's participants go through, what it is they want, why they want it, and what it means, because I lived it through my body, heart, and mind.

CrossFit X is a typical representation of a CrossFit box in many ways. For example, it is housed in a warehouse-type space approximately the size of two basketball courts, in an industrial strip adjacent to the airport. The roaring of planes provides perpetual background noise (and can be heard in almost every audio recorded interview), and diesel fumes often find their way into the workout area, drifting from the Southwest Airlines maintenance facility next door. The smell of these fumes is often suffused with that of roasted meat and garlic, from the catering business two doors down. On long group runs next to the airstrip you can also catch wafts of sweet honey smelling vape juice from the vape factory, across from the wetsuit warehouse, as planes take off at sharp angles towards the ocean.

Figure 4 Some of the informants of this study, preparing for a Saturday workout in front of the whiteboard. Source: Commissioned photo by Juan Busciglio.

I park my little 2006 Honda Civic on the street every day, in between Mercedes and BMW's, as this is a fairly wealthy part of the United States. The occasional tractor trailer can be found parked in the middle lane, delivering exotic cars to the exclusive dealer on the corner. It's a short walk across the street and through a small parking lot toward the sign over the door: CrossFit X[9] in bright Orange, Purple, and Blue letters, into the dark workout space, music often booming in dissonance with the loud clanging of weights.

There are dumbbells along the back wall, behind the "rig," a 32-foot-long apparatus comprised of pullup bars, squat racks, hanging rings, and climbing ropes. In the right corner are a water cooler, two bathrooms (one including a shower), and a separate shower, in front of which sit three aero bikes, and in the opposite corner, a treadmill. The rest of the space is open space, every square inch covered in black matting that one of the three owners, and my primary informant, Henry, mops daily. Along the walls are stacked jump ropes, kettle bells, ab mats, medicine balls, and the like, and in the center of the back area to the right are two cutouts with traditional wood lifting platforms inserted.

Behind these lifting platforms lies the office area, with its own separate door, comprised of two rooms: 1) a back office with two desks, a dusty printer, stacks of workout drinks, and photos of members taped to the walls, and 2) a lounge with a tv, two couches, and a very dirty carpet upon which sit wooden boxes for box jumps, serving as temporary tables for children to do their coloring books and play tablet games.

Back out into the main space, to the right of the main door (a rolling industrial door) is the social area, with cubby holes for belongings, and weight benches for sitting before or after a workout. In front of this, to the left of the door, is the central focus of every workout, and the central focus of the community inside and outside of the gym: the Whiteboard.

[9] All names are pseudonyms, per IRB protocol.

The Whiteboard serves to mark the times and scores of each member for each WOD, for each day of the week, with a week's worth of workouts visible at any given time. It is used by most members to track their own scores in comparison with those of others. Most members will check the scores before and after their workout, first to set a benchmark time with someone they compare with, and then to see how they did overall. Often members will take a photo of their score to post on social media or to enter into their own personal tracking system later.

There are ongoing rivalries and "classes" of athletes who jokingly compete with one another around the whiteboard. It is well-known who will score well on different workouts, as the regulars of the gym are aware of each other's strengths. For example, I am well known for bodyweight exercises such as burpees, pushups, lunges, and air squats, as well as my skill as a runner. Therefore, workouts that combine these movements are sure to bring me challenging comments from the highest-level athletes at the box on that day. In contrast, on days where my strengths are not featured, such as snatch lift days, other athletes will take center stage.

Figure 5 The Whiteboard. Source: Personal Photo.

Even for members at the lowest skill level, the whiteboard is important for tracking their large and small victories, with a few exceptions. There was one individual I interviewed who professed that he did not look at the whiteboard at all, and a few others who stated directly that competition and benchmarks were less important to them than the elements of community and general exercise. However, it would seem that for the majority of the subjects of this study, the

whiteboard is of primary significance, serving as a motivator and a unifying feature of the community.

The Informants

Started in 2011 by Henry and his two partners, CrossFit X currently houses approximately 140 members. As I state above, the diversity of this box relative to other Orange County CrossFit communities is what first appealed to me. There are members that range in age from 16-78, representative of at least ten different racial groups, a few different class brackets, and even a handful of LGBTQ members. The majority of this population is in the professional class, which makes sense, as monthly rates as of this writing are $165.00, or $135.00 for students. However, over the course of my data collection I spoke with some members who professed to make personal sacrifices to maintain the fitness experience and community they find at CrossFit X, many of whom are students or early in their careers. Nonetheless, this sample population, though diverse in terms of age and race, is far from a diverse sample in terms of socioeconomic status.

Figure 6 Good Vibes at this Field Site. Source: Commissioned Photo by Juan Busciglio.

A walk around the box when there is not a WOD going on reveals a wide array of activities. During a WOD, most bodies are moving with concentrated effort on the same tasks, usually for time or reps. However, when there is no WOD ongoing, members can be seen standing and sitting, chatting, stretching, rolling out tight muscles on foam rollers, working individually with a coach,

or fitting in their own lifts or workouts, outlined against the bright purple and orange-painted walls, adorned with the phrase "Good Vibes."

Attire within this community is very gendered, with most women wearing tights and tank tops, and most men wearing long shorts and t-shirts. I resisted this gender dichotomy early in my fieldwork, having come from a sports background in which we trained in shorts and t-shirts, but over time I found myself wearing tights and tank tops, and receiving positive validation for having done so. Workout attire, especially shoes, is often commented upon, with Nike as the favored brand for shoes, and Lululemon for workout attire, for both men and women.[10]

I spent some time theorizing as to why there was such a stark gender dichotomy in terms of dress within CrossFit, comparing it to other sports, such as soccer and basketball in which the division is not so apparent. I thought at first that this might be a move to recuperate femininity and reinforce the gender binary in a culture that in many ways undermines the binary and normative femininity. However, I came to find that workout attire is very standardized in Orange County, California, and though CrossFit is a sport for some individuals, for most of my informants it's

Figure 7 Some of the ladies at this field site wearing typical workout attire. Source: Commissioned Photo by Juan Busciglio.

[10] It is possible that this community favored Lululemon to some degree because one of the owners is a brand ambassador, but regardless, the brand is quite popular in Orange County fitness circles.

a fitness program first. Why should they differ from what their friends wear when working out? I think the bigger question then is why is fitness attire in general so gendered? For example, if tights are so comfortable, why don't men wear them?[11]

Young and old, black, white, Mexican, Asian, everyone mingles and chats, and many have been friends for many years. Even after over two years of fieldwork I was just beginning to scratch the surface of the long-standing and new relationships that make up CrossFit X. Considering the history amongst so many in this community, it impressed me that the space did not feel cliquey or closed, something that stood in great contrast to the other community I inhabited for three months. CrossFit X is, quite simply, full of really nice people, people who value the sense of "family" and "being a part of something" (interview quotes) that they get from joining CrossFit X.

I spent some time considering why there was so much good energy and love for everyone who walks in the door, and I came to conclude that it is the result of the purposeful intention of Henry, one of the owners, mentioned above. Upon our first phone call Henry impressed me, telling me that the mission of his business was to "liberate" people from the limitations of their bodies, to allow them to live fuller, freer, more capable lives. As time went on and Henry and I collected hours talking before and after workouts, I grew to realize that the business wasn't really profitable for him, and yet he felt fulfilled in his purpose.

Henry described how he sees CrossFit to me, in one of our earlier conversations, which took place within the first year of this research. For Henry, CrossFit is the "best thing" he's found thus far that enables him to help people find "complete" fitness that is "measurable and

[11] The answer is of course to be found within our culture's desperate preservation of hegemonic masculinity, which relies upon an almost prudish level of modesty when it comes to obscuring men's legs, for the purpose of avoiding a sexualization of men that might make them objects, or what's more feared, objects of the homosexual gaze. But such a conversation lies outside the scope of this project.

quantifiable." He told me that "CrossFit is a capacity-based program. It will make you fitter than anything," and that it helped him push himself into a "bigger pond" of self-exploration and personal growth, and that he is passionate about helping others do the same. On more than one occasion he uttered the words "I want to help people move better."

As I mention above, I began this research focused on the question of female muscularity, as I had noticed in my own personal life that the reactions of complete strangers to my muscular upper body had shifted from negative to positive, somewhere around 2012. However, as my ethnographic research progressed, I found that so much of what I was observing around me, and what my informants were sharing with me, could not be contained within my original research question. Therefore, I added two additional research areas to this project, one concerning neoliberal discourses of health as fitness and another focused on subjectivity and perpetual becoming, via the self as a project. I outline how I approached these three research categories, chapter by chapter, in the following section.

The Chapters

Chapter 1 is an exploration of how CrossFit exposes how neoliberal discourses of health as fitness serve as a conduit of Biopower, compelling subjects to govern themselves according to norms that individualize personal responsibility for health and fitness, detracting from collective solutions. I trace four sub-discourses via which Biopower functions as health and fitness in this CrossFit community: 1) Neoliberal Personal Responsibility, 2) Will-Power, 3) Anxiety and Control, and 4) Empowerment. I trace the way each of these discourses function within Biopolitical capitalism and within the everyday lives of my informants, grounding my interpretations in their verbalized experiences. The implications of this chapter include a better

understanding of how neoliberal discourses of health and fitness are internalized and enacted by real people, lending insight into how individuals and communities interact with these norms, to what degree, and to what effect.

Chapter 2 is an analysis of the subjectification process within the CrossFit experience. Built upon the ethnographic work of Wictor Hansson and the theoretical work of Michel Foucault, Nikolas Rose, Rosi Braidotti, and Deleuze and Guatarri, this chapter explores how and why subjects work so hard at and find some much joy in the process of becoming a future self. I explore how subjects find meaning and purpose in the process of becoming, rewards in surpassing limits, and hope in the collective energy of the group, which pulls them toward their future selves, a self that is indeed a project and requires care.

This latter result is the most significant of this line of inquiry, in that I theorize that the affective energy of the collective pulls subjects into a "trajectory" of hope in a future self. This grants subjects affective and physical momentum, calling them into a future form of subjectivity. The role of pain in this process is of some significance, as the collective experience of enduring discomfort lends power to the affective unity and energy of the collective. I believe this chapter can help us better understand the potential for resistance to Biopower via affective and other physiological openings, which enable diverse forms of subjectivity, energy, and experience. This chapter is highly theoretical, but also grounded in the experiences and statements of those interviewed and observed over the course of this two-year ethnography.

Chapter 3 is part one of two chapters that comprise my analysis of the increasing acceptance and valorization of the muscular female body in American culture today. Chapter 3 presents a review of the literature, including an historiography of the American feminine ideal, a review of relevant ethnographic studies, and a review of literature on the female sporting/athletic

body. I also present some evidence showing that the feminine ideal has been shifting toward increased muscularity, while interrogating its limits. Finally, I present a Biopolitical explanation as to why this might be happening in American society at this juncture, building upon the work of Leslie Heywood, Anita Harris, Angela McRobbie, Susan Bordo, Shari Dworkin, and Anne Bolin. I affirm the work of Heywood and Geissler by supporting their assertion that the athletic female ideal is a direct result of neoliberal demands for "empowered" female laborers and consumers, which evolved in tandem with increased girls sports participation and growing support for women's athleticism and fitness through the 1990's. I also suggest that these Biopolitical forces may surpass economic motivations and perhaps include an element of militarism as well, particularly considering the timing of the rise of female muscularity in the late 2000's. My hope is that this chapter can provide a foundation for understanding the history and causes of what may be a significant shift in the terms of ideal femininity, the gender binary, and sexual dimorphism.

Chapter 4 is an interrogation of the background and theories presented in Chapter 3 via ethnographic data provided by this study's informants. In this chapter I explain my findings regarding the number of women who do or do not desire large muscularity, teasing out their motivations and processes. I analyze how and why women pursue small "toned" physiques, medium "toned" physiques, and large powerful (lean) muscularity. My findings support those of Shari Dworkin and Anne Bolin, in that the limit on female muscularity persists, as most women I interviewed do not desire large "masculine" muscles. I do, however, suggest that what is considered masculine has shifted in the last twenty years, using my survey results, interviews, and observations to support this conclusion. I extend my results into a theorization as to what future social and biological effects we might expect as more and more women lift weights in

response to weakening social constraints, as research on the physiology of women's strength training continues to reveal that women can and do develop muscular strength and size. I acknowledge that these shifts seem to be the result of Biopolitical forces, but that they also bring with them potential opportunities for agency and resistance.

It is my hope that this dissertation is a meaningful contribution to our understanding of Biopower, Biopolitics, neoliberal discourses of health and fitness, subjectification as perpetual becoming, the care of the self, the self as a project, and ideal embodied femininity in the United States. While I did not set out to examine all of these facets of Biopower, they emerged naturally from my ethnographic results, with Biopower forming the thread that connects all of this project's themes.

Chapter 1

CrossFit and Neoliberal Discourses of Health as Fitness

"The neoliberal agenda of restructuring governmental techniques so as to minimize state intervention, secure competitive markets, while at the same time evading risks and establishing a social body comprised of knowledgeable, prudent, health conscious citizens, while also accepting the inevitability of inequality as a side effect of the freedom of choice, is symbolic of the 'healthy' society." (Ayo 104)

Health has taken on increasing social importance over the course of the last thirty years in Western societies, as the intensification of neoliberal logics have manifested as a rhetoric of individual responsibility for health and wellness. (White et al.; Crawford; Neville; Ayo; Glasgow) This individual responsibility is essential to neoliberalism, an economic and political rationale that requires individuals to govern themselves from the inside out, thereby enabling the shrinking of external state governance and support and the expansion of corporate privatization and profitization. (Ayo 104) Discourses of health have thrived in an increasingly intense climate of risk and danger, as epidemics, catastrophes, and various other forms of ever-present physical danger dominate public consciousness. (Giddens; Lasch; Beck; Crawford) Individuals are called upon to mitigate the anxieties brought on within this climate of risk, through constant surveillance of self and others, coupled with careful attention to diet, fitness, and mental and physical symptoms. Prevention is of particular concern here: neoliberal discourses of health increasingly emphasize diet, and even more so, physical fitness. (Neville 36)

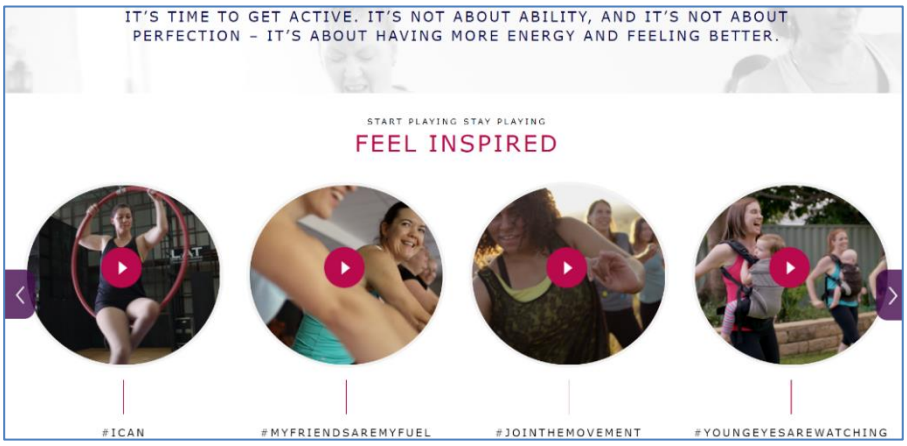

Figure 8 "Join the Movement" is the Queensland Australia government-sponsored initiative to get women and girls to exercise. Source: Join the Movement

State and corporate investment[12] in discourses of health as fitness have also grown. The governments of the United States, the U.K. and Australia all have extremely visible health *as fitness* campaigns, with non-profit partnerships, media outreach, and community programs.[13] These examples are indicative of state and non-profit investment in communicating the ideology of personal responsibility for health via fitness, particularly to girls and women, who are also seen as purveyors of cultural norms to their families. Sport in particular is viewed as an avenue to closing the "gender gap" in "achievement" between men and women. This is due to the understanding that sport enables women to develop traits essential to their social and economic success, such as self-confidence, competitiveness, and leadership, an idea I will explore in-depth in chapter 3.

[12] Often through "non-profit" organizations working in collaboration with states.
[13] UK, Australia body movement movements:
https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/mind-your-body/201802/strong-is-the-new-skinny-do-women-their-bodies-more
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=toH4GcPQXpc
https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=2&v=4JhUkNFN9lQ

In this chapter I will analyze how and why discourses of health are transmitted to the general population[14] in the form of a rhetoric of personal responsibility through physical fitness. While Biopower[15] is a prominent force motivating these discourses, these processes are complex: many discourses of health and fitness arise from non-profits and individuals who intend to help people survive better within the system, rather than changing the system. This discourse is internalized by subjects to varying degrees, becoming a part of how they govern and produce themselves as ideal subjects, taking pressure off state resources while creating new types of consumers and markets.

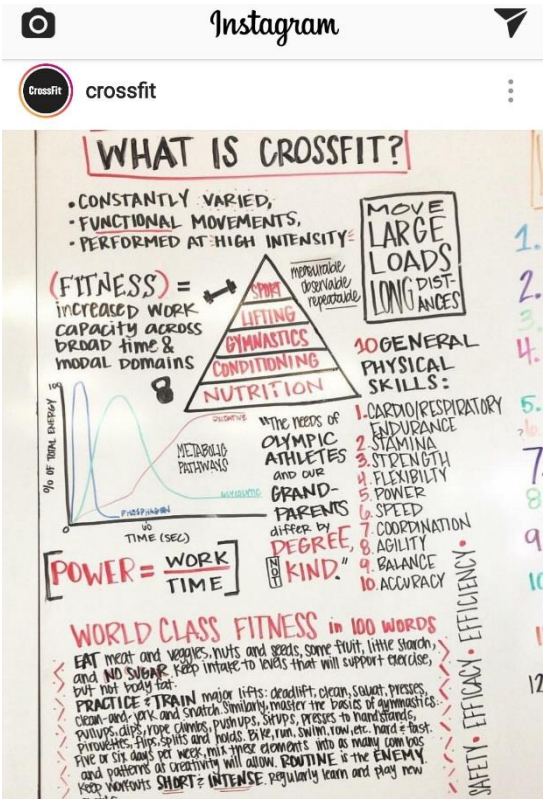

Figure 9 "What is CrossFit." Source: CrossFit Official Instagram.

Health vs. Fitness Definitions

Within the CrossFit narrative, which I explore in detail in the following paragraphs, definitions of health and fitness are almost indistinguishable. In fact, CrossFit's official definition of health defines it as fitness: "Health can now be concisely and precisely defined as increased work capacity across broad time, modal, and

[14] Via popular media, political rhetoric, education, nonprofit outreach, etc.

[15] Biopower is defined in the introduction, but I will also include here this brief review of Biopower and Governmentality: Biopower, as I am using the term, is the force that compels individuals to manage their own bodies (and characters) in accordance with norms that produce a more economically efficient and productive larger population, within late (Biopolitical) capitalism. Individuals do this through what is called "governmentality," or the governance of their own values, behaviors, and identities, again, in accordance with norms that create ideal social and political circumstances for the perpetuation the status quo. "Foucault termed 'governmentality', or 'mentalities of government': the complex of notions, calculations, strategies, and tactics through which diverse authorities - political, military, economic, theological, medical, and so forth - have sought to act upon the lives and conducts of each and all in order to avert evils and achieve such desirable states as health, happiness, wealth, and tranquility (Foucault, 1979b)." (Rose, Inventing Ourselves 154) This occurs hrough technologies of the self, ethics, and the care of the self, which I will explore more in Chapter 2.

age domains. Work capacity is the ability to perform real physical work as measured by force x distance / time (which is average power). Fitness is this ability in as many domains as possible."[16]

If a distinction must be made, as it sometimes was among this study's informants, it is that fitness leads to and maintains health, understood to be optimal individual wellness, mental and physical. Yet for those I interviewed, to be fit is also to be healthy and to be healthy is to be fit.[17] Within the official CrossFit narrative, fitness includes nutrition, body functionality, mental health, and even internal character traits such as self-discipline and self-esteem, just as health does. However, the interviews I conducted revealed that the majority of CrossFit participants believe that fitness is a road to health, rather than health in and of itself.

The marketing of CrossFit has evolved as it has become more popular, though it has always been oriented around fitness as health. The early days of the 2000's brought new participants into boxes through friends, as well as church, athletic, military, firefighting, and law-enforcement networks. The sport grew in popularity around 2011, when ESPN started showing the CrossFit games on its network, and growing public interest accelerated in response. The branding of CrossFit in the early days can be surmised via an analysis of their in-house periodical, the CrossFit Journal. It seems that founder Greg Glassman, a libertarian, has always been focused on personal freedom and responsibility through health and fitness, defined in part by the ability to move freely and respond to various ever-changing external conditions. He

[16] http://journal.CrossFit.com/2009/02/CrossFits-new-definition-of-fitness-volume-under-the-curve-2.tpl

[17] Some scholars (Neville 64, Bauman) have argued that lack of limits and definition is what distinguishes fitness from health: they assert that health has an end result: a healthy body and mind, while fitness is supposedly immeasurable and limitless. I disagree: I believe health is both immeasurable and limitless in the same way that fitness is: we do not have the information or resources to fully understand optimal health and the conditions that lead to it, and we have just as many measurements for fitness as we do for health, even if they are less conventionally understood. I also believe that the qualities that define fitness and health overlap to such a degree that they define one another, and are theoretically inseparable, particularly within the CrossFit narrative. (According to Neville, citing Bauman, fitness cannot be defined absolutely, the fittest possible cannot be quantified. Or can they? CrossFit attempts to do this: "The Fittest on Earth", "Forging Elite Fitness".)

espoused this idea in close relationship with the belief that a body and character that moves and cares for itself for via proper nutrition and exercise is a healthy body. (The CrossFit Journal)

CrossFit branding in the past few years has been increasingly public, accessible, and focused on health, at the level of individual responsibility, but also at the level of the collective, with a particular focus on corporate and government responsibility for American health issues. CrossFit recently launched the CrossFit Sports and Health Sciences Institute[18], an effort funded

Figure 10 The CrossFit Health Website Banner. Source: CrossFithealth.com

by the nonprofit The CrossFit Foundation, with the mission to increase health awareness through funding "unbiased" academic research on health, fitness, and nutrition, as well as media outreach, lobbying, and legal campaigns designed to raise awareness about related issues.

One such campaign has been the Crush Big Soda movement, which has resulted in a bill proposed to the California state legislature (SB 300) that would mandate warning labels on soda products. Glassman himself has lobbied the U.S. Congress for a similar national initiative, while urging the members to more closely examine what he believes is corporate/government collusion in the promotion of sugar in American food products. (Cecil) CrossFit also maintains The CrossFit Community Health fund, also funded by The CrossFit Foundation, which supplies

[18] As of May 2018 this "institute" had a web presence, but it was gone by November 2018. As of November 2018 information on research funded by CrossFit can be found here: https://www.CrossFit.com/foundation/research.

grants to underserved communities and organizations with similar missions. (CrossFit Community Health Fund) CrossFit also recently launched the CrossFit Health website (CrossFit Health) designed to provide a forum through which "the ills of modern medicine and the willful abuse of the public's trust in science" might be investigated. These initiatives indicate CrossFit's accelerating mission to "fight for public health" by combatting what they see to be corporate and government collusion, while raising awareness in the public as to the importance of nutrition and exercise in the reclamation of health in the United States. Of course we must be wary of a corporate brand that stands to represent the American public in the arena of health, particularly when it has positioned itself as the "prescription" for many of the ills of contemporary Western society. However, Glassman's refusal to sell the brand and franchising model, as well as his continuing commitment to public welfare at multiple levels, gives me pause. Clearly CrossFit branding benefits from positioning itself as such, and yet Glassman's intentions have a ring of truth.

Figure 11 CrossFit's diet philosophy. Source: CrossFit Official Instagram.

Glassman's passion for health is extended to the CrossFit brand more generally and serves to support the discourse that exercise and fitness, and the CrossFit lifestyle specifically, are a means to achieving better health. CrossFit's exercise regimen does not aggressively promote any specific diet at the level of its franchises, but it does generally recommend whole foods, vegetables, meats, and low to no-sugar as the content of an ideal diet, via CrossFit.com, the

CrossFit journal, social media platforms, and YouTube videos[19]. These four mediums are the primary means by which CrossFit markets itself to potential consumers, secondary to word of mouth, which this study's interview results revealed is still the most common way newcomers find CrossFit. CrossFit also reaches out to medical professionals, urging them to "prescribe" CrossFit to their patients. (Dalton) Ross Neville articulates this move by CrossFit to "prescribe" exercise as medicine as "a general shift in emphasis in the model of healthcare that has occurred from reactive to proactive approaches to life-politics (e.g. towards practising preventative as opposed to only curative medicine)…if exercise is medicine, then fitness is the new health." (Neville 3)

CrossFit's investment in "health" is not limited to physical health, but extends to mental health and personal character-building that enhances the life and livelihood of the individual outside of the gym. This is because CrossFit has the capacity, confirmed by the subjects of this study, to enable personal growth through the cultivation of self-discipline, will-power, adversity through pain and discomfort (physical and emotional), goal-setting and achievement strategies, and self-esteem building. The image at left is one example of CrossFit's promotion of personal growth as an outcome of CrossFit training.

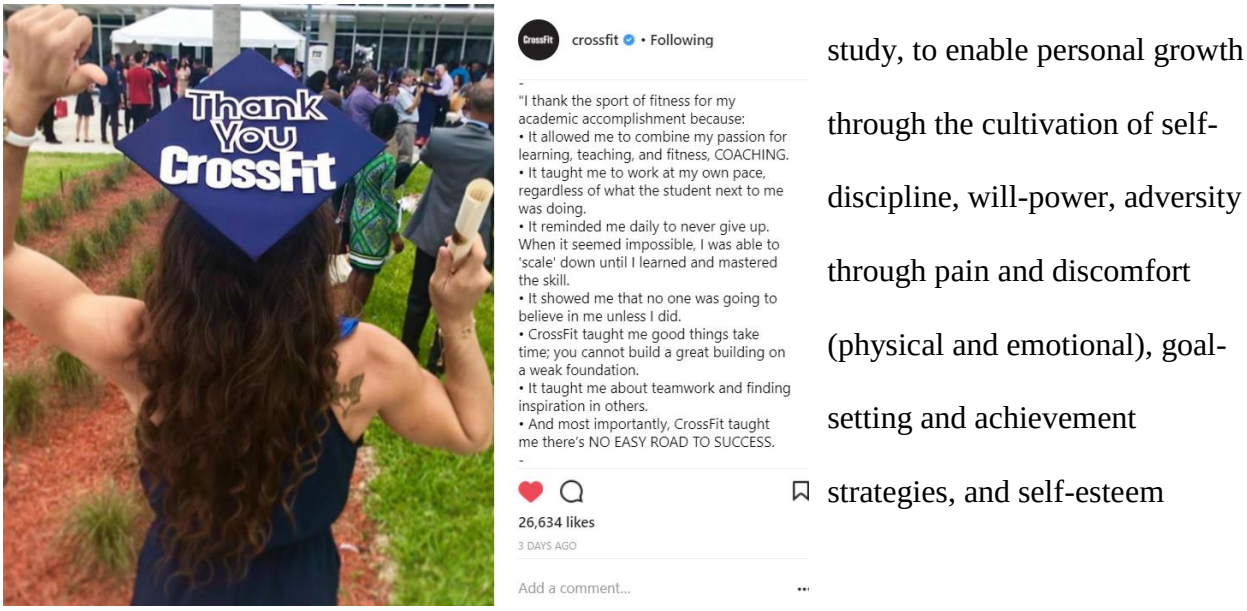

Figure 12 Social Media promotion by CrossFit that touts CrossFit's effect on character building. Source: CrossFit Official Instagram.

[19] Some of the subjects I interviewed mentioned that they know that CrossFit promotes the zone diet, which emphasizes "macros" or units of different types of food, with an emphasis on vegetables and protein, and a de-emphasis on sugar. The level to which this is carried out by actual CrossFit participants varies in proportion to their investment in the CrossFit identity and their fitness goals.

Glassman's investment seems genuine, especially considering his history and politics, and it serves to promote the brand in a way that aligns with a very dominant and widely-accepted cultural discourse, thereby making CrossFit's brand stronger.

The actual experiences of the CrossFit participants in this study mostly supported CrossFit's official message. While many of my interviewees expressed that they had first heard that CrossFit was actually unhealthy and dangerous, due to its more extreme intensity and perceived high skill requirement compared to other fitness options, they had concluded that these perspectives are erroneous, because of the support, training, and coaching that they received once they "gave it a chance." Almost every subject I interviewed expressed that they believed that their CrossFit training has contributed positively to their overall mental and physical health and quality of life, despite some occasions of injury, soreness, and joint and tendon wear and tear. In fact, the narratives of empowerment and liberation through better health and movement espoused in the official CrossFit narrative were supported in the narratives of almost all of this study's 37 interview subjects. Of course, had I interviewed individuals who had tried CrossFit and quit, I might have found very different results.

In what follows I will advance an analysis of CrossFit within discourses of health and fitness in the United States, tracing the influence of Biopolitical power in the adoption of these narratives and their associated subject positions. I hope to do this while honoring my ethical imperative to value the real, lived experiences and interpretations of my very gracious study informants, who do not view their actions and lives through a Biopolitical lens, but rather see their experience as positively empowering. Within this apparent contradiction there is an opportunity to tease apart what empowerment means by more closely examining subject formation and agency within this context, which I do more extensively in chapters 2 and 4. But

first I will advance a more general analysis of CrossFit as a discourse of health within the context of late modernity in the United States, focusing on four main threads of Biopower as they weave their way through the lived experiences of this study's informants.

These four main threads of Biopower are

(Neoliberal) Personal Responsibility
Willpower and (self) discipline
Anxiety management and control
Empowerment and Self-Care as meaning and purpose

Neoliberal Personal Responsibility

Neoliberal conditions[20] have since at least the 1970's have resulted in a withdrawal of state support for health and welfare programs, a privatization of health and welfare risk to the level of the individual, and an extension of rhetoric that "empowers" the individual to take responsibility for health, welfare, and risk. (Crawford; White et al.; Ayo) What's more, the rhetoric of individual responsibility for health has, as Robert Crawford argued in his work on Healthism, "become a model of and a model for the neoliberal restructuring of American society," in that it has served as a basis for an extension of this logic to all areas of American life in which individual responsibility is expected to trump state and social/collective responsibility. (419) In other words, the logic of individual responsibility for health (understood as attainable through diet and fitness), advanced most famously by Richard Nixon[21], and later by Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush, has served as a means of rationalizing other types of personal responsibilities in American society. This has shifted focus away from structural and communal quality of life solutions, such as universal healthcare, a standard living wage, or public lands and

[20] Neoliberalism is an economic system based on principles of laissez-faire free market capitalism, deregulation, privatization, and decreased government spending on social welfare. It is accompanied by ideologies of personal choice as freedom, as well as individual responsibility for health, welfare, and livelihood. (Harvey, Brown)
[21] An abbreviated transcript of Nixon's most famous speech on health and fitness as personal responsibility, compared to Bush's, can be found in Neville's dissertation: A Phenomenology of Fitness.

resources: “Crucially, the ideology of healthism also tends to place responsibility for body vigilance solely on the individual, and deflects attention away from the social and cultural conditions which shape and constrain health.” (White et al 160) This individual responsibility is frequently termed and experienced as “empowerment” through choice, freedom, and self-determination.

Biopolitical imperatives of the neoliberal era demand subjects who wholly identify with taking personal responsibility for health and fitness, to the effect of ignoring social and political influences that affect access to healthcare, good food, and exercise, while also ignoring the labor conditions and related mental health challenges that are impediments to accessing all three. This is the result of state and corporate logics that would transfer responsibility for social welfare onto individuals, to enable decreased state responsibility and increased privatization and profitization. It also serves the purpose of enabling individuals to govern themselves from the inside out, thereby permitting a shrinking of external governance structures. (Rose, Inventing Ourselves 29)

This process is furthered by the common experience that once one’s basic needs are met, it is easier to ignore structural conditions that prevent other individuals from “empowering” themselves and gaining health through fitness. For example, many people in this country lack basic healthcare, or the time, energy, and money required to engage in CrossFit. It is difficult to exercise after working a full day, or two jobs, especially considering the mental health effects of labor exploitation and the hopelessness it fosters. It is even more difficult to prepare a fresh, wholesome meal when healthy vegetables and meats cost more to purchase, and take more energy to prepare, than easily accessible fast-food and processed foods. However most of the subjects of this study seem to believe that anyone can attain health through fitness.

Danny, a man in his early 30's, described with great passion and positivity how taking control of one's life not only improves one's quality of life, but could in fact save it:

> *Danny: But I feel like this is one of the steps, or a stepping stone towards that. With the positivity aspect, the whole having the mind right. I mean it's like the more positive you think, it's easier to live. As opposed to if you keep dwelling in the past and thinking about negative shit, it fucks you up mentally. Like your well-being is not meant to be that way.*
>
> *And it's cheaper than a drug, if anything, right? Because it actually fixes problems, makes you a better person. As opposed to someone giving you a pill and saying alright have this pill but now this drug doesn't work anymore. Hold on you need another drug now because now the drug doesn't actually work anymore, you know? …*
>
> *See that's another thing. With this it's only one hour right? We have 24 hours in a day. We don't know what happens after we leave here, whether you're standing, you're sitting, moving. So that's another thing, it's an outlet, I need a, it's a health-beneficial outlet I need, as opposed to you stagnant.*
>
> *I always tell people, **if you stop moving you're dead.** The more you move the blood flows. If the blood flows then that's when you quit. You basically quit.*

Danny's words have a ring of truth and cannot be summarily dismissed as the result of neoliberal logics or Biopower. Of course, Danny is right that we are indeed responsible for making the best of this life we've been given, and doing whatever it is we are capable of to ensure our own happiness. Yet Danny's words also hint at what it is we are not addressing as a society: the reason why we are so prone to reaching for a drug, remaining "stagnant," having to fight day after day for our own peace of mind, or a semblance of happiness.

The degree to which Danny and the other subjects of this study fight for their own health and happiness is impressive: the pain they are willing to endure, the dedication it takes to show up day after day for more pain, struggle, soreness, etc., is all quite remarkable. Of course, as one gains fitness and fitness goals and becomes a part of the community, it no longer feels like a fight, except on those rare days. But the energy and passion in Danny's response, the way he has

framed his ethics as a battle, reveals a great deal about the social context in which he lives. He is referencing that he feels compelled devote a significant portion of his energy to his self-care, framing it as survival, which brings me to question the environmental circumstances that require individuals to work so hard to hang on to health and happiness: Neoliberal capitalism in the contemporary United States is characterized by constant exploitative labor, consumption as a value system, environmental degradation, loss of meaning and purpose and collective experiences, a climate of risk and accompanying anxiety, denial of collective resources, and the individualization of personal responsibility for all of the ills that result (it's your fault if you're poor, unhappy, sick, etc.).

However, this study's informants also felt that not only that they are personally responsible for and in control of their own health and fitness, but that they feel empowered by this sense of responsibility and control. Natasha, a woman in her late 20's, shared with me her perspective on this:

> *Natasha: Yeah this is because this your overall mental health, your fitness, these are things that you can control...your job, that's something that you can't control all the time. There's like other factors and like that you can't control but like your overall well-being I think mentally and like physically I think those are the two most key things that you can have control over and be happier in life.*

Natasha's insights gave me the impression that she felt positive about the sense of control and empowerment she found through taking personal responsibility for her health and fitness, a theme that emerged in many of the interviews I conducted, and which I explore more in the sections below.

While none of my respondents brought up social and political factors that play a role in personal health, this is more likely due to the context and framing of my interview questions,

rather than their perceptions, although the relatively comfortable social and economic conditions of this sample population likely also played a role. Had I interviewed subjects who do not have the time and money to participate in CrossFit, I would have likely heard more about labor conditions, mental health struggles, and lack of access to adequate healthcare and nutrition. However, there were a few interviewees who briefly referenced these things in terms of their past lives, but did not reflect further. I surmise that once the baseline of life conditions is met, a sense of individual control can be maintained. Unfortunately, the fact that the baseline conditions are not being met for a large population in this country at this time seems largely forgotten, even by those who once shared this experience. It is possible that those who "overcame" their past struggles may even have less empathy for those still entrenched, in that they believe that if they could overcome, others can and should as well. (Ruttan et al.)

Discourses of health and fitness in the popular media play a significant role in the proliferation and maintenance of these ideologies in American society. Nike's "Just Do It" slogan is of course a prime example. Thinking of this slogan from the perspective of someone who is exhausted, depressed, and malnourished reveals just how ridiculous the concept truly is, and yet for those who feel so "empowered" it would seem that everything is possible, if one wills it to be so.

Figure 13 Henry's Motivational Strategy. Source: Instagram

Another example of this discourse in action was revealed in my research via an owner of the gym, Henry, who would often share social media posts (See Figure 11) espousing this idea of individual "no

excuses" accountability and "empowerment," and often strongly suggested to me that my obesity at the beginning of the study (I lost fifty pounds over the course of this research) was a matter of personal choice. ("You have to make a decision.") My internal response to him was one of frustration, as I was dealing with several other significant contributing life challenges, and did not feel that I could just make a choice to stop drinking alcohol and eating bad food, or simply will myself out of bed in the morning to get to the gym or go for a run. Yet his recommendation came from a place of personal investment in the rhetoric of personal responsibility for health and fitness as empowerment, and his genuine desire to help me in the way he best knew how.

As we stood face to face in the midst of this discussion, neither of us considered the various historical, economic, social, and political factors that contributed to life circumstances and my subsequent loss of "will-power." All that remained in the void between us was clear evidence of my personal failing, revealing to me personally how neoliberal logics transfer blame through a "positive" logic of personal responsibility as empowerment, negating the impact of structural causes, such as poverty, racism, sexism, homophobia, labor exploitation, lack of access to education and good nutrition, etc. It seems like anyone, no matter the effects of structural violence on their psyche, past and present, should be able to lace up their shoes and "just do it."[22]

Willing one's self to "just do it," regardless of external circumstances, not only transfers responsibility onto individuals (rather than institutions), but it gives subjects a sense of control over their lives, the aging process, and by proxy, death itself. It holds anxiety at bay for many, gave them a sense of moral character via their performance of "will-power," distinguishing them

[22] Despite the clear presence of neoliberal discourses of individualization and atomization via personal responsibility in the results of this study, the collective nature of the CrossFit experience exceeds these explanations. While participants do express that they are solely responsible for their own personal health and fitness, they also describe feeling as if they are not doing this alone: they have the community to support them, inside and outside of the gym. In fact, for many of this study's respondents, community is the most important factor in their CrossFit participation, more important than health, body aesthetics, and personal growth. I will explore this finding below, and in subsequent chapters.

from those "others" who lack the willpower they possess, and even translated into an "empowering" sense of hope in a future they experience as precarious. These results are the subject of the following sections.

Will Power

The concept of will power in health and fitness discourse is often couched within the narrative of self-discipline and individual responsibility, which is not unique to this era or culture, but does reinforce neoliberal constructions of subjects within late capitalism, as well as the concept of governmentality as Biopower. In the Biopolitical context the external disciplinarian of schools, prisons, and other institutions becomes secondary to the will of the individual, signaling a shift from disciplinary power as the primary form of regulatory force, to Biopower, which occurs through governmentality at the level of the individual[23]. Will power can be expressed through the individual's disciplinary potential to force themself to exercise and eat "right" even when they do not feel like it, because they have the internal capacity and character to be this kind of person, regardless of their feelings or inertia.

