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## Disciplining the Female Body Through Fitness: "Women Participating in CrossFit and Perceptions of the Body"

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DISCIPLINING THE FEMALE BODY THROUGH FITNESS:  
“WOMEN PARTICIPATING IN CROSSFIT AND  
PERCEPTIONS OF THE BODY”

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Dean of the Graduate School

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## **Dedication**

I dedicate all efforts to complete this thesis to my entire family: Celina Aguilar, Joe Sarinana, Elizabeth Sarinana, Lisa Torres, Angel and Mia Dimuzio. Thank you for supporting me and encouraging me throughout my entire academic and professional career. I especially want to thank my parents, Alicia and Jose Sarinana, who have loved me unconditionally and believed in me from the beginning. For my mother who constantly pushed me to continue my education, and for always loving me, guiding me and giving me strength through the most important part of my life. To my father who always knew I was strong enough to do anything I set my mind to and who never gave up on me. I want to thank Chris for giving me his time to read my drafts, proofread all my papers and who encouraged me when I was tired and frustrated. Thank you for always pushing me to be a better version of myself. I would also like to thank Miguel Angel Ramirez for giving me the confidence to apply to graduate school. Lastly, I also wish to dedicate this thesis to my mentor Dr. Carina Heckert for all the time she has given me, for giving me confidence in my writing and for always putting me at ease through this entire process. She is truly an inspiration, an exceptional mentor as she assisted me in this long process.

DISCIPLING THE FEMALE BODY THROUGH FITNESS:  
“WOMEN PARTICIPATING IN CROSSFIT AND  
PERCEPTIONS OF THE BODY”

by

NOEMI DIMUZIO, B.A.

THESIS

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## Overview

Within US society, a patriarchal and hegemonic system shapes perceptions of the ideal female body (Podmore and Ogle, 2018). For the purpose of my research, I focus on the traditional Western ideal body image. The Western ideal female body image is that of a “white middle-class woman, tanned, healthy slenderness with no unsightly bumps, bulges, or cellulite, and bodily and facial perfection” (Duncan, 1994, p. 50). Over the past several decades, US society has evolved in ways that has enabled medicine to alter body parts through cosmetic surgeries, allowing some women to achieve this ideal body image. However, during this same period, there has been a fitness revolution that has allowed women to manipulate their body, break gender stereotypes, and recreate ideal body images (Johansson, 1996). CrossFit joined the fitness revolution and opened up doors for varied experiences related to bodily appearance and ideals (Podmore and Ogle, 2018). In the CrossFit community, a woman’s image is shaped not by her thinness or by medical alteration, but by the changing of her body through muscle definition and strength, while embracing this image. CrossFit disrupts the hegemonic feminine ideal image of “socially acceptable goals of slenderness but by women pushing their bodies to become strong, powerful and fit” (Podmore and Ogle, 2018, p. 5). Women are depicted participating in strengthening activities that build muscle (Podmore and Ogle, 2018). However, to what extent is CrossFit changing the traditional Western ideal body image? In a sense, it does trigger some changes, but it also creates a tension between an old ideal image and a new ideal image. There has been a shift from the Western thin ideal image to a new fitness image of a lean body with sculpted muscles. This image, while perhaps more empowering for some women, is still creating a self-awareness and self-surveillance of women’s bodies, which I explore through how women experience and discipline their bodies through fitness and nutrition in relation to CrossFit

participation. I use in-depth interviews and my personal experience with CrossFit to explore how women discipline their bodies through fitness. This discipline occurs through constant surveillance of women's bodies and women internalizing a particular body image in private and public spaces. Through my research, I examine self-surveillance and disciplining the body from a Foucauldian perspective. In doing so, I give attention to themes of fitness, biopedagogy, body dissatisfaction, and empowerment associated with reshaping the traditional Western ideal body image.

## **Introduction**

Women tend to believe that a mirror can be either her best friend or her enemy. What does this really mean? The mirror can show the image of a beautiful woman, who loves her face, hair and body. However, for some women it can be their worst nightmare because it displays every imperfection, from the top of their head down to their feet. Why is it that when women look into the mirror, they often pinch at their love handles, stretch their face, notice new wrinkles, examine their noses and suck their stomachs in? Women's self-surveillance has been shaped through nutrition, technologies, social media and fitness. Women are constantly struggling with disciplining their bodies to produce a particular body image. The use of technologies has produced images of ideal bodies of beauty, perfection and constant awareness of body parts. Women are led to believe that the only way they can possibly compete in society alongside males is to beautify themselves. The body can be shaped and molded in a variety places, most notably the gym. Fitness allows for the construction of the perfect body. Fitness creates a constant urge to develop and change the body and produces self-surveillance and discipline. CrossFit embodies health, hard work and reexamines beauty for women. CrossFit claims they do not focus on appearance but rather strength and power. However, CrossFit contradicts their message by allowing women to think they are agents of their own empowerment, while also subjecting women to ideal beauty standards that produce self-awareness and self-discipline.