This capacity for will power expressed through self-discipline not only proves the individual's inner character to themselves and others, but it separates them from those who cannot or will not exert such will power, and from past versions of themselves that failed in this capacity. One interview subject, a woman in her 60's, remarked that maintaining fitness is important for her sense of self because she doesn't want to embarrass her children by being visibly overweight. She did not elaborate on why this would be so shameful, but in our culture being overweight is often considered evidence of inner moral failing (laziness) and would also expose her and her children to the social censure of others, which she admitted she fears.

[23] See Introduction for a review of how this works.

Gail: And I wanna look good for my kids. I want my kids to be proud I'm their mom. You know that I'm not some fat bimbo sitting around the house.

Richa: [another subject joining in]: Yeah that's not you

Gail: Yeah I want my kids to be proud to introduce me to people. I don't want them to be ashamed that their mom is big and fat.

Richa: Well none of us is going to get caught driving that scooter around Walmart. That's not gonna happen.

We can see through this example what Bourdieu famously expressed in his work on social signs and embodiment: written on the bodies of contemporary subjects is their inner character and moral qualities, their capacity for self-discipline, achievement, and will power, and therefore the social value of the individual. (Bourdieu, Distinction 218, cited in Shilling 139) This value can be converted into social currency and power, or it can stand as an impediment to achieving social currency and power, in the case of obesity. The fact that these women see looking good as a social responsibility casts light on the value American society places on appearances, exposing the belief that external appearance reflects the "internal qualities" of the individual, particularly willpower, as much as it accords sexual value to those who appear "attractive."

In addition, the idea that one has the capacity to build and maintain willpower can serve to separate one's self from social others who one perceives to lack this capacity, thereby justifying social stratification and mitigating class and race anxiety. Robert Crawford points this out when he references middle class Americans constructing themselves as possessing will-power in contrast to those in lower economic classes, who they perceive to be less capable of maintaining it, and therefore individually and collectively responsible for their own poverty. This

construction serves to justify class positions and mitigate middle class anxieties about the precarity of their own social position. (411-412)

Yet while Crawford's findings revealed many middle-class interviewees using words like "self-control," "self-discipline," "self-denial," and "will-power," my interview subjects did not generally adhere to such phrasings. An analysis of 60,000 words in the transcripts of interviews did not yield one single mention of the word "discipline," and one mention[24] of the word "willpower", by Burt, a man in his early 60's:

> *Burt: That's good because really all it is about is being happy and if being that kind of person doesn't make you happy then you're going to be miserable. I know a lot of people...I hope my kids don't have to go through that but at some point you have to find out on your own you know the words that I have or whatever won't change anything*
>
> *It's like telling somebody to stop smoking because I used to smoke too. It's like hey if you don't wanna...if you don't stop...anybody would tell me if you don't quit...yeah yeah yeah if you don't want to do it, then you won't do it.*
>
> *And I think if you take that as an example, right? Stopping smoking. If you're able to get through those kinds of things then you've at least proven that you have, whether you call it drive or* ***willpower****...and it's also like the weight loss...if you can maintain and not go back, then you're successful.*

Burt's response was a kind reflection upon my own weight loss and life transformation, which he had witnessed over the course of two years. It also reveals a bit of the neoliberal personal responsibility rhetoric, as well as its implicit governmentality, and most importantly, references addiction as a choice, or something you want or don't want to do, a matter of willpower. This reinforces discourses of personal responsibility founded in Biopolitical ideologies of self-governance, while also implicitly suggesting that those who do not take care of

[24] It did at first surprise me that so few participants framed their experience of CrossFit in terms of discipline and willpower. However, as I deepened my study of this community and came to my own embodied experience, I realized that these participants enjoy going to CrossFit, and therefore it does not feel like a discipline or require a great deal of willpower for most of them. I explore this theme in Chapter 2.

themselves and their health are making a choice and lack willpower. This has the social effect of distinguishing between those who do possess "willpower," and those who do not, despite the fact that this was not Burt's intention.

This type of will-power-based Othering[25] can function to reinforce a sense of control, through differentiation as an explanation of social ills, in a cultural context in which all is precarious. In a climate of risk, defined by terrorism, epidemics, and economic and political instability and strife, a sense of continuity and control can be maintained through action upon those things we feel we can control. However, economic, racial, and gender and sex-based inequalities ensure that some individuals and communities have more control than others over the circumstances of their lives. For those who do possess some feeling of control, it is hard to imagine the circumstances and experiences of those who do not, or the surrender these circumstances and experiences often require. But as Crawford so keenly observes in the American context, "the fantasy of individual control will not likely be significantly disturbed in a culture in which the self is held to be sovereign." (417) In the case of will-power, this control is a sign that one is not like those who do not possess it, reinforcing social boundaries, solidifying identity, and serving as "proof" that inequalities are often the result of choice, rather than social, economic, or political circumstances.

Control and anxiety management

Many scholars have pointed to fitness as a health intervention as integral to how postmodern individuals and societies manage anxiety: anxiety about health, loss of social and

[25] Othering is the process by which we distinguish between ourselves, the in-group, and Others, the out-group, or in critical race theory, the socially abject. It is easiest to understand this concept when considering anti-blackness and other forms of racism, which require we think of the Other as not like us, which is often a form of dehumanization, often unconscious. (Hegel; Said; Mountz)

political power, and the inevitability of aging and death. Anxiety is a common experience within late-modernity, because we are perpetually uncertain as to the conditions of our existence and our identities in a world in which jobs, structures, and events are constantly changing yet also within our field of awareness, due to the relatively recent advent of instantaneous information access. (Beck; Lasch; Baudrillard; Giddens; Castells; Bauman) Anxiety is arguably more intense in the contemporary era because the locus of responsibility is centered on the individual, who is told that it is within their power and responsibility to maintain their health, lifespan, and identity, in the face of evidence to the contrary in the form of perpetually shifting conditions and information. (Giddens)

In reference to generalized anxiety about health and identity, the results of this study indicate that CrossFit is indeed a mitigator against various forms of anxiety. My interviews revealed three consistent forms of anxiety experienced by interviewees: 1) anxiety about losing control of the body, functionally and materially 2) related anxiety about aging and health, and 3) generalized anxiety, with no expressed cause. It surprised me to find how often anxiety was mentioned, despite the fact that I never directly questioned anyone about it.

Anxiety about losing control of the body expressed by the subjects of this study often was referenced within the framework of aging and deterioration, injury, becoming overweight, "unhealthy," or weak/unfit, or generalized/unlabeled anxiety that was most effectively mitigated through exercise. Abbey, a woman in her late 50's, expresses her experiences with feeling unsettled if she doesn't work out:

> *Abbey: One thing I didn't say was that um I'm one of those people that...I, like you, used to work out three hours a day. I did two classes and I be like "when I can do this, when can I do that" or I'd do CrossFit then I'd go swim for awhile...not so much anymore I*

don't have the time, but it's uh I need that release. I'm not a nice person if I don't...you know and sometimes the WODs are too short

Now I have to go ride the bike or clearly I didn't go hard enough it's six minutes, like I'm like I love it but shoot I want more…Absolutely it's just...yeah...it's like a physiological, I just, I'm one of those people who I have to do it...I do it five days a week at least. And I think part of that is my basic core, I am still...well I say I am comfortable in my own skin, I still feel fat and lazy when I don't release, you know what I mean?

Abbey's response is interesting because she feels "comfortable in her own skin," provided she exercises, otherwise she feels "fat and lazy," yet she attributes the relief she finds in exercise to a "physiological release". Her response was echoed by many other informants, who surmised that their anxiety came up if because if they didn't work out they weren't managing their lives or identities in a way that would result in their ideal selves. However, others had no reference point for the cause of their anxiety, alluding only to a presumed biological reaction in the form of "thoughts that get quiet" during or after a workout, assumed to be the result of immersion and endorphins. Christina, a woman in her mid-twenties, expressed a response that is representative of this sample:

Christina: My head's so loud like all the time all this planning, and thinking about myself, and like what could go wrong in my life, and when I went to CrossFit I was like, that was it for like an hour, and that's huge for me.

While several other informants echoed Christina's assessment, referencing the "silencing" of their thoughts or mind, some merely referenced that they felt ill at ease if they didn't work out, which was the case for Brian, a man in his late 20's:

Brian: Um, why do I work out. If I don't work out, I honestly feel like crap about myself. So I think it's not even so much about looking good or or just what other people think,

it's personally I don't feel good if I don't work out. It gives me a high, it makes me in a better mood, and...shoot. It's a hard question.

The way that these CrossFit participants experience anxiety, and exercise as the solution, can be interpreted as a result of what Giddens and Beck termed the "risk society" of contemporary Western culture. Within this context it is argued that individuals feel called upon to mitigate ever-present and visible potential dangers and pitfalls, many of which are deemed life-threatening, such as terrorism, crime, and epidemics. (Beck; Giddens) In this configuration "health-consciousness is danger-consciousness-an awareness of and sensitivity to increasingly ambient and omnipresent potential harms." (Crawford 403) In the risk society "everything potentially is a source of 'risk' and everyone can be seen to be 'at risk'," through discourses of illness, epidemic, and health. (Petersen et al. 195, cited in Neville 32) In this way, not only are the environment and other people potential sources of risk, but one's very self could be exposed and degraded, leading to its own negation through death or exclusion from the social body as the result of ill-health. (Shilling 39; Bauman; Burgess 199, cited in Shilling)

Within this climate of risk, we are called to rely upon the state for mass security, even while the state withdraws its support of health and social welfare programs, while also taking personal responsibility for those things we believe within our control, in an effort to manage our health, well-being, and very lives. (Crawford: 2006) The body is for many people (those whose basic life conditions are regularly met) one of the few domains that feels within their control, at least in terms of fitness and to some degree, health. (Kroker et al., cited in White et al, 163) The anxiety that fuels this system compels the action required to maintain good fitness, and therefore, health. This individual management of risk through individual control and effort takes on

increasing importance as the state withdraws further and further from its interventionist role in health and social welfare systems[26].

Anxiety over health can also sometimes belie a fear of a loss of social and political power: Anthropologist Mary Douglas was one of the first to theorize that the policing of bodily boundaries is a means of policing social boundaries, and as Crawford points out, this perspective is illuminated by the boundaries established in American society today between the "sick" and the "well," the "healthy" and the "unhealthy", the "fit" and the "fat," the "us" and the "them." Crawford in his earlier work uses the example of AIDS victims in the 1980's and the surrounding discourse to illustrate how ideas of wellness vs. sickness can serve as social boundaries separating communities from the social body. (409) In the case of this research I found very limited evidence supporting discourses of exclusion and difference motivated by anxiety, because for the majority of my informants, fitness is an accessible route by which "anyone" can change their very selves. However, there was the example of Gail, quoted above, along with Heather, who manage this boundary in themselves, so as to avoid identities, behaviors, and labels they associates with "unfit" or "out of shape" people. Burt's responses regarding willpower also can serve to reinforce domains of exclusion (despite his good intentions) rooted in anxieties about maintaining security and the social order.

Scholars of sport and exercise have also consistently pointed to anxiety over ontological insecurity[27] and the deep-rooted fear of death as a motivator for exercise and fitness, and consistent with the above anxiety-based motivational factors, this fear is mitigated through the

[26] At this point I'd like to clarify that I'm not arguing that we shouldn't take responsibility for our own health, but that we should be aware of the intensity of the pressure to maintain strength of will and control over health, even in the face of omnipresent and increasing "dangers" and "risks", and how this works to negate the importance of institutional structures that leave so many in this country incapable of exercising this will and control.

[27] Ontological insecurity is the term used to describe a deep sense of anxiety about the security of one's own existence, past, present, and future. It is often unconscious, manifesting only as a dark sense of unease or fear. (Giddens 35-69)

sense of internal control that progressive fitness and action provide. In our contemporary culture death is no longer the ultimate reward, nor is commonly imbued with the spiritual meanings it once held, but is experienced rather an inevitable loss of control and being that we work to mitigate on an individual and societal level. As science and medicine continue to make apparent inroads in postponing mortality, bringing it within the illusion of control, the pressure upon individuals to take responsibility for their continued physical existence increases, and with it, the pressure to maintain health through fitness. We are in a moment where perhaps we feel the power and responsibility to control death itself, for acceptance and surrender is more elusive than in previous periods in which religion was stronger and the illusion of control was weaker. Consequently, anxieties about death, chaos, tragedy, and control saturate our lives. Health and fitness is one means of addressing these anxieties. (Giddens 162, 203, cited in Shilling 192)

Ron, a man in his 40's, expresses how he views the relationship between fitness, health, aging, and death:

> *Ron: It's funny I always remember this...my grandfather was dying. He had brain cancer. And he was so unhealthy. He was overweight. He had lung issues so they couldn't even operate on his tumors. He was at the VA hospital in Long Beach basically in the nursing home wing that's like hospice kind of. And we had to take him in a wheelchair. He couldn't walk anymore because of his brain tumor it was affecting his functions. And he didn't have leg strength enough to do it anymore.*
>
> *And we were going up to the elevator it was on the second floor, and some people came to walk up the stairs, and he looked over at me and he said I never knew how much I wanted to walk up a flight of stairs until I couldn't. You know? And that stuck with me. That was twenty years ago and that stuck with me so much you know? I was pretty young back then and now I'm like oh my god just from hearing that from somebody who's like a month or two from dying and just wanted to be able to walk as a person. Oh my God.*
>
> *So when I see people at work going one flight of stairs they hit the elevator. And it's like you know there's stairs right here. I wanna say it but I don't. Every time I see somebody skipping the stairs and using the elevator to go down instead of walking it makes me think*

of my grandfather. And I laugh and I think I guess I'm doing pretty good right now I'm healthy and I can walk these stairs.

Ron's response indicates that he does not take his ability to walk for granted, nor any aspect of his health or mobility. His illustration of his grandfather's last days reveals the connection he sees between physical fitness and maintaining life itself, or avoiding death. He has chosen to take control via fitness, in an effort to avoid the fate of his grandfather.

The increasing privatization and individualization of death makes it more fearful, something to avoid, something to manage, "something alien and terrible". (Kellehear 145) Death has become an isolating experience, shut off from public view, sequestered in hospitals and nursing facilities, and increasingly accompanied by fear and revulsion. As technology and medicine have evolved death is also seemingly brought within our control, as it can be broken down into manageable diseases and causes, via mortality statistics, medical discourses, and the fitness movement. (Bauman) Yet death remains an inevitability, awaiting each of us. Avoiding death may not be possible, but health as a project mitigates its presence. CrossFit in particular, with its "quantifiable" and "measurable" outcome, which is to produce a body that is ready for any event or circumstance, provides a particularly post-modern remedy for the feeling that one is losing control.

Interviewees' conceptualization of fitness as a mitigator of these manageable diseases and causes and the degradation that accompanies aging, as well as their desire for longevity, or the avoidance of death, are well-expressed in Jaycee's (a woman in her 60's) response:

Jaycee: I have high cholesterol. And osteoporosis runs in our family. So um, I just feel better. And I've always wanted to live a really long life. And I know I tease about this but I want to be doing CrossFit in my 80's. And I want people from the Vibe community to go oh my gosh Jaycee made it to SoCal regionals [the annual CrossFit open competition].

We thought she was old when we worked out with her 30-some years ago. Holy cow. She made it to regionals.

Aging and the degradation of the body is indeed something we are called to manage on practical level, not only because of its association with death and ontological insecurity, but also for its very real and physical consequences, which my interviewees referenced often as something they are trying to actively manage. While a few of my female interview subjects mentioned their preoccupation with how aging decreases their social value[28] (Featherstone), most of my interviewees were more concerned with the material ramifications of aging: how it will affect their mobility and their ability to "be around" for their kids. This motivation for participating in CrossFit was the third most consistent result I found through the course of this study. Bauer, a man in his mid-30's, expressed his concerns about aging:

Bauer: I'm curious to know when I'm eighty years old what's going on. You know and hopefully this works on my mind. My grandmother she's about to be gone. Like her mind. Right?

Annie: I'm sorry

Bauer: Yeah yeah she's like 91. That's what happens but, it's like her body's kind of not there. It's healthy-wise but she can't walk up stairs. You know so I wanna make sure I can walk up stairs when I'm 85. I wanna make sure my niece and nephew aren't like wondering if like, I don't know. Even mental like I wanna be. I think this helps. I think that's a huge part of this. Exercise and being active and the intensity of it, sure, I don't know. We'll see we'll see. It's still an unknown a little bit. Are overhead squats at 115 lbs good for me? I hope so!

[laughter]

Bauer: Right I feel stronger, I feel more flexible. So something's working. Um, yeah we'll see I don't know. Yeah I think the discipline and all that will lead to hopefully when I'm 85...it's scary to think about.

[28] The idea here is that as individuals, particularly women, age, they have less value to the society around them, and experience this via less validation from others. A few women expressed their awareness of this fact.

Annie: I know. Time.

Bauer: What the fuck. I don't wanna be in a home. Maybe I do. Maybe...

Annie: If it's a cool home.

Bauer: Yeah exactly! But I still wanna be able to get myself around. I still wanna be able to do all that. And I think now it starts now with this kind of stuff.

Bauer, despite being fairly young at 37, is clearly quite concerned with the impact of old age, as he watches the decline of his grandmother. It became clear to me through the course of these interviews that many young CrossFit participants are very concerned about aging, and most of them reference their experiences with family members as a reason why they are paying attention to this process. Monica and Anna, both women in their early 30's, referenced their children as the reason why they desire to mitigate the effects of aging via CrossFit:

Monica: Cuz you'll live longer. Things are just easier. As simple as your posture when you're sitting and when you're standing. That's because you're muscular. You have your back muscles, you have your neck muscles, um yeah I just don't ever want to be where I can't run after my kids or pick them up when they're injured or...I don't ever want to be like that. That's important to me, to be strong physically. Yeah so I can do things, live longer

Anna's response reinforces Monica's:

Anna: Cuz, first, it's healthy for you. You're healthy. And I do wanna be healthy because I'm a mom and I want to be healthy for my kids. To be able to do all the things that they wanna do. Like sports, and bike riding and hiking and all that stuff. Like I wanna be healthy to be able to all types of things.

Finally, there is the often sublimated anxiety regarding the fragmentation of the self under neoliberalism. Maintaining a consistent sense of self in a world in which identity can no longer be consistently framed in terms of job, family, or worldview is no easy task, and yet

society still requires an individualistic orientation that requires a consistent identity and sense of selfhood. The fragmented self in post-modernity requires action to maintain its coherency, physically and psychologically. (Giddens 189-191; Jameson) One such action occurs through body work: work on the body, and in the case of CrossFit, also the mind and internal character, results in the literal creation of a self that is relatively independent of external conditions for its source stability, while also providing purpose, which in turn solidifies identity. Purpose for many CrossFitters lies in the process of growth and creation, perpetual improvement, and the collective experience, imbued with suffering alongside others, through which this process occurs. Natasha reflected on how managing her mental health through CrossFit gives her a sense of stability:

> *Natasha: And um I think in terms of mental health that when you have a long day at work or when things aren't going right like in your life like in your personal life maybe, I think coming into the gym, working out, I think that helps with your overall mental health and I know for me it's been a good outlet with grad school and work, just because I think this was the only thing that was my safe spot, aside from sleeping.*
>
> *I remember like I saw a shirt that said when life gets heavy, just lift. It's corny but it's also very insightful at the same time. Yeah you can sit and dwell and think why aren't these things going my way, or you can go well what are you going to do? It's always about being proactive and thinking what can you do to better yourself. The same mentality that I have with my overall training and fitness is the same that I have with my career and my overall life. Maybe I'm too extra. [laughs] …because I think that's more important in the long run and I'm going through a little bit of a rough time right now but it's been easier for me to come in here when I can because it's like the one thing that keeps me sane*
>
> *Annie: Right. So you're able to show up here.*
>
> *Natasha: If I can. Yeah it's been really hard this last month I think. I've only been able to show up like twice a week and I can see the decay in terms of my interactions with my colleagues, I wasn't as chipper or happy. Given there's other factors that feed into it, and you know I was like I need to work out. And so I have a break this week so I'm trying to get in as much working out.*

The role of the collective in maintaining a stable, secure self of self is very significant for Natasha and many of my other informants, because it provides CrossFitters like Natasha a mirror for who they are and who they are becoming. It also gives them something to be a part of, which calls them into being (Hegel) as the person they are and hope to be, on a regular basis.

CrossFit is somewhat akin to the experience of being on a team, or in a military unit, in the sense that there is a collective goal with individual components, requiring individual labor and suffering, and collective emotional support. This experience is one of the most treasured and meaningful of all human experiences in our society, and yet it is decreasingly available in American society. (Putnam) It is an experience that almost all American children are taught to value, through sports participation and media socialization, and yet in the relatively atomized labor market, many people never find it again. Natasha again lends her insight how it feels for her being a part of a "team," her CrossFit community:

> *Natasha: Yeah I used to throw my racquet. I pulled a lot of Serena Williams. I reacted to people's judgement. I mean I still like the sport. But I think it really changed my mentality and my attitude. I don't think sportsmanship was very high of a priority when I did the individual sport and I think when I did a team sport it was like ok that's very motivating. Because you see everyone, you guys are all in it together and I think and it carries on in CrossFit even though it's individual and you're going for time, the community itself is very much like a team in itself. I think the reason why I like this box and I like CrossFit in general is that it reminds me a lot of Dragon Boat. And I think people still cheer you on, I think the coaching is great. You're not in the gym by yourself, like not knowing what to do. Yeah and I think that's also why I like coming in here. It's like a social hour and I get my workout in.*

The identity that is forged through this individual and collective labor has a stability that is not easily found elsewhere in the neoliberal context. It is also, I believe, one reason why the CrossFit culture has such a strong following among its members, with clothing, jargon, and

unceasing loyalty of the true CrossFit convert solidifying an identity that carries great power and purpose.

All of this stands in stark contrast to culturally dominant constructions of body work that individualize and atomize it, bring attention to it for the sake of ideal production and consumption, through what Elias described as individualizing perception. (Elias, cited in Shilling 194) In sum, the pursuit of health and fitness through CrossFit can also be a process of recuperating a fragmented postmodern self, primarily through cultivation of a sense of control and recognition of the self by the community, thereby mitigating existential anxiety. As Jaycee expressed it: “Show up at your worst, give it your best, and they love you anyway.” -Jaycee, referencing her church’s description of CrossFit.

Health as a Neoliberal Biopolitical Discourse of Empowerment/transformation/becoming

The fourth category I am utilizing to better understand the Biopolitical function of health via fitness under neoliberalism is meaning-making, which includes processes of becoming, self-care and self-production, empowerment, and transformation. Here again I refer to Crawford’s analysis of Healthism in our time. Crawford states that “health has become the secular salvation of a society that either does not believe in eternal life or makes it a mere residual to the incarnated one, a society

Figure 14 Reebok's 2012 Marketing Collaboration with CrossFit: "Be More Human." Source: Reebok 2012

for which this one-and-only life becomes everything. Health is conceived as the condition of possibility for the good life or even the good life itself." (404) For the CrossFit brand and the subjects of this study, including myself, Health is a pursuit in and of itself, and if the category of health includes fitness, as I believe it does within the CrossFit narrative, it also includes mental health, everyday functionality, aesthetics, and character building, all considered the fruits of CrossFit participation.

The most consistent narrative of my interview subjects was about their desire to consistently improve their self, become someone better, keep pushing their limits, to constantly grow. The joy and pleasure my informants expressed when they talked about setting a new Personal Record, or seeing evidence of their progress inside and outside of the gym as the result of their hard work, was palpable, and something I could relate to, as a former athlete, CrossFit participant, and a human being living in this society. I found myself wondering if this drive to become someone, or something, better, is what gives us purpose, and if so, is it because of a spiritual vacuum, as Crawford argues? Many of my interview subjects are quite religious, and I am strong in my own spirituality, and so I paused before assuming that Crawford is correct. CrossFit's partnership with Reebok a few years back used the slogan "Be more Human" (see Figure 13) and CrossFit's own marketing to women in its Beauty Speaks video makes the point that the beauty is in "becoming." This idea of perpetual becoming as health, fitness, beauty and most importantly, as the purpose to life in our current era deserves further inquiry. I do not think it is in the absence of spirituality or religion, but a supplement to it, at least in my own case and the lives of my informants.

Yet Crawford's connection to neoliberalism does make sense, even if I do not agree entirely with his argument about a spiritual vacuum. Of course, most children in our society

today are socialized through sport, which teaches individuals to work hard to constantly improve themselves, for competition with others, and for the sake of themselves: be the best, and if not, at least be better (than you used to be). This type of perpetual labor upon the physical, mental, and moral elements of the self is not unique to the neoliberal era, as Foucault outlines in his work on the Care of the Self, but its deployment and process of subject-internalization may be. It is no longer necessary for institutions to create individuals: they perpetually create themselves, and they never stop improving, because there is no limit to how much they can improve. This is an ideal scenario for a society that no longer seeks to manage individuals and communities primarily through institutions of schools, labor, the prison, etc, and is consistent with Biopolitical imperatives that necessitate individual governmentality.

The labor of becoming, otherwise known as askesis, is innately pleasurable for the subjects I studied. The value they place on perpetually improving I believe derives from a cultural ideology that equates personal growth with good moral character. There is also of course an element of control at play here: if one can steer the course of one's life in what appears to be a positive and manageable direction, anxiety is mitigated, and the illusion of control is maintained. And, as I previously mentioned, a more stable sense of self and identity can be created through the unique collective experience of becoming someone better within a group context that is independent of more precarious social, economic, and political conditions.

In a cultural context in which meaning and purpose are self-negotiated on a daily basis, meaning is often derived from growth. (Ryff and Singer) This stage of modernity requires future orientation, and growth towards this future imbues the present labor of becoming with meaning not easily found elsewhere. Danny describes how this perspective affects his CrossFit experience:

Danny: Yeah I mean when I think about CrossFit it's like goal-setting, right? You always wanna...that's why we write our name on the board, that's why you have a number. You always wanna relate back and say ok back in 2011 or 2012 when I started it's like...did I better myself? Like if I didn't better myself it's time to recalibrate. Like why am I doing this? Like what makes me continue to do this is it just because I just like pain or something? Am I masochistic? I don't know.

It's one of those things that you think about it and you're like I kind of enjoy it and plus it's a lifestyle, right? I mean it's not meant for everyone. Not everyone's gonna be like oh I'm going to do CrossFit for the sake of doing CrossFit, right? It's one of those things that I feel like if it scares you do it and see what happens. If it doesn't...if you don't like it, back away any time.

Yet there is something else in excess to these explanations that I believe is also occurring. To return to Crawford's arguments about the spiritual in fitness meaning-making, there does seem to be something spiritual in the experience of those I interviewed. The pleasure and the affective experience of improving within a collective plays a vital role in this process, and it is akin to the feeling that one can be fulfilled through uniquely collective processes of personal transformation: physical, mental, emotional, and yes, spiritual, if one defines spirituality as purpose, discovery, and fulfilment through personal growth.

The labor of becoming someone better than they were the day before, day after day, through adversity and pain, inertia and fear, while an indication of Biopower at work, is truly beautiful to those who experience it. It is a worthwhile endeavor that they see improving all aspects of their lives, giving them something to work for, and producing through their labor a product that they do not feel alienated from, because it delivers to them their very selves. In a way this is an interesting development in our times, because it provides (for those privileged enough to have the time, money, energy, and mental health capacity to do the work) an opportunity to work and produce something that really feels like it is totally theirs, something

that has a future, and gives hope to this future being better than the past. It is not money to be exchanged for goods, or a product to be bought and sold by the company they work for, but their own bodies, minds, and spirits. While these bodies, minds, and spirits are also commodity products, to be bought and sold in the marketplace in accordance with hegemonic principles and ideologies, my informants express almost universally that they are becoming closer to who they want to be, and that they feel that this is joyful and liberating. Who they want to be, why they hold these ideals, and how much agency and freedom they may or may not experience within their own subject formation will be analyzed in depth in the following chapters.

In conclusion, CrossFit as the pursuit of health is not a solution to the neoliberal conditions that I have described; in fact, in many ways it reinforces neoliberal discourses that detract from larger collective solutions to health and wellness. Among these discourses are 1) neoliberal personal responsibility (to the detriment of collective solutions), 2) Will-power as Othering and social boundary reinforcement, 3) health and fitness as a means of maintaining a sense of control in a society characterized by risk and precarity, and 4) Fitness as empowerment and meaning-making, in the absence of other forms. CrossFit is also one way of coping, escaping, creating, and connecting. The community I have been studying and become a part of these last two years has provided for its members a means of navigating the social and political stressors of neoliberalism, and in my opinion, the demand for CrossFit is evidence of the problems I have just outlined. CrossFit does seem to allow individuals to better cope with oppressive external conditions. The fact that coping does little to change structural problems is problematic, but the alternative is for these individuals to be less capable of managing their daily lives, and therefore less capable of contributing to structural change.

Better physical and mental health should surely not fall squarely on the shoulders of individuals with the effect of negating or ignoring the role of institutional factors that contribute to health and wellness. It should most definitely not be limited only to those with the time and money to pursue it. Yet in the absence of a better, structural solution, with CrossFit we find a bandaid for a few, in the form of the emotionally-charged collective experience of group exercise as team sport, with all of the neoliberal trappings of competition, achievement benchmarks, and a perfect pairing of discipline and consumption. The community I studied also found a way to (I believe) exceed the limits of Biopower through community-based self-production that seems to have improved almost all aspects of their lives. The degree of agency and freedom they attain through their own self-construction and subjectivity is the topic of the following chapter.

Chapter 2

Becoming One's Self: A Trajectory of Hope

If anything it's more of a mental thing as opposed to being all strength. That's what I got out of it. And I still feel like the mental segment for me is not quite all there yet. I mean it's not complete. I don't think it'll ever be complete. But it's always a continuous growing process day in and day out every time I come here. So that's what I take away from it for sure. -Danny, CrossFit X informant

CrossFit, for many of its participants, including those interviewed and observed in this study, is a means of self-creation. While fitness in general has been analyzed through the lens of subject formation or subjectification, that process by which individuals come into "being" and an understanding of their own selves (Neville; Smith-Maguire; Crawford; Giddens; White et al.), I believe CrossFit presents an interesting context for the analysis of subjectification under late capitalism in the United States, for a number of reasons: 1) As outlined in the previous chapter, this CrossFit community reveals how many of the ideologies of neoliberal capitalism are internalized and negotiated by individuals and groups, 2) CrossFit provides an opportunity for us to analyze how and why some individuals *collectively* produce ideal selves (physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual) through their own individual efforts, but within a community and collective experience, 3) It provides a context in which we can analyze how embodiment and the restructuring of the body affects subjectivity and identity, and 4) it allows us an opportunity to analyze what subjectivity really means within this context, in theoretical terms and in terms of lived-experiences, and how we might conceptualize agency and freedom within these definitions.

One scholar to date, Wictor Hansson, has conducted a brief ethnographic exploration of subjectivity within the context of a CrossFit Space. Hansson's 90-day ethnography of a Swedish CrossFit community illuminates a few key areas that I hope to expand upon below and elsewhere

in this work. His is the longest ethnographic study to date, not including this one, and no existing research examines in-depth the lived-experiences of CrossFit participants or how these experiences can illuminate our understanding of subjectivity, subject formation, or embodiment. I will briefly present Hansson's key findings and compare them in a general way to the results of this study, after which I will embark on a more thorough exploration of subjectivity, the care of the self, becoming, embodiment, and collective effervescence, contextualized more deeply within this 2-year ethnography of a CrossFit community.

Hansson begins with an understanding of subjectivity (the term we use to describe how the self exists: what it is, how it experiences itself, how it is created, etc.) based on conceptualizations advanced by Foucault and Deleuze and elaborated upon in the work of Rosi Braidotti. Hansson states that "the self, according to Foucault, is composed of a web of multi-layered forms of cognitive, affective and emotional relations, which — temporarily —coagulate into an individual (which is a more of a di or multi-vidual). This is what the Deleuzian school would call rhizomatic subjectivity or nomadic subjectivity." (Hansson 13) In other words, for Hansson, Foucault, Deleuze, Braidotti, and Rose, the subject is perpetually in flux, called into different forms, reactions, self-identifications, and awarenesses in different environments, in response to different stimuli.

This very fluid and fragmented definition of subjectivity has two main implications for those of us living in our present moment: 1) It feels very tenuous and scary to think we are not the stable entities we are always trying to hold constant, but are rather always shifting and changing in response to conditions that are often out of our control, and 2) Therefore the implications of this definition of subjectivity calls into question any potential for agency (the

capacity to have power over the direction of our own lives and personal control over our actions).[29]

Despite these concerns (how frightening is it to think that I am not me, but rather a coagulation of various effects over which I have little control), Hansson's work provides us with an example of how this form of subjectivity is not only managed but embraced by CrossFit participants (though they would not describe themselves in this way) to create a better, happier life for themselves and those in their community. There are three main findings that Hansson found in the results of his research on CrossFit: embracing pain and the feeling of dying is a way of pushing thresholds/limits for CrossFitters, the active process of Perpetual Becoming (betterment/the care of the self) provides meaning to his informants, and collective effervescence is key to these processes[30].

My study results were consistent with those of Hansson's, with two exceptions: pain was of much less importance to this study's 37 interview informants and 140 participants, and collective effervescence through pain, while significant, did not have the effect of erasing boundaries between bodies and individuals, as it did for Hansson's study subjects, though it did serve to solidify collective identification. The idea of perpetual becoming, however, was completely consistent with Hansson's results, as I will describe below.

Hansson found that for his CrossFit study participants the experience of pain was tantamount to the experience of dying (exercise so hard you feel like you are dying), and therefore of pushing the limits of the body and mind, with the result of feeling more alive and knowing one's self more completely, all with the intention of creating one's best self. In the

[29] Rose addresses this "problem" of agency in his work as not a problem at all: resistance does not have to be conscious for Rose, but rather irises organicallyinh. (Inventing Ourselves 35)
[30] Collective effervescence is the phenomenon of joyous affirmation and collective energy that occurs in groups that combine their energy toward a common will or cause. (Durkheim)

words of one of his study informants, “the more it hurts, the better you will become.” (Hansson 32) While I did find a few individuals (1-3/20 per workout) at my field site who ascribed to this belief system, it was not the rule. Most participants worked hard and pushed through some discomfort during workouts, but did not seek the limits of their capacity for pain, but rather sought the limits of what their bodies could grow capable of doing, over extended periods of time (gains). For Hansson, his participants often take themselves to the limits of their capacity for pain: “People fall dramatically on the floor, screaming, crying as if, yes, they are dying. The feeling of being reduced to the intimate immensity of bodily pain, also gives a profound feeling of being: an acute sense of wholeness, of not just knowing that I was alive, but feeling alive.” (Hansson 33) About 15% of this study’s informants described this type of relationship to pain, while the rest either saw it as a necessary requirement for personal growth or something they merely experimented with in small doses or avoided. (See in-depth analysis of this finding in the following section.)

The decision to take one’s self to these limits is for Hansson explained as a response to the emptiness of late capitalism: “The CrossFitter resists the spiritual death brought about by late modern capitalism, by symbolically dying in physical and mental catharsis.” (33) It is also a means of getting to know one’s self while actively participating in the willful creation of an ideal self, always a moving target: “Only by pushing yourself do you get to know yourself,” (30) as you are creating yourself, as pain is transcendence toward an ideal you. (31) For Hansson’s informants, pain is the touchstone of progress, for my informants, it is sometimes pain that signifies growth or provides its own satisfactions (immersive experience/high), but it is more so consistent work, day after day, that results in the perpetual becoming that provides what I term trajectory of hope for their lives.

This trajectory of hope is an affective momentum sustained by the process of Perpetual Becoming, which Hansson also found in the results of his study, though he did not term it as such. For Hansson, the "process of ceasing to be — letting go of a diet, patterns of thinking, negative habits, previously perceived limits of body and mind — and seeding to become, constructs a future affirmative force, as the ceasing of the past and the becoming of the future intensely saturates the present as a movement with agency and possibilities." (46) Here Hansson connects his findings to the theorizations of Rosi Braidotti, who describes the momentum created by positive energy: "The production and expression of positive affects is what makes the subject last or endure: it is like a source of long-term energy at the affective core of subjectivity." (Braidotti 3) The results of this study confirm Braidotti's and Hansson's theorizations: CrossFitters put energy into themselves, into their becoming, and thereby manufacture a sense of hope, a positive affect, that grows in intensity in proportion to how much effort they put into it.

My findings indicate that this process creates momentum that allows them to put still more energy in, and the process snowballs, barring injury or other life-obstacles. This is of course another common-sense result for anyone who's ever gotten in shape after being out of shape: the first few weeks and months are terrible, but over time, momentum is created. The more you feel good, the more you want to do it, and the more you feel good and the more progress you make and the more you feel good. But I would suggest that this is about more than feeling good; I believe it is about being called into a future form of subjectivity by the energy of one's self and perhaps more importantly, the group, as I will discuss below.

We must be careful not to assume that this perpetual effort for a better version of one's self is simply an internalization of neoliberal tenets that emphasize constant adherence to dominant ideologies of fitness, health, wellness, and consumption, as I describe in the previous

chapter. It is surely that, but there is something in excess to that explanation happening here in terms of subject-formation, its affective momentum, and the role of the collective in this process. Hansson, using Braidotti's work, explains how perpetual becoming can be a means of sustaining a stable sense of self, (another result of this study I describe in the previous chapter), in terms of resisting fragmentation via control. But Hansson's and my findings reveal a more metaphysical and spiritual turn, in that individuals describe an energy and momentum that is also created in this process, and for Braidotti, this is an opening up of potentialities, or the potentia of the individual. Hanson, channeling Braidotti, expresses this: "Here it is important to make a distinction from the late modern self's endless search for something newer, truer and better self. The perpetual bettering of the CrossFitter is not a manifestation of change, but the faithful commitment to a sustained self. Perpetual bettering, or becoming as Braidotti phrases it, requires endurance, and endurance comes from the joy of recognising and believing oneself to have potential to succeed in the task undertaken." (46)

For Hansson there is freedom in this, through surrender to CrossFit's collective pain, and it comes via what Durkheim termed "collective effervescence." Collective effervescence is the phenomenon of joyous affirmation and collective affect that occurs in groups that combine their energy toward a common will or cause, resulting in greater group unity. (Durkheim) Most common in religious or spiritual communities, this phenomenon is often extremely emotional and charged with energy. For Hansson's participants it feels like surrender to something larger than themselves: "You become the will of the box" (32). Hansson interprets this as a transcending of the self, and he attributes the occurrence of this feeling to the shared experience of pain toward a common purpose: to make one's self and the other perpetually better. For Hansson, this is collective pleasure and spiritual work (askesis), and results in a dissolution of

the boundaries between bodies and people: “In Durkheimian terms, CrossFit seems to offer a collectively shared effervescence, an extraordinary experience similar to that of a religion, which elevate the consciousness of the agent from egoistic dimensions of the perceived self, to a supernatural realm where being a part of something mutes being a particular someone.” (37)

While I did not come to a similar conclusion in my analysis of the results of this study, I did find that “labouring together offers a formative and immersive community, which extends beyond the walls of the box.” (Hansson 37) Participants at my field site surely suffered together, but did not chase pain equally or to such intensity that they were elevated beyond their bodies into a collective existence. They did however push through discomfort with enough commonality and consistency to create a sense of community and common identity that was strengthened by the shared goal of perpetual becoming: self-improvement being a goal shared by everyone and something everyone supported in one another. As Hansson states and the participants of this study confirmed, “it is only with others one can reach the upper threshold.” (33)

In what follows I will interrogate some of these ideas in more depth, using the results of this research to explore how my informants view their own selves, how and why and who they are becoming, and what these results can teach us about the social and political implications of the care of the self and its relationship to embodiment, collective askesis (spiritual work), and the possibility of human agency and freedom within Biopolitical capitalism.

Pain

The role of pain for my study participants, as I’ve stated above, is much more limited than what Hansson found in his study: my study informants did not seek pain as a limit, however pain was of great significance in that the collective experience of pain contributes to the affective

power of the group, resulting in what I term a trajectory of hope. While Hansson's participants seemed to chase pain, I found that there are three types of relations to pain in the subjects I studied: 1) Avoiding pain, 2) Being willing to endure or even push through some pain/discomfort in the interest of growth (most common), 3) Seeking pain, pushing thresholds.

One respondent, a woman in her late 20's, described herself as somewhere between 2 and 3: she sought painful workouts with some intention, and pursued some level of pain, but within limits, and for the purpose of growth, rather than the pain itself and its experience. In this excerpt from our interview, she describes seeking pain for these reasons, with some added self-analysis about the reasons why pain as growth is enjoyable for her and her fiancé:

> *Annie: Could you describe it when you're in pain, the thoughts in your head?*
>
> *Britney: A lot of times we're in pain. I think some of the best workouts are the workouts where you feel like you're gonna yack but don't. You just kind of have that like you gave it 100, you gave it your all, you left it all out there on the floor. And that is painful but then you kind of realize that you persevered, you dealt with it, and you accomplished something and in CrossFit we have a way to monitor that and that's very appealing.*
>
> *Annie: You mean the whiteboard?*
>
> *Britney: Yeah the whiteboard. Um, and that pain is part of it. Um why do we do it?…We're animals and we have a need to feel that kind of pain and that accomplishment that's rooted thousands of years back from the beginning of time and computers and social media have just made us idle and kind of dead in a big way and I think what we're seeing is people wanting to get back to our natural and rustic roots. And when I saw that on the documentary[31] it really translated to me and Brian and we do often work and we're pretty stagnant during the day so when night comes and we're ready to work out it's like it really just makes sense for us. We need that to at least be an outlet.*
>
> *I think it's just about telling yourself that the pain is something that you enjoy and I think it kind of goes that way. Just trying to give yourself the mentality that this is going to be painful but I'm just going to enjoy this pain and it's going to produce something positive. I think that with life in general, the moments that we remember the most are not those that were easy. Personally, whether it was a spartan race or a half dome hike, those are all moments that are painful but at the end of it there's something positive that comes from it.*

[31] A reference to a documentary she had watched recently with her fiancé, called Sufferfest.

Britney's explanation illustrates a few points. Some individuals who do CrossFit do pursue some degree of pain because they associate it with growth. Britney's analysis also includes some ideas about how growth through pain can provide meaning and purpose to life, how achievements that are won through pain and struggle have an added intensity and gratification to them. She also refers to high intensity workouts providing an "outlet," particularly in contrast to her and her fiancé's white-collar day jobs, which is something many of my interview respondents referenced.

Michael Atkinson, in his study of white-collar triathletes in Canada in the early 2000's, discovered that for his middle class study participants extreme athletic intensity gave them a few positive effects: 1) It allowed them a cathartic released for their emotions and energies, 2) It gave them a sense of being "special" through liminal experiences (170), 3) It gave their lives meaning and purpose (171), and 4) Through "edgework" or symbolic death, it gave his subjects the feeling of being alive through the experience of pain and pushing limits, leading to "exciting significance" in the community (178). Britney's response seems to be a complete reiteration of Atkinson's results, and also rings true for Hansson's in many ways, but her interpretation was by no means universal among my respondents.

Monica, a woman in her 30's, describes in more detail the experience of "pushing through" pain as a mental limit. Monica was one of only a few informants who described it as "the" limit, and meaningful in and of itself for that reason:

> *Monica: Well it's...like Noe [a coach] especially is always like no you can do it and I'm like no really like I can barely nod [laughs] But he's like no, trust me. Or like Seraphim [a coach] is like no just take deep breaths you can still like pick it up but in my mind I'm like no because if I can't breathe I can't lift, you know? But it's not...it's all in your head because even yesterday's workout it's like two deep breaths and I kept going and I'm just like oh yeah the bar's not that heavy it's just knowing how to exercise your lung, it's like*

two deep breaths instead of five ten short breaths you know? You kind of just stop [breathes deeply] And kind of get over it. But yeah. Before I would just sit there [breathes fast and heavy]. In my mind it's like if I'm tired I'm weak, or if I can't breathe I'm weak. But it's not, it's all like just breathe through it.

Annie: So you've learned that through this?

Monica: Yes. I've learned even like with pullups, that's always like a big challenge for me, and I would stop. And it's like...Seraphim's always like no you do a pullup, take one deep breath, and jump into it. It's just a fight in my mind.

Annie: Yeah. And you've learned through doing this to get stronger it sounds like mentally and physically?

Monica: A lot. A lot of it's mental. I know my strength is there but sometimes I double guess myself. Like oh no I can't or for reals this time I really can't.

Monica's response is one of several I found in support of Hansson's theory of pain as a human limit, but again, it was far from the primary motivation for why these subjects chose CrossFit. Consistent with the responses of other subjects, elsewhere in the interview Monica was keen to reinforce the other areas of growth she appreciated as the result of her CrossFit bodywork, such as character growth, strength, and aesthetic improvements.

One subject, Jake, a man in his early 30's who has a reputation for wearing his pain on his face, told me that he isn't necessarily in as much pain as it would appear, but that when he is working out and pushing himself he has an opportunity for "catharsis," a chance to channel his energy through his body and into the intensity of the workout. When I prompted him to explain whether he pushed himself for the sake of the pain itself, he assured me he did not chase pain for its own value, but that he did enjoy the sensation of releasing the energy he already carries around with him day to day.

Three people out of the 37 that I interviewed did refer to pain as its own pursuit, telling me about a "high" or "zone" that they actively chased by pushing through pain. Megan, a woman in her late 30's, discussed this when I asked her why she likes CrossFit:

> *Megan: That was the thing I'm just always liking to push myself. I always like to test my pain tolerance, and I think I have a pretty high pain tolerance, whether it's tattoos or piercings. You just get kind of addicted to something. In a way this is an addiction because you see yourself improving and you get that intense fatigue and then you feel that high and you're like I wanna push...I can do better than that. It's just crazy.*

While Megan does reference the pleasure of the "high" that comes from pain, and signals a form of addiction that may be productive rather than destructive[32] (interesting in light of Braidotti and Deleuze's work on addiction) she also describes it in a way that is intertwined with the idea of progress, or perpetual becoming. For her it would seem that part of the high is the progress she makes, which echoes Britney's midline stance and also reaffirms what George, another of the participants who professed to enjoy the pain, told me. In his discussion of pain George assured me that I too could push through my own pain to a beautiful experience, but when I prompted him to tell me more about the feeling of the high, he did not pursue that line of thought, but rather responded by talking about how great it feels to improve your scores, just as Megan and Britney did. However, in an interview with George that I conducted a few months prior he did reference the feeling of bliss, of his thoughts disappearing, and how amazing this feels for him:

> *George: I just love it. I just like Reeses for me. I love it yeah.*
>
> *Annie: Yeah? What do you love?*
>
> *George: Everything! Like the pain, the adrenaline, just yeah. I like the competition and all the stuff...It's painful but every time I'm stressed out I come here it's like I forget*

[32] Thank you to Rodrigo Lazo for signaling me on this idea.

about everything, I don't know. That's cool. That's the part I like. You forget about your problems, you forget about everything. You just focus on beating that person right next to you. [laughs] …It helps. I got so much shit to do at home and at work oh my god I just wanna explode sometimes. And I come here and it's like [whirring noise] it's like nothing. I forget about everything.

George's experience was echoed by that of Brodie, a man in his late 20's, who described it as an "amazing feeling" to push through the pain to the "other side", where "it doesn't hurt anymore." When I asked him to describe more about why he likes to do this, he said "everything goes away, my thoughts, the pain, everything. It's awesome." I told him about what I had read about the "immersive experience," and asked him if that it what it sounded like. He said "yeah that's it. It's amazing."

Braidotti, building off Deleuze's conception of the immersive experience, as well as a long history of religious and philosophical explorations of what it means to surrender one's self, or ego, argues that "what we most truly desire is to surrender the self, preferably in the agony of ecstasy, thus choosing our own way of disappearing, our way of dying to and as our self." (Braidotti 24) She continues: "This can be described also as the moment of dissolution of the subject – the moment of its merging with the web of non-human forces that frame him/her. This point of evanescence has to do with radical immanence, with the totality of the moment in which, as Jacques Lacan cynically and wittily put it, you coincide completely with your body, i.e. you become a corpse." (Braidotti 24) Braidotti's words are reminiscent of eastern traditions of surrendering the ego and connecting to God/Nature (Spinoza; Lloyd) by way of releasing attachments, including emotions and thoughts, but also of the Christian tradition most well recognized in the words of St. Francis: "it is by dying that we are granted eternal life". This is an old idea, and yet one that persists in many cultures and moments throughout human history: to be

rid of self is a form of bliss, a feeling of freedom from the fetters of the mind into a complete immersion in the moment, connection to God/Nature.

I would agree with Braidotti's phrasing up until the moment she refers to becoming a "corpse," as I do not believe this word's association with the material body is the correct association to make when considering the death of the ego or the "self." Braidotti goes on to argue that part of us wishes to die, "to become imperceptible," because this would be walking the line of living most intensely. But I do not think we wish our bodies to die, but rather what we want to die is that part of us that keeps us from fully living, which is the ego, most commonly associated with the mind, not the body. The ego never takes on material form, and therefore references to the dying of the body as a "corpse" feel misguided in light of the experiences of my study subjects. George's experience suggests he wishes to lose himself in the experience, for his thoughts to go quiet and his energy to become focused, to become fully present in his body and what he is doing, all blockages to his own energy removed. I would argue that this is what I would call a spiritual experience: a surrender of the ego to the present moment, with the result of becoming a part of an energy flow that is both inside you and outside of you, with no barriers or boundaries, such as your ego or your mind, to impede this connection. Hansson found this in most of his CrossFit participants, while I only saw signs of it in a few of mine: those who pushed the limits of their pain.[33]

I spent many months trying to decipher the difference between those individuals who seek pain for the sake of the immersive experience, the flow and silencing of thoughts, and those who limit their experience of pain. I concluded that I would have to ask pointed questions of

[33] I had a hard time relating to Brodie's description of pain as immersive because despite my long athletic career, I was never someone who pushed through to the to the "other side" of pain. Rather, I could put up with intense pain for long periods of time, but always held back once it hit a certain level (fainting or vomiting imminent), and I didn't know until doing this research that there was another "side" of it.

everyone's lives to come up with enough data to draw any conclusions. I did not find any pattern in my standard analysis. I had suspected that former athletes would be more likely to push through pain, if only for the sake of progress, and I found this to be generally true. However, seeking the high or the experience of losing one's self was such a rare aspiration in this sample that I was not able to determine what types of experiences or personalities would lead one to pursue this direction.

Pain was one of my core interview questions, and therefore I was able to evaluate with some accuracy how the majority of participants related to it. For most, pain leads to progress and growth, and therefore it is desirable to some degree, for the sake of becoming who one seeks to become. Of more importance than pain, for every person I questioned over the course of two years, were two values: 1) Perpetual becoming as a source of personal growth and meaning/purpose, and 2) Community, both of which are explored in the sections below.

The CrossFit Promise: Beauty in Becoming

One of the most consistent ideological beliefs that I found in my respondents that corresponds with CrossFit marketing discourse is the belief that through the process of "becoming" one can attain health of body and mind, as well as a more developed and ideal personal character, thereby producing one's ideal self, which can never be held constant or static, as there is always a new benchmark to achieve. Aesthetics are secondary to functionality and perpetual improvement/becoming, and held as secondary by CrossFit marketing with purposeful intention.

CrossFit marketing, as discussed in the previous chapter, promises a new relationship with one's self through CrossFit. CrossFit marketing is primarily extended through four main

channels: 1) The CrossFit Website, 2) CrossFit social media and its videos linked to its YouTube channel, 3) CrossFit broadcasts of The CrossFit Games, and 4) The online publication The CrossFit Journal. There is also ancillary marketing through corporate sponsor social media and advertising, outreach to consumers via medical professionals and affiliates (Box owners and coaches), as well as the social media of CrossFit Games celebrity athletes. While I have not conducted a systematic content analysis of CrossFit's self-branding, I have done thorough (albeit casual) discourse analysis of the messages transmitted by CrossFit to the public between the years 2012-2018. I have compared the results of this discourse analysis to the discourses, ideologies, and beliefs of this study's 140 participants, and have uncovered some consistencies.

One example of CrossFit's emphasis on aesthetics as a secondary side effect of CrossFit is the Letting Beauty Speak YouTube video, which has been featured prominently on various CrossFit social media accounts over the past four years a currently has 1.3 million views.[34] "Ask a hundred people to define beauty and you get a hundred different answers." the video begins, to conclude that "beauty is in becoming." The assertion throughout the video is that CrossFit is not about aesthetics, or how the body looks, but the "beautiful" process of its becoming:

> If you think of our bodies as machines, we're a finely tuned machine. We are putting ourselves in situations where we are having to fight or flight. Um, that idea or that workout or that lift. So you look around, you see a lot of people with defined muscles. Their traps, their abdominals, their quads. You can see the striations in their legs...Yeah that's beauty in a sense. But at the same time there's that confidence between them where maybe they've gone through a personal struggle or where they've found something where this is what helps them define themselves as an individual. [1:19]

This video first aired on YouTube in 2013, at the cultural moment when CrossFit was beginning to become widely popular. At this time, one year after I began my pilot research, larger muscles were still highly discouraged in the popular discourse for American women

[34] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CDXxURPagpM

(especially upper body muscles). Part of the intention in the video is to assert a new definition of beauty for women in particular, a definition that includes athletic muscularity, while at the same time denying that beauty is about how the body looks, but is about confidence, skill, fitness, and health, but most of all, about becoming "better" every day, while also accepting one's self as one is. (The quintessential paradox.)

Figure 15 "Letting Beauty Speak" YouTube Video. Source: CrossFit YouTube Channel.

The video addresses the association between female muscularity and masculinity, a standard of beauty for women that requires frailty, and how aging diminishes the social value of women in particular: "Beauty is no longer fleeting, but becoming," is a direct reference to how age takes away stereotypical beauty. The music for the first two thirds of the video is a type of sad and yet inspiring orchestral, set against slow motion images of elite athletes competing at the CrossFit games, cut with interviews of CrossFit athletes. At the 2/3 point the music switches to uplifting faster-paced orchestral, building momentum and excitement around the idea that one can "become" whoever one wishes to become. The images of CrossFit games athletes moving through various Games workouts feature them shirtless, revealing a plenitude of youthful skin and muscles and athletic beauty.

The video addresses what it frames as a "disempowering" standard of beauty, by emphasizing that beauty is in becoming more skillful, confident, healthy, and physically and emotionally strong. It is an attempt to encourage new participants to take up CrossFit as a lifestyle, promoting a discourse of beauty as beyond aesthetics while using images of

traditionally beautiful athletic bodies working in slow motion, sinews flexing, water and sweat rippling and dripping, colors vivid and music inspiring. The idea is that no matter how old, weak, unhealthy, or overweight you may be, with time and effort and the CrossFit community, you can become beautiful, inside and out, by not focusing on aesthetic beauty[35].

This perspective on CrossFit and aesthetic beauty is echoed by the subjects of this study. One informant, Ron, a man in his late forties, went in-depth with me about how much satisfaction can be found through effort, and that the aesthetic beauty of the CrossFitter body is less important, but will inevitably come as a side effect of maximum effort and consistency:

> *Ron: They think it's like to lose weight at first, and then they realize oh wait I don't really care about my weight I want to be able to do the snatch or like I wanna be able to do pull ups I wanna get a ring muscle up or a bar muscle up or whatever. And who cares about how much I weigh I wanna be strong enough that I can do it so. And I think the good thing about this is that if you are consistent somebody who comes four five days a week your body naturally starts looking like everybody else's here. Because you're doing the workout. Your body will naturally...you're going to get slimmer in the waist or you're gonna get stronger in the shoulders, stronger in the legs and you start to look better. And that's a great byproduct that kind of happens when you're not really paying attention that's kind of the great part about it but you realize oh yeah all the people that work out five six days a week all start to look alike they look like pretty good…You can't work out six days a week doing this for a whole year and not look better, you know? So that's a nice benefit.*

Yet for the respondents of this study, beauty is surely in becoming, but it is also aesthetic. Most interviewees did downplay the importance of physical beauty in their lives, but it is also the primary motivation that brought them to CrossFit. The results of this study indicate that most people come to CrossFit to look better, but as they become a part of the community, chatting, making friends, and comparing results, they start aspiring to achieve other more functional goals: increased weight lifted, better scores on workouts, etc. The culture of the community is forged

[35] The results included in Chapter 4 reveal that most female respondents adhered to this rhetoric.

through working out together in a semi-competitive context, with scores recorded after every workout, and compared throughout the day by all who show up to do the Workout of the Day. It is well known who is good at what movements, and who is expected to win certain workouts. Participants will often pick someone that they are similar to in skill to set a goal time or weight for the day, and then set about beating that person. Therefore, the focus shifts to performance, rather than body aesthetics, the more one becomes immersed in the culture of the Box.

This approach to workouts is common, but also not universal. I would estimate that about 60% of those I studied exhibited this type of comparison-based competitive approach to the workouts. The other 40% simply showed up to get their workout in for themselves: to stay slim, fit, and/or healthy. This distribution in attitudes is something that sets the results of this study apart from those of Hansson: Hansson found that all of his participants pursued pain and intensity to an extraordinary or competitive level, when compared with the general population. The participants at CrossFit Vibe, however were much more mellow. I believe this is because the culture of this particular Box is friendly to beginners and more casual clientele. It is not a "competitive" Box, which means the programming is not designed for competition-level athletes. They do not field a CrossFit Games team, and the attitude of the owners is oriented around helping clients move more freely and capably in their everyday lives, rather than training elite athletes. [36]

Yet the idea of beauty in becoming was complicated for those I interviewed and observed. As I stated above, most interviewees downplayed their investment in aesthetics when questioned about it. However, it became clear to me over the course of two years that aesthetics, the primary reason why people come in the door, remains of importance to almost everyone,

[36] I did three months of field work at a neighboring box that was much more competitive, and found the environment was not as friendly, and it was also much more intense in terms of the limits people were willing to go to push their bodies.

despite their denial of this fact. I gathered this information by observing and participating in conversations: noticing the values of the community, and paying attention to the concerns, anxieties, and ideals of those around me. For example, many of the men discussed how to gain muscular size, despite some of the smaller men being able to lift more than some of the larger men. They gave one another advice on what protein shakes work the best, what lifts get the best results, etc. Dan Bailey remains an aesthetic ideal for many men (one of the larger CrossFit Games athletes), despite the fact that Bailey is no longer one of the frontrunners in the competition.

For both women and men body fat percentage is ideal when it's lower, regardless of size or performance. Some women aspired to grow large muscles, while most stated that they preferred a more "toned" physique. (I will elaborate more on this in the next chapter.) For both genders nutrition and exercise were a large part of how they constructed their identities in the world, and the goal of "looking good at the beach" or shirtless was discussed on numerous occasions. Plastic surgery and botox are also subjects of discussion among many of the women, and avoiding being "skinny fat" was mentioned by a few women as their goal in lifting weights. Therefore, it would seem, that beauty is more than "becoming" for these CrossFitters in Orange County, California.

That being said, becoming, or building one into one's ideal self, one workout and meal at a time, was a highly significant consistent theme I found in the course of this two-year ethnography. It provides meaning, purpose, and hope to almost every single individual I interviewed. I will explore this idea more in the next section.

Perpetual Becoming

Perpetual becoming by working on the self as a project is one of the most pervasive and widely accepted discourses in contemporary America. Self-help, mindfulness, fitness, health and wellness, therapy, recovery programs, and a variety of other self-building and correcting exercises, programs, and activities have multiplied over the course of the last forty years, as we have seen the "self" and its development take on new meaning and importance in popular culture. Many scholars (Crawford; Neville; White et al.; Giddens) argue that this shift is a product of late capitalist ideologies that put an extreme amount of pressure on the individual to manage their health, wellness, fitness, productivity, and life-trajectory, and that these pressures amount to what Foucault originally termed "governmentality," the force by which individuals are governed, and more importantly, govern themselves, in accordance with social norms. This situation allows for minimum state support and maximum privatization and profitization, while increasing the productivity of flexible consumers and laborers ideal for late capitalist economic demands.

I approached this study with an awareness of how these Biopolitical forces, namely Biopower or more generally, Power, might be influencing people to do CrossFit. Power is the term we use to describe the force that compels individuals and communities to act in ways that are in the best interest of those with power in the society (corporations, state actors in collusion with corporations, Patriarchal beneficiaries, etc.), and not necessarily their own best interests.[37] Biopower is the more specific term we now use to describe how power works upon bodies to

[37] An example of what we understand to be a discourse of Power would be the idea that if someone is poor they must have some internal failing: laziness, lack of motivation, etc. In this example we can see that the onus is placed on the individual (or racial or class group) rather than the conditions that may have contributed to their experience or personal characteristics. This functions to hide structural causes such as racial discrimination, lack of opportunities and education, corporate exploitation, government corruption, etc. It results in a culture powerless to address structural inequalities, a culture that is also divided along the lines of race and class, competing with one another for resources while pointing the finger at each other's perceived shortcomings.

reinforce Biopolitical capitalism, an economic system intent on mobilizing the productive and reproductive potential of bodies and populations. (See Introduction)

When I approached this research I considered the obvious forms of Biopower at play in the context of CrossFit: adhering to dominant norms of beauty, a culture of self-discipline, discourses of health and wellness that support neoliberal constructions of individual responsibility as a powerful primary force, etc. I analyze some elements of how adherence to power plays a role within this CrossFit community in the previous chapter. However, I found myself suspecting that the age-old adage about power and resistance was true here as well: that where there is power there is always resistance. Or at least, power is productive and its effects aren't always negative for the individual. In the case of perpetual becoming, this study reveals both positive and negative effects for the individual.

Negative effects would include the psychological pressure to always be working on one's self, with the job never done, which several subjects referred to. There is also a certain level of exhaustion and anxiety that comes from feeling like one might lose control of one's self if one misses a workout or cheats on a meal. Many interviewees expressed this anxiety, which I discuss in the previous chapter. The energy required to maintain one's self on a positive trajectory can be draining, but my results indicate that most people found their energy increased as they gained momentum moving toward their ideal selves. I found this to be true for myself as I lost 50 pounds and became more mentally and physically "healthy". This energy balance is of particular interest to me, as I believe it holds the key to discovering the difference between power and "resistance," if we might call it that, in this context.

When a norm or ideal increases one's life chances, life opportunities, or life force/energy, can we then call it good for the individual? When it opens things up, rather than closing things

down, can we say that a human's potential is increased, as Deleuze and Braidotti would argue? What if the effect is positive for some individuals, but it leaves structural inequalities intact, as in the case of CrossFit? How does CrossFit create and/or detracts from human freedom at the level of subjectivity?

Most of the individuals I studied professed that CrossFit has improved their lives. Many stated that it had gone so far as transformed everything about their lives, helping them overcome an eating disorder, divorce, the death of a spouse, addiction, and depression. When I asked them what it was that they loved about it, they often told me that it was the feeling of always improving. The following conversation with Amy, a woman in her late twenties, illustrates this:

> *Annie: Um when you first started, what were your first impressions, like of actually doing it?*
>
> *Amy: I was pissed.*
>
> *Annie: Pissed?*
>
> *Amy: Frustrated. Because the movements looked really easy but they're not. They're not. My god. Pissed. But I also felt like awkwardly motivated by my anger. It was weird.*
>
> *Annie: Yeah. Are you still motivated the same way or has your motivation evolved over time?*
>
> *Amy: Interesting question. Uh...I have to think about that...I guess my motivation is my own progression.*
>
> *Annie: Your progression?*
>
> *Amy: Yeah, my own progression. For instance I can [unintelligible] squat a hundred pounds now. This time last year I could barely do 60 pounds. It's just crazy like and now it's like oh my god what else can I do? I really want to see how far this can go.*
>
> *Annie: Cool. That's awesome. Have you always been that kind of person, er...*
>
> *Amy: I've always been the kind of person who never gives up. Like I get..I get..you'll see me kick and scream before I give up. Like literally, kick and scream and cry before I give*

up. I'll go down fighting. It's a blessing and a curse. Yeah and it's just like [laughs] yeah. I don't know whenever I have a goal I'll like...like I said it's a blessing and a curse. I'll hurt myself doing it. Not purposely but I'll drive myself to the point of like, crazy...I think we want to become a better version of ourselves. I think it's because we can...it's not even about aesthetics or about looks. It's about like what can my body do? Like what is it that our bodies are actually capable of? We don't really know until...

Annie: We push the limits

Amy: We push the limits, yeah. And that's what CrossFit is all about.

It is interesting to note that Amy's description of why she loves the process of perpetual becoming also includes the idea of pushing limits, which for Amy translates into more weight lifted, faster times, and higher workout scores, all which require some discomfort and discipline. This is a finding that duplicates what Hansson found in his ethnography of a CrossFit community: pushing limits gives CrossFitters a sense of purpose, meaning, and fulfillment, and doing it together creates community. Hansson also brings up the question as to whether our desire to push limits, or "thresholds," as Braidotti would term it, is what makes us human, or post-human. (Hansson 46) This idea is interesting because many of my informants also cited their desire to push limits as an affective source motivation and purpose. But for Hansson's respondents pain is the primary limit or threshold, while for mine, limits are sometimes revealed in pain, but are more consistently perceived to be the limits of what one can do or achieve with one's body and mind (weight lifted, miles run, etc), over time, as the result of consistent work on the self as a project.

The Care of the Self, or the Self as a Project

Michel Foucault famously made the Care of the Self a scholarly subject of interest in his second volume of The History of Sexuality. In his analysis of Greek and Roman traditions of

personal ethics he advanced several ideas about subjectivity in postmodern times (at the dawn of neoliberalism). He defined the care of the self as "those intentional and voluntary actions by which men not only set themselves rules of conduct, but also seek to transform themselves in their singular being, and to make their life into an oeuvre." (Foucault, The Use of Pleasure 10, cited in White 491) Foucault argues that in our current moment individuals are engaged in processes of perpetual self-creation. Rather than seeking the truth of themselves, as they might have in earlier times, current conditions require that they actively create and re-create themselves. Man is compelled "to face the task of producing himself." (Foucault, What is Enlightenment 312, cited in White 497).

Richard White extends Foucault's analysis in his 2014 article "Foucault on the Care of the Self as an Ethical Project and a Spiritual Goal," arguing that Foucault's work offers the promise of human freedom through spiritual development, or specifically, an ethics of self-care. White is painstaking in his assertion that the care of the self, as Foucault explains it, can enable the individual to be of maximum service to others, more connected to others, and more fulfilled. White establishes these understandings based on Foucault's comparison of Christian interiority and Roman care of the self: "The difference here [between Christian interiority and Roman care of the self, for Foucault] is between the ancient askesis, or spiritual discipline of the self, which aimed at self-cultivation and the achievement of a beautiful life, and related Christian practices which were ordered in terms of self-abnegation for the sake of personal salvation; but both are versions of the Care of the Self as Foucault understands it." (White 492) In the case of CrossFit, we have both forms: productive self-cultivation, and negative self-discipline. White's interpretation is based on the idea that if one does not care for one's self, one is of no use to

others (ontological priority), and that in reality, there is no fixed, isolated self: we are always connected to others, and therefore caring for one's self is to care for others. (496)

This analysis is a far cry from interpretations of Foucault's Care of the Self as simply a reinforcement of dominant discourses of power that mandate we care for ourselves in such a way as we are governable ideal citizens. The voices of my interview subjects reinforce White's analysis, in terms of how they feel liberated, free, and connected to others through the practice of CrossFit. White's interpretation of Foucault's conception of freedom is useful here:

> "we are free within certain parameters—according to the Stoics, some things are up to us while other things are not up to us—and by reconnecting with the care of the self we can recover the possibilities of ''autarchy,'' ''autonomy,'' or ''self-mastery,'' which are the conditions of freedom as much as its fulfillment. (White 500)

For White, freedom comes through being capable of changing those things within one's control, according to one's wishes, even when those wishes are determined by ideologies of power. So in the case of CrossFit, we have a scenario in which the wishes of this study's informants may indeed be to individually manage their own health and bodies in accordance with societal norms, which don't always serve their best long-term interests. Yet they feel a sense of power over their own futures, along with physical and biological freedoms from depression, anxiety, infirmity, illness, and weakness/frailty. These material gains they interpret as concrete manifestations of their own power, hence their experience of "empowerment." Henry, one of the owners of the box and my main informant as I designed this study, calls it "freedom": freedom from the limitations of the body and mind. He has made it his life's mission to explore the body and its movement as a space of freedom, and to share his knowledge and experience with others so that they may find their own freedom. So here we find freedom as freedom from the

limitations of the body and mind, and to some degree, the negative effects of a disempowering social and political context, or more simply, living life.

There is also something interesting about the spirituality of the care of the self, something I felt throughout the two years of studying this community. Hansson also touches on the spiritual nature of CrossFit, but again, he is keen to focus on pain, whereas pain was not as prominent in the experiences of those I studied. Rather, the Care of the Self and the beauty of becoming, through collective energy and support, were consistently visible, and seem to reinforce White's definition of spirituality as "the quest for a more purposeful existence that affirms a sense of belonging, as opposed to separation and death." (White 500) This purposeful existence, something this study's informants professed is created in part through their CrossFit journey, follows a trajectory of hope created through the affective energy of the collective, which I analyze in more detail in the following section.

A Trajectory of Hope

This study's informants shared almost universally that they felt an increase in their sense of momentum toward their ideal selves, the more they labor on the creation of these selves. One respondent, Danny, a man in his early 30's, described with great passion this process of perpetual becoming in terms of both "bettering" and "growing", in an effort to "better" himself daily. Danny continued by talking about how the practice of pushing through discomfort and challenges gives him clarity, provides him with an "outlet" that enables him to focus, and helps him develop character traits and skills that transfer over to other areas of his life:

> *Danny: I mean I do enjoy it. For me it's...a different way to think of it for me is that it's more of a mental thing. It builds a mental toughness. Like if you…and it brings up spirits.*

Like your morale gets better. Like overall your whole being is a lot more clear ...You have a clear mind. Like it's easier to let things go for the one hour we have here. And then you have to come back to it and you're like damn. It's a great outlet.

This is a great outlet. From reality. Like whatever stresses you out at home, whatever personal things you're going through like this is an outlet for you to put that behind you and go ahead and give 110% to whatever you're doing at hand. Like it helps you focus. Like someone like me who's very busy in the head, it's something more like hold on let's think about it, finish the task at hand, once it's done go ahead and continue the next thing. Like it develops that kind of behavioral sense you know?

And it continues the process of being able to continue on in life. It's like step stones kind of thing.

Danny's analysis of how he feels CrossFit helps him develop a useful "behavioral sense" for other aspects of his life that is both physical and mental is particularly intriguing, and also a common interpretation for many subjects of this study. "It's like a step stones kind of thing" means that for many CrossFit participants, working on their emotional, physical, and mental strength, endurance, and resiliency transfers into other areas of their lives. This transfer of skills is work, but it work on the self that is building a future self, pulling the present into the future along a trajectory of hope and promise. Hansson interpreted his study participants' commitment to their future self in terms of Braidotti's "joy" in perpetual bettering:

> Perpetual bettering, or becoming as Braidotti phrases it, requires endurance, and endurance comes from the joy of recognising and believing oneself to have potential to succeed in task undertaken. Or as one of the CrossFitting mothers said "You must really like yourself, or learn to like yourself, in order to fight so hard for yourself." The caring of that self, means sustained commitment to the relational factors which situate the subjects in a position to progress, that is, diet, friends, The Box and relentless editing of choices she makes. This sustained self means that she is able to stretch her self over temporal and spatial dimension, and by doing so, the CrossFitter shuffles her perspectives from instant gratification of needs and wants, to a sustainable, or a more stable, futurity in which gratification and happiness is elicited from a multidimensional, accumulative whole. (Hansson 47)

Hansson's analysis sheds light on what Braidotti suggests is a trajectory of positive affect, or as I would put it, a trajectory of hope, that pulls subjects into a current of energy toward a future self that they believe is possible and that they actively desire. This love for their future self translates into affective momentum that gives purpose and meaning to their lives, pulling them forward into a future they can believe in, regardless of the other conditions of their lives. Anna, a woman in her mid-30's, expresses the hope and drive she unexpectedly found when she started CrossFitting:

> *Anna: Like before I would feel...like I said I was a stay at home mom I felt really depressed and I felt really like, useless. Like I wasn't able to get up and do all these things like how I wanted to. So now that I started coming here like my self-confidence got higher and I feel better about myself and I feel stronger.*

Anna's tone when she was telling me these things gave me the sense that something really big had shifted in her life as a result of CrossFit. Christina, a woman in her mid-20's, reinforces Danny's assessment about bettering herself and silencing her "head", while also echoing Anna by referring to a moment in her life when everything changed, as her introduction to CrossFit coincided with when she got sober, which she referred to earlier in this interview (something that was true for 3 different people who participated in this study):

> *Annie: And then if you were to analyze your obsession, what was it that drove your obsession then? [Christina referred to her "obsession" with CrossFit earlier in this interview, in reference to the period in her life when she first got sober.]*
>
> *Christina: Um, I always feel like, I always, well I still feel this way but especially then, I always felt like when I left a CrossFit class I was better than when I got there. You know what I mean? Like I always felt like I had gotten better at something or like I was just better off when I left than when I came.*

Monica, another woman in her mid-30's expresses how she enjoys surpassing her own limits to provide an example for her children, extending her own trajectory of hope to those around her:

> *Annie: Yeah. So what motivates you to do this?*
>
> *Monica: Um, just to really prove to myself that I can. Um, I have a 13 and 12 year old. They're athletes and I want them to know that you know what if you really push yourself, you can do it, you know? Because if their mom can do it and I'm like over a hundred pounds heavier than they are, it's like you can do it too.*
>
> *Annie: Yeah. [laughter] Cool so being an example for them...*
>
> *Monica: Just losing weight, proving it to myself, and showing them that it's possible. Like because they see me throwing it up and they're like how do you do that?*

Monica's role as a mother and example to her children reinforces how a trajectory of hope isn't solely about the individual calling themselves into a future state of existence, but also about how this trajectory connects the self to others. Jaycee, a woman in her late 50's, elaborates on how "overcoming" through physical workouts, with some implicit reference to the pain of life struggle, teaches her how she can be more capable in other areas of her life:

> *Jaycee: Yeah so my whole life, like everything I ever wanted, everything like literally came crumbling down. And I had never been real athletic...And that's the other thing I like is that all kinds of different abilities can compete together. So you're bettering yourself but you're helping others better themselves.*
>
> *But there was something about...I couldn't cry anymore, I couldn't talk anymore, it's like exerting myself physically in CrossFit was like another language. And when I had no words there was just power in physically overcoming something, physically doing something it was literally like pushing up or out emotions and intensity and just overcoming. That translated into other places in my life just spiritually or mentally or emotionally like. Oh my gosh I just did whatever and there's a little bit of that I can do this for twenty minutes. Like I can do the next twenty minutes of my life, whatever that is. I can do the next phone call, do the next thing. And it is huge.*

Jaycee's experience sheds light on the affective momentum that becomes a part of the subject's identity and experience as a result of perpetual becoming, bettering or caring for one's self as a project. Braidotti expresses affective momentum when she states

> The task of turning the tide of negativity is an ethical transformative process. It aims at achieving the freedom of understanding, through the awareness of our limits, of our bondage. This results in the freedom to affirm one's essence as joy, through encounters and minglings with other bodies, entities, beings and forces. Ethics means faithfulness to this potentia, or the desire to become. (Braidotti 2)

"Turning the tide of negativity" is using one's own will to create a "better" self, thereby providing one's self with evidence that one can indeed be better than yesterday, and if that is true, then perhaps it can continue to be true, thereby providing some hope for a future that is better than the past. This experience is characterized by an increase in positive affective/emotional energy that is intensified by the pull of the community, which calls the positive, perpetually becoming subject into existence, which I will discuss below. There is also some implicit reference to pain in both these responses, and the idea that proving to one's self that one can "push through" discomfort is a form of training one's self to believe that one can do this outside of the gym as well.

Community, or Collective Effervescence

Danny once again offers us insight, this time into how both pain and community are both essential to the process of perpetual becoming:

Danny: But then every day when I come in here I'm not gonna lie. I get scared. I have that fear factor. I get that fear factor. I get those butterflies. Every time someone says 3-2-1 go, it's like alright breathe. Think. Focus. It's like one of those things it's very...

Annie: What do you think it is that scares you about it? This is like a psychological question. Is it like the fear of pain? Or what do you think it is that gets those butterflies?

Danny: I'm pretty sure it's the fear of pain. You know it's gonna hurt, but then it's like how much can I endure it? You know you're gonna survive, but then it's like how bad do you want it to hurt, right? So that's where your threshold is, and like that's where the community comes into play, because if you have a competitive mindset, it helps you know that persona A or person B are very competitive as well and their gonna be going all gung ho and like I mean I wanna do the same thing. If your personality portrays that sense, you know?

It's like it betters you in that way because...or again, it's an outlet...I think that's one of the best things I like about CrossFit: everyone has a very positive outlook on life. It's like they want everyone else to be better. It's not like you come here and talk shit about someone, oh they did this. You may be talking shit but it's like I'm trying to make you a better person.

It's like I know there's better in you. You're not letting it out right now. It's like wait you're sandbagging the workout man I know you're capable. It's like what's the problem? Are you hurt? Let's understand.

Yeah. [aside] Let's go buddy! Come on D! Pick that bar up! With CrossFit I'm dead tired at the end of the day. I feel like I accomplished what I needed to do, and I'm able to sleep very well

Danny's reference to the importance of the community in pulling one forward into a more "positive" future was also a consistent study result, with shared pain or discomfort as perhaps the primary factor in creating the affective intensity of the collective. The collective energy of working together, pushing through discomfort, encouraging and being encouraged by others seems to create an affective "pull" of possibility. This is a finding that may not come as a surprise to those with military or team experience, but it is interesting to find such a popular cultural phenomenon in the commercial sector, on a voluntary basis. Again, Braidotti's analysis

is relevant here, as she describes how working for our own "potentia" gives hope and temporal purpose, as well as spatial direction:

> Thus, an ethically empowering option increases one's potentia and creates joyful energy in the process. The conditions which can encourage such a quest are not only historical, but also relational: they have to do with cultivating and facilitating productive encounters, which sustain processes of self-transformation or self-fashioning in the direction of affirming positivity. (Braidotti 5)

Braidotti sees limits as bondage, and ethics as being faithful to our potentia, or desire to become. If one is realizing one's potentia one is being ethical. If one is not, or harming it, one is being unethical, a viewpoint reminiscent of Foucault's Care of the Self. Working toward one's potential is an opening up of life possibilities and energies, while any behavior that closes down opportunities is unethical because it is destructive.