The purpose of my research is to explore how women's perceptions of their bodies and the female body more broadly change through participation in CrossFit. My goal is to explore if women are seeing their bodies differently in relation to how CrossFit gym communities are promoting and embracing certain types of bodily changes for women, or if women continue to

struggle to accept their bodies. In this paper, I examine the Foucauldian concepts of self-surveillance and disciplining the body through the process of fitness, biopedagogy, body dissatisfaction and empowerment associated with the traditional Western ideal body image.

This study contains four central research questions (RQ):

RQ1: In what ways does CrossFit help change the perception of the ideal female body image?

RQ2: While participating in CrossFit, in what ways are women focusing on their body image?

RQ3: How does participating in CrossFit shape satisfaction with one's body?

RQ4: In what ways does CrossFit empower women through a focus on strength and power?

## **Literature Review**

This paper utilizes Foucauldian theory to explore disciplining the body through fitness employing concepts of self-surveillance, biopedagogy, nutrition and body talk. The concepts explore women using fitness to create a particular body image in ways that deal with weight, food and fitness. Topics such as self-surveillance, fitness culture, fit biocitizenship, biopedagogies, body dissatisfaction and empowerment in fitness, all contribute to women's struggles with the traditional Western ideal image and the desire to change their bodies by participating in CrossFit.

### Self-Surveillance and Discipline of the Female Body

Foucault's idea of the panopticon is that the threat of surveillance promotes self-sanctioning behavior. Foucault references Bentham's Panopticon architectural design of having 360-degree visibility to see the prisoners at all times. The panopticon design allowed for constant surveillance without prisoners knowing if they were actually being observed as a mechanism for establishing self-discipline (Applerouth and Edles, 2016). Foucault (1977) states the threat of surveillance is enough to control people via regulations and moral codes. Such structures create a hierarchal surveillance of individuals under constant gaze.

According to Foucault (1977), disciplinary power is established not only through certain institutions or authorities, but also through everyday social interactions. Thus, we are subjects of self-surveillance that stems from a constant threat from the public gaze. Fitness culture and social media foster the constant surveillance of women's bodies; women repeatedly internalize the constant surveillance of their bodies in private and public spaces. Fitness achieves self-disciplinary regimes through dieting and exercise routines placed upon the individual (Pylypa, 1998). Technology has increased self-discipline and surveillance by providing scales in gyms

and private homes (Pylypa, 1998). Food scales, fitness and nutritional books, and even the bathroom mirror have promoted a self-surveillance culture in women (Washington and Economides, 2016). The media glorifies sports and competitive sports by focusing on the appearance of the fit, energetic, weight controlled, lean, muscular females bodies (Johns and Johns, 2000). The media has the power to shape the ideal female body image and does this through magazines, television and advertisements (Washington and Economides, 2016). Women then internalize this message and blame themselves when they are unable to achieve a particular body image, creating dissatisfaction with their bodies (Washington and Economides, 2016). Women internalize a particular body image in ways that shape how they perceive and self-regulate their bodies. How much personal choice and freedom do women really have when under constant surveillance?

Women are pressured to meet cultural standards that a patriarchal society has used to define beauty in women. The standards of beauty that are produced to the masses are established through media, advertisement, fashion and cosmetic companies (Volkerts, 2014). The media helps produce women's internal struggle of self-consciousness through bodily monitoring based on physical appearance. The idea of a panoptic gaze is structured to function effectively because it can be used in public and private spaces. Women are trained in Western culture to use this gaze to self-evaluate themselves and others resulting in skills as both the observer and participant in the patriarchal feminine ideal, becoming objects of their own gaze (Duncan, 1994).