Braidotti here references Deleuze's descriptions of addiction as a closing down of potentia and energies and life possibilities: "Addiction is not an opening up, but a narrowing-down of the field of possible becomings. It increases the rigidity, not the fluidity of the subject: it locks the subject up in a black hole of inner fragmentation without encounters with others." (Braidotti 10) Addictions, depression, a life lived within limits, a life based on a logic of lack (a neoliberal life) all close down the "core energy source" of the "affective core of subjectivity." One hopes, and the words of this study's participants leads me to believe, that this core of subjectivity can be built up in the individual through their own efforts into a trajectory of hope that can pull the individual forward to into new phases of becoming that continue to open up more spaces and potentialities for them and those around them, or what I describe as freedom in my arguments above.

This "core energy source" is partly built and maintained through the collective energy (effervescence) of the CrossFit community, which is emotionally physical, and pulls the subject into a future state of being, a vision of who they could become, if they continue doing the work alongside others. Ron describes how this feels for him:

> *Ron: Well I like...I think it's the group. You feed off the group. You feed off the people like cheering you on. That you're kind of competing against everybody but then you're also pulling for everybody at the same time, which is different than most sports that you do you know. And I like that. To me the vibe here and everything is just putting out effort gets you respect with your peers. Whereas there are people who are older or heavier and can't do pullups but the people who are trying and they just get one pullup everybody cheers for them. And I love that. You can tell everybody knows in here they might be at different levels of fitness but you kind of know the people who try real hard. And they're considered in the same realm with the best athletes, people will give them that same respect so I love that.*

This "vibe" Ron describes is the energy of the group, pulling the individual forward in time, space, and becoming. Hannah, a woman in her early 30's, describes how the pull of the group compels her to finish the workout, even when she doesn't want to:

> *Hannah: I know the guys are into like let's beat each other, but for me it's more like seeing everybody going as fast...it's not like everybody is trying to compete with it, and it's not like they're pushing you, but it's kind of more like I feel like I need to push myself because everybody is pushing themselves. You know what I mean? So it's kind of like I think it's the atmosphere. I've done some of them on my own but then I don't feel as, not as motivated but then when I get tired when I'm by myself I'm just like eh, I just give up. Like here I get tired but I don't give up because it's kind of like I gotta finish it. I got to.*

Hannah's response is interesting to me because she is not motivated by competing with others, but still feels pulled along by the energy and example of the group, leading me to theorize that the energy is more than individually ego-driven. Bauer, a man in his mid-30's, expresses how this experience sets CrossFit apart from other fitness options, emphasizing that the

combination of the intensity and the collective experience creates a special bond between people (which fulfills the definition of collective effervescence):

> *Bauer: Yeah. And then the community is...I don't know. I don't know many yoga places or pilates places that have that same kind of aspect. I think the intensity of the workouts and the companionship that you build goes a long way. When you see someone dying on the floor you...pilates or yoga you're not going to go hey that was awesome! You know? Maybe some people do.*
> *[laughter]*
>
> *Annie: Nice pigeon pose man!*

These results indicate that there is indeed something unique to the CrossFit experience, at least when compared to other fitness domains popular in the United States at this time. The collective experience of being pulled forward, into a future self that is always becoming, signals a trajectory of hope reminiscent of Braidotti's expansion on Deuleuze and Guattari's theorization of the subject. These findings also confirm those found by Hansson, in that the role of collective affect is of particular significance to the becomings of these study participants, despite the fact that the experience of pain is of less significance to their subject formation, in comparison to Hansson's study subjects. Despite pain not being the primary limit, or threshold for this study's subjects, pain did play a significant role in creating the affective power and unity of the collective.

The role of Biopower as a productive force is apparent here, in that subjects are creating "ideal" selves that certainly align with Biopolitical imperatives that require them to be self-disciplined, flexible, self-creators who increase their health, fitness, and productive potential independent of state resources, without conscious interrogation of why it is they desire to become who and what they desire to become. However, I am arguing here, as an extension of

Hansson's work, via Braidotti, while channeling Hardt and Negri's theories in Commonwealth, that there is something in excess to the Biopolitical imperative, in that Biopower creates unpredictable subjectivities and energies that can be put to differential uses by individuals and communities.

The "trajectory of hope" that I point to in the collective experience of these CrossFit participants surely pulls them into alignment with Biopolitical imperatives, but it also creates a momentum that allows them to do more and be more than they could before. Perhaps this too is Biopolitical, but it also enables the "potentia" of individuals and this community to be more than Biopower decrees. It is as Henry, the owner, intended: these subjects are "liberated" to move better in the world, to feel positive affect increasing day by day, opening up (dare I say) more options and opportunities for their lives, better self-regard, and an alternative to sick, depressed, dis-abled stagnation and stasis. Without a change in the unequal structure of power, these evolutions are a privilege of the few, but on a micro-level they reveal the potential of the body to create openings and possibilities for the subject, via affective and biological shifts (affect is rooted in the biological, therefore these shifts are not distinct).

Affect and the body (in which affect finds its root) have been two openings for resistance to Biopower pointed to by scholars in recent years (Braidotti, Hardt and Negri, Deleuze and Guattari).[38] This study confirms those theorizations to some degree[39]. However, it is as yet unclear what role agency (the ability to consciously choose one's own future/destiny/resistance) has to play in these openings. For the subjects of this study agency plays little to no role, by my

[38] Braidotti's conceptualization of the work that must be done by individuals to utilize the excess of affective experience for resistance: "The point of the ethics of joyful affirmation and becoming is to extract this awareness from the economy of loss, the logic of lack and the moral imperative to dwell in never-ending and un-resolvable states of mourning. (Braidotti 23)

[39] As has my previous work on empathy and affective connection, and the enclosure of the queer body. (Yaniga Master's Thesis, email for access)

assessment. They are not consciously choosing resistance to Biopower, but simply responding to physiological and emotional evidence that they are happier if they continue to do the work of perpetual becoming. Yet it would seem to me that agency is not a requirement for resistance to Biopower (as Rose would also argue), but that resistance can emerge organically. In fact, I think it often does, as individuals grow increasingly discontented to the point of breaking open to a thought, idea, or action that saves their lives. The problem at hand is that sometimes it is only their own lives that they save, to the detriment of the collective, or others, which often serves to merely reinforce structural inequalities and the system of Biopolitical capitalism.

The solution to this problematic may perhaps lie in waiting for the suffering of so many to reach a fever pitch, compelling complete revolution, something that Marx alluded to in his suggestion that revolution is immanent when enough people stand to gain more by revolution than they will lose.[40] In an era of easy credit (which artificially upholds a false living standard for so many) and increasingly pervasive ideological manipulation (via instantaneous communication) it seems as if this moment is further out of reach than ever. Geographic barriers remain effective in isolating the bourgeoisie from the global proletariat. Yet as suicide rates in the Western world continue to increase and antidepressants maintain the productivity of nearly half of our population, I can't help but wonder when enough will be enough. When will the energy of the collective pull us forward into a collective, rather than individual, trajectory of hope? When will our collective pain break us open to our collective potentia? When will our

[40] Marx describes the degradation of the conditions of the working class as inevitable, and therefore so is revolution, as the suffering of this class will lead to clear action: "It [the ruling class] is unfit to rule because it is incompetent to assure an existence to its slave within his slavery, because it cannot help letting him sink into such a state, that it has to feed him, instead of being fed by him. Society can no longer live under this bourgeoisie, in other words, its existence is no longer compatible with society." (Marx, The Manifesto of the Communist Party)

bodies give us the affective and physical signals that enough is enough? How will our bodies show us the way forward, into new becomings?[41]

I have little to offer at this time by way of answering these questions. However, the subject of the following two chapters does offer some solution via an example: the gender binary. I suggest in these ensuing chapters that the body's "secrets" can in fact offer resistance to cultural prescriptions that confine and limit the potentia of human beings. While this potential for resistance arrives by way of Biopolitical imperatives that reinforce systematic oppression, as in the case of the trajectory of hope, it also brings with it excesses that offer solutions.

[41] Braidotti's proposed ethical revolution: "My stated criteria for this new ethics include: non-profit; emphasis on the collective; viral contaminations; link theory Practice, including the importance of creation. The non-hegelian notion of the limit which I propose as the threshold of sustainability means that limits are to be seen as dynamic connectors or attractors. They need to be experimented with collectively, so as to produce effective cartographies of how much bodies can take – or thresholds of sustainability. They also aim to create collective bonds, a new affective community or Polity. (Braidotti, The Ethics of Becoming Imperceptible 11)

Chapter 3

Strong is the New Skinny: CrossFit and the Biopolitical Logic(s) of Female Muscularity

Indeed, women's sports have the power to rearticulate gender ideals such that those very athletic women's bodies that, at one time, are considered outside the norm (too much, too masculine, even monstrous), can come, over time, to constitute a new ideal of accomplishment and grace, a standard for women's achievement. In this sense, ideals are not static, but constitute norms or standards that are surpassable and revisable. And women's sports offer a site in which this transformation of our ordinary sense of what constitutes a gendered body is itself dramatically contested and transformed. (Butler, 1998)

Introduction

This and the following chapter[42] utilize a multi-disciplinary mixed-method approach to examine the increasing cultural acceptance, prevalence, and valorization of certain forms of female muscularity in contemporary American popular culture. The ethnographic data resulting from this two-year study of a CrossFit community will illuminate, through participant observation and interviews, how women who have chosen to develop the size, strength, and/or definition of their muscles are negotiating what has historically been an incompatibility between muscularity and femininity. I will extend my findings into a larger theoretical analysis of the gendered body in contemporary American society that includes an exploration of subjectivity, identity, and Biopower in advanced capitalism.

This research is derived from previous theorizations of the female sporting body in the Anthropology and Sociology of Sport and the body, in conjunction with Cultural Studies and Critical Theory approaches to the gendered body in society. While there is extensive research on theories of embodiment, Biopolitics, femininities and masculinities, and sporting females within

[42] Thanks to my dad George Yaniga for cultivating in me the intellectual curiosity and critical thinking skills that enabled me to reach this level of education and scholarship. (Also, thanks dad for all of your great ideas and for sending me articles and images on this topic for the last five years.) It was an article my dad gave me when I was 11 years old that was the seed of this project ("Competitive Girls Make Successful Women," The Plain Dealer, 1994), and it was my dad who encouraged me to play sports and develop my own physical potential.

Anthropology, Sociology, Cultural Studies, and Critical Theory, there is less research on female muscularity and its sociocultural antecedents, contradictions, and implications[43].

Female muscularity has been conceptualized by theorists as empowerment, deviance, and/or disciplinary power. While some scholars point to the 1960's and 1980's as the rise of the "athletic ideal" or "jock chic" (Bolin:1992, 2012), it was during the late 1980's and early 1990's that research on the phenomenon proliferated (Bolin; Bordo; Basalmo; Markula; Duncan; Messner). However despite the great deal of attention bestowed upon this new "firm but slender" feminine ideal, public acceptance has always been within very defined limits (Markula:1995, Bolin:2003, Bordo:1993, Dworkin: 2001, 2003), and always "softened" by an accompanying "emphasized femininity." (Connell:1987; Bolin:2012; Smith) It is my belief that what we are experiencing now in the dominant culture is an expansion of these limits (to new limits), and that there are perhaps socioeconomic and nationalistic reasons behind this expansion. This development calls for interrogation, if not new theorizations, of the muscular female, American hegemonic femininity, and the gender binary.

Anthropologists, Historians, and other theorists of the gendered body in society have traced various social, economic, and nationalist discourses that have affected the cultural construction of the feminine ideal across time, including discourses of patriarchy, race and class, and economic and militaristic discourses. For example, Dori Geissler, along with Leslie Heywood and Shari Dworkin, has theorized that the rise of girls and women's sports in the 1990's was connected to a need for aggressive, competitive, team-work oriented girl/women leaders ideally suited to be laborers in the New (information) Economy (Geissler; Heywood and Dworkin), a theorization that plays out nicely when considering the timing of Title IX and the Girl Power movements, both which coincided with neoliberal economic developments in the

[43] See Bolin, Heywood, Dworkin, Bordo, Basalmo, Shilling, Bunsell

U.S. economy that called for a new gendered order of labor. The contemporary Lean In[44] movement and the demand for such qualities in women in corporate America also lend credence to these theorizations. It is also my hypothesis, based on research related to the socialization of males through sport, that girls and women's participation in sports has also been mobilized to construct aggressive able-bodied women who are developed as girls to be capable of the aggressive, disciplined, team-oriented physicality required of female soldiers, who are increasingly in demand and recruited by Western Nations such as the United States. (Carreiras; Grewal; O'Hanlon).

While the simplicity of such theorizations is seductive, there are counter-discourses, contradictions, and complications that intertwine with these explanations, such as patriarchal constructions of ideal female bodies, race and class ideologies that sometimes valorize, lack access to, or reject "traditional" femininity, discourses of biology and the materiality of biology and reproduction, and divergent forms of nationalism that glorify disparate and often contradictory constructions of femininity. These counter-discourses must be interrogated along with discourses that celebrate the sporting, muscular female. I intend to build upon prior theorizations to investigate the prevalence and distribution of this "new" ideal, as well as the motivations and reflections of increasing numbers of women who desire to be strong, if not muscular, via the results of this ethnographic study a CrossFit community[45].

[44] Lean In is the title of a book, non-profit organization, and social movement authored by Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg. It began as a means of evaluating why women were not succeeding in the corporate sphere at the same rates as men, and it evolved into a movement to encourage women to be more aggressive and competitive in their pursuit of their goals. It is highly lauded by the popular media for promoting women's equality, but also highly critiqued for its reinforcement of neoliberal ideologies of personal responsibility at the expense of systemic structural change. See my earlier work (2014) for a closer analysis of Lean In, Female Corporate CEO's, and neoliberal ideologies of personal responsibility (vs. systemic social change). http://leanin.org/

[45] CrossFit definition, according to the CrossFit website: "CrossFit is many things. Primarily, it's a fitness regimen developed by Coach Greg Glassman over several decades. He was the first person in history to define fitness in a meaningful, measurable way (increased work capacity across broad time and modal domains). CrossFit itself is defined as that which optimizes fitness (constantly varied functional movements performed at relatively high

I seek to develop theorizations based on my findings that help us understand why American popular culture is (in some ways) encouraging the development of musculature and body mass in women at this juncture in history. I hypothesize that my findings will compliment theorizations by Bolin, Dworkin, and Heywood, and also that new conclusions may be drawn from a deeper interrogation of a larger pool of women who desire to be strong within a dominant culture that is more accepting than ever of muscular female embodiment. While previous research has focused on female athletes and/or bodybuilders, most of this research conceptualizes its subjects as members of deviant subcultures. CrossFit, in contrast, is a large popular (not deviant)[46] cultural phenomenon, drawing the interest and participation of thousands of women and men nationwide, characterized by expansive media coverage and marketing power. Though most CrossFit participants are economically stable heterosexual Caucasians in their late 20's and early 30's, there is some degree of diversity along the lines of age, race, class, and sexual identity (Knapp:2015). This diversity is what leads me to believe I will be able to draw larger conclusions that will lend insight into changing conceptions of femininity, masculinity, and the gender binary in American society today.

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intensity). CrossFit is also the community that spontaneously arises when people do these workouts together. In fact, the communal aspect of CrossFit is a key component of why it's so effective. Today, CrossFit, the company, provides accredited training seminars throughout the world. We publish several websites providing extensive free content, including workouts, training and support for becoming fit, as well as a growing Journal of extended instruction. We have a worldwide network of more than 11,000 affiliated gyms [now 13,500] and more than 100,000 accredited CrossFit Level 1 trainers. And, we have created the Sport of Fitness, known as the CrossFit Games, where we crown the Fittest Man and Woman on Earth." Source: http://www.CrossFit.com/cf-info/what-is-CrossFit.html. Accessed: June 3, 2013.

[46] CrossFit is a mainstream phenomenon, rather than a subculture for the following reasons: 1) CrossFit does not challenge the dominant culture, but rather reinforces many hegemonic ideologies, including ideologies of discipline, self-care, production and consumption, and most ideologies of gender, 2) CrossFit and CrossFit participants are not represented by popular media sources as deviant, but rather are represented as trendy and desirable, and 3) The founder of CrossFit and its participants are not oriented around an insular in-group, but are in fact desirous of spreading their lifestyle and sport across the globe. It is the second of these three arguments that distinguishes this study of CrossFit from previous studies of women bodybuilders. The first and the last arguments are necessary to differentiate CrossFit from past theorizations of subculture, including that of Dick Hebdige (1979).

In the sections that follow I will outline the 20th and 21st century history of the American feminine ideal via a historiography of the literature, followed by a tracing of the coincidental evolution of neoliberal capitalism and the culturally-accepted sporting female. In the following chapter I will examine the results of this ethnography, using survey data and interview quotes as a means of expanding upon existing theories, concluding with my theorizations as to the implications of this work across multiple fields, particularly Anthropology, Visual Studies, Body Studies, and Critical Theory, paying close attention to the valences of Biopower the contemporary muscular female embodies.

The Feminine Ideal through the Decades: A Historiography

"Men act and women appear." (Berger, 1972)

As I articulate above, this project seeks to understand if, how, and why dominant conceptions of American femininity in recent years seem to be increasingly incorporating, if not encouraging, the development of larger musculature on the female form, despite its contrariness to the biologically-naturalized gender binary and traditional femininity. A movement toward increasing acceptability of female muscularity has been noted by many scholars as having begun sometime between the late 1960's and early 1990's (Dworkin and Messner: 2002; Bordo: 1993; Bolin: 1992, 2012), around the same time as the acceptability of women's sports participation was accelerating. However, it would be useful at this juncture to contextualize these shifts within a broader history of the American hegemonic feminine ideal, in order to trace how, and hypothesize as to why, certain female forms have been glorified during certain periods. This

tracing and thinking will allow us to better understand the moment we have arrived upon in terms of the forces that have shaped it, while getting a sense of the historical and theoretical work of some of the scholars who have laid the groundwork upon which I wish to build.

At first glance, it seems easy to define American femininity as what is culturally expected and/or demanded of women, in terms of how they appear, how they act, and the connection between the two. However, upon further inspection it becomes clear that we cannot disentangle our conception of femininity from social structures or historical circumstances: the way women appear and act, and what is expected and allowed of them, is affected by factors such as race, class, the nation-state, economic forces and ideologies, individual and group agency and resistance, etc. All of these factors are greatly influenced by historical events, particularly shifts in power relations, the majority of which are rooted in economic structures.

There are also often contradictory definitions of femininity in tension with one another during any given temporal period, across and within disparate geographic and social milieus. These definitions are also always in relation to definitions and experiences of masculinity, as the two are constructed in binary opposition, and therefore define one another. Yet in the midst of all these complications it is still possible to uncover some of the numerous social and economic forces that are behind the way we define ideal womanhood as a society, particularly within the imagined community that was 20th century America.

Attempting to define contemporary hegemonic femininity[47] is today made difficult by the proliferation of communications made possible through online culture and the deregulation of

[47] The ideal femininity as idealized by and through the dominant culture. This femininity is representative of the dominant culture's ideals, and yet is internalized as "natural" by many who are not representative of this culture. For example, hegemonic femininity is a glorification of many white, middle and upper class physical and social ideals, such as Caucasian facial features, slenderness, blonde hair, and feminine "grace" and "poise." This ideal is by definition unattainable to those without the biological and economic capacity to embody them, ie, physical laborers cannot by definition embody "grace," nor can women of African genetic lineage embody blondeness or

television, which has led to a number of feminine "ideals." Yet throughout most of the 20th century, popular culture gave us a few dominant, or hegemonic, feminine ideals for each period in modern American history, something scholars of history and gender have explored in great detail, as I will illustrate below. This ideal has been almost categorically racialized, with those features associated with whiteness as hegemonic. It has also been classed, with those norms most attainable via leisure time and material resources as most dominant. Because femininity is by definition strongly connected to how a woman appears (as appearance is one of her fundamental sources of value as a consumable object), appearance is of particular interest to any historical analysis of the feminine, and cannot be easily disentangled from the behavioral aspects of femininity.

Historical work concerning the American feminine ideal in the 20th century is built upon the foundational texts of scholars who studied the evolution of western fashion, or 'costume', as they attempted to decipher the reasons why fashion changes in different epochs. Many of the early academic works on the subject were written by social theorists such as Quentin Bell, James Laver, George Simmel, and Thorstein Veblen, all of whom were oriented around theorizing fashion in terms of social class. Laver, however, was also concerned with sexuality, positing "the seduction principle" as a motivator in changes in women's fashions: what appeals to men is what women wear. He bases this argument on his theory of "shifting erogenous zones," which explained why certain parts of women's bodies are highlighted in different epochs. (Laver, cited in Entwistle 64)

Caucasian facial features, at least without technologically-based modification. Hegemonic femininity, then, is a way of visibly delineating who has access to race and class-based power. The fact that this ideal has also historically required physical weakness is particularly interesting, as this results in a large portion of the population being literally dependent upon others (men) for their physical defense and every day weight-bearing tasks (despite the proven large muscular potential of women).

Veblen and Simmel, however, were more concerned with fashion as emulation of social class and conformity. Veblen's Theory of the Leisure Class was considered the seminal work in the field throughout most of the 20th century, and was pivotal in establishing the idea of class dominance as key to the popularization of certain fashions and beauty norms, such as whiteness/tan skin and voluptuousness/slenderness. It was Veblen who popularized the notion that fashions trickle down to the lower classes, a point that later scholars such as Lois Banner, Elizabeth Wilson, Joanne Entwistle, and Valerie Steele were quick to complicate through their greater emphasis the role of political economy, sexual agency, and other social forces in dictating norms of femininity.[48]

These later scholars revealed how early theories of fashion and the feminine ideal had perhaps succumbed to the seduction of reductionism and functionalist generalization as they attempted to explain the "why" behind the evolution of adornment and female beauty. Joanne Entwistle connects theories of embodiment to the history of fashion in The Fashioned Body (2000), noting the importance of recognizing that the body that we inhabit is most often a clothed body, with all the significations of how the body shapes and is shaped by what we wear. Entwistle conducts her own literature review of theories of embodiment and the history of fashion, making connections between philosophy, history, and sociology that prove fruitful for thinking across history and the disciplines. Entwistle argues in The Fashioned Body: "Dress needs to be understood as a situated practice that is the result of complex social forces and individual negotiations in daily life." (65) Body ideals too need to take into consideration the complex variables of economic and nationalistic ideologies and conditions, race, class, other

[48] Valerie Steele took particular issue with Veblen's refusal of female agency in the donning of the corset, claiming that the corset gave women a sense of sexuality and sensuality that was quite erotic for women subjects. (1985:3) Kunzle (1982) three years before, had taken this argument even further: the corseted woman was, by lacing up the corset, asserting herself and her sexuality.

cultural forces, and of course, agency. For our contemporary purposes, these early scholars remind us to question who are these muscular women? How do their body idealizations intersect with their race, class, and sexual identities?

The methods of these early scholars revolved around analyses of images, mostly art representations, and some early advertising. Historian Lois Banner tried to expand the limits of their source material in her 1983 text American Beauty. Her methodology includes reviews of "contemporary diaries, autobiographies, novels, fashion magazines, beauty and etiquette manuals, foreign travelers' accounts of their own society and that of the United States, and general periodical literature." (4) Banner traces the social and economic forces that intersect in each decade in American history to create disparate and often conflicting feminine ideals, citing the 1920's as the pivotal decade in the American culture of beauty, as it witnessed both the rebellion against restrictive Michellen dress but also the ascendancy of the cosmetic industry. (16) For Banner the 1920's, particularly "the flapper, with her frenetic dancing" represented the vitality of the consumption-oriented life of leisure. (279) She argues that Americans could accept the rising sexuality of the flapper because they could laugh at it, in all of its bound-breasted pre-pubescent straight-lined streamlined glory. She argues that perhaps in its infantilized form, was less threatening than a mature, more sensual representation of feminine sexuality. (280)

Steele (1985) and Cahn (1994) later complicate this assessment, as they both emphasize the 1920's as the moment when female sexual agency emerges, and began to be conceptualized then, and in later decades, as a threat to moral order. In contrast, Taylor and Wilson (1989) suggest that the relative social and political "freedoms" enjoyed by women in the 1920's may have served as a substitute for larger gains, (79) rightfully muddying Banner's assessment of the 20's as an era of progress. Elizabeth Wilson and Mary Thesander (1997) take care to note the

importance of the bicycle and technologies of fashion (materials, duplication of styles) in the rise of more varied and fluid styles of dress in the 1920's. Steele makes the point, reinforcing that made by Banner, that the boyish physique of the 1920's, in contrast to the S-shape figure of the previous era, was more about youth than a relaxation of gender norms. (239)

The 1920's feminine ideal was relatively unfeminine, in terms of ideal body shape, contrasting to later decades and not returning until the 1960's. Perhaps the adolescent boy physique, with bound breasts, short hair, and skinny legs, was as Banner implied: it provided a child-like counter-balance to the loss of innocence experienced by a nation trying to forget about WWI, a nation in a great state of rapid change. Maybe women in the workforce, in the cities, in the movies, the looser moral order, the culture of consumption, would have been intolerable to society at large if women were depicted in traditionally feminine, mature, sensuous styles. This conclusion would be a nice integration of the theories of both Banner and Steele and deserves further scrutiny. It also pairs well with the context of the Twiggy frame of the 1960's and the Tomboy of the 1970's (Hatch), which was also a period of disillusionment and rapid cultural change, a period that glorified both youth and innocence. Bolin (1992) refers to this ideal as a "non-reproductive" somatic form, which I believe also lends credence to theorizations of youth and innocence.

Other historians and social theorists who form the foundation of the canon are of course, the above-mentioned Valerie Steele and Elizabeth Wilson, along with Ann Beth Presley and Rita Freedman, who draw attention to the role of the feminine ideal in the construction of a "modern" nation in early 20th century America. Their work, along with that of Tinkler and Warsh, among others, outlines how the flapper of the 1920's signified more than commodity logic, liberation, and youth: she was also a symbol for a "modern" America. Tinkler and Warsh make the

connection between the linearity of modernity and the linearity of the ideal female form of the era: “Corsets, cars, and cigarettes contributed to the production of the modern woman by facilitating a modern way of looking and moving. “Lines were key to the modern look, especially by the 1930’s, and this applied as much to women as to cars.” (122)

Technology was needed to enforce the “streamlined” look, which evolved, eliciting discourses of control and discipline synonymous with modernity and still prevalent today. Tinkler and Warsh also point out the ambivalent discourses of femininity in the 1920’s and 1930’s, in that women were depicted as both in control of themselves and their presentation, while also being in the grip of the control of others. This is a conclusion that I believe Banner would agree with, as it elucidates the transition from the 1920’s flapper look into the 1930’s more curvaceous, reproductive look. No transition is clean or clear, and multiple norms exist simultaneously and in tension. Women did enjoy greater freedoms in the 20’s, but they did not lose them all in the 1930’s, despite the resurgence of the gender binary during the Great Depression’s crisis of masculinity.

According to Thesander two parallel types of dominant feminine ideals emerged in the 1930’s: a slender yet soft and traditionally feminine ideal emerged early in the decade (143), alongside a more sensuous provocative and curvaceous ideal that rose to prominence in the late 1930’s (148). Thesander attributes a return a sensuous, more reproductive ideal female form as a return to patriarchal family values as a result of the economic hardships of the great depression, which decreased available jobs both men and women, and I would argue, a resultant crisis in masculinity. Banner’s focus is also on a more “reproductive”-bodied feminine ideal, but she integrates the reproductive body with a masculine-mannered ideal of the 1930’s, epitomized in the image of Greta Garbo and pervasive in films starring Bette Davis, Katherine Hepburn, and

Marlene Deitrich. (Banner 281) Banner draws attention to the open question of such images of strong female masculinity emerged during this era, which simultaneously saw a return to a strong gender binary, exemplified in the more mature body types of even the most masculine of stars, along with icons such as Mae West. In thinking about films of this time, it was an emergence of a strong yet decidedly feminine femininity, "womanly" but also tightly controlled both internally and externally.

WWII, although epitomized in the image of Rosie the Riveter, did not bring about a complete shift toward masculine presentation in ideal femininity. Women were found wearing more functional clothes for jobs outside the homes, such as padded shoulders, skirts above the knees, and the slow popularization of pants, which had been worn for sports and leisure for two decades, but were not acceptable for some places of work. (Thesander 153) However, these more "masculine" styles were not a radical shift by any means: "feminine" curves at the waist and hips and bust were still accentuated.

The post-WWII years brought about a return of a more traditional feminine ideal, something Banner termed "resurgent Victorianism", emblemized in the likeness of Marilyn Monroe. (285) It is clear that Banner sees this era as a period of confinement, similar to that of the Victorian era, defined by corsets, peroxide blond hair, and three inch heels. It was a return to the home after the war years, and a restrained yet reproductive femininity. Thesander describes the period of 1947-1964 as "clearly defined female forms" emblemized in Christian Dior's "New Look" fashions. Thesander describes Dior's intention as a "return to elegant femininity, a welcome trend after the clothes rationing, poverty and rather masculine lifestyle and image to which women had been subjected during the war years." (155) The New Look featured longer fuller skirts of longer length (mid-calf), with a small waste and high full bust into a "modern

hourglass" shape. (Thesander 155) Thesander theorizes that "the feminine ideal fitted in very well with the post-war consolidation of middle-class family ideology, which positioned woman as the central figure in the nuclear family." (173) For her, "the inhumanity of the war had fostered a longing for security in everyone." (174) This is a theorization makes sense, particularly considering the increasing emphasis on youth in idealized femininity in the later years of this period and into the 1960's, which was perhaps a call for a return to innocence in the wake of turbulent times.

The work of Kristen Hatch supports this view. Hatch (2011) argues that prior to the 1970's, filmic representations of Tomboys (such as Gidget) and their always inevitable heterosexual relationships with men were motivated by a general cultural anxiety about masculinity during the period, particularly the 1950's. (79) Hatch argues that concerns about men choosing alternate paths, in addition to the shifting landscape of labor needs, led to a crisis of masculinity that was resolved in film via the recuperation of the transgressive woman. A general cultural anxiety about masculinity and its relationship to economic order is a logical explanation for a reinforcement of the gender binary during both the Great Depression and the post WWII years and would also support Susan Cahn's finding of reduced cultural support for women's sports during this time.

The 1960's and 1970's brought about a move toward women's "liberation" from some of the "restrictive" norms of the previous decades, such as corsets and bras. While the women's liberation movement and the hippie movement did not have a drastic impact on the fashions and body ideals of everyday American women, it did filter into fashion and had a small impact on dominant ideologies of ideal femininity. However, these shifts could hardly be conceived of as total resistance or widely pervasive. Most women persisted in adherence to shape-defining

underwear, stockings, and traditional skirts and blouses. Yet as more women entered the workforce with each passing decade, trousers and jeans became widely popular, as did a popularization of the "natural" "desexualized" body, albeit increasingly slender. (Thesander 179-199)

As the 1970's turned into the 1980's Neoliberalism began to have a visible impact on cultural ideologies, with physical fitness increasing in importance: now the body had to be shaped principally through discipline and effort, rather than primarily calorie restriction and clothing. (Thesander 201) This evolution had a significant impact on women's fashions and body ideals, as dominant discourses demanded a fit, disciplined, and increasingly slender and toned physique for women (Bordo; Bolin; Markula) and fashion moved away from body-restricting dress. The body's shape and general appearance, as Crawford and others have noted, became synonymous with the moral character of the individual, signally a shift toward increasing Biopolitical pressure to govern one's self in accordance with the norms of late capitalism, as I discuss in Chapter 1. More and more identities and options were becoming available, as neoliberal capitalism and its attendant market changes brought in a plurality of products, marketing, and identity categories. "People's clothes no longer clearly indicated their identification with a role, but became a variable means of expressing different facets of the same person." (Thesander 207)

The 1990's and early 2000's were characterized by still further emphasis on physical fitness in mainstream American culture, as well as an intensification of commercialization, again, the result of economic changes we associate with Neoliberalism. These forces resulted in a yet more products and identities associated with fitness and self-creation. Fashion grew increasingly varied and diverse, with still more emphasis on the fit body as ornamented by

clothing, rather than clothing shaping the body. The requirements of the New Economy of the 1990's included flexible subjectivity, changing jobs, locations, roles, a disciplined yet productive subjectivity, and the continuing production of an ideal self (see chapters 1 and 2). The female athlete as a cultural icon also rose to prominence during this time period, which had a significant impact on ideal femininity, as I will discuss in detail below.

Scholars of the body and embodiment, such as Susan Bordo, Elizabeth Grosz, Anne Bolin, and Sandra Bartky, among others, have gone to great lengths to understand what the history of the female body in American culture represents in terms of loci of control and domination, and it is Bordo who is credited with expounding upon theories of control and discipline in late capitalist female embodiment. At this juncture I will diverge from literature rooted in history and move toward the more recent, yet historically-grounded, work of feminist scholars rooted in theories of the body/embodiment and sport.

Of foundational interest to feminist scholars tracing the history of the feminine ideal are Mary Douglas and Erving Goffman. Both anthropologists, Douglas and Goffman presented theories of the body that interrogate the way we inhabit our bodies in culture. Douglas (1984) was particularly interested in the boundaries and definitions of the body (biological and cultural), while Goffman (1971) was more interested in "the presentation of the self in everyday life": the way we perform core elements of our identities we believe to be rooted in our bodies, such as gender, though they are culturally inscribed. These theories established a few core principles that have provided the scaffolding upon which later work, such as Bolin and Bordo's, was built. They established that the body serves as an inscription of culture, a marker of the underlying structures of power relations. The way the body is marked, unmarked, adorned, and treated reveals the priorities, values, and organization of the society it inhabits

The work of Susan Bordo and Sandra Bartky take up the idea of female embodiment and the feminine ideal through a combination of popular cultural, historical, and textual analysis, paired with theories of embodiment and power. Bartky's influential essay *Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power* expounds upon how the slender toned female body ideal of the 1980's was an embodiment of Biopolitical power: disciplined, restrained, and "docile." Foucault's "docile" body is a body in service to power, reproducing and producing according to the dictates that serve the oppressor, via the bodies of the oppressed.

Bartky extends Foucault's Biopolitical theory into a deeper interrogation of the docile female body, which is a body that is small, restrained, comported with deference, and objectified, through processes enacted by female subjects themselves. Following Foucault's theorizations of power in modernity, Bartky emphasizes the importance of recognizing that it is women themselves who internalize ideologies that render them defenseless, inferior, object, and abject, disciplining and laboring to construct themselves in accordance to societal norms and dictates. (107) This essay had a monumental impact on later scholars of femininity and embodiment because it did two things: it drew attention to the ways in which women were reproducing their own oppression while also (in the Foucauldian tradition) noting the historical and material circumstances that produce ideologies of power.

Susan Bordo has famously extended Bartky's work by laying out theories of the slender body, and later the muscular body, as literal embodiments of the contradictions of late capitalism. (Bordo:2003, 187) She asserts that the double bind of late capitalism-which encourages gross consumption alongside a disciplined and controlled medium of production-leads to extremes (discipline yourself, but also consume as much as you can) that are accelerated along with the intensification of commodity logics in late capitalism. Bordo also connects the

hard body to militarism, arguing that the muscular body is impermeable to external threats, such as terrorism (199), a finding that has particularly interesting implications for the growing acceptance of female muscularity in our present moment. However for Bordo, in a culture of gross excesses in consumption fighting death and degradation is the ultimate mastery, and so tightness (visible only with a low body fat percentage) signifies control and discipline, and is accompanied by an unprecedented emphasis on youth. (153)

Youth, in the form of the un-developed non-reproductive female body, is equated with thinness. Bordo argues that "anxiety over women's uncontrollable hungers tends to peak "in periods of gross environmental and social crisis," as well as "during periods when women are becoming independent and are asserting themselves politically and socially." (161) This conclusion is in some ways affirmed by Hatch's finding that that the tomboy aesthetic in the 1970's, that of the female-bodied pre-pubescent boy, was a reaction to the crisis of innocence in American culture at the time. This crisis resulted from cultural and political disillusionment and was projected onto the bodies of women via the dominant standard of beauty, represented in film as the pre-pubescent tomboy (81)

Connections between androgyny, youth, and athleticism embodied in the tomboy can be further elucidated through research on the history of the feminine ideal viewed through the lens of sport. Susan Cahn has written the most comprehensive history on women in sport: Coming On Strong (1994). Cahn's intervention is broad, as she analyses a chronological history of women's sports participation in America, while taking into consideration cultural and economic forces that, by affecting women's sports participation, greatly shaped American standards of femininity. She draws a number of conclusions about athleticism, femininity, and America in the 20th century, outlining through her history how women's sports participation served as a weathervane

for gender relations and the forces that determine them, as (fashion and the body has done for scholars of those subjects). Chief among them perhaps is her connection between the emergence of female sexual agency in the 20's and the rise of the lesbian threat, which played out largely in the arena of women's sports. (169) In her words, "the 1920's and 1930's mark a transition period in which changing sexual practices and beliefs laid the groundwork for later associations between women's athletics and "mannish" lesbianism," which served as a form of social control to limit women's athletic and physical development to the norms of ideal femininity. (169) Cahn also asserts that one reason why women were encouraged to participate in athletics during the 1920's was the nationalist project, in that sports was framed as productive of a heathy reproductive system for women who would reproduce the nation. (81) This athletic beauty ideal would decline in the 30's only to rise up again in the early 40's (WWII), and then decline again until the late 1960's, a pattern that matches moments of wartime in the United States.

Cahn, through an extensive review of primary source material and interviews, also addresses how class, race, and sexuality played a huge role in how and why women participated in athletics, and how these categories of identification affected the way female athletics were perceived. She illustrates how working-class sexuality was under great scrutiny and therefore working class female athletics in the early 20th century drew more intense control than middle or upper class athletics. (75) She also explains how black femininity was excluded from the realm of the feminine for the duration of these years, to the extent that sports in which black female athletes dominated, such as track and field, were thus labelled "masculine" sports. (139) Cahn's work has served as a foundation for later scholars working to trace the terms of femininity via discourses of sport, as the boundaries between the masculine and the feminine prove more visible in this traditionally "masculine" arena.

Michael Messner is one such scholar who has done work on the "new" athletic ideal and the impact of women's sports participation on ideal femininity, arguing that women's sports has been a contested terrain of gender struggle. In his 1988 article Sports and Male Domination: The Female Athlete as Contested Ideological Terrain, he argues in support of Cahn that "crises of masculinity" lead to greater scrutiny of women's sports participation, as well as increasing dominance by men, to the exclusion of women. Leslie Heywood, Angela McRobbie, Anita Harris, and Dori Geissler add to this canon by making connections between increasing girls sports participation and the athletic feminine ideal in the 1970's and 1990's to the rise of GirlPower and neoliberal capitalism (with its need for a new, disciplined female labor force). Heywood and Geissler's work examine in some detail how the growing participation of girls in sports led to new definitions of femininity, definitions that included an athletic body along with increased aggressiveness, competitiveness, and leadership qualities, qualities agreeable to neoliberal capitalist labor and consumer market demands. (Heywood:2002; Geissler)

Anne Bolin, one of the foundational scholars of female muscularity utilizes the work of Banner and Freedman to trace an outline of female body types throughout the 20th century, concluding with her own research: female bodybuilders in the 1980's. In her 1992 essay Vandalized Vanity Bolin found that:

> Throughout history the athletic image has made its appearance as an unconstructed and linear form coexisting or even, as in the 1920's, supplanting the dominant hour-glass contour, nevertheless at no time has the muscled woman been regarded as the paragon of beauty. Muscles and femininity are representationally exclusive categories…Women whose muscles reach a degree of size indicative of underlying strength are in fact denoting a marginal body type. (88-89)

She uses this historical lens to examine patterns of power, domination, and resistance within her ethnographic cohort as a "reflexive" or "embodied" ethnographer, i.e., a participant

observer in the truest sense of the word: she is a bodybuilder herself. Her focus on the "new" athletic ideal, or "jock chic", of the 1960's and the 1980's reveals that what we are observing today is not entirely unique, and that we must make distinctions between female muscularity today and past parallel trends. (If such distinctions can be found.) Bolin herself makes one such distinction, by drawing our attention to the important difference between (lean, small) muscles for the sake of appearance, or the male gaze, and (larger) muscles developed for functionality. This difference is integral to this project, as CrossFit culture emphasizes functionality over aesthetics.

Yet as Bolin states so directly, none of these definitions of femininity in the 20th century included large muscularity. A toned and controlled athletic physique with some degree of musculature, yes, at times, but never was this ideal largely muscled, and certainly never anything close to what the female body is capable of, on average.[49] All this is in stark contrast to the recent prevalence of the (more largely) muscled female body in the popular media. This historiography is the beginning of the historical work necessary to understand why.

I suspect that a combination of factors have led to an increasing number of women building and carrying muscles on their "feminine" bodies, if we may call them that. The rise of sport as a means of socializing girls to be productive, disciplined laborers in the New Economy has of course had material effects on the bodies, habits, and self-presentation of the women they became. Niche marketing in a post-modern image-based culture in which identity is fragmented, flexible, and up for sale has of course had an impact, as athletic bodies developed through athletic trends such as CrossFit sell products, and these bodies themselves have become the

[49] This capacity to grow large muscles has been supported by Shari Dworkin's very convincing ethnographic research on women in gyms, which reveals that women who lift weights actively monitor their muscular growth, expending a great deal of energy limiting their size, while simultaneously attempting to get lean and gain strength. (Dworkin 2002, 2003) Also, recent studies on the physiology of women's responses to strength training confirms Dworkin's findings. (Abe; O'Hagan; Nuckols; Nindl)

product that can be desired and bought (one's image is one's value in many sectors of Western economies). Finally, as the Western world has become more militarized, perpetually on the defensive against external threats and more in need of female soldiers than ever before, the bodies of women can now permissibly become hardened exteriors ready to protect the nation, in symbolic and material terms. So then, does it remain that "men act and women appear?" It would seem that yes, women still appear, but they also act, in sport, in combat, in popular culture. And men act, but they also appear, as popular culture representations of masculinity have widened to include men as objects as well as subjects. In the section that follows I will more extensively explore recent history, tracing the impact of neoliberal or "late" capitalism, militarism, and other social forces on American ideologies of femininity and female embodiment.

The Increasing Acceptability of Female Muscularity

While theorists started noticing a shift toward increasing acceptance of female muscularity beginning in the late 70's and continuing into the late eighties and early nineties (again, coinciding with market changes and the increasing popularity of girls sports), the ideal was slim and toned, rather than large and muscular. (Bolin; Dworkin; Bordo) This is in contrast to increasingly common popular representations of "ideal" women with larger musculature than we have seen idealized in the past. What's more, popular discourses on women and fitness have shifted toward an acceptance of weight training and muscularity (not just a lean, toned physique), resulting in an athletic appearance AND functional strength. This is a marked shift from traditional standards of feminine beauty, which prioritized a slender yet curvy physique denoting the frailty and passivity of the 20th century feminine ideal, an ideal that was not functional. Steinfeldt et al discuss this evolution toward a new, muscular feminine ideal, citing Gruber:

> Examples of this new ideal are omnipresent in the media, with contemporary actresses displaying well-defined muscles on screen (Gruber 2007); an increase in magazine publications and articles focusing on increased muscularity in women (Thompson et al. 1999); and athletes posing for Sports Illustrated swimsuit issues instead of traditional thin models (Gruber 2007).

Figure 16 An example of FitSpiration. Source: CollegeTimes

Steinfeldt et al. found that women themselves are beginning to discuss their aspirations for increased muscular size and definition, in an effort to attain an ideal that was considered a disdainful deviance only a decade before. They surveyed perceptions of female muscularity in female college athletes across the 2000's through their quantitative analysis, which indicated that 84% of female college athletes surveyed desired to increased muscularity in 2011. This finding contrasts with what Krane found in 2001, which is that female college athletes overwhelmingly did NOT desire increased muscularity, as they found it disagreeably associated with masculinity.

The work of Steinfeldt et al. and Gruber documenting an increase in muscularity for the American feminine ideal is supplemented by more recent survey data that showcases this shift post-2010. For example, Boszik et al. found that female college students, when presented with images of female beauty pageant winners, chose to idealize more muscular physiques over simply thin physiques (albeit all of the examples were relatively slender when compared to American averages). They attribute increasing desire for high levels of muscularity in college-aged women (when compared to survey results from prior decades) to the influence of

"fitspiration", a widely popular social media trend that "inspires" women to develop their bodies through fitness. (See figure 15) Boszik et al. also note the adjustments that other researches are making in the last few years as they begin to incorporate muscularity into ideal body surveys of female subjects:

> The Sociocultural Attitudes Towards Appearance Scale-4 (SATAQ-4; Schaefer et al. 2015), a well-established measure of thin-ideal internalization, includes five items designed to assess this new focus on muscularity and fitness. An exploratory factor analysis confirmed that this scale is an important dimension of the construct of thin-ideal internalization. Among female adolescents, a desire for enhanced muscle tone has been found as evidenced by the use of protein powder, steroids or other substances, as well as alteration of diet or increased exercise (Eisenberg et al. 2012). (Boszik et al. 2)

The rising incidence of muscularity in body idealization surveys for women, coupled with increasing media idealization of muscularity on women's bodies, suggests that increased acceptability and valorization of some degree of female muscularity, arguably more than in previous decades (particularly when considering upper body musculature ideals), is an indication that this "trend" in the feminine ideal may signal a significant shift.

Figure 17 Nike's new muscular female mannequins, which started appearing in stores in 2016. Source: Unleashed.

More evidence can be found via a cultural comparison of the decades leading up to this shift. The late 2000's saw the advent of female mixed martial arts fighting, comparable to boxing in its characterization as a violent, aggressive, physically demanding masculine domain. For the first time in history female fighters aggressively squared off against one another on national television, their large, defined muscles straining, faces bruised and bloody, to the cheers of enormous audiences and sell-out crowds. In prior years

such a display would have disgusted and horrified popular audiences, because of both the masculinization of the female bodies and the physical violence and aggression they were enacting upon one another. Concurrently, CrossFit exploded in the United States: local CrossFit gyms and teams became widely popular around 2012, and the marketing of the CrossFit Games quickly emerged as a highly successful televised sporting event. CrossFit bodies, both female and male, are highly muscled and lean, visibly powerful and efficient for functional lifting, gymnastics, and endurance exercises[50].

My survey results[51], which I include in the following chapter, confirm this cultural shift within this CrossFit community. It may be easy to dismiss this community's body idealizations as the result of a subculture "niche," however, these individuals move through the world with attention and care to how their bodies are perceived by others, and do not attach themselves to any deviant or resistant movements or identities. I also have my own embodied experience to offer as evidence of this cultural shift: ten years ago my large upper body muscularity was often met with derision or questioning, whereas around 2012 I started to notice friends, family, and even strangers validating my (female) muscularity. In fact, it was by noticing changes in the ways strangers were reacting to my muscularity that drew my attention to CrossFit as a potential cause, and eventually to this project's conception.

These significant developments beg the question as to why it is only now that such displays of "female masculinity" are becoming acceptable, and what's more, intelligible as female bodies, thereby shifting the terms of femininity. News and magazine articles, blogs, and

[50] Thank you to Jennifer Traxler for sending me images she found in the world of increasingly muscular female bodies, including a personal photo she took of the new muscular mannequins at the Nike store in Irvine, CA.
[51] I designed an original survey for this project, with the help of an artist, based on the work of Novella et al. and Grossbard et al. At the time of this project's inception, no surveys existed that included muscularity on a continuum of body types, alongside options for non-toned, toned, and muscular female bodies. Rather, Novella and Grossbard's study included muscularity separate from slender and thin ideals.

internet news outlets are documenting this trend, with the phrase "strong is the new skinny" prompting some to question it as perhaps just another standard of beauty women feel pressure to live up to. A recent Huffington Post feature article by Jennipher Walters highlighted this issue:

> Again, I love strength training and think everyone should do it a few times a week. But a new obsession with looking a certain way, even if it is a healthier way of life (which, many could debate as many fitness models shown in these internet memes have highly-restrictive diets and extreme workouts)? No way.

Even the Women's Tennis Association, with their "strong is beautiful" campaign, has extended itself into this terrain, touting strength and muscularity as a form of beauty suitable for popular consumption, with their ad campaigns overtly sexualizing what was once considered masculine physical display in female form. (See figure 16)

I contend that none of these developments would have been possible in the early 2000's, as popular culture was at that time unwilling to consider muscularity and female physical aggression as positive female traits, at least not to the degree we are witnessing at this juncture. Again, the timing of the transition across the first decade of the 21st century is interesting, as it coincides with increased demand for women in the United States military, including combat roles, as will be discussed below.

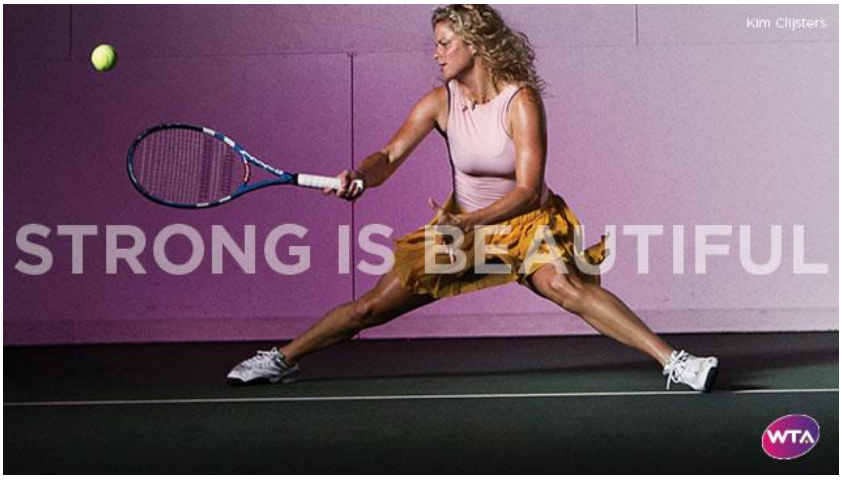

Figure 18 Women's Tennis Association "Strong is Beautiful" Campaign, 2014. Source: WTA

One final piece of evidence that points to this marked cultural shift in the late 2000's and early 2010's is the decline of acts and portrayals of the recuperation of femininity by women in

sport. Since Title IX and through the mid 2000's female athletes enacted and were represented through acts that signaled the recuperation of femininity. That is to say, female athletes (and those who represented them) often toned down their masculinity while emphasizing their femininity. This was done most often with references to heterosexual relationships (Krane: 2004) or through feminine styling, such as heavy makeup, ribbons, wearing pink, etc (Messner: 1998). The emphasis on heterosexuality in particular has long been utilized in the world of sport as a means by which to defend one's femininity and refusal to challenge existing patriarchal structures. Janet S. Fink discusses this issue in her 2012 article Homophobia and the Marketing of Female Athletes and Women's Sport:

> As an institution, sport possesses ubiquitous appeal (Fink, 2008) which renders it, "one of the most powerful economic, social, and political institutions on the planet" (Kane, 2011) . As such, it is a potent tool in the reinforcement of male hegemony. By their very nature, female athletes who exhibit strength, power, and superior athletic ability threaten this male hegemony (Fink et al., 2012; Messner & Sabo, 1990). Women "naturally" are not "supposed" to be as strong, athletically gifted, or powerful as men. Females are "supposed" to be "naturally" feminine, perhaps graceful in movement, but weaker and less "genuinely" athletic. As such, female athletes' exhibitions of physical excellence fracture long held, "common sense" notions of gender roles, patriarchy, and male hegemony (Fink et al., 2011; Messner, 2009; Hardin & Greer, 2009). In response, athletically superior female athletes, particularly those who do not conform to a more feminine and heterosexual archetype, are typically labeled as "unnatural" or "deviant," and often, lesbian (Griffin, 1992; Sartore & Cunningham, 2009).

In this way the label "lesbian" has worked to censure women considered a threat to the order of gender dimorphism. The power of this discourse historically is overwhelming, pushing countless female athletes into the closet and limiting the potential of women athletes and non-athletes to develop their bodies to their potential. The fact that homophobia as an enforcement of femininity in women's sports has been so consistent and so long-standing makes it even more significant that this discourse began to change, yet again, in the late 2000's, as is evident in the increasing numbers of female athletes who have come out as lesbian, that label most-feared.

While there is still rampant homophobia in many domains of U.S. culture, including women's sport, it would appear that this is changing, to some degree. Though admittedly complicated, it could be argued that increasing acceptance of homosexuality in general is a sign of the decreasing power of the gender binary and the patriarchal power that relies upon it, and therefore increasing visibility of lesbian female athletes could be seen as an indication that an emphasis on heterosexuality is no longer necessary as an act serving to recuperate femininity in women's sport. In other words, the strong, "masculine" bodies of these women do not need to be softened or feminized in the same ways they did ten years ago. This extrapolation, when combined with the increased prevalence of images of female muscularity in the popular media, leads me to hypothesize that it is not only social components of idealized femininity that have changed in recent years, but the physical ideal as well. At the very least we are witnessing an increasing acceptance of female muscularity, to a degree that we have not witnessed before. What remains to be discovered and discussed are the reasons why.

The Coincidental Evolution of Neoliberalism and Female Muscularity

Title IX and the Rise of Girl Power

> Girl Power! is the power that girls have, individually and collectively, to be the best they can be—confident, fulfilled, and feeling good about themselves. Girl Power! helps girls make the most of their lives and pursue their own interests and talents. Girl Power! is about telling all girls that they are worthy of succeeding, that opportunities do exist, and that expressing themselves is okay. Girl Power! is about being healthy— physically and mentally. Girl Power! girls can grow into strong and competent women. (Girl Power! campaign pamphlet, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1996, cited from Geissler).

The passage of Title IX and the popularization of girls sports marks a significant rupture in modern conceptions of girlhood and the socialization of girls and women. (Harris; Geissler)

Its coincidence with neoliberalism has been marked by few scholars (Geissler; Heywood and Dworkin: 2002; Heywood: 2007), despite the fact that sport effectively develops qualities ideal for laborers in "New" de-industrialized neoliberal economies, such as aggressiveness, competitiveness, leadership, and physical and mental discipline. The rise of girls sports through the 1990's paralleled an acceleration of globalization and an intensification of neoliberal ideologies. This intensification occurred on an individual level through the internalization of these ideologies along with the imperative toward individual self-care and self-policing, which then are incorporated into ideologies of subjectivity, such as masculinities and femininities. (Brown: 1992; Foucault: 1979)

Anita Harris and Angela McRobbie were the first to note that in the 1990's sports for girls, and the GirlPower movement more generally, were vehicles of these processes, promoted to the general public and parents in particular via a discourse of security and protection. Sports became a means by which parents could keep their daughters safe from dangers public and personal, such as depression, teen pregnancy, and drugs. Inderpal Grewal also identified one of the functions of this discourse, as a means enabling further parental control of children in their socialization in the service to the state and its ideologies:

> Thus the Biopower that produces forms of gender through Title IX and girls' sports in the United States works along with regulatory mechanisms based on race, class, and gender for mobilizing "parental concerns" for the welfare of children. These technologies include keeping girls healthy and thin through sports activities, keeping them "out of trouble" (as any sexual activity is called), and preparing them for college. (33)

For Grewal, Title IX was the perfect mechanism by which social control of girls could be extended, through the figure of the "security mom" in the service of neoliberal ideologies and enacted by the state. Dorie A. Geissler's work on the topic, building off of Leslie Heywood's

2007 article *Producing Girls: Empire, Sport, and the Neoliberal Body*, illustrates this relation through her explanation of the development of discourses around girls and sports:

> I argue that the emergence of girl-sport-knowledge is conditioned by three key developments of the 1960s and 1970s: 1) The self-esteem movement, particularly the emergence of self-esteem as a psychological construct correlated to adolescent behavior and capable of being quantified, 2) The proliferation of the sport sciences (sport and exercise physiology, psychology, sociology) which established sport and exercise as physical, social, and psychological constructs and valid objects of scientific investigation, and 3) the emergence of neoliberalism as an economic orthodoxy, and by extension, a technology for governing subjects who are constituted as self-managing, autonomous, and enterprising. (Geissler 12)

These discourses reached their peak intensification during the 1990's and early 2000's, as the "girl power" movement became mainstream, enacted through discourses of the state, local institutions, and the mainstream media:

> Part social transformation, part niche market, during the 1990s, girl power and its embodied form, the empowered female, became ubiquitous, entering mainstream cultural arenas through a diverse range of forms and contexts including among others, marketing slogans, child welfare programs, television, film, music, and mainstream magazines. (Geissler, 4)

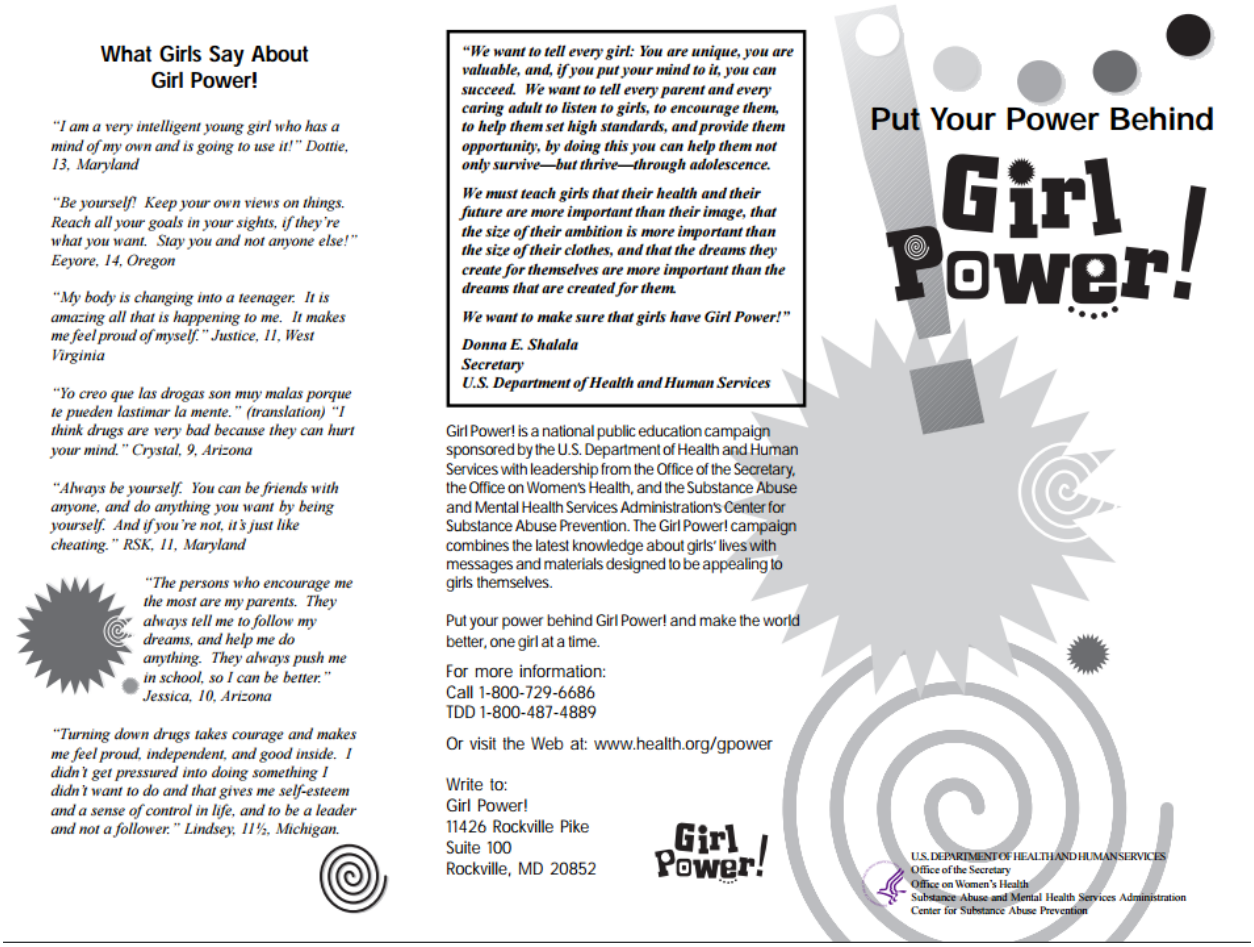

Figure 19 Girl Power Campaign Pamphlet (1996). Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

One particularly salient aspect of the girl power movement was Nike's "Let Me Play" advertising campaign, which illustrated the increasingly dominant rhetoric that the participation of girls in sports would prevent the horrors of teen pregnancy, drug abuse, and low self-esteem. The video shows images of diverse young girls, with sweet expressions, saying to the camera "if you let me play sports…" and then stating "I will be sixty percent less likely to get breast cancer", "more likely to leave a man who beats me," " I will be less likely to get pregnant before I want to," "I will learn what it means to be strong", etc."[52] Most significantly "I will learn what

[52] http://youtu.be/AQ_XSHpIbZE

it means to be strong, if you let me play sports" is the last line in the ad. This message would not have appealed to the previous generation.

This particular advertising campaign [53] was well-funded and pervasive[54] and it illustrates the connection between the ideological production of new female laboring subjects in the neoliberal era and the niche markets that were developing around these subjects. This production of new consumers is best expressed by Geissler in her re-working of Anita Harris' research on girlhood in the 1990's:

> The discourse of sport-inflected girl power, and particularly its reliance on the category of self-esteem can be seen as an element in, and extension of Harris' (2004b) "future girl". The construction of the can-do future girl, in Harris' view reflects the needs of the new global economy which relies on individuals with flexibility who see their lives as projects and who will take responsibility for their failure rather than looking to the larger economic structure or to the state. In this context, the project of self realization is supported by a discourse of limitless choice– of consumer products, life-course decisions, and identities – that are instruments of self-production. (Geissler 224)

Because girls' sports was framed as imperative to the protection of girlhood it appealed to parents' desire to secure girls and girlhood without throwing into question dominant conceptions of femininity. Sports became something that would help girls grow into strong, successful women, women who could be responsible for their own well-being, independent both economically and emotionally, because in the evolving neoliberal landscape "women's greater

[53] It is interesting to note that while the majority of the publicity around this campaign was regarding its emphasis on girls sports, another "Let Me Play" commercial represented the importance of sport to the economic development of the Global South, posing an interesting juxtaposition between Western women and economic development in the Global South in the mid-1990's (super interesting!): http://youtu.be/s18OG2Hyz6E This parallel, though beyond the scope of this project, is interesting in both its content and timing: as girls and women as docile laborers were being developed in the West, the Global South was being ushered into its own new neoliberal regime. The relevance of sports and its attendant (masculine) behaviors and personality attributes to both of these interrelated processes (and the history of the feminization of women and colonial subjects) would be a fascinating topic for further research.

[54] I remember it playing in my living room in the mid-1990's, right around the time my dad signed me up for my first team sport.

autonomy is now linked to an expectation, that all individuals, regardless of their sex or domestic responsibilities, will support themselves." (Fernandez-Kelly 1110)

Leslie Heywood in her 2007 article presents a critique of girls' sports "as a space where girls learn to become the ideal subjects of a new global economy that relies on individuals with flexibility who are trained to blame their inevitable 'failures' on themselves rather than the system their lives are structured within." (113) The result of this is that "female athletes are no longer 'deviant', they are normalized, serving as 'role models', the 'can do' girls who have gotten it right…can-do mapped directly onto her biceps and supple lines of her flexible, lean shoulders." (113) Heywood does the work of connecting shifting discourses of American ideal femininity to neoliberal ideologies that support Biopolitical capitalism:

> Furthermore this construction of girls as the new possibilities for success works to produce subjects who see their lives as projects and who will take personal responsibility for their failure rather than looking to the larger economic structure or to the state. Late modern times, Harris writes, "are characterized by dislocation , flux , and globalization, and demand citizens who are flexible and self-realizing. Direct intervention and guidance by institutions have been replaced by self-governance; power has devolved onto individuals to regulate themselves through the right choices." (Harris 2004a: 2) and "public policy often employs the language of responsibility and enterprise to fill the gap left by deregulation." (Harris 2004a: 4) (Heywood: 2007, 103)

Yet Heywood's "can-do" girls of the early 2000's are defined in large part by their physical appearance of flexibility, which for Heywood maps them directly onto the model of subjectivity outlined by Hardt and Negri. Hardt and Negri's Biopolitical subject is flexible, independent, and capable, fit for neoliberal capitalism's demand for flexible, independent, capable laborers and consumers in a global economy that requires these characteristics (you don't hold one job your whole life, or one skill-set, or one identity, but several, and you must adapt to survive). (Heywood: 2007 102)

While CrossFit does encourage some degree of physical flexibility, as it is necessary for success in the sport and progress in the box, the body of the CrossFitter does not read so much flexible as it does powerful. It is, however, infinitely capable, defined as fit across five modal domains. According the CrossFit.com's own definition: "The program prepares trainees for any physical contingency—not only for the unknown but for the unknowable, too. Our specialty is not specializing." This is in itself perhaps a more convincing form of flexibility, and supports Heywood's reading of Hardt and Negri's ideal Neoliberal subject.[55]

However, in the late 1990's and early 2000's, as American society increasingly demanded its female subjects be independent, capable, and competitive, idealized feminine autonomy was not intended to come at the expense of traditional femininity, and heterosexuality served as a gatekeeper to these processes until quite recently. As Mary Jo Kane illustrates in her article on Media representations of female athletes in the mid-1990's:

> Female athletes are trivialized when they are portrayed in ways that do not treat them, or their athletic achievements, seriously. This is accomplished by focusing on the off-the-court characteristics and behavior of sportswomen, such as their femininity and personal lives, rather than their hard work, discipline, and contributions as gifted athletes. Female athletes are sexualized either overtly, by portraying them as sexual objects, or more covertly, by overemphasizing their physical attractiveness. In either case, female athleticism is ignored or devalued. (108)

These processes, in addition to the public stigma attached to certain sports and athletes as associated with lesbianism, worked to reinforce the limited power of sports in altering the self-concepts of girls. Perhaps femininity would allow a bit of tenacity, self-confidence, and competitiveness, but overt physical masculinity or competitiveness within the domain of men would not be tolerated, at least until very recently, as we've seen with the recent rise of female muscularity. Which begs the question: why the lag between the popular acceptability of the

[55] Heywood briefly references this reading of CrossFit's modal flexibility in her 2015 article Strange Borrowing, however I did not take my interpretation from her article.

social aspects of female socialization through sports (leadership, aggression, competitiveness, teamwork) and the physical attributes necessary to be a successful female athlete (muscularity and power)? In other words, it seems it has been acceptable for girls and women to be competitive and independent and aggressive (to some degree) since at least the 1990's, while widespread acceptability of female muscularity and physical aggression did not arise until the early 2010's.

One obvious explanation for this lag has been suggested by several scholars who have analyzed popular media representations of female athletes from the 1970's onward: muscularity and physical aggression were considered too threatening to the patriarchal order. This explanation echoes the findings of scholars who have found recent evidence of the recuperation of femininity[56] by female corporate leaders (Yaniga), athletes (Kane), and Bodybuilders (Bolin; Heywood; Shilling and Bunsell), a recuperation that serves the purpose of "softening" their gender transgressions. Considering this explanation for the slow acceptance of female muscularity and physical aggression it must then be considered: why the change now? Why in the early 2010's did "strong" become "the new skinny?"

The Biopolitical Breakdown: Neoliberalism and Empire

> *"We know that the dominant discourses of sexual identity in overindustrialized sectors, spun across national lines through media and travel industries, seem to be changing, albeit in uneven ways. In these parts of the world, the network of equations among sex, gender, sexual practice, and desire on which normative heterosexuality as a matrix of intelligibility came to depend under Fordism is being disrupted. The discrete asymmetrical opposition between male and female is being thrown into question, pressuring the imaginary logic of opposites and sex-gender equations that the prevailing*

[56] The recuperation of femininity, as utilized the scholars cited here, means that women in male domains will often emphasize other aspects of their femininity via as hair, nails, makeup, and clothing as a means of "recuperating" their femininity.

heterogender system once relied on. In the media images generated in overdeveloped capitalist centers especially, more permeable, fluid, ambiguously coded sexual identities are allowed, even promoted." (Hennessey, 107)

Building off the work of Dorie Geissler and Leslie Heywood, I propose two primary interrelated forces behind the increasing prevalence and acceptability of female muscularity in the dominant culture. As I discuss above, neoliberalism can be connected to growing acceptance and idealization of female muscularity as an attendant side-effect of Title IX, the women's empowerment movement(s), and increased female participation in sports. It stands to reason that the material conditions that led to the need for a differently socialized female labor force, resulting in a state and corporate-sponsored campaign to increase female participation in sport, would have the attendant, if delayed, effect of influencing the physical construction of women. However, this effect did not occur within the first thirty years of this evolution in cultural values (in contrast to the shift in social norms which occurred most noticeably from the 1990's onward). Rather, the shift in physical norms occurred very slowly, then seemed to tip suddenly in the late 2000's.

Therefore, while it seems clear that this shift in the physical female ideal can be partially explained in the same way that the social shift can be explained, this cannot be the entire picture. I propose that a few other factors tied to the neoliberal explanation, combined with the increased demand for female participation in the United States military and a heightened climate of militarization also contributed to this phenomenon.

The need for a flexible, efficient, non-gender dimorphic productive labor force in information economies has been documented by many scholars.[57] Juanita Elias has documented

[57] Hennessey, Hardt and Negri, Harvey, Elias, Deleuze and Guattari, Appadurai

the Malaysian process of transition to an information-based economy, in her article *The Gender Politics of Economic Competitiveness in Malaysia's Transition to a Knowledge Economy*:

> As a number of studies of Malaysia's economic transition since 1969 have shown, labour markets were an important site for economic reforms centred around the construction of 'flexible' and 'efficient' depoliticised and feminised workers (Ong 1987; Crinis 2002; Elias 2004). These studies underline the significance of gender relations and identities to processes of state-led integration into the global market economy. (535) Central to government initiatives to bolster economic competitiveness is the increased salience of ideas concerning the need to construct flexible, productive, skilled and competitive workers. The Ninth Malaysia Plan (2006–2010), for example, states that 'efforts will be intensified to develop knowledge workers who are competitive, flexible, dynamic and performance minded' (Malaysia Government 2005: 259).

Elias' findings replicate the theorizations of Rosemary Hennessey in her assessment of the impact of neoliberalism on increasingly flexible gender identities:

> "As postmodernism is fast becoming the cultural common sense of postindustrial capitalism, it brings in its wake porous, gender-flexible, and playful subjects more adequate to the complexities of multinational commodity exchange where the expressive self and transcendent morality of liberal humanism have become embarrassingly inadequate." (Hennessey, 68)

That is to say, the gender binary, the nuclear family, and patriarchy are no longer essential to capitalist production, rather, all three hinder the continued expansion and growth of capital in information-based economies. What's more, sexual and social reproduction, traditionally considered women's work in much of the world, has become increasingly privatized and therefore another sector of private profit accrual and production, while concurrently enabling the utilization of women as a private labor resource. Fordist industrialism, which necessitated the nuclear family structure, patriarchal organization, and consequently, heterosexuality and sexual and gender dimorphism, is now virtually obsolete in the West. We are encountering an economic system in which flexibility, mobility, and consumption, in both the physical and subjective sense, are the order of the day.

However, these explanations do little to help us understand what role female muscularity and physical aggression could possibly play in a functional sense. In other words, at this point, the above articulations only serve to characterize the recent acceptance of female muscularity as a by-product of the increasing obsolescence of the gender binary and the socialization of docile female subjects through sport. Yet if female muscularity was merely a by-product of sport, it would be down-played as it was through the 1990's and most of the 2000's, compensated for through other moves to recuperate femininity, such as allusions to heterosexual relationships or feminine styling, as discussed above. However, what we are presently observing in popular media is almost a *valorization* of female muscularity, or at least physical strength and larger musculature than past decades, in stark contrast to recent previous conceptions of the feminine ideal. Further explanation is necessary, and found, in the realms of niche marketing, generational differences in socialization, and the impact of a growing need for women in the military and combat roles.

Figure 20 CrossFit promotion via Instagram 2018. Source: CrossFit Official Instagram.

Niche marketing is one element referred to above in the success of the Girl Power movement and the participation of Nike and other corporate interests. This element is also relevant to changing physical norms and does a lot to explain the seemingly sudden growth in the popular glorification of female muscularity in younger (mostly white, socioeconomically advantaged) Americans. CrossFit, like

Nike's participation in the Girl Power movement, stands out in this regard. CrossFit, in collaboration with Reebok, has effectively created the equivalent of a social movement that has taken over fitness and athletic culture and its influence is evident in a Saturday perusal of ESPN, a cursory review of any sports magazine or website, or a visit to the gym. Its popularization as a fitness regime as well as a lifestyle, community, and competitive arena open to anyone with or without affiliation has earned it the classification of a culture craze. (Upton) CrossFit is appealing to a lot of people, and it enjoys considerable press coverage, corporate sponsorships, and product partnerships. It is one of many fitness-oriented niche marketing products that one could associate with the increasing desirability of female muscularity, but it is arguably the most accessible and pervasive in popular media representations of female bodies as largely-muscled and strong. What's more, it's connected to other neoliberal ideologies of individual and team fulfillment of potential, delayed gratification, discipline and hard work, and competitiveness. Its rise to prominence between the years 2009 and 2013 is notable within the context of this analysis.

Also notable is the fact that the first generation of females to be socialized in the wake of the Girl Power movement, that is, the generation described in the analysis above as the first to be socialized through sport, has reached their late 20's and early 30's. Those younger than this generation experienced arguably even more sports participation, and therefore it is bears significance that as these individuals have only recently risen to positions of authority in various cultural venues. It stands to reason that cultural norms previously most resistant to change, particularly those influenced by sports participation, such as physical strength and aggressiveness, would be ripe for change just as the cultural industry guard begins to shift.

Along with neoliberalism's demand for flexible identity categories, the influence of niche marketing, and the rise of the Girl Power generation, the impacts of heightening militarism and increased demand for women in military roles also serve to explain the shift toward the glorification of female muscularity. In her book Gender and the Military, Helena Carreiras outlines a growing need for female military participation in Western Nations. Through a comprehensive analysis of NATO forces as well as the military operations and rationale of several Western countries, Carreiras concludes that

> Two main types of influences have been identified to explain the various rhythms and characteristics of female military recruitment, as well as policy orientations regarding their presence in the armed forces. On the one hand, social and cultural factors seem to frame the process and generally create the background conditions for women's military recruitment. Such factors arise from global social change concerning patterns of women's social and political participation, their entry in the labor market and democratic pressures toward more egalitarian gender values. On the other hand-and probably wielding a more direct influence-there are transformations within military organizations deriving from major shifts in international relations as well as from technological change: the inversion of the ratio between combat and support functions, organizational fragmentation and organizational specialization, the end of the mass armies and the development of all volunteer forces, increasing professionalization and size reduction. All these changes have determined the need for more qualified personnel and underlined the dependence of the military on global society. If, additionally, the trend to decreasing birthrates and the legitimacy crisis (Harries-Jenkins and Van Doorn 1976) that makes military service unattractive to young generations in Western developed countries is taken into consideration, the result is a rather complex picture concerning the factors that may exert influence over women's military recruitment. (Carreiras, 12)

So while the neoliberal political and economic shifts described in this project thus far have contributed to the creation of new possibilities for women in the military, the creation of a demand for their service is more complex. Technological innovations and research on women's fitness and training have the potential to reduce the impact of sexual dimorphism in combat situations by over 70%, (Nindl 2016). This factor, along with intensified and increasing discourses of securitization have led to increased recruitment and facilitation of American

women in combat. While a direct correlation between these economic, political, and cultural transformations and muscularity as a feminine ideal cannot be made at this time (and might never be made), it stands to reason that they may be related, particularly when considering the types of women American military branches aim to recruit.

For example, recent American military ad campaigns differ from those produced in the early 2000's, not only in the number of females represented within the ads but in the roles in which they are depicted. (Rowland) Increasingly, women are portrayed within discourses of toughness and humanitarianism (as are the men), and are shown in physically demanding special ops situations, as well as training scenarios that imply combat readiness. One recent Navy ad, titled "Tough Piece of Work,", aims to specifically target females who identify themselves as "physically tough". Set against loud aggressive electric guitar, and depicting women in a variety of physically grueling scenarios, and held to "the same standards as the men" the video tells women "you don't have to be a man to do this work," you just need to "be one tough piece of work." [58]

Figure 21 Female U.S. Marines check their rifles while on deployment in Afghanistan, 2012. Source: Stars and Strips; US Marines.

This ad however is not representative of ads that reach the wider population: it's a spec ops ad, Explosive Ordinance Disposal, and is targeted toward female YouTube audiences with a preexisting search history that reflects relevant interests. However, these types of advertisements are ideologically consistent with those that reach a national audience via large television

[58] https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=ptexjZA-Ypo

broadcasts such as the Super Bowl, such the U.S. Marine Corps 2018 super bowl headline ad "A Nation's Call." This ad foregrounds (placing her in the opening shot of personnel) a woman in one of the increasing number of combat roles available to women in the United States Marines: aircraft gunner.[59]

Military recruitment has vastly expanded its efforts in attracting women, again notably beginning in the later 2000's (Rowland) promoting and glorifying a female, militarized ideal that emphasizes the same characteristics emphasized in its male recruitment efforts: physical and emotional strength, discipline, determination, love of country, self-sacrifice, teamwork, service, and humanitarianism. This recruitment has been bolstered by new findings that indicate that resistance training can close the strength-based performance gap between male and female recruits. (Nindl: 2016) It stands to reason that as the United States grows ever-increasingly militaristic and defensive of its world-wide dominance, the representation of its women as "strong," "able-bodied," and "free" would set it apart as an Empire resistant to incursion in both symbolic and real terms.