The male gaze describes the role patriarchy plays in women's construction of self-beauty (Saxena, 2013). Mulvey (1975) coined the term male gaze to describe how film audiences are assumed to be from the perspective of the heterosexual male. In film, the camera focus lingers on the curves of the female body and women play out events that occur for men's reactions. The



male gaze focuses on the constant surveillance of women's bodies and how women repeatedly internalize the constant surveillance of their own bodies in private and public spaces. Women internalize the male gaze in ways that shape how they perceive and self-regulate their bodies. Women then base their evaluations on what is perceived as the cultural norm. The male gaze becomes more apparent and visible as women begin to compare their bodies to cultural standards (Saxena, 2013.) Advertising in magazines, film, and media form a bridge between the woman who will be the consumer, rather than a producer of commodities such as beauty products, clothing and cosmetic surgeries. According to Mulvey (2013), the film industry uses celebrities as marketing tools to reproduce self-surveillance. Mulvey's theory of the male gaze links power and surveillance; those in power have the skill to conceal or camouflage the gaze and surveillance from others. The male gaze can be seen in the media and sports media (Mulvey, 1975). However, women may not be aware at times that the media is creating surveillance techniques. In sports, women's bodies are focused on in relation to their sexuality, weight, clothing and overall appearance (Pressland, 2017). Duncan (1994) states that the media creates an unrealistic female body image and invites the continuous self-monitoring and self-disciplining behavior in women.

According to Foucault (1980), biopower is formed through the political order to control individuals through institutions such as hospitals, prisons and the family by bringing all parts of life under a controlling gaze. Through institutional discipline and surveillance, bodies are controlled through frequent regulations "to discipline the body, optimize its capabilities, extort its forces, increase its usefulness and docility, integrate it into systems of efficient and economic controls" (Foucault, 1980, p.139). Therefore, institutions produce certain body images that society requires. Through medical institutions, Foucault's (1977) term of biopower is associated

with the medical gaze. The doctor's medical gaze has allowed the use of their medical expertise to judge what is considered normal or abnormal. Foucault (1977, p. 226) says "the examination, surrounded by its documentary techniques, makes each individual a case: a case which at one and the same time constitutes and object for a branch of knowledge and a hold for a branch of power." The body is seen as submissive and as an object, which is reinforced by the presence of the doctors (Steinhoff, 2017). The medical physicians view the body as an object, and this gives them power to objectify the body. The prestigious position of the doctor has been upheld within the community and depends on individual expertise of their skills of observing the body. The panopticon has been used by some feminists to describe women who internalize "social norms, self-surveillance and self control" through practices such as cosmetic surgery and dieting (Steinhoff, 2015, p.23). A medical physician's examination of their patient is seen "as a technician diagnosing ways to improve a mechanical object" (Kaw, 1991, p.83). As the doctor's role and position is established in a medical facility and through the use of technical language, it allows the doctor to objectify patients' bodies and reinforce a particular body image. The medical gaze is further reinforced through medical news and commercials pushing for the physical well-being and health of individuals, making the public more conscience and aware of a perfect body (Greenhalgh, 2015).

Health is associated with a good life and has been adopted as an identity of a successful, happy individual by how well they succeeded in adopting healthy practices (Greenhalgh, 2015). An example of the medical institutions creating the pursuit of a healthy perfect body was through the establishment of the body mass index (BMI) system. BMI is used to measure an individual's body fat based on their height and weight (NIH). BMI became a tool for self-surveillance and self-disciplining the body and became a body reflection of one's health. To be able to achieve a

properly trimmed, fit body, the body demands constant surveillance and self-discipline through rigorous diets, training and avoiding risky behaviors to maintain a normal BMI (Greenhalgh, 2015). Disciplining the body can be seen through the work of athletic trainers, coaches, nutritionists and teachers. These professionals often have notions of how an ideal body should function and appear as experts based on the knowledge they have obtained through their education (Amsterdam et al., 2017). They share their knowledge by shaping and creating self-discipline within the individual on the ideal body image one should obtain (Amsterdam et al., 2017). Coaches, parents and trainers are mechanisms of surveillance and use disciplinary power to regulate bodies in accordance with the expectations of the normalization of ideas and actions of what an ideal normal body should look like (McMahon and Penney, 2012).