Figure 22 Screenshot of the U.S. Marine Corps Super Bowl Commercial 2018: "A Nation's Call". Source: Marine Corps Recruiting Official YouTube Channel

[59] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wMqmP5C5WHI

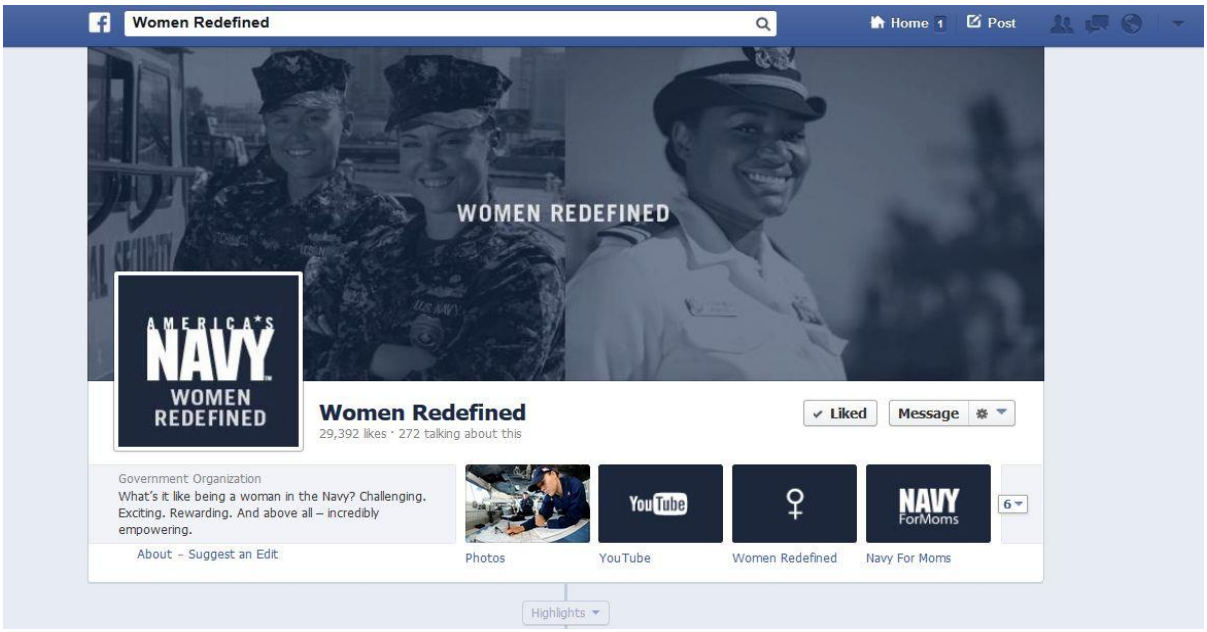

Figure 23 U.S. Navy Social Media Recruitment Campaign, 2014. Source: Women Redefined.

In summary, the increasing acceptability of female muscularity in popular American culture can be theorized as an effect of Biopolitical capitalism via neoliberal labor demands and market proliferation of female athletic identities, and perhaps also militarization. Neoliberal influences include a demand for a flexible and non-gender dimorphic labor force created through the socialization of girls through sport, the impact of niche marketing on the increasing intelligibility of the American female as muscled, and the rise of the Girl Power generation to positions of cultural influence. Factors attributed to militarization are the increased demand for females to fill a larger number and greater diversity of military roles, including combat roles.

In the following chapter I will focus on the lived-experiences of the subjects of this study: their words, actions, and survey responses, in the hopes of answering the following questions: 1) Is female muscularity truly becoming more acceptable and/or idealized? 2) If so, how is it happening, in the minds and hearts of those women who are adopting it as a form of

embodiment? And 3) What are the implications of this shift, Biopolitically, and in terms of ideal femininity, the gender binary, and sexual dimorphism?

Chapter 4

CrossFit and the Biopolitics of Female Muscularity: Ethnographic Results

Introduction

In this chapter I will explore the results of this two-year ethnography as they pertain to female muscularity[60]. Consistent with the theme of this overall project, I will analyze these results within the context of Biopower and Biopolitical imperatives of Late Capitalism. As I discuss in more theoretical terms in the previous chapter, these results have implications for if and how the definition of femininity and the gender binary might be shifting within American society at this juncture in history, extending the analysis of the previous chapter from theory, to ethnographic data, and back to theory again. Ultimately, these findings reveal that there is indeed a larger, albeit largely unconscious and limited, shift in the terms of embodied femininity, at least within this CrossFit community. This shift is likely within the larger American context as well: the opinions and values of these study participants are not representative of what we would consider a deviant subculture, but in fact are received positively by the friends, families, coworkers, and acquaintances of these subjects.

As I explain in the sections below, most of the women and men interviewed for this study supported some degree of muscularity for women, but most did not glorify gains in muscularity that would entrench upon what they consider the domain of masculinity. It is my belief that the body idealizations of these subjects are larger and more muscular than in decades past, but that there is still some work being done to maintain the gender binary and some aspects of traditional femininity (defined as frail, gentle, small, passive, meek, etc. See Bartky).

[60] I have so much gratitude for Professor Anne Bolin who advised me on the research methods and ideas that have resulted in this chapter.

Despite this, I did observe remarkable support for my own muscular gains, which, by the end of this study crossed into the realm of what might be considered "manly." However, this support was not translated into what most women sought for themselves; in fact, only a few of them said they wanted muscles like mine, while the majority wanted their muscles a bit "smaller." What is perhaps most significant in the results below is the fact that physical strength-building had effects in these women's lives that exceeded their expectations and predictions, changing the way they moved through and experienced the world. This in and of itself can be characterized as resistance, or perhaps even agency, and may have unpredictable consequences upon the gender binary, sexual dimorphism, and the definition of femininity, regardless of its origination as a Biopolitical imperative.

Mini-Literature Review: Ethnographies of Female Muscularity and Female Sporting Bodies

Popular exercise programs have varied through the decades, but for most women, including working class women and women of color, resistance training has been an exercise approached with caution, even for those athletes at the very highest levels of competition. Research on these athletic women has consistently found that their fear of "getting too big" is what keeps them from developing their muscles to their full athletic potential. (Dworkin: 2001, 2003, Kane: 2001) As the participation of girls and women in sports became culturally acceptable and even lauded, female athletes found themselves "living the paradox", a phrase Kane coined in 2001 to describe the paradox experienced by female athletes who desire strength

but do not desire the muscular size that come with it.[61] What's more, increasing numbers of women strength training has resulted in increasing numbers of women who have found themselves negotiating what Shari Dworkin termed "the glass ceiling" of muscular size: a self-imposed limit on their own body size that was in fact contradicting their pursuit of increased strength.

Dworkin's ethnographic research on women in gyms in the early 2000's revealed that women were experiencing growth in their muscular size that they did not perceive as normal, and that they actively monitored this growth and attempted to constrain it, in a concerted effort to maintain their bodies within contemporary norms of feminine beauty, which of course mandated frailty and smallness:

> Both nonlifters and moderate lifters strategically structured fitness practices to ensure "femininity"—defined as the maintenance of curves coupled with a desire to not increase body size from fat or muscular bulk. Both frequently saw cardiovascular work as integral to the maintenance of "femininity," while too much weight work was perceived to threaten its construction… Moderate lifters uniquely mediated the perceived pleasures and "evils" of weight lifting not by avoiding weights altogether but by seeking strength and pushing upward on a glass ceiling on strength. At the same time, contrary to the widespread belief that women cannot get big from weights, moderate lifters clearly struggled with their own bodily responses to weights. Moderate lifters carefully negotiated this upper limit, watched their bodies for signs of "excess" musculature, and consciously adjusted or stopped their weight workouts accordingly. So as to mediate an expressed fear of bulk with a simultaneous desire to seek strength, several distinct strategies were used that pushed upward on a glass ceiling on strength yet bumped up against it and then "held back." These strategic practices were to "keep the weight the same" across weight sets instead of increasing weights, to "stop lifting" weights for a period of time, to "back off" in terms of the number of days or time spent in the weight room, and to "hold back" on the amount of weight lifted (2001: 340-341)

Dworkin's finding that the women she interviewed found it very easy to "bulk up" contradicts cultural "commonsense" that women are biologically incapable of developing

[61] This situation is a paradox in that it is difficult to have strength without size, and female athletes who desire an elevated athletic performance do so at the peril of losing their attractiveness, as defined by the norms of hegemonic femininity in 2001.

muscular size and strength, and that in fact, this biological commonsense is reinforced, if not created, by the imperative women feel to construct their bodies as small and frail. In other words, and as recent research within the field of biology indicates, whatever biological differences there are between men and women are at the very least exaggerated, if not created, by the fitness practices of women:

> "When using the naked eye, it appears that absolute, biological difference between women and men is the sole culprit in explaining the bodies we see. What is left out of this equation is women's conscious negotiation with a historically-produced upper limit on strength and size. In opposition to quick commonsense claims that women are biologically different from men and therefore cannot gain much muscle, my ethnographic and interview work revealed that muscle is something that women can and do gain. In fact, based on tensions between what bodies should do, what bodies actually do, and culturally shifting standards of emphasized femininity, approximately three-fourths of the women at the fitness site expressed an awareness of an upper limit on the quest for muscular size and strength." (Dworkin 2001: 345)

Despite the fact that the women I interviewed professed that they did not limit their muscular size, they did overwhelming believe that they were incapable of growing large muscles, which contradicts both Dworkin's findings and recent research on the physiology of female muscularity. (O'Hagan et al., Abe et al.)

While Dworkin studied the experiences and perceptions of "everyday" female gym goers as an observer, another inspiration for this project, anthropologist Anne Bolin, conducted reflexive, or in her own words, "embodied", ethnographies as a participating and competitive female bodybuilder, yielding research that today forms the foundation of later work on female muscularity. Bolin's 1992 essay "Vandalized Vanity: Feminine Physiques Betrayed and Portrayed" is in fact one of the main (and first) inspirations for this project. In it she investigates the rise of the "fit and athletic" body during the 1960's and 1980's as both resistant to and reproductive of power relations: "The athletic body gained momentum as a result of the dovetailing of two movements: that of feminism in the 1960's and the fitness movement of the

1980's. The fit female form is a toned one with low body fat indicative of diet and of exercise as well. This new soma inscribes women's greater strength socially and economically through the body as text." (89)

While Bolin identifies the empowering potential of this new feminine ideal, she also identifies its limits through her research on female bodybuilders.: there is a threshold of "too much" muscularity that women reach, after which point they become stigmatized. (92) Therefore, in order to be considered "attractive" by the standards of the dominant or popular culture, Bolin's bodybuilding subjects need to limit their muscular size and growth. Through this observation Bolin provides a precedence for Dworkin's findings 10 years later: gender dimorphism is at the very least exaggerated by the fitness and diet practices of women themselves, as they respond to societal pressure to be small.[62]

As I describe in the historiography in the previous chapter, Bolin (2012) also draws our attention to the important difference between (lean, small) muscles that women develop for the sake of appearance, or the male gaze, and (larger) muscles women more rarely develop for functionality. This distinction between appearance and functionality is important to this project because CrossFit is a fitness regime based on *functionality*, not appearance. Surely, many CrossFit athletes participate because they desire a certain body type, but many do it for other reasons, including increased strength, improved health, self-confidence resulting from a sense of body mastery and functionality, etc. (Knapp: 2015; this study)

Because CrossFit is focused on pushing the body to new limits, or Personal Records, women are not as likely to stop at Dworkin's glass ceiling on muscle size and strength, rather

[62] The conclusion that the gender dimorphism is at the very least culturally exaggerated if not produced is supported by the most recent U.S. Military research conducted on the subject of sexual dimorphism, which found that women service members catch up with "untrained" men in terms of strength after less than six week of strength training. (Nindl:2016) These findings, in addition to several other biology studies (see below), are also discussed elsewhere in this project.

they will desire to grow stronger and therefore will also grow bigger. It seems to me that for the first time in history there is a fitness trend that is actually producing larger rather than smaller women. These women are also, of course, disciplined in their self-care and unrelenting in their competitive drive, which Heywood argues are important internalizations of Biopolitical imperatives that support the neoliberal state. (Heywood 2002, 2007)

As I illustrate in the previous chapter, it is Heywood who deserves much of the credit for making the connection between girls sports and the neoliberal production of a feminized labor force (2002, 2008). She herself is "embodied" scholar of women's bodybuilding, and has taken up the research of prior scholars of the athletic female body to interrogate its connection to Biopolitical capitalism's neoliberal ideologies, specifically ideologies of self-care, self-production, discipline, and goal-orientation. Heywood methodology is not based in ethnography (although she does employ participant observation in her earlier work, and focus groups in her 2002 collaboration with Shari Dworkin), but it is embodied and reflexive. In addition to remarking upon the emergence of the idealized female athletic form and its connection to ideologies of power, Heywood, like Bolin, also sees an opportunity for empowerment in the growing acceptability of female strength:

> These cultural shifts are] rewriting the symbology of the female body from empty signifiers of ready heterosexual access, blank canvasses, or holes on which to write one's heteronormative desires, to the active, self-present sexuality of a body that signifies achievement and power and is in that sense "masculinized" or "queered" if you follow the traditional equation of masculinity with power and heteronormativity. (82)

In her attention to the potential power of female bodies, Heywood reinforces the work of Bolin and Dworkin in that she is advocating for women to develop their physical potential as a means of liberation. In her view, which is in alignment with the corporeal/physical/muscle feminism school of thought (McCaughey; Grosz), women who are small cannot resist physical violence,

are dependent on others for everyday tasks, and do not feel the sense of control and confidence that comes with developing one's body as powerful, especially considering that the power of men is a power that rests on biological assumptions about women's inability to develop physical strength.[63]

Bobbi Knapp has conducted one of very few published ethnographies focused on gender and CrossFit, along with a content analysis piece evaluating the evolution of images of women in the CrossFit journal across the 2000's. Knapp's ethnography utilizes feminist geography to investigate the role of space in the maintenance and disruption of gender norms in the CrossFit gym, or "box." Knapp found that some gender norms were replicated in the coed space. For example, prescribed lifting routines were organized by gender rather than body weight, something the CrossFit women she interviewed agreed with. (50) However overall Knapp found that these women were encouraged "to move beyond the socially acceptable goals of 'firming' and 'toning' and push their bodies to become strong, powerful, and fit." (52) She calls attention to the role of the owners in the culture of the CrossFit space, calling for future research that would interrogate the different dynamics produced by the individuals that comprise each CrossFit box. Her results reinforce my findings that this fitness regime is unique in its emphasis on the achievement of personal strength goals in a "team" context in which everyone is cheering and competing with everyone else, women and men. This difference has for Knapp yielded results that reinforce and transgress traditional gender norms; most significantly, the women she studied desired to become stronger, even if that meant becoming more muscular.

While the work of Bolin, Dworkin, Heywood, and Knapp are the models and inspiration for this project, there is a much broader canon of ethnographic and theoretical work on female

[63] Roth and Basow provide an excellent summary of this argument in their 2004 article Femininity, Sports, and Feminism: Developing a Theory of Physical Liberation.

athletic bodies. Scholars of Sport have interrogated a wide variety of phenomenon related to role of sport in American society and many have found the field an ideal venue for the interrogation of gender in American culture. This is due to both its prominence as an American cultural institution and because of its role in the socialization of youth, particularly male youth. (Messner; Pederson; Birrell, Theberge; Hall Duncan; Hargreaves).

Because American sports participation and socialization plays a key role in the definition of hegemonic masculinity, it also perpetuates and produces cultural understandings of men as physically and therefore innately superior to women. What is historically ignored is how male sports participation and training actually reinforces, exaggerates, and produces this assumed superiority. Michael Messner articulates this in his 1988 essay Sports and Male Domination: The Female Athlete as Contested Ideological Terrain:

> Organized sport, as a cultural sphere defined largely by patriarchal priorities, will continue to be an important arena in which emerging images of active, fit, and muscular women are forged, interpreted, contested, and incorporated. The larger socioeconomic and political context will continue to shape and constrain the extent to which women can wage fundamental challenges to the ways that organized sports continue providing ideological legitimation for male dominance. And the media's framing of male and female athletes will continue to present major obstacles for any fundamental challenge to the present commercialized and male-dominant structure of organized athletics. It remains for a critical feminist theory to recognize the emergent contradictions in this system in order to inform a liberating social practice. (208)

Markula's interviewers with female aerobicizers in the 1990's provides further evidence of sport as a bastion of male superiority via its association with physical power, strength, and dominance. Markula found that the women she studied did in fact desire musculature, but only muscles that were small, toned, and for the most part limited to the lower body. While she did find that many women desired improved strength, she also found that they were afraid of getting

"too bulky," and therefore experienced their athletic desires and embodiment as contradictory. (439)

> Feminist research explains that such rejection of big muscles serves women's oppression in society. Namely, patriarchal domination over women is based on the assumption that men are naturally-biologically-stronger and bigger than women. Physically stronger males are also alleged to be naturally determined, intellectual, active leaders who should dominate the weak, passive, and small women. To retain this power arrangement in patriarchal society, it is necessary, thus, to define the female body differently from the male body: ideally, the weak female's muscles are sleek and firm, whereas the powerful male's muscles are visible and big. The aerobics body fits in this scheme nicely, whereas the bodybuilding body challenges this gender dichotomy, because it resembles the big, muscular male body and minimizes the biological gap separating the sexes (Holmlund: 1989). (Markula:1995 441)

While many scholars of gender and sport have heralded girls' sports participation as an avenue to equality (Dunning and Birrell; Kane; Butler; Hall; Brace-Govan; Theberge) others have also complicated and/or questioned it's potential to create change (Hargreaves; Dworkin and Messner; Messner). Ethnographies of female bodybuilders inform this research, as they foreground the experiences of women themselves in their pursuit of muscularity while also (like sport) revealing the cultural constructions upon which the gender binary relies. In the words of Bolin: "Bodybuilding for women is a sport that textualizes gender relations, reflects traditional notions of femininity, actively rebels against these in terms of challenging the cultural construct that muscularity and femininity are mutually exclusive, and finally contributes to the ongoing larger redefinition of femininity and womanhood." (Bolin 2004: 111, citing herself: 1998: 200-4)

Ethnographers of female bodybuilders have closely traced the cultural line between male and female bodies, that is, the line that female bodybuilders approach as they grow increasingly muscular. (Bolin, Basalmo, Shilling and Bunsell, Lowe) This line lies between the degree of muscularity that is idealized in women vs. stigmatized, which Bolin has found is highly dependent on historical circumstances. (1992, 2003, 2012) Scholars of women bodybuilders have

illustrated some of the processes by which women who cross this line are stigmatized, and how women themselves walk a fine line between empowerment and oppression, a line entirely depends on their own consciousness and agency. (Heywood: 1998, Bolin: 2003, St. Martin and Gavey:1996, Felkar:2012)

Ethnographers of female bodybuilders have also noted the "recuperation of femininity" that their subjects engage in, that is, how they emphasize their femininity through styling, wardrobe, etc., as a means of making themselves appear more attractive to others who seek symbols of the feminine on female bodies, particularly bodybuilding judges and markets. (Bolin 2012) This is a consistent finding in the arena of women's sports as well, as female athletes and the media that cover them constantly recuperate the femininity of those who blur the line between male and female by aspiring to physical strength and acuity. (Smith; Cooky) This recuperation of femininity is evident within the CrossFit space as well, as the dress code within the CrossFit space is starkly gendered: men wear long shorts and shirts with sleeves (until they remove their shirts halfway through the workout), and women wear tights or bootie shorts and almost never wear sleeves. The almost universal adherence to this dress code was alarming to me at first, and I found myself in defiance of it during the first three months of my research, until I finally caved in, quickly finding myself being complimented on my change of attire.

In the section below I will engage more directly with the ethnographic results of this study, which yielded deeper insights into how the women I observed and interviewed related to their own bodies, their muscularity, and how their changing bodies affect their self-concepts and identities. These results suggest that Biopolitical imperatives that mandate healthy, fit, and most importantly, *strong* bodies for women and men in Late Capitalism have effects that both exceed and fulfill the mandates of Biopower, in that they throw into question the traditional binary of

masculinity and femininity (in both social and biological terms), and perhaps open up spaces for (true) empowerment and agency.

Results

Of the 37 subjects that I interviewed over the course of two years, 23 of them were women. I asked these women mostly the same questions I asked of the men, paying attention to how they responded to my question about limiting their muscularity and size. I asked women two questions to derive this information: 1) Have you limited your muscularity while doing CrossFit? and 2) What is your ideal body type? The majority of the women responded to the first question by stating that they have not tried to limit their muscularity since starting CrossFit, often adding an explanation that they don't think they could get "too big" because they don't train "as much as the CrossFit Games women do" or because they don't follow a "strict" enough diet.

This belief contradicts recent biology research that indicates that women can gain significant muscularity (Abe; O'Hagan. It also contradicts Dworkin's 2001 study that revealed that women who strength trained were afraid of becoming too big, believed and/or discovered they would if they lifted "too heavy or too much," and actively mitigated the effects of their lifting with this concern in mind. The women of this study who professed that they did not believe they were capable of getting "big" may perhaps unconsciously mitigate the effects through diet or holding back on some resistance training. However, within the context of CrossFit it is quite rare to "hold back" on exercises considering the semi-competitive setting, the culture that glorifies muscularity, and the pursuit of benchmarks. Therefore, it is in my opinion more likely that the standard of what is "too big" has changed since Dworkin's 2001 study.

Interestingly, I found myself with perhaps the largest upper body muscles at my field site by the end of this two-year ethnography (Figure 23-I am on the far right). My observations of the muscularity of this study's female subjects revealed to me that many women had very large and developed lower bodies, and their 1 rep max scores on lower body lifts supported this observation. However, the 1 rep max scores on upper body lifts (maximum weight lifted one time) and their relatively smaller upper body musculature of most of the women observed in this study perplexed me. I specifically observed the women with this question in mind, asking them casual questions during workouts to ascertain why this discrepancy might exist, particularly as I discovered it is not supported as inherently "natural" in the biology research.

Figure 24 Three of the girls at CrossFit X. I am pictured on the right. Source: Commissioned photo by Juan Busciglio.

My own experience as a trained athlete since childhood led me to observe that my upper body strength was disproportionately more developed in comparison to my lower, and I surmised that this was because I trained bench press and overhead press since I was 14, but did not train squat or deadlift. This experience is in contrast to most of the women I observed, many of whom had been working on their glutes and quads for many years, but had only been training the upper body with heavy lifting since starting CrossFit. It is tempting to assume that the reason for this is because American culture has long glorified developed thighs and glutes on women, but not large and muscular arms and shoulders. Some women admitted that they did not like working on upper body lifts such as the bench press or overhead press. None stated because it was that they

did not want large upper body muscles, however, but rather cited their reluctance to work on something they are "not good at." Skipping workout days, or WOD's, that focus on bench or overhead press, or any lifts or workouts that are not favored by the individual athlete, is a common practice in this CrossFit community.

As I made the rounds asking women about whether they ever limited their own muscularity I began to get the impression that it was taboo in CrossFit culture to openly admit that you do not desire large muscular size. Some women convincingly expressed that they desired large musculature, but the majority of women seemed to side step the question by saying they did not think they were capable of it, as I note above. It stands to reason that CrossFit's marketing of female muscularity as beautiful and sexy and empowering (Washington) has filtered into the CrossFit community, creating a stigma against frail physiques, but perhaps not so deep as to guide the lives of those who believe it in their heads but not their hearts.

Four women I interviewed convincingly expressed that they desired large muscularity, while three openly admitted that they did not. The other sixteen fell somewhere in the middle, desiring a "toned" physique and again, qualifying their response to whether they limit their muscularity, answering "no I don't" but then expressing their belief that they "can't" get muscular anyway, due to diet, genetics, or lack of training time and motivation. These women also expressed that their ideal body type was "toned" or "just healthy."

To better understand the aesthetic ideals of my subjects, as well as to gather information for chapters 1 and 2, I asked both women and men what their goals and perceptions were when they first walked into CrossFit for the first time. Most people stated that they had originally wanted to lose weight and/or "get healthy." Two women stated that they were tired of being "skinny fat," in that they were unhappy with their thin but untoned bodies and desired more

shape and structure to their appearance, particularly in the context of aging, as both of these women were entering their 40's at the time.

Despite these initial motivations, almost every person I interviewed expressed that their values had changed since they started: many of them are now focused on improving their lifts and scores rather than the appearance of their bodies, although for some, this remains the priority. The data also seems to reveal an apparent shift in body ideals for women, compared to when they first started CrossFit. Many of them admit that they once desired to be thin, but now they seek increased muscularity. Polly, a woman in her early 20's reflected on this shift:

> *Polly: Um my husband and I moved here, to California, and wanted to like, start some exercise programs and we were like "yeah let's try CrossFit" randomly. Um, and we ended up really liking it. Um, I think I chose it just randomly, but I stuck with it because, um, because I was definitely seeing improvements, not just in like how I looked... I actually didn't really notice how I looked, but I just like felt so much better and felt so much better about myself and wasn't concerned about how I looked as much.*
>
> *Annie: Do you know what it was that started making you feel better about yourself?*
>
> *Polly: Um yeah I think it was just that for the first time I was actually healthy. And I didn't feel like I had to like only eat a 1000 calories a day...I felt like I could eat whatever I wanted…Because I was always hungry because I was working out…And getting rid of that burden of having to always monitor what I was eating, which is so much better.*
>
> *Annie: So like the burden of trying to restrict yourself all the time was lifted?*
>
> *Polly: Yeah definitely. Yeah. And I was always really obsessed with like being skinny. So when I came to CrossFit I was realizing I actually don't want to be skinny, I want to be big and muscular. So that was nice.*

Polly's responses are particularly interesting when contextualized within her life experiences. Later in the interview she revealed to me that she struggled with an eating disorder earlier in life, and still struggles with managing her anxiety as it relates to "control" over her body, a result I found to be fairly common in this study sample, and which I discuss more in

depth in Chapter 2. Of more relevance to this chapter is her newfound idealization of muscularity. Polly is pictured in the middle in the photo above, which reveals that she has succeeded to some degree in her goal, while maintaining a lean and relatively small physique that would not be considered "bulky" by today's standards, but surely "masculine" by those of earlier eras.

Other women also expressed that their ideals had changed since starting CrossFit. Gail, a woman in her mid-60's, talks about how she wishes she could gain "toned" muscularity, which she differentiates from being "skinny," and was an ideal she did not aspire to in previous years:

Annie: What do you think that young girls want to be today? What's their ideal?

Gail: Oh I still think they wanna be skinny. I don't want to be skinny, I want to be toned.

Annie: Have you ever been afraid of bulking up from the weights?

Gail: No.

Annie: Why not?

Gail: Because I think it would take so much for me to bulk up it would never happen. I think it would take too much.

Annie: See I bulk up really easily

Gail: Yeah but you're not my age either. And if I bulked up I would be proud.

Annie: See that's interesting to me. Because people always used to tell me I was too big.

Gail: Well I've never had that problem.

Gail's response is typical in that she does not believe herself capable of developing "bulky" or "large" musculature, however she is atypical in that she says she would go so far as to be "proud" of being so. Elsewhere in this interview she shares that her views on lifting weights

have changed over time, and that today she is concerned with not only maintaining a fit appearance (for her children), but also with the positive health effects she desires as she ages, particularly preventing bone loss and functionality.

This interview excerpt is interesting in that Gail states that the younger generation still aspires to the thin ideal. However other interview subjects stated that they believed that the dominant ideal is changing. My survey results, which I present below, seem to support Gail's assessment, in that the majority of my survey respondents still believe that the dominant feminine ideal is rather thin, or at least thinner than their own ideal and real bodies.

My findings revealed that for some men, perceptions of what they consider the ideal female body shifted as the result of their immersion in CrossFit culture. Ron, a man in his late forties, illustrates this shift in his own terms:

> *Ron: Well yeah you put all this work in and also I think with CrossFit all the women are around a bunch of other athletic women so. You see that oh this is ok, I like this, you know? And not every woman is gonna be...I've had women so oh I don't wanna get big traps or look like that. And I always tell them first of all you're probably not a good enough athlete in your DNA to let you be like the girls in the CrossFit Games, so I'm sorry I don't mean to burst your bubble you're never gonna look like that like those girls are so the elite of the elite that you see in the CrossFit Games you don't just show up for like six months and look like that. And besides those girls can all crush me I can't even come close you know. So don't worry you don't just become that girl you don't look like her. You don't look like Tia Toomey just because you just did six months.*
>
> *Yeah and you met...Henry told me that you guys went up and saw Jamie Hagiya. And I think she's like totally beautiful and she's like she's a thicker girl and she's super muscular but she's very pretty and some people are intimidated by that or think that it's too like...I don't know maybe it's because I'm around muscular people at the gym more now that I think that's more beautiful than I used to think. But whenever I see all these women training, I follow all these people because I wanna see what they're doing on training, and I think these people are good looking. And maybe I didn't think that as much before and it's just from being around people who are fit, you know? But I guess there's like beauty in all shapes. And I guess if you're around all this you start to think you know*
>
> *Annie: Your conception changes*

Ron: Yeah. There's nothing wrong with it.

While Ron's assessment that strong women and women of all shapes and sizes are beautiful seemed pretty commonplace at this field site, I did observe that many men seem to draw the line at popular Games athlete Brooke Ence, stating that Ence is "too big," but that the Icelandic women, such as Sara Sigmundsdottir, are "perfect." I was delighted to have my male study participants provide me with such a concrete boundary, and so I set about asking other interviewees what they thought about the comparison. The majority of respondents indicated that the Icelandic athletes were more "feminine" in the size and shape of their muscles and bodies, but also that their jawlines and faces were more feminine, giving them the appearance of traditional feminine beauty, while their muscles conveyed more grace and capacity than raw "masculine" power, as Ence's do. I'll let the reader be the final judge in this case. (See figures 23 and 24 for a comparison.)

Figure 25 Brooke Ence, considered by many informants to be just over the line of what is considered "too big." Source: Brooke Ence Instagram

The effect of CrossFit marketing and the celebrity cult of CrossFit Games athletes within the CrossFit community is clear: more muscular, toned, powerful bodies are likely more glorified within this culture than they are in the dominant culture.[64] However there has been a rising trend within popular culture as well, characterized by the "fitspo"[65] or "fitspiration" movement and a

[64] I would love to test this hypothesis in future work by administering a comparative survey to the general population.

[65] A popular online phenomenon, mostly visible on social media platforms such as Instagram, that encourages the development of "fit" bodies as beautiful. Some degree of female muscularity (toned and not "bulky") is glorified in this discourse. Despite the rather toned and slim aesthetic ideal, many of these bodies would have been considered "manly" in previous decades.

popular discourse known as Strong is the New Skinny/Sexy, which I explore in theoretical terms in the previous chapter.

Figure 26 Sara Sigmundsdottir's body is considered near perfect by most informants I questioned, and preferable to the "more masculine" body of Brooke Ence, pictured in Figure 23. Source: Sara Sigmundsdottir Instagram.

Over the past five years there has been a significant increase in social media promotion and idealization of some degree of muscularity for women. (See previous chapter for arguments and evidence.) The degree that is acceptable varies by community, but the trend is pervasive enough to impact the ideals of most Americans, leading to increased acceptability and glorification of some degree of muscularity for women. For example, a recent study by Boszik et al titled "Thin is in? Think Again: The Rising Importance of Muscularity in the Thin Ideal Female Body" found that in a survey of undergraduates the majority of respondents preferred a thin muscular body over a thin unmuscular body, leading them to hypothesize that popular media representations of women are having an impact on the ideals of young women, trending toward increased muscularity.

The impact of popular media imagery on the ideals of various populations has been studied by scholars for three decades through content and textual analysis. While I did not conduct a formal textual or content analysis of ideal female bodies in popular media or social media, I remained attentive to their impact upon my study participants. For my study design purposes I did delve into the academic literature, focusing on textual and content analyses of women's bodies that were cross-historical and/or focused on the athletic or muscled female body.

An influential study that informed this project is Margaret Duncan's 1994 textual analysis of Shape magazine. Duncan, building off of Spitzack (1990), evaluates how the words and images that idealized certain female forms in the pages of Shape magazine serve to instill in women a panoptic level of self-discipline and self-control that is framed through the discourses of health and wellness, and reinforced through the confessional mode of people who've "succeeded" at becoming healthy and therefore beautiful. She analyzes the types of bodies that are idealized and how the text works to reinforce ideologies of self-discipline. Duncan found that images of women's fit, athletic, toned, and slender bodies, along with the accompanying text, consistently sent the message that if readers followed the suggested body maintenance plans they would end up "healthier and happier," and de facto more beautiful. (53)

Duncan's analysis remains one of the most influential analyses of how popular representations of idealized female bodies reinforce structures of power by teaching women how to internalize culturally-mandated forms of discipline, while producing and reproducing norms of hegemonic femininity. Her findings document a historical shift in cultural representations of femininity as athletic and "healthy", vs. slender and frail. Yet rather than interpreting this more athletic ideal as de facto empowering, Duncan, building off of Sandra Bartky, reveals how it in fact is merely shifting the terms through which women discipline and define themselves toward more contemporary Biopolitical objectives of self-care and social functioning. While Duncan doesn't address the functional purposes of this shift, her close attention to both imagery and text, examined through the lens of Foucauldian analyses of power relations, specifically, women's oppression, has informed my interpretation of this study's findings.

Other theorists discussed at length elsewhere in this study, such as Bolin, Dworkin, Markula, Heywood, and Knapp, combine ethnographic field methods with content analysis. The

most cited in this field is Pikko Markula's 1995 study *Firm But Shapely, Fit But Sexy, Strong But Thin*. Markula analyzed the bodies of female aerobicizers in 1995, by participating in and observing their workouts and interviewing exercisers while also analyzing the body representation and discourse in aerobics videos and fitness magazines (including Self). Markula's textual analyses (I discuss her ethnographic findings below) found that while fitness magazines "promote upper body work, they clarify that their weight training will not result in bulging arm muscles. (Barrett 1991; Brick 1990)." (441) This finding is reminiscent of the cultural commonsense we hear today, even in the context of CrossFit.

Markula also found that while magazine discourses around female bodies encouraged "self-acceptance," they also promoted the idea of self-care as a means to accept one's self, to "take responsibility for their change." (449) This finding is similar to that of Duncan and Spitzak, in that it recognizes the discourses of self-discipline that produce and reproduce (oppressive) norms of femininity that require small-bodied women who control and discipline themselves.

However, Markula took her research a step further by investigating how her female subjects interacted with these magazine depictions and discussions. She found that many of the women she interviewed did not internalize media discourses automatically, but rather picked and chose what they agreed with or did not agree with. Some women were critical of the thin and young bodies that dominated the magazine and video representations, while others preferred those bodies, citing them as their ideal and goal. (445) Markula's work is a reminder that reception is just as important as representation and deserves its own scholarly attention.

Of particular relevance to this project is Bobbi Knapp's 2014 analysis of the representation of CrossFit women's bodies in CrossFit's own online publication, the CrossFit Journal. Knapp

found that that traditional femininity is both subverted and reinforced in CrossFit imagery. (Knapp: 2014) Washington and Economides reinforced these results in 2016, finding that neoliberal values (choice, meritocracy, liberalism) and heterosexist framings of ideal femininity (the recuperation of femininity via feminine styling, sexual objectification) persisted in CrossFit representations, but that there were also representations of women as strong and physically powerful.

Survey results:

In an attempt to evaluate how much in line my study participants' ideals were with popular media imagery that idealizes some degree of female muscularity, vs CrossFit imagery, which idealizes larger, more muscular, yet still highly "feminized" bodies, I conducted an online visual survey, which yielded 36 responses. The results indicate that the majority of my participants do indeed prefer some degree of muscularity on their ideal female body. Their ideals reflect more muscularity than that of their real bodies, but that their ideal bodies are for most women smaller than their real bodies. This finding disputes theorizations that these respondents desire increased size, but reinforces the idea that they do desire visible muscularity and tone.

These results also indicate that they believe that their ideals are outside of what society considers "ideal", which they consistently determine to be thinner than their own ideal and real bodies. However, as is apparent in the images below, there was also a large degree of diversity in the responses to the "ideal body" question of these 36 male and female respondents (although 64% did idealize some degree of muscularity), making it difficult to make concrete extrapolations. In my future work I would like to confirm whether the ideals of this CrossFit community are truly distinct from those of the general population, by collecting more responses

and comparing them to non-CrossFit respondents. It would also be very interesting to compare results cross-historically, to evaluate how much the dominant feminine ideal has changed over time.

However, this cross-historical comparison would be difficult because prior surveys did not include muscularity as an ideal on the same spectrum with thin and toned bodies. Grossbard et al. and Novella et al. used figure drawings to evaluate preferences for fatness/thinness or lesser or great muscular size in both genders and across genders. They found that females desired to be thinner and less muscular than they saw themselves, while males desired to be larger and more muscular than their self-perceptions. These results were replicated by Novella et al. in 2015, revealing that men continue to idealize larger muscularity for themselves, while females idealize thinness.

These studies contradict what I found among my ethnographic subjects, and while I am of course open to alternate results, both Grossbard et al. nor Novella et al. depicted their fat and thin figures separate from their muscular figures. What this means is that I was unable to find any studies that would provide an option for women and men to select their ideal form from thin, toned, medium, muscular, and fat options of varying sizes. For example, in previous studies there was no option for women (or men) to compare side by side a small thin figure to a small, muscular figure and determine which they preferred, rather the images were on separate charts, and arranged according to size. Therefore to design my surveys, I paid an artist to draw toned images in the style of Novella et al, and asked permission from Novella et al to borrow thin, fat, and muscular images from their 2015 study. I then set the thin, toned, and muscular images side

by side and arranged them according to increasing body size, so that respondents could choose their preference based on body size, body composition, and muscularity, all at the same time.[66]

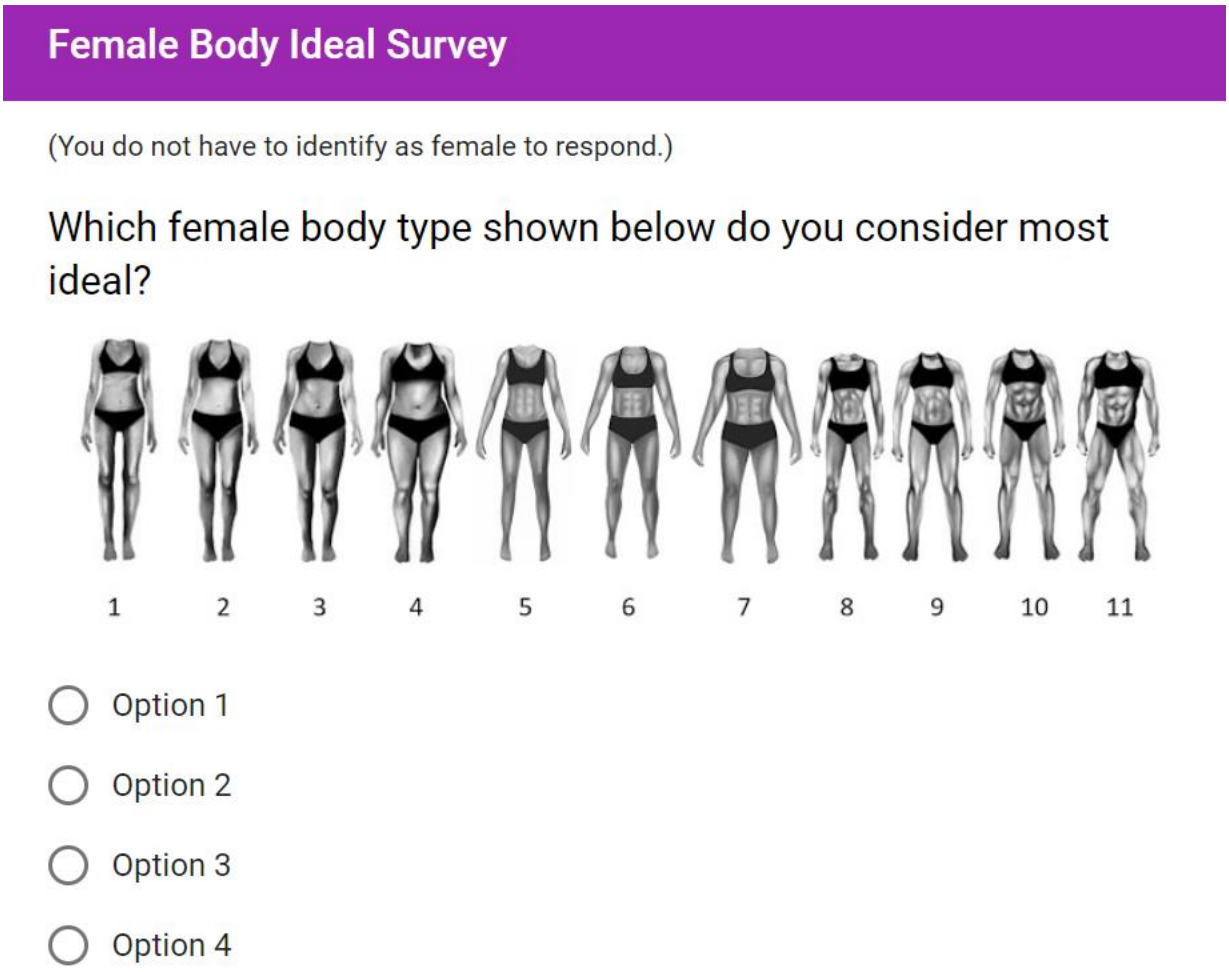

Figure 27 Body idealization survey I designed, utilizing an artist and some images used with permission from Novella et al.

[66] Many thanks to Novella et al, artist Veronika Schmidt for her amazing talent, kindness, and general support, and my brother (also an artist) Danny Yaniga (for helping me shade the images).

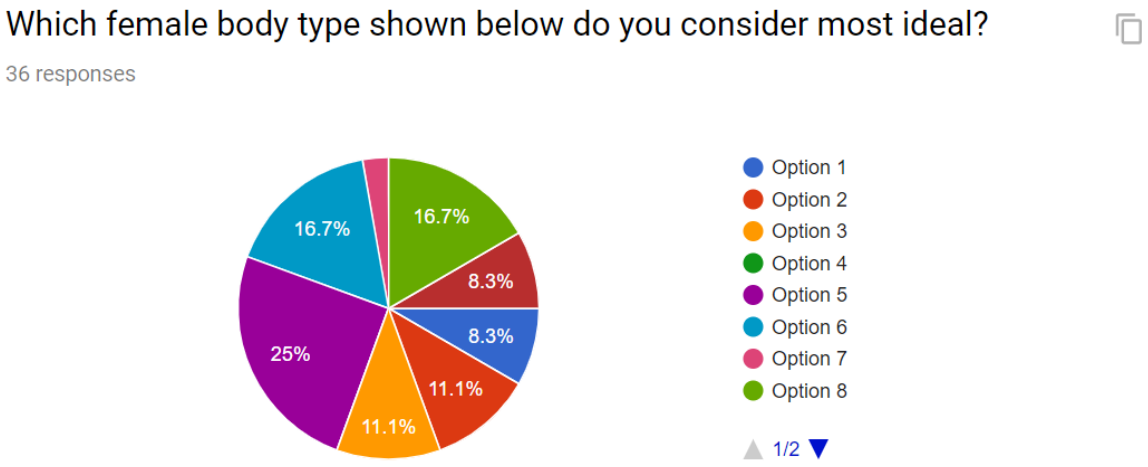

Figure 28 Survey results 1/3.

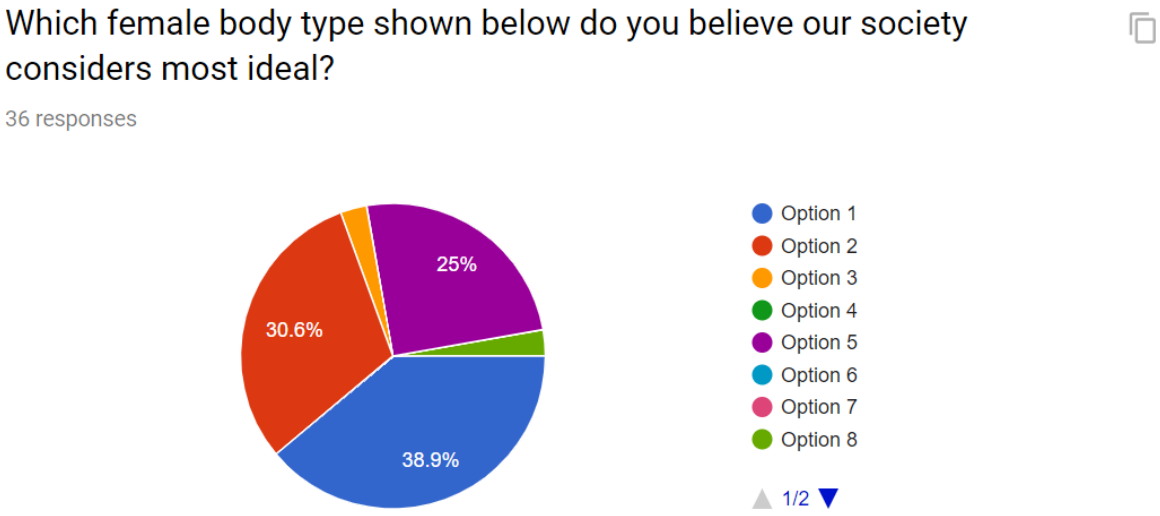

Figure 29 Survey Results 2/3.

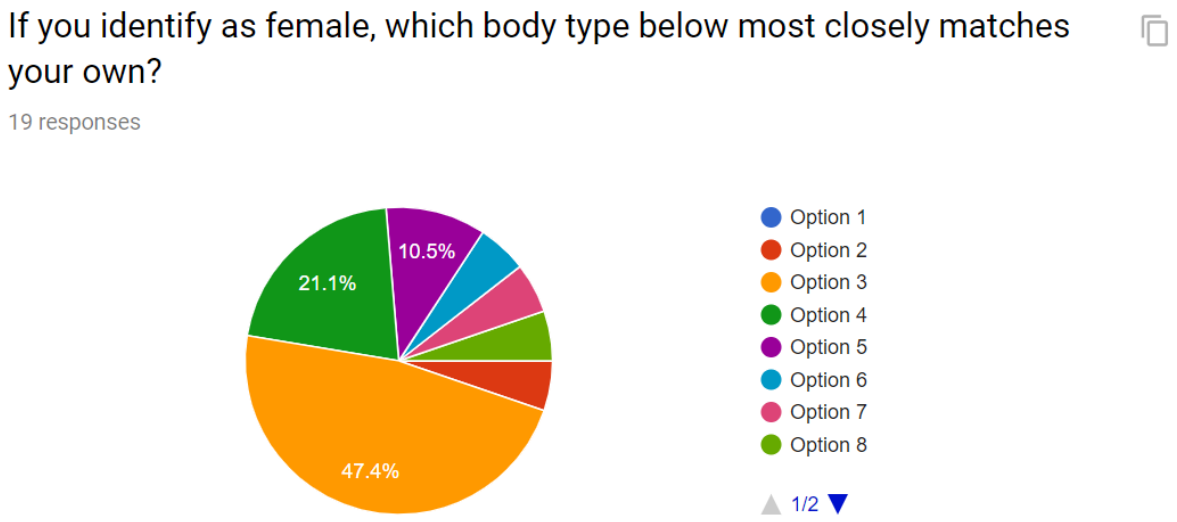

Figure 30 Survey results 3/3.

Supplementary to these survey results, a consistent result of my ethnographic findings was that older women express caring less about maintaining a physique in line with the dominant ideal than they did as younger women. Their focus is generally on strength and health, and for some of these women, their increased muscularity is of ancillary and almost negligible importance. Abbey, a woman in her early 50's, expressed this quite clearly:

> *Annie: and so what was that process like for you, did you have to say to yourself "I don't wanna get big, or I do want to get big" or what was that process like for you, negotiating that?*
>
> *Abbey: That's a good question, uh you know, I I'm older, than a lot of people here too and with age has come, or at least for me, has come a lack of concern as much with other people think about me, it's about what I think about myself, and I feel, given the variety of the workouts that I still do, this is my chosen, the one I come to the most. And I enjoy it the most, so I'm not so concerned with what other people think, you know I feel stronger. The more I come here consistently, the healthier I feel…I almost never wear makeup. As you age there's certain things you care about more than others.*
>
> *Annie: Do you have any goals here, or is it just the healthiness that you said or...*

Abbey: Overall life balance I think. I would love to maybe get a little stronger. I'd love more definition, I'd love to shed a little more fat, the usual, but I'm not obsessed with it, it's more staying healthy and active and being able to continue to do CrossFit as I age.

Annie: Awesome. Then the last question is do you have an ideal body type for yourself, and if so do you think it matches the ideal in our culture?

Abbey: Mostly just being healthy, and lean, and fit. No it doesn't match. I think I'm always going to be bigger than what society says we need to be and how we need to look.

One thing we can deduce from Abbey's response is that she is not actively pursuing muscularity. In fact, she implies that society does not accept it, by answering my questions with commentary on how she doesn't care what others think, despite the fact that I did not suggest that society would consider muscles in a negative light. I also found it interesting that later in this interview she continues at length about how she once had an eating disorder and how she still needs to exercise a lot every day to not feel "fat and lazy". This is interesting to me because it reveals that despite her professed comfort regarding the opinions of others she still has to fight every day to maintain her own peace of mind around her body.

For other older women it was less clear as to whether their shift in body ideals away from aspiring to a frail passive physique to a stronger (in some cases more muscular) physique was the result of maturity, CrossFit culture, or the shift in the culture at large toward acceptance of female muscularity. Liz, another woman in her early 50's, expressed that she wasn't quite sure why her own ideals had changed, except to suggest that there had been change in the larger culture's ideals:

Annie: What is your ideal body type?

Liz: Not small. But just toned. Whatever size you are, on your own, just toned. I used to think small skinny was [ideal] but now I wish I could be bigger. [laughs]

Gail [also in the conversation]: When I was younger everyone kept telling me to be smaller

Liz: Oh exactly me too same thing. When I was growing up everyone wanted to be like a stick.

Gail: Yeah

Annie: When do you think in your mind that changed? Like the body type you wanted shifted?

Liz: You know what maybe just like maybe five years ago?

Annie: Do you know why?

Liz: I just think that overall everybody was not thinking that that was the great look.

Younger women too expressed that their ideals had changed, many citing CrossFit as the reason why. Jennifer, a woman in her early thirties, expressed that sports, and later, CrossFit, gave her a sense of power and capability in her body as well as her personal capacity, both of which translates into her everyday life and sense of self:

Annie: Cool so considering your first negative impression, what made you want to do it [CrossFit]?

Jennifer: Well I was a runner and I was a very strong runner but I wanted to be stronger in my upper body and I started with a boot camp that was at CrossFit. And I did that for a full month and I started gaining strength and I did that for a full month and I started seeing results fast and it improved my running too and so then I got enough strength and confidence to try actual CrossFit and um you know start getting confidence to throw more weight around and try things I wasn't willing to before.

Annie: Awesome. So you said you wanted to be stronger in a culture in which not all women want to be strong. Do you know what your motivation is for wanting to be stronger?

Jennifer: Um I've been an athlete my whole life and I think I value being strong over being skinny or necessarily how I look...it's more how my body can perform. I think running my first marathon showed me a whole new outlet of what our bodies are capable of. So then I was like just because I'm a woman doesn't mean I can't olympic lift and do pullups and things I never thought I could do in my twenties...but we did as kids though.

Annie: So when you refer to results you said when you first started coming to CrossFit you saw results were those results what you're referring to performance or were they also aesthetic or mental?

Jennifer: Mostly performance. Um because I was thinner when I started, and at first I had a hard time because my extra small scrubs were getting tight on my thighs. And I had to get over the fact that it's not necessarily about how thick my legs were, it was like how much weight can I lift and getting PR's on my back squat that stuff was way more exciting than whatever sized jeans I wore.

Annie: Awesome. Do you have an ideal self in mind either aesthetic or performance wise or in any other way or is it just getting to the next level? Do you have a picture of yourself or is it just see what comes and...

Jennifer: Um I don't really have a picture of myself...it's more like and honestly I feel like I'm pretty thrilled at where my life is right now. I was just reflecting on it the other day like I'm about to turn thirty and if I could have pictured fifteen years ago what turning thirty would look like I'm married to my best friend, I love my job, I'm having a healthy baby, like I work out, I'm healthy, we have great friends, like if I can just keep up the physical fitness in this way my ideal is that like I'm gonna run with my baby in the stroller and like I'm gonna be still coming to the gym to workout and as long as I keep seeing that I improve and that I eat well and take care of myself and I feel good and have good energy then that's kind of what I feel is my ideal.

Jennifer's responses indicate that her growing capacity made her reflect differently upon her own body, shifting her ideal from thin to "strong," though not necessarily muscular in its own right. Her responses support theorizations that for women in particular strength brings self-esteem, because it increases their sense of personal capacity in their everyday lives. (Ginis et al.; Smith 94)

Natasha, a woman in her late twenties, also professed to feel more confident and capable as a result of CrossFit, both in terms of personal self-confidence and bodily capacity. However, she reflected a bit more deeply on her own body ideals, as well as that of the culture around her, referring specifically to her Asian American background as a source of tension in her own self-identity:

Natasha: Some people brought their CrossFit classmates to practice and a lot of the women were really bulky so it was a little scary at first because in dragon boat

predominantly the physiques were a little smaller, I mean it is a predominantly Asian sport so people are just a little bit smaller, it's just their genetics, we're smaller and we're not as muscular, so seeing these women get super muscular was kind of scary...So yeah with the Asian girls I think it's a cultural thing they don't wanna be too buff and that's where you get into as a kid growing up you're either super skinny you should eat more or you're little fat. There was never anything that was a healthy medium, so I think that goes back to like a healthy body image for young girls and I knew I struggled with that. And it wasn't until starting CrossFit where I actually started feeling comfortable with my body. You know once I noticed a change with my physique...I'm not super bulky like what I saw years ago, but um I'm definitely leaner and toner but I'm not...but I appreciate it because it's a lot of work that goes into it…

Annie: So you noticed other people commenting, you felt leaner, you felt toner...these are the things that made you feel more comfortable?

Natasha: Yeah and I think that this is something that I've always struggled with as a kid...I was always like a chubby kid. I think uh growing up I was known for having really chunky thighs. Like my mom called me chunky thighs. And they are chunky. And huge calves and I never like knew how to change that, it was something with genetics and it was only with lifting weights that I found something that promoted a healthy body image. And I think as a woman like nowadays it feels so good to be strong, um, and I think that comes with not just physically strong but also mentally strong. And I think with CrossFit as women the workouts are the same, they are gender neutral, the weights are scaled but they're not scaled down to oh that's cute.

Natasha: So I remember...so I think the funniest thing was when I went to go get furniture for my house, and someone asked me oh do you need help with those nightstands you're gonna need help, moving those into your room, because I said my townhouse was like three stories and I had like two flights of stairs. And they're like you're gonna need help you're gonna need a man. And I was like I don't need a man! Uh, so I did do it, I managed. I kind of struggled a little bit but I managed to carry my nightstands to my room and I was like I'm really sweaty.

Annie: That's awesome. I wonder if your ideal body...it sounds like it changed over time. Has it?

Natasha: It has

Annie: What did you used to want and now what do you want?

Natasha: I'm not going to be super skinny, so it's like knowing how are you going to adapt to your physique and kind of like optimize it in a way where you're going to feel comfortable like. Um I mean I lost weight during my first year of CrossFit. And then I gained it back, but my pants feel fine, so it's more like leaner muscle, so you know it's not that muscle weighs more than fat: a pound is a pound, but it's just that it takes up less space.

Annie: I love it. So if you were to describe...I'm still having a hard time picturing what your ideal is.

Natasha: Me too…I think it's a moving target. I think it's always what you feel. Because also people that...and this is also kind of scary too because the fitter you are the more comfortable you are, but um I've also found that I walk a little bit with my shoulders a little broader and I walk a little taller because I think a lot of people like a lot of men make a lot of inappropriate comments like oh you look fine or you look really sexy and I'm like I don't need to be objectified because I worked hard for this body like I wanna feel good for myself, I don't need those comments. And I hear like some people who go I wanna have a hot body and I'm like I don't want a hot body like I mean it's just a byproduct of hard work. I wanna be strong and I wanna be comfortable but don't objectify me.

Annie: Cool. So strong and comfortable.

Natasha: Yeah.

Annie: And you like being strong because you like feeling like you can do stuff, in the world.

Natasha: Yeah so I feel like that comes with a lot of my personality too…So for me knowing that I can control my body, that I have that ability, it makes me feel comfortable, so...

Natasha's responses reveal how her growing capacity and confidence in her body and herself, which she attributes to CrossFit, changed her body ideals and perception of what fitness means to her. As she became stronger (and more exposed to CrossFit ideals, goal-setting, and the culture), she found herself changing her opinion of what is attractive and herself. This is a common experience for CrossFitters. However, Natasha was hesitant to admit in this interview exactly what her ideal is, and when I asked her later more directly if she desired muscles as large as mine, she was abashed to admit that she did not because she prefers a more "toned" look because it is "slightly more feminine." Here again, we find that most of these women do desire some muscularity, and more so the more they become entrenched in CrossFit culture, but that for

most of them this muscularity has limits defined by what is considered "feminine" within the dominant culture.

However, a few women were unapologetically passionate in their desire for large muscularity and did not express that this had changed significantly as a result of CrossFit. Their reasons for this varied. Amy, a woman in her mid-twenties, was the most fired up about building large and powerful muscularity on her own body:

> *Annie: If you...and I know you just said this isn't about aesthetics, but if you had to identify an aesthetic if you have one for yourself, what would it look like? And if you don't have one for yourself you can just say I don't have one.*
>
> *Amy: Yeah I have an ideal, of course. Everyone has an ideal. I'd be lying if I said I didn't have an ideal.*
>
> *Annie: Alright.*
>
> *Amy: Of course aesthetics is part of it. For me it's part of it, but another part [unintelligible]. Aesthetic wise I aspire to look like the elite CrossFit athletes. You know what I mean? Like muscles, muscles, muscles on a woman look fucking awesome. I'm a fan. Always have been.*
>
> *Annie: Yeah. Like one of the Dottirs.*
>
> *Amy: Yeah. Holy shit! I think that's fucking cool.*
>
> *Annie: So if you're thinking like....they vary somewhat. Like obviously the Dottirs aren't as big as...I don't know if you've seen Brooke Ence? She's the one who was in Wonder Woman.*
>
> *Amy: Oh yeah I know Brook Ence.*
>
> *Annie: So would you put a limit, or would you say get as big as Brooke Ence?*
>
> *Amy: Brooke Ence is like, Brooke Ence is intense.*
>
> *Annie: Yeah she is.*
>
> *Amy: She's crazy. Um. I dont' think, just because like so I think anybody can become Brooke Ence. Like honestly I really do. It just all depends on your drive, your life, and what else you have going on in your life. Like that's her life. That's all she does. 24/7 that is all she does.*

Annie: Yeah

Amy: As far as like me....I...I'm sorry what was the question?

Annie: Just like would you put a limit on it. So for example a lot of people criticize her. A lot of people on Instagram they say oh the Dottirs are pretty but Brooke Ence is too big. That's what they say. So I just wondered.

Amy: Anytime I see that. Anytime someone says to a woman oh you're too big or don't get too big I wanna tell them go fuck themselves.

Annie: Yes [laughter]

Amy: I tell them go fuck themselves.

Annie: Yeah

Amy: Yeah exactly like. Who the fuck are you? You know what I mean? And I think Brooke Ence is awesome.

Annie: Yeah

Amy: I think she's awesome. And would I love to be strong like her? And like look like her? Absolutely. But I have to be realistic about it. I also have a full time job, I also have other commitments. Like I wanna have kids. You know what i mean like? I have other priorities which is not to say that doesn't make me any better or any less, it's just you know.

Amy's pursuit of large and powerful muscularity was a rarity in this study's subject pool. Her reflections revealed that she shares the more common aspiration to make gains with her lifts and her overall strength, which she attributes to her competitive mindset, something she's had since childhood. But Amy also seems to exhibit a resistant approach to society's definition of what a woman can and should be, adamantly asserting that she doesn't care what society tells her to be, that she wants to be and look strong and powerful. Christina, another woman in her mid-twenties, shares this perspective, but also admits that she struggles to maintain it in the face of

the opinions of others, which she recognizes as having an impact on her self-concept and self-esteem:

> *Annie: Yeah so what is your ideal body, you told me last time but I wonder if you could remind me.*
>
> *Christina: I wonder what I said last time. Because it's always changing…Like seriously some days I want to lift heavy but I also wanna be so skinny, so I'm going to eat nothing, like I'm going to eat like 500 calories a day and waste away, and wear like a size two and I'm not even going to worry about working out. I just won't eat, and I won't need to work out. And like the next day I'm like I wanna be huge and shredded so what I'm going to do is I'm going to lift super heavy and then I'm going to eat a whole bunch of carbs and then not eat for the...you know what I mean?*
>
> *Annie: You said that last time. Yeah you wanted to be huge and shredded.*
>
> *Christina: Yeah so I still lean like way more towards I just wanna be super ripped. Like I wanna be super shredded. I think that's because my love for fitness puts me around a lot of shredded people all the time and so I'm constantly comparing myself to them, um, so I would say that's still my ideal body. Um, it's interesting because I feel that way when I'm in the gym, and then when I'm walking down the street in Newport Beach I'm back to wanting to starve myself again, so...*
>
> *Annie: Yeah it's interesting how our values are affected by the people we're around.*

Christina made the transition from CrossFit to Powerlifting over the course of this two-year study, something she attributes to her "natural" body type being more disposed toward lifting than gymnastics. She admitted that she struggled with the idea of never getting light enough to be good at the gymnastics elements of CrossFit, and that it made her feel "ashamed" sometimes that her body was not naturally light or lean enough to gain skill in those areas.

Veronica, a woman in her early twenties, also expressed resistant body idealization. Her story was a bit different: when I delved deeper I found that she found inspiration in the bodies of body builder friends and family, who inspired her to develop a powerful, capable body of her own:

Annie: When you first heard of CrossFit what did you hear about it and what were your first impressions?

Veronica: I first heard about it when I was probably seventeen or eighteen. My best friend's sister started doing it and it changed her life. So...

Annie: How did it change your friend's life?

Veronica: So she used to be really thin and I kind of liked how her body was changing. I thought it was really neat. She was able to do a lot of things that you know a lot of people can't do. Like the lifts and stuff and I was just really intrigued by the lifts. And like everything she was able to do with the intensity and I thought that was pretty neat so. Annie: Have you always been drawn to...like because not everybody in the world admires being able to lift things and move their bodies with efficiency...can you trace back what it was in you, or is it just you just don't know?

So my best friend his sister...he's my ex...he started bodybuilding it used to be when he was eleven or twelve he got diagnosed with diabetes and then he started lifting when he was thirteen and within like three years he was just massive. And it was natural. And I was always really just intrigued by muscular people. Like the dedication that has to be put in to get that physique I've always kind of admired that.

Annie: So in terms of your goals what are you trying to do?

Veronica: Um just be strong. Which it's now just basically leaning out. So I wanted to be really strong and then have a physique that looked really lean but still really muscular. I didn't just want to be thin. Because all throughout high school I was always just thin. And I was like ah I'm gonna start lifting and so I started doing CrossFit and yeah started getting more muscular. Now I just need to lean back out. I could probably lose like thirty pounds. And hopefully maintain as much muscle as possible.

Veronica's reflections in this excerpt and elsewhere in the interview revealed that she had long had a conflicting relationship to her own body: she too had once suffered from an eating disorder, a commonality five different women shared during their interviews. She also admitted that she used to exercise compulsively in order to remain thin, but that she also was never happy with having a thin body, despite her efforts to maintain it. Today, Veronica professes to not only admire muscularity and the character it "requires" to maintain it (her observation), but also to seek it for herself, both in terms of functionality and aesthetics.

The responses of women who desired large muscularity stood in stark contrast to those who verbally maintained that they did not. Again, I asked two questions of most women related to size. I first asked them if they ever purposely limited their muscular growth, to which most women replied "no, but I don't think I could get big muscles," or some version thereof. However, when I asked women what their ideal body type was, they mostly replied that they wanted to be "toned." The women who expressed that they actively monitored this process did say that they did not want to "get too big" in terms of muscularity. In other words, women who actively maintained smaller bodies, sought strong and toned bodies, but not so much that they were willing to gain size or "bulk," the term women often use to refer to larger musculature. Michelle, a woman in her mid-forties, was one such woman:

Annie: Do you have an ideal body type?

Michelle: Well for me I tend to be bigger around the thighs and the hips so I wish I was a little bit thinner there. But other than that

Annie: Do you limit your weight lifting to keep yourself smaller in terms of muscle?

Michelle: Uh no I don't think so. I do that just kind of unconsciously I guess. I try it. Sometimes I think I just don't have the right technique you know and I just can't really get it but I don't really want to be buff I just want to be lean.

Annie: Right

Michelle: That's my goal. Just to be toned. Not have the...[gestures at arms]

Annie: Haha the batwings. Yeah I have some of those myself.

Michelle's response, as I mention elsewhere in this chapter, is more typical of your "average" CrossFitter. While this research indicates that most CrossFitter's ideals change over time, adapting to the culture spurred on by the motivation that results from having benchmarks and progress tracked publicly on the whiteboard, most women I observed and interviewed for

this project simply desired the toned and lean, yet strong, bodies glorified in contemporary Fitspo culture. Britney, a woman in her mid-twenties, also aspired to this ideal, and was perhaps the most conscious of her aversion to gaining size or "bulk":

> *Annie: So if you remember the first time you heard of CrossFit, what were your first impressions?*
>
> *Britney: Um I don't wanna do that.*
>
> *[laughter]*
>
> *Britney: I don't wanna get hurt, which everybody says. I don't know where it came from or where it derived from but without hearing too much about it my first thought is that I'm going to strain something. Or that I'm going to get thick in a way that I don't wanna get thick like too muscular. Obviously I was just being naive and not knowing that much about the sport. I think CrossFit, we spend fifteen minutes each day going through warmups and making sure our bodies are primed for these movements, and we actually break down the movements and I've been in other programs that don't really care or pay attention, so that notion was absolutely crappy. I just thought that I was gonna get hurt or I was gonna get fit in a way I didn't want to.*
>
> *Annie: Right. So then what is your ideal body type for yourself?*
>
> *Britney: I just wanna be healthy. I wanna be toned. But yeah that was that misconceived conception of being overly kind of wide.*
>
> *Annie: So you don't wanna be like Brooke Ence?*
>
> *Britney: Yeah I don't wanna be like that. That's why I don't work out seven days a week so I can hide that.*
>
> *Annie: The muscles pop out*
>
> *Britney: Yeah the muscles I need to tone them down.*
>
> *[laughter]*
>
> *Annie: Yeah*
>
> *Britney: Yeah just toned*
>
> *Annie: Have you ever said I don't wanna lift that heavy because I don't wanna get that big?*

Britney: Maybe in the beginning when I didn't...to be in honest in the beginning when I didn't fully understand CrossFit as much as I do now, I was getting used to CrossFit and I had that kind of like I don't wanna get too heavy I wanna get toned. But I now know that that's really hard to do. You have to work towards that, you have to have your protein, you have to have all these other things. But you could be a particular size, be very muscular, and not gain that kind of thickness. So I would say now I don't...

Annie: Like Anna

Britney: Yeah like Anna. Powerhouse! Thin but powerful. I think society has a certain idea about what fit means, but it's different for everybody. We all have different body types and fit is different for all of us. So I think stepping on a scale I don't do [despite me overhearing her talking about her weight gain]. I don't think it's about following that certain diet or following that certain body trend, it's about working out, staying healthy, and being fit so you can be mentally fit and physically fit and that's different for everybody, so I think it's important not to go with the tv norms of society and to just try to be a healthy person. I personally don't weigh myself because of that.

Britney's aversion to "bulk," to the extent that she actively works to make sure her muscles don't "pop out" was the most pronounced of all the women I interviewed. Over the course of two years I observed Britney gain more defined muscularity but she maintained her small physique, maintaining her weight at under 120 pounds on a 5'3 frame. Her idols in the gym were also very small, lean, yet defined women. While Britney's responses were at one extreme end of the spectrum of women I interviewed, I do not believe she was alone in her perspective. It is possible that some women were hesitant to admit so openly that they desired to limit their muscular growth, due in part to the CrossFit culture's glorification of muscularity, but also perhaps as a result of the fact that the woman interviewing them had very large muscles. Natasha is an example of someone who, when pressed, admitted that she had not wanted to be so blunt about her desire to maintain her "femininity" while in my presence.

However, while not all women desired increased muscular size, they all, without exception, expressed desiring increased strength. The reasons they gave included feeling more

empowered and confident, gaining the capacity to do every day activities, serving as an example for their children, finding purpose and meaning through physical and personal growth, gaining and maintaining control over their bodies, finding beauty in strength, and improved health. Mary, a woman in her early forties, expresses her ideal as being "strong," "healthy," and outside of society's norm:

> *Annie: Yeah. And then uh what would you say is your ideal body type for yourself?*
>
> *Mary: It's whatever uh, is...makes me strong. Yeah so it's not like you know...when I feel healthy, when I feel strong, that's my ideal body type.*
>
> *Annie: Do you think it's different than what society's norm is in your opinion?*
>
> *Mary: Very.*

Mary's preference for a "strong" body type is universal among this study's participants, as is her pursuit of a "healthy" ideal. It is also a typical response for her to consider her ideal outside of the norm. But I had to delve deeper with other interviewees to understand more about the motivations of these women in their pursuit of strength. Ann, a woman in her early thirties, reflected more on why she enjoys becoming stronger:

> *Ann: Uh in the early, when I first started getting involved I had never done Olympic lifting or anything like that before so it was just kind of interesting you know and like and it kind of made me feel like oh I kind of feel powerful now, you know? Like I never thought I would be able to do this kind of stuff. I think it's just...empowering I guess. Like when you're in the middle of a workout and you look at the clock and you're like oh my gosh I have so much time left how am I going to be able to finish this or I have so many rounds left to finish but then you just kind of keep chipping away at it and pushing through and then you finish it and it's just like a huge sense of accomplishment, like because you thought oh my gosh I'm never going to be able to finish this and then you do finish it and it's like oh I didn't think I could that, you know? Yeah so like it really just helps to push yourself beyond what you think you can do, you know? And so I think it does make you feel more powerful and it makes you feel more...I don't know what the word is, just...you can do more than your mind thinks you can do, you know?*

Ann's response indicates that she feels a newfound sense of power in her body and in her own capacity to overcome challenges. The feeling of being "powerful" can be associated with women's sense of their growing capacity to affect the world around them, as well as their increasing physical, emotional, and mental resiliency (an effect also mentioned by many of the men interviewed for this study). Diana Smith connects these three arenas of power, "effectance," and resiliency in her study of strength training women:

> …when females expand their somatic horizons to include the intentional development and maintenance of muscle mass and strength, a generalization of its effects may occur. Through the actualization of their full physical potential, one dimension of female mresilience will be acquired naturally through somatic pathways, rather than by traumatizing or victimizing experiences. (97)

Smith's understanding carefully emphasizes the role of "somatic pathways" in the actualization of new female self-concepts, a conceptualization which reinforces my understanding of agency and resistance found via the material, or the body's capacity to adapt beyond the limitations of culture, which I explore in more detail in the final sections of this chapter.

However, Ann's articulation of the joy she finds in feeling "powerful" did not extend to her aesthetic goals, that is, she did not profess to desire the appearance of strength:

> *Ann: Um I mean losing weight is always ideal. But I think I do it just to stay in shape. Not necessarily lose a million pounds or anything but I don't wanna gain weight too.*
>
> *Annie: Have you ever tried to limit your muscularity?*
>
> *Ann: Uh no, I don't really think about that.*

Ann's response that she "doesn't think about" her muscularity is indicative of CrossFit's focus on functionality over aesthetics. It is also a response representative of a number of women I interviewed, and when compared to Dworkin's subjects who stated they were quite concerned

with growing too large in 2001, is a sign that societal strictures limiting female muscularity may be somewhat more relaxed than in previous decades, although they clearly have not disappeared.

Monica, another woman in her early thirties expressed a different relationship to her body than Ann, in that she was actively pursuing a strong-looking body, in addition to increased capacity, even if it were a large body, although she qualified the latter with her desire to acquire a low body-fact percentage:

> *Annie: Very cool. One more question. So one of the things I started studying here was how different women relate to their own muscles, because it's counter to traditional femininity. What's your perspective on that? Would you limit your muscular size?*
>
> *Monica: No. No I don't. It's the other way around, like. I plateaued recently but it's like people are like just do more cardio don't lift too much weight, and I'm like no, I'm not going to do that, because I wanna lose weight and I wanna figure out how to lose weight but I don't wanna lose like strength. And if that means that I'm like this thick but as long as my fat percentage goes down I'm fine.*
>
> *Annie: Right.*
>
> *Monica: Like I'd rather be 200 lbs of muscle than 200 pounds of just pure fat or you know 40, 30 percent body fat. But no I wouldn't um...maybe like in the past when I was younger maybe I would have thought of that but now I just don't care. I'd rather be strong, I'd rather be mobile, like I'd rather be strong than look a certain way and I don't really care anymore. [laughs]*

Monica's attention to body-fat percentage represents the continuing pervasiveness of cultural mandates that require controlled, disciplined, "tight" physiques for both men and women (Bordo), but her desire for the appearance of power and strength is not representative of past versions of the American feminine ideal.

Jaycee, a woman in her late fifties, had one of the most inspiring stories I encountered: she is one of several people I interviewed who credits CrossFit and the strength and capacity it gave her, with completely transforming her life:

> *Jaycee: And how many times it's...that's another thing that's changed my life. I could not have my mother out these last five years. I cannot tell you how many times people say you*

are so strong. Like my mom, she's lost probably twenty or twentyfive pounds in the last few years but there's no way. I can transfer her. I can stand her up. I can you know move the wheelchair. I can hold her. And I would have been able to do none of that. None of that. And so it's the best. I've never...I wasn't an athlete, and my brothers were really athletic and so I was..of all of our stories growing up the biggest belly laughs are about my lack of athletic prowess. So I'm now in far better shape than either one of my brothers. And I love that people, one of the things they refer to me as is strong. Now I don't, you know what I mean? I'm little…

I've never had the physical part of my life be such an integrated part of my life…like for example I've learned things about how to lift and move that have translated into me being able to take my mom out and improve an awesome relational aspect in my life because of what I've learned at CrossFit…I was walking out of the store the other day and some guy's like oh my gosh I can't believe you're carrying that. And I'm like: I do CrossFit…It's kind of a proud badge of courage for me. Because so many people go you do CrossFit?

And I guess that's the other thing I would say is that there's...I remember years ago the pastor at our church had us do this thing where we had to look up the meaning of our name. You know? And um Jaycee means something like victorious in battle. [laughs] You know it's not like Graceful or...it's like Atila the Hun, you know what I mean? There's a part of me that that's very much my...like I'm an overcomer. But physically nobody would ever say that about me. So now it feels like there's some more congruency in my life because that is true about my life physically now. It's changed my life.

For Jaycee, the strength she gained physically, mentally, and emotionally are a part of her new identity, and this identity is decidedly female for her:

Jaycee: And women's sports were just coming in. We weren't encouraged...now my mom did a great job of like...we were exposed culturally to a lot of things, you know music and art and things like that....but like sports...we had...it was a big deal we had a girls basketball team, and then we had a girls volleyball team. And that was...and there was track. It's not like there wasn't...but you had to be uber athletic. And now when I was listening to you talk I was just thinking I can't help but wonder if today...like for so long it was like "we're equals with men" well guess what: structurally we're never gonna be exactly the same so it feels...I just can't help but wonder if there's a little bit more of a levelling out of "no, I don't wanna be man-strong" I wanna be female strong. You know? Like female strong. I don't wanna be man strong.

Jaycee is adamant in her assertion that she doesn't wanna be "man-strong" but that she wants to be "female-strong." I interpreted this to mean that for her, strong women aren't trying to be like men, but rather she aspires to a new definition of femininity.

The experiences of the women I interviewed for this study reinforce the idea that strength training for women can result in improved confidence and capacity, leaving them feeling, in their own words, "empowered." These findings reinforce theorizations within the field of corporeal feminism, which asserts that the root of gender inequality is the justification that women are biologically or "naturally" weaker, frailer, and determined by nature, therefore they need the protection and assistance of men to function in their everyday lives, and are by definition, inferior to men. Elizabeth Grosz expresses these mechanics of women's oppression eloquently:

> Instead of granting women an autonomous and active form of corporeal specificity, at best women's bodies are judged in terms of a "natural inequality," as if there were a standard or measure for the value of bodies independent of sex. In other words, women's corporeal specificity is used to explain and justify the different (read: unequal) social positions and cognitive abilities of the two sexes. By implication, women's bodies are presumed to be incapable of men's achievements, being weaker, more prone to (hormonal) irregularities, intrusions, and unpredictabilities. (Grosz 1994, 14; cited in McCaughey 26)

As Grosz explains, femininity, as it is experienced and performed by women today and in past decades, is perceived to require some degree of physical and emotional frailty (or at least a lack of strength relative to men), passivity, and incompetence. The women of this study find pleasure in defying these norms, even if only a few of them are conscious that redefining the terms of femininity is what they are doing. For "feminine manners and attractiveness require a concern for the needs of others, a degree of pleasantness to which we do not hold men accountable (Cline and Spender 1987), and a cultivated inability to defend moral and physical boundaries (MacKinnon 1989). Being looked at (rather than looking at others) and withholding one's strength help make up femininity (MacKinnon 1987; Young 1990)." (McCaughey 33)

But these enactments of femininity go beyond performance and become written onto the body and experienced as "natural". Elizabeth Grosz, building off Bourdieu's 1990 work on

habitus, who was working with Merleau Ponty's conception of motor memory, states it succinctly: "Discourses of gender help constitute our very biological organization." (Grosz 1994, 142, cited in McCaughey 38) That is to say, what we understand to be masculinity and femininity we enact and exaggerate, through performance. We learn to perform the gestures, gaits, and mannerisms of our culture, expected of our society, and unconsciously they become who we are, and they feel like a part of our very biological makeup.[67]

In other words, the idea that we are weak as women, or that we cannot perform certain tasks with competence, or that we cannot and should not develop physical strength and size relative to men, is not natural or biological, or at least to the degree we believe it to be. Iris Young's work on sport and femininity illustrates this by revealing how girls and women are socialized to feel less physically capable, in that the tasks that girls vs. boys are encouraged to perform as small children, and the reinforcement they receive from adults, shapes how they view their own bodily capacities, and how these capacities do or do not develop.