Foucault (1988) asserts that discipline can be transformed from constraint to liberation. Power is not always repressive but can be used to produce knowledge and desire (Pylypa, 1998). When power is met with resistance, it will transform and find a new way to express itself. For instance, the phrase ‘Strong is the New Skinny’ was an act of resistance when women rebelled against the skinny, thin image, but power reasserted itself to gain control through another form, which was strength. Foucault says, “power is everywhere and comes from everywhere” (Foucault, 1998, p.63). Therefore, power is exerted by forces such as institutions that constantly reinforce power through self-belief and by shaping lives. Ideologies are produced through constant reinforcement in institutions such as the education system, medical institutions, beauty and health corporations and political system. These institutions are able to create self-surveillance and self-discipline in individuals and shape them as products of what society believes to be the norm of a good citizen. Power is also dispersed throughout society in our everyday social relationships that operate through coaches, fitness trainers, institutions and

technology. Power will change direction and transform to regain control. For example, saying women no longer will stand for the skinny, thin image while welcoming the image of strength reflects a shift of power. The new image allows women to change. However, this new image still reflects power of educational, medical, corporate and political institutions to regain control of the body. These institutions exert power in reproducing a particular body image through media images, slogans, and new technologies to produce self-discipline and self-surveillance to achieve a lean, toned, feminine body. The main focus is to create desire in achieving the 'perfect body' by disciplinary practice in physical fitness and monitoring weight (Pylypa, 1998, p.25).

The production of desire of a fit, thin, and healthy body emerged from two discourses: medical and moral. Health discourse is produced through the knowledge of the medical profession, which takes on a scientific tone to justify this look. The fit, thin, lean body is seen as healthy, while anything other than this image is considered unfit and deviant (Pylypa, 1998). Schwarez (cited in Pylypa, 1998 p. 25) clarifies that "In the first half of the twentieth century, the concern with overweight increased substantially, but the nation had not grown suddenly heavier; rather, the tolerance had narrowed." Therefore, the use of health discourse has allowed for gained control and increased self-discipline by creating guidelines to follow in order to produce an ideal body image.

The moral framework is determined by the things, people, and qualities society values and respects; such entities guide actions by promoting an ideal that individuals strive to achieve (Widdows, 2018). Moral discourse provides standards in which individuals judge others and themselves in successes and failures (Widdows, 2018). Moral discourse pushes women to internalize a particular body image, leading to self-surveillance (Pylypa, 1998). Through the priorities and goals individuals set, they focus and work on their habits and practices on a daily

basis. Moral discourse sheds light on ideals that develop identities in individuals (Widdows, 2018). As Pypla (1998, p.27) states, “Fitness/thinness, morality, and self-discipline come to imply one another, so that thinness is believed to be an unmistakable sign of self-control, discipline and will power.” Therefore, individuals are inclined to feel morally successful when they stick to a diet, say no to unhealthy food, and go to the gym. Widdows (2018) addresses moral discourse by saying, “We view ourselves as successful when we have attained some aspect of our ideal; when we’ve reached our goal weight, filled our wrinkles, or firmed out thighs” (Widdows, 2018, p. 27).

Foucault (1980) states that normality and deviance are manufactured to promote certain body types that fit society’s needs. In my research, some participants said they felt good exercising not only physically, but also morally. By feeling good while working out and having discipline, participants expressed how they continue to stay within the norms of society. In contrast, lack of exercise is a sign of moral failure. Moral failure is associated with shame and disgust, attaching it to bodily failures. Individuals who are seen as letting themselves go, gaining weight or failing to make it to the gym are perceived as moral failures, thereby increasing shame and guilt. Those who are associated with moral success are those who are able to maintain a low BMI and a thin physique and are highly valued as self-disciplined with self-control, while those who have a high BMI with excessive fat are seen as moral failures that are self-indulging with lack of control (Greenhalgh, 2015).

### Fitness Culture

Feminine body images are represented in Western society through images of slim, tight muscles and the appearance of youth and health (Mansfield, 2004). Therefore, there are

connections between how women use fitness to change their bodies to fit a particular appearance. In the 1970's, the fitness boom erupted and Americans started realizing that there were different ways to get their bodies in shape (Robin, 2014). Sports and athletics gained attention and women would take an interest in participating in sports. However, little funding was available for women to participate in sports until the passage of Title IX in 1973 (Robin, 2014). Title IX opened up the doors for women in sports, stating: "No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving federal financial assistance" (cited in Olmstead, 2016).

The fitness boom would continue into the 1980's with personalities such as Jane Fonda and Richard Simmons creating fun aerobic movements for women and gym owners making changes to their facilities in order to attract customers (Andreasson and Johansson, 2013). In 1978, there were over 3,000 fitness gyms nationwide; today that number has increased to 38,477 fitness gyms (statistic portal, 2018). Fitness gyms offer people a variety of ways to change their bodies and it also creates gendered spaces (Johansson, 1996). The gendered use of space in fitness gyms is quite obvious to even a casual observer. In gym facilities, women tend to congregate around the cardio and exercise classes, while