The fields of Biology and Kinesiology have also increasingly illustrated that sexual dimorphism, or the size and strength differential between the sexes, is to a great degree culturally influenced, and subject to change/evolution. This research indicates that women make greater relative strength gains compared to untrained men, particularly in upper body exercises. (O'Hagan et al.; Weiss et al.; Kell et al.; Ribeiro et al.), or equal gains (Ahtiainen et al.) In terms of muscular size gains, women and men, when subjected to the same strength regimen, increase muscular volume in proportional or equal levels and rates relative to body mass. (O'Hagan et al., Abe et al.)

[67] To some degree hormones do affect gestures, gait, and mannerisms, but these hormones are highly variable amongst and between the sexes, and they are also influenced by environmental factors.

Studies that evaluate the strength capacity of women relative to men within a military context have found that untrained women "catch up" to untrained men at around the 6 month training mark. Nindl et al., citing a landmark study by Kraemer et al., state these results: "Women who underwent 6 months of total body strength/power training had load carriage abilities equivalent to those of untrained men." (Nindl: 2016 59) These findings imply that women who engage in weight training earlier in life might close the gap between women and men in terms of strength. While the final results compared women who had trained for six months to "untrained" men, the physical activities of even untrained men in American society are arguably more physically intensive than those of untrained women, depending on class status and subcultural background, of course.

What's more, recent research indicates that weight-bearing and impact exercises impact the hormonal composition of individual bodies, which in turn affects everything from base-level muscle mass, height, bone density, and hair growth, to sexual desire and mood. For example, weight training can increase blood serum testosterone levels in both men and women, which can impact future capacity to develop musculature. (Nindl: 2001; Kraemer: 2012; Vingren: 2012) If weight training and general physical activity between women and men were held at equal levels throughout life, would we see such a large disparity in size and strength between the sexes?

Recent research also indicates that the role of testosterone in muscle growth has also likely been overstated. A comprehensive meta-analysis of the research on women and strength training, titled "Strength Training for Women: Setting the Record Straight," was recently published by Greg Nuckols[68] on the popular fitness blog Stronger by Science. In this work,

[68] Many thanks to Greg Nuckols for sending me pdfs of many of the research articles I used for this section, and for his very illuminating Reddit posts, which is how I discovered his very thorough and informative meta-analysis.

Nuckols presents the research on women and strength training, including the role of testosterone in strength and muscle volume growth:

> Also note, testosterone isn't the only relevant sex difference here. There are sex differences in gene expression, sex differences in other anabolic hormones like IGF-1 (which may play a bigger role in women than men), and, obviously, sex differences in estrogen (which, contrary to popular belief, exerts anabolic effects in muscle tissue). Testosterone is only one piece of a much larger picture that only gets more confusing and convoluted the more you look at it. At the end of the day, it's best to just remember the messiness of physiology and understand that outcomes (similar relative muscle growth and strength gains, supported by heaps of research) trump mechanisms (differences in testosterone levels) every time. (Nuckols)

The "messiness" of physiology includes a number of other factors, such as progesterone, a hormone produced by both women and men but more well-known to stimulate menstruation in women, which is a precursor for testosterone. Estrogen, while having androgenic effects on muscle growth, also serves as a protective mechanism against muscular fatigue, and is theorized as the reason why women can lift longer and recover faster. (Liu et al.) While it is true that men generally start with base levels of muscle mass higher than those of women, it is important to consider the role of activities and exercises both prior to puberty and thereafter that affect this development.

All this is without taking into consideration the role of epigenetics, which is as yet little understood. Epigenetics reveals that the body's genes adapt, turning on or off, based on environmental cues, including forms of exercise and labor. It is plausible that genes that determine physical characteristics and behaviors that we associate with gender could be adaptive to environmental cues. Those aspects of femininity or masculinity that reside in the body, such as musculature, gait, mannerisms, jaw density, height, voice timbre, posture, etc, could be in fact be influenced by genes that are adaptable to environmental stimuli, as well as hormones that also

adapt to environmental stimuli. The human body and species are truly flexible even their material elements.

This proves to be true in-utero: the environment that mothers are exposed to while carrying a fetus to term affects the development of the child's sex development in terms of genes, gonadal development, and most relevant to my interests, hormones. For example, exposure of the mother to various environmental stimuli can affect the exposure of the fetus to hormone levels in utero, thereby affecting their sex development, characteristics we associate with masculinity and femininity (such as gesture, gait, voice, etc.), and even sexual orientation. (Robinson and Manning; Cohen-Bendahan et al.)

All this is to say that we are only beginning to understand how much of an impact cultural expectations and myths have had on keeping women frail, weak, and defenseless, despite the muscular potential of the female body. Of course, in an ideal world, it is every individual's choice to be large or small, frail or strong. If the dominant ideology is such that beauty is frailty, then it is my hope that individuals can be free to choose frailty as beauty, if that is in fact their choice.

However, it is surely difficult to choose something that society considers an abomination. To choose muscularity in my youth meant being labelled unattractive, manly, and/or lesbian. I chose it, because I wanted to become a great athlete, but it came at a large social cost. It would seem that today increased muscularity for women is much more accepted and even lauded to some degree (I argue the reasons why this is so in the previous chapter), so long as it does entrench upon what remains of the definition of ideal masculinity, which is still larger, more powerful, and more defined. As many of this study's informants indicated, some muscularity on a woman is beautiful, but once it crosses the line into what they have determined is men's

domain, it is remains something unsavory, or even grotesque, and surely "unnatural." And so, true physical equality remains out of reach, no matter the material/biological potential of half of our species.

Martha McCaughey cites Andrea Dworkin to illustrate corporeal feminism's[69] understanding of the construction of physical frailty as being at the root of women's oppression in her 1997 ethnography of women's self-defense, Real Knockouts:

> The right to physical strength as power, in a male-supremacist system, is vouchsafed to men. [One] tenet of male supremacy is that men are physically stronger than women and, for that reason, have dominion over them. Physical strength in women that is not directly harnessed to "women's work" becomes an abomination, and its use against men, that is, as power, is anathema, forbidden, horribly punished. The reality of male physical strength in an absolute sense is less important than the ideology that sacralizes and celebrates it. In part, the physical strength of men over women is realized because men keep women physically weak. (Dworkin 1979, 14-15; cited in McCaughey 29)

While the results of this study do not indicate that American women are seizing strength as power, that they seek larger bodies, or that they are in any way remotely conscious that their fitness practices could affect the root of their oppression (and their exposure to sexual violence), they do acknowledge that their strength gains have changed the way they move through the world. Whether or not this unconscious self-restructuring of the bodies and characters of these women can be characterized as resistance, is the subject of the final section.

Agency:

As I've previously outlined at length, women training their muscles in many ways remains in contradiction to the definition of what our culture defines as woman. Weight training changes the material text of a woman's body, while also changing the script she follows in her construction of her identity. The text and the script interact, the text shaping the script, and the

[69] Also "physical feminism" and "muscle feminism"

script shaping the text: the sense of power she feels from her own stronger physical capacity informs her sense of self, and this sense of self wills her onward to grow yet stronger and more powerful. Can this be defined as agency, particularly considering its unconsciousness, as well as the likelihood that Biopower in late capitalism is mandating this shift?

Agency, as I understand it, is the capacity to shape one's own self, through one's own will. Arguably one's will is never outside of cultural constructs that determine what we perceive, believe, and want. And yet there is something outside of power that resides in the physical, the biological, as it is beyond the grasp of knowledge: we do not yet completely understand (via current discourses of knowledge/science) the human body.

By tuning into the body's "truths", our physical experiences, particularly when they contradict cultural scripts, we have an opportunity to move and live beyond these scripts. I might even extend this idea of tuning into our own physical power as tapping into Zoe, our collective life force (Braidotti 7) or even Spinoza's God-energy (Lloyd). It is a current of something true that for the moment escapes our own cultural constructs, constructs that determine almost everything else we see and believe. Of course Biopower works to maximize the productive potential of the material at the level of individuals and populations, by harnessing the psychological: teaching us how to govern ourselves according to the principles that would maximize this productivity. But if there is truth to be found there is truth in the material, in the body, and for this reason it is to the body that I perpetually return.

Carrie Noland's 2009 work "Agency and Embodiment" explores the question of agency through experiences of the body and performativity, arguing that "motor challenges to acculturated behaviors are themselves a form of agency, one that arises from the experiences of movement afforded, paradoxically, by acculturation itself." (Noland 2) She continues by

explaining that "kinesthesia", the "sensations of movement transmitted to the mind from the nerves of the muscular, tendinous, and articular systems," (Noland 9-10) reveals the capacity for movement and training to change our thoughts, perceptions, and even the structure of our brains.

The potential for this is incredible, particularly when considering "new" movements and trainings that may be conceived of as resistant, such as women strength training. Indeed, the women of this study indicated that the changes they experienced in their everyday lives exceeded what they expected to gain from their fitness training: they felt more empowered, confident, and capable as they moved through the world. While this may seem in some ways like a commonsense result, I suggest that the restructuring of the body, its habitus, and the brain may have a more revolutionary impact on how we define femininity, woman, and the gender binary in the United States today.

Noland offers us another insight into how this might be working:

> Gesturing also affords an opportunity for *interoceptive* or kinesthetic awareness, the intensity of which may cause subjects to alter the very ways they move. If body motility is, as Henri Bergson once claimed, the single most important filtering device in the subject's negotiations with the external world, then a theory of agency that places movement center stage is essential to understanding how human beings are embodied within-and impress themselves on-their worlds…kinesthetic experience, produced by actions of embodied gesturing, places pressure on the conditioning a body receives, encouraging variations in performance that account for larger innovations in cultural practice that cannot otherwise be explained. (Noland 2-3)

In other words, when we move our bodies in new ways, when we act upon our bodies, whether it appears to defy or support dominant ideologies or power, it changes us, and we cannot possibly predict the impact this will have on who we are or the social structures we inhabit. Even when we do not act upon the body, it is beyond our comprehension, relatively unpredictable, and therefore a wellspring of potentialities, some, if only for a moment, beyond the reach of power. It will be interesting to observe whether increasing numbers of women continue to strength train,

without putting limits on their strength gains, and what impact this has on the gender binary, sexual dimorphism, the definition of femininity, and gender oppression. Studying the cultural phenomenon of CrossFit and its impact on American society is just the beginning of this research.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this dissertation has been an exploration of how Biopower[70] operates through physical fitness in the contemporary United States. I have utilized a two-year ethnographic study of a Southern California CrossFit community to explore the ways in which Biopower functions to produce ideologies, subjectivities, and bodies, while also yielding openings for resistance to its own power.

In Chapter One I investigated how neoliberal discourses of health as fitness influenced this study's subjects, via internalized norms, to adopt personal responsibility for health and fitness, view fitness as evidence of personal willpower and moral superiority, utilize fitness as anxiety mitigation and control, and experience fitness as empowerment and personal self-realization. In Chapter Two I analyzed the CrossFit experience as a form of subjectification, examining what types of subjects are produced within this context, why, and to what effect. I extended this analysis into a theorization of "a trajectory of hope" that materializes as a collective energy that pulls subjects toward a future self. In Chapters Three and Four I developed a framework to better understand the increasing acceptability and valorization of female muscularity in American popular culture. Chapter Three included an historiography of the American feminine ideal, a review of the literature, and a theorization as to why the American feminine ideal may be shifting toward increased muscularity at this juncture in history. Chapter Four expanded upon chapter Three's arguments using ethnographic data to test my hypotheses. I found that most women do not desire extreme "masculine" muscularity within this sample, but that their ideals appear more muscular than past generations, and that they do desire strength

[70] The force that works to uphold Biopolitical capitalism by mobilizing individuals and populations to maximum productivity. (Foucault; Hardt and Negri; Introduction to this work)

without limits, a finding that contradicts previous results in this field. I extend my results into a brief analysis of these findings' implications for ideal femininity, the gender binary in late capitalism, and the sexual dimorphism of our species.

In future articles, and perhaps a book, I hope to deepen my interrogation of these findings. More specifically, I would like to collect more data, in the form of additional interviews and surveys, and conduct a coding-based quantitative analysis to observe whether more patterns emerge. I would also like to collect more consistent demographic data that I can associate with responses and compare them to a survey of the larger United States population. The focus of my questions would interrogate in more depth women's desire for physical strength and how it correlates to their aesthetic goals. I would also be interested in continuing my analysis of what it is that these subjects desire to become, and why, as an extension of chapter 2.

My personal evolution as one of this study's subjects greatly informed my interpretation of these results. I found myself physically, mentally, and emotionally changing as a result of my integration within this community and my participation in the sport and fitness practice of CrossFit. I intended this study to be a reflexive ethnography, that is, I knew that my own participation would impact the results and my interpretations, and therefore I included myself as a subject of the study.

As the weeks turned into months, and the months into years, I underwent a massive transformation inside and out. Not all of this was due to my CrossFit participation, but much of it was. I lost over fifty pounds, became a part of a supportive community, and found an activity and a project that I enjoyed investing my time and energy in. At the start of this project I doubted if I would have the discipline, fortitude, and social energy to see this dissertation to its completion. Interestingly, the work I put into it gave me increasing capacity to complete it, as it yielded

increased self-confidence, new personal and physical skills, and a group that supported me in every endeavor. I myself saw the results of chapter 2 working upon my sense of self: I too felt pulled into a trajectory of hope.

I view this study as just the beginning of work examining the role of fitness in subject formation, as a primary mode of subject creation, via the self as a project, in the United States today. Future work could interrogate further how Biopower mandates that subjects continually labor to produce ideal selves, and how physical fitness is serving as a means to compel individuals to work on their bodies, creating their characters, moral values, and psychological well-being. I would be particularly interested in work that examine my idea of a collective "trajectory of hope," built upon the theories of Deleuze, Braidotti, and Hansson, as an affective "excess" to Biopower that enables new ways of being and seeing, opening up space for freedom and resistance.

Foucault pointed to sex as the locus of Biopower, because it was the intersection of ideology and the body, and therefore the focal point of forces that move to organize and utilize individuals and populations in the service of perpetual productivity and the accumulation of wealth and power. In his words, "sex was the means of access both to the life of the body and the life of the species." (The History of Sexuality 146) With this work, I point to fitness as another locus of Biopower in the contemporary United States today. I believe it is also an intersection of the body and ideology, the individual and the population, and perhaps its growing importance in western societies today points to it as a replacement for sex as the primary means of social control, or governmentality, as the importance of reproduction in the western world (arguably) wanes. Future research could interrogate whether my hypothesis is indeed true.

I also believe that the results of this study indicate that women in the United States desire increased muscularity compared to generations past, and that this "trend" has been building momentum for approximately forty years, or since the dawn of neoliberal capitalism and the ascendance of Biopower as the primary form of governance in the western world. As I illustrate in chapter 3, Biopolitical capitalism requires flexible, independent, self-creating subjects to fulfill labor and consumer mandates, and the gender binary that characterized the 20th century no longer fits the requirements of today's economic system. Ideal femininity today requires women to be competitive, independent, and capable, and this shift in the terms of ideal femininity appears to be extending to the body.

While these mandates seem to be the result of Biopower, they arrive with attendant "side-effects," that is, the physical potential of bodies remains somewhat outside the realm of power, as it is beyond the complete grasp of the knowledge/power apparatus (we do not completely understand the workings of the body, its adaptability, its evolutionary mechanisms, or its potential). Therefore, we cannot possibly predict the ways in which individuals and communities will evolve in response to new ways of being, becoming, and moving.

In the case of women, it seems that traditional interpretations of women as "naturally" weak are continually disproven, both within the social sciences and the fields of biology and kinesiology. As our society continues to shift toward "allowing" and even encouraging women to strength train, it will be interesting to observe what impact this has on the gender binary, that is, the mutual opposition of men as "strong" and women as "weak," its effect on American society, particularly the liberation of women and the culture of sexual violence, and what physiological impact it has on sexual dimorphism, or the size differential between males and females of our species. Future work could interrogate these shifts as they occur.

As a qualitative project I believe there are few limitations to this study, but from a quantitative standpoint, there is much work to be done. Quantitatively, there was limited survey data (36 responses), limited interview data (37 responses), little quantitative analysis, and a lack of socioeconomic diversity in the study sample. I was also not able to consistently cross-reference demographic variables such as race and class that would impact subject responses.

Because there was so much consistency in my main findings, I do not believe this to be a significant flaw in this study's design, however I would like to remedy this in my future work, if only to leave open the option of quantitative demographic-based analyses. A comparison to the larger American population would also be of particular interest to me at this juncture, as I think it would address counterarguments regarding the "niche" or "subcultural" aspects of CrossFit that some argue limit the potential for extrapolation to larger American cultural shifts.

It is my hope that the results of this study will contribute to our understanding of Biopolitical forces in late capitalism, by interrogating how Biopower functions at the level of individuals and communities, and how these influences are impacting American society today. I believe that by better understanding the operation of neoliberal discourses of health, processes of subject-formation and self-creation, and ideal femininity, we can enable increased capacity for agency, that is, the power to choose our futures. In my view this is preferable to being swept along in accordance with norms that do not equally serve the betterment of individuals and communities, or the creation of a more egalitarian society. It is my goal with this work to expose inequalities and systems of oppression, while offering hope by revealing fissures and cracks in the structure of power, by confirming the body and its affective (emotional) power as a locus of resistance.

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APPENDIX

Field Site Selection

When I embarked upon the data collection portion of this project in March of 2016 my first task was to find the CrossFit community that would become my future field site. It was my hope to find a community that represented "average" Southern Californians rather than a niche subculture of elite athletes, that was also a large and diverse enough sample to make extrapolations based on race, class, gender, and age. After researching several different boxes I settled on one that was a well-known CrossFit community in the area. However, after spending three months at this field site location I felt that the community was not diverse enough to serve my purposes (it was mostly white, young, and extremely fit), but more importantly, it was structured in such a way that cliques made it difficult to talk to people and become fully integrated. In fact, I found myself feeling so unwelcome by the end of three months that I started looking for another field site.

After perusing several other boxes' websites I found one that showcased photos of members and coaches that represented a diverse array of ages and races. This intrigued me, and so I explored the rest of the website, which featured a blog by one of the owners that revealed his mission: to empower individuals to find freedom through their bodies. After speaking with Henry on the phone I felt hopeful again and set about trying the community for a few days. My very first day the members of CrossFit X made me feel welcome and hopeful about my fitness future. At the time I was fifty pounds overweight and had very little CrossFit experience. The coaches at CrossFit X helped me scale the movements and gave me personalized instruction on

the high skill movements. As shy and out of shape as I was, I felt like I could spend two-plus years in this space.

Participant Observation

Participant Observation is a research technique that "involves immersing yourself in a culture and learning to remove yourself every day from that immersion so you can intellectualize what you've seen and heard…" (Bernard 258) In practice, it involves participating in the community as a full member, engaging in activities, conversations, rituals, and customs fully, then stepping back and taking field notes on the experience, and extrapolating from those field notes to generate theories about the culture, and in the case of this work, the larger American cultural context. I spent almost two and a half years as a participant observer at CrossFit X, or approximately 600 hours.

I set about taking field notes after every workout session, which I would often audio record on my drive home from workouts and transcribe later. I started going to CrossFit 3-4 times a week, however there were several periods during which I became ill and missed entire weeks, and at one point I missed an entire month of workouts. However, by the second year of the study I was consistently attending CrossFit classes between 3-5 times per week. My fieldnotes at first were mostly "grand tour" observations of the space through a newcomer's eyes: what the space looked like, how many people came to the workout, what the workout consisted of, how people responded to it, how people dressed, what they discussed, etc.

Occasionally I would have an idea about a research question, or an observation that I could feel developing into a possible theory. For example, I was intrigued early on by CrossFit attire: tights and booty shorts for women, long shorts and t-shirts for men, which follows fairly

strict regimentation that reinforces gender norms. I thought it might be something to pay attention to and develop a theory around, but as I continued to observe the space, asking casual questions, and researching the larger popular culture representations of sport and fitness, I concluded that this research question was a dead end: these gender-normed workout clothes were not unique to CrossFit, but merely emblematic of workout attire for the general population in this time and place, and so I dropped this line of questioning and replaced it with other more fruitful inquiries that were beginning to organically emerge, and which became the subjects of the first two chapters of this project.

Integration

My integration into this community was a gradual process. Because I was very shy and anxious in the beginning, I spent the most time at classes that were popular with older folks and women, particularly the 12 noon class. These individuals attempted to get to know me despite my awkwardness. I also had the added challenge of not adhering to dominant norms of dress and body aesthetics in the first year. I noticed that as I started to mimic the clothing of those around me I received positive feedback, and so I made attempts to continue doing so. I also noticed that as I began to lose weight, the positive validation intensified, to the extent that the community began to rally around my progress and respect my efforts.

The turning point in my integration occurred during the first year's CrossFit Open, an open competition that is a part of the larger CrossFit Games event. Most of the community participates in this event annually, signing up online, participating in competition workouts, bringing food and drink into the box, cheering each other on, and creating an overall party atmosphere on Friday nights in February and March. My participation in this competition gave

me center stage exposure, and because I gave it my best effort, I earned the respect of many of my peers. I found myself writhing on the floor in agony, soaked in sweat, and gasping for breath, but with the cheers of my fellows ringing in my ears. They knew my name, and after this period, I noticed a lot more people approaching me and trying to get to know me.

Interviews

I conducted 37 interviews for this study. Most of the interviews I conducted took place when there was not a WOD ongoing, usually sitting in a corner or leaning against a wall, or outside in the parking lot. One long interview took place in a café. I usually approached members after the workout in a casual manner, referring to the study via the IRB-mandated study information sheet (posted on the bulletin board in public view for the duration of this study), and asked them for 5-10 minutes of their time. Sometimes interviews stretched as long as 50 minutes, but only in cases where it was apparent the informant wanted to talk at length about their perspective and experiences.

At first, I approached members with whom I was familiar. I chose to do the majority of my interviewing in the second year of the study, because I felt that I would be more comfortable asking members for their time after I had become somewhat integrated into the community. I noticed that as time progressed, my growing interview skills, confidence, and stature in the community made the process a lot smoother. My growing confidence and skill-set likely had a small effect on interview results: I was much more anxious during early interviews, which led me to speak more than I should have, and I sometimes did not have the courage to ask all of the questions I initially intended to ask. The later interviews occurred during the last six months of the study, and included individuals that I did not know as well, and were overall much more

smooth and methodologically sound. Most members said yes to my interview request, but I did have one direct no response, and several people who put it off indefinitely.

This interview sample of 37 consisted of 23 women and 14 men, age 18-65, of various racial backgrounds including African American, Latino, Asian, Middle-Eastern, and White. While I did code interview responses based on gender and age, I did not conduct a quantitative analysis based on race, as I have no theoretical imperative to do so at this time.

Interview questions were semi-formal, but I adhered to a few main questions religiously:

> *When did you first hear about CrossFit and what were your first impressions?*
> *Why do you do CrossFit?*
> *Have you ever tried to limit your muscular growth? (Women)*
> *Why do you want to be strong? (Women, if they state they want to be strong as a response to either of the previous two questions.)*
> *What is your ideal body (aesthetically, performatively, etc.)?*
> *How do you cope with pain during a workout?*
> *What is your approach to health?*

I maintained the above ordering of questions fairly regularly, although there was some variation based on the responses of my informants (tangents, segues, etc.).

I transcribed all of my interviews manually, and did not conduct formal coding, although my future work may include axial coding to interrogate various themes and patterns. For this version of the project I stuck with the themes that were apparent without formal coding: health, becoming, and the original focus of this project: female muscularity.

Survey

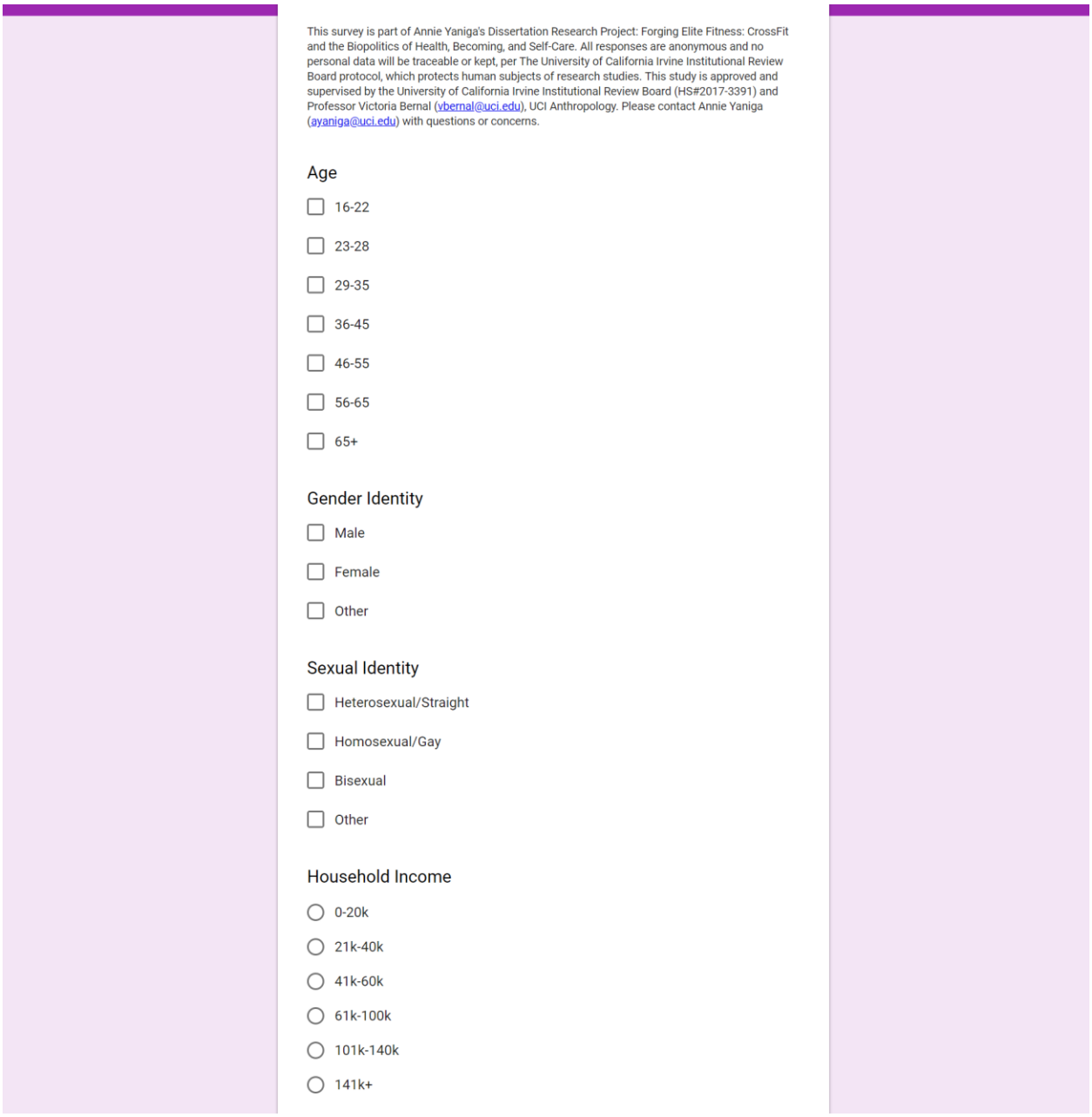
I designed and administered an online survey, with the primary intention of evaluating member's opinions on ideal female body aesthetics. At this project's inception there were no previous studies that gave respondents thin, toned, and muscular visual options side by side for

women, making cross-historical analysis likely impossible. In fact, in order to design a survey that met my needs, I paid an artist[71] to draw toned images in the style of Novella et al, and asked permission from Novella et al to borrow thin and muscular images from their 2015 study, which placed thin images and muscular images on separate surveys, arranged according to body size. I then set the thin, toned, and muscular images side by side, arranged them according to increasing body size, so that respondents could choose their preference based on body size, body composition, and muscularity, all at the same time.

I designed the survey within Google Forms, and administered it via an email link that was sent out to all members subscribed to the community email list. I also posted the link on social media for members who were connected to me that way. Responses were anonymous and no identifying information was collected.

This survey had 36 respondents and is analyzed to some degree in chapter 4. The complete survey is included below.

[71] Many thanks to Novella et al, artist Veronika Schmidt for her amazing talent, kindness, and general support, and my brother (also an artist) Danny Yaniga (for helping me shade the images).



This survey is part of Annie Yaniga's Dissertation Research Project: Forging Elite Fitness: CrossFit and the Biopolitics of Health, Becoming, and Self-Care. All responses are anonymous and no personal data will be traceable or kept, per The University of California Irvine Institutional Review Board protocol, which protects human subjects of research studies. This study is approved and supervised by the University of California Irvine Institutional Review Board (HS#2017-3391) and Professor Victoria Bernal (vbernal@uci.edu), UCI Anthropology. Please contact Annie Yaniga (ayaniga@uci.edu) with questions or concerns.

Age

- [ ] 16-22
- [ ] 23-28
- [ ] 29-35
- [ ] 36-45
- [ ] 46-55
- [ ] 56-65
- [ ] 65+

Gender Identity

- [ ] Male
- [ ] Female
- [ ] Other

Sexual Identity

- [ ] Heterosexual/Straight
- [ ] Homosexual/Gay
- [ ] Bisexual
- [ ] Other

Household Income

- ○ 0-20k
- ○ 21k-40k
- ○ 41k-60k
- ○ 61k-100k
- ○ 101k-140k
- ○ 141k+

Figure 31 Survey 1/5.

Race/Ethnicity

- ◯ African American/Black
- ◯ Asian American
- ◯ Mexican American
- ◯ Other Latino
- ◯ Middle Eastern
- ◯ White/European American
- ◯ Other
- ◯ Mixed race
- ◯ Prefer not to state

Highest Education Level

- ◯ Some high school or less
- ◯ High School Diploma
- ◯ Some college
- ◯ College Degree
- ◯ Masters or Professional Degree
- ◯ Medical Degree
- ◯ PhD

Hours a week you spend doing CrossFit

- ◯ 0-1
- ◯ 2-3
- ◯ 4-5
- ◯ 6-7
- ◯ 8-9
- ◯ 10+

Hours a week spent employed/working/studying (including homemakers)

- ◯ 0-10
- ◯ 11-20
- ◯ 21-30
- ◯ 31-40
- ◯ 41-60
- ◯ 61+

Figure 32 Survey 2/5.

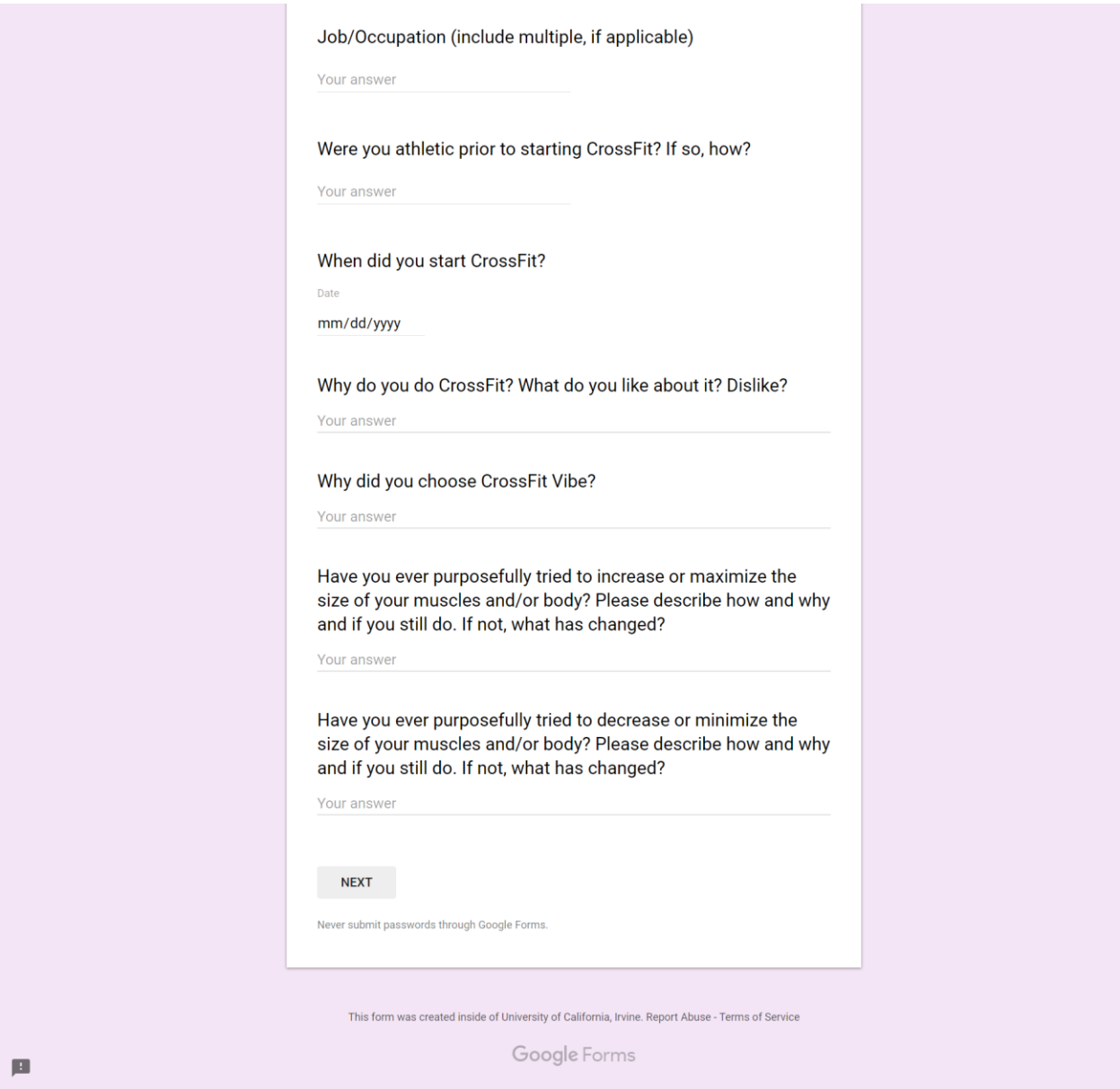
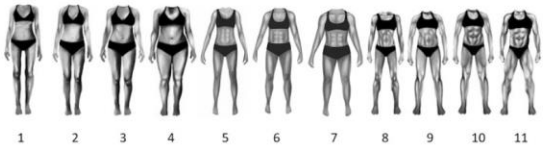


Figure 33 Survey 3/5.

Female Body Ideal Survey

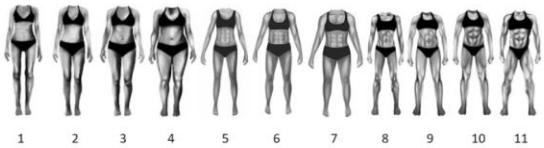
(You do not have to identify as female to respond.)

Which female body type shown below do you consider most ideal?



- ◯ Option 1
- ◯ Option 2
- ◯ Option 3
- ◯ Option 4
- ◯ Option 5
- ◯ Option 6
- ◯ Option 7
- ◯ Option 8
- ◯ Option 9
- ◯ Option 10
- ◯ Option 11

Which female body type shown below do you believe our society considers most ideal?



- ◯ Option 1
- ◯ Option 2
- ◯ Option 3
- ◯ Option 4
- ◯ Option 5
- ◯ Option 6
- ◯ Option 7
- ◯ Option 8
- ◯ Option 9
- ◯ Option 10
- ◯ Option 11

Figure 34 Survey 4/5.

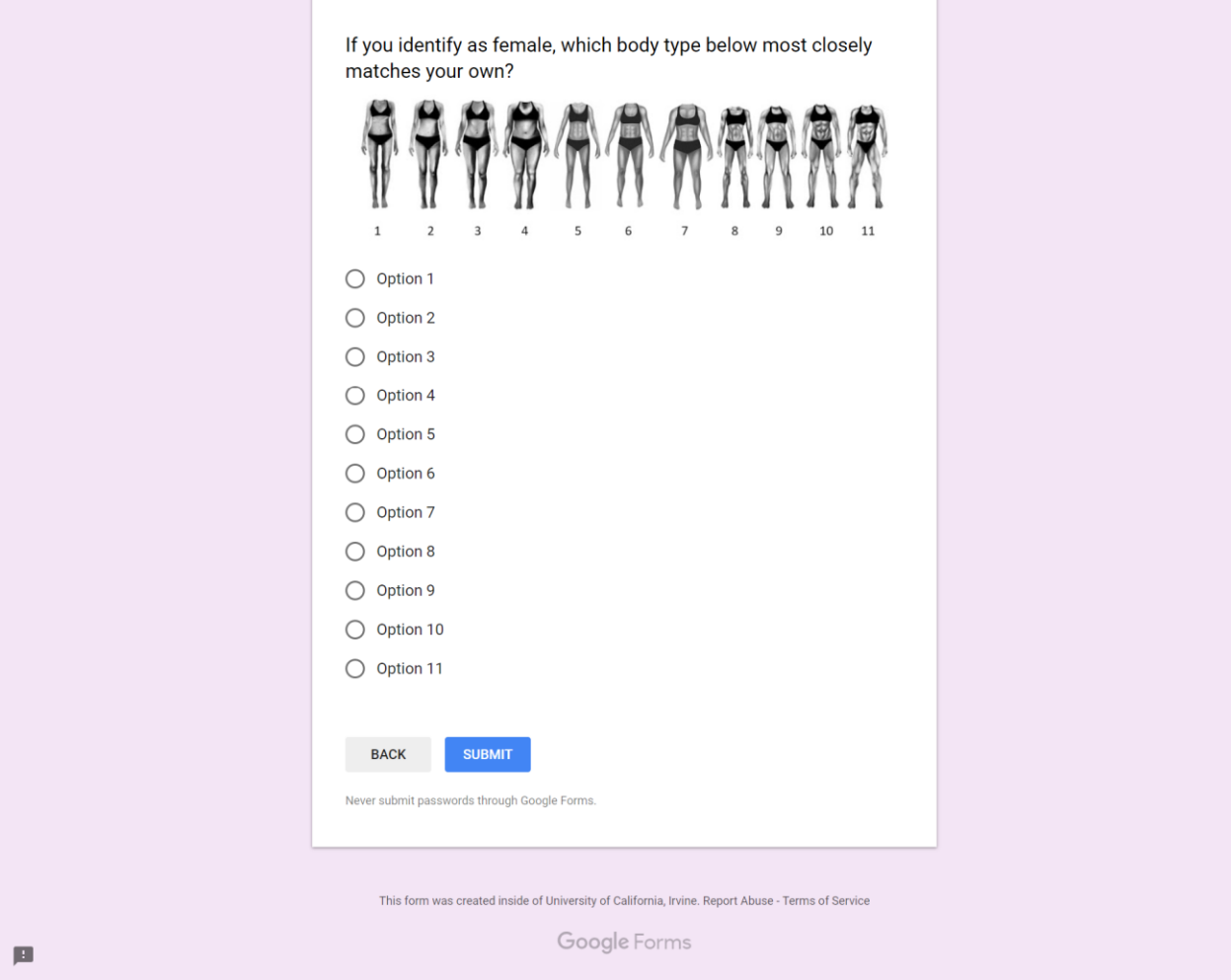


Figure 35 Survey 5/5.

My analysis of these survey results focused on the body aesthetic idealization questions, which Google forms compiled automatically (see Chapter 4). My future work may include a more comprehensive analysis of other questions, and perhaps an extension of this survey to the larger (non-CrossFit) population, with demographic-associated coding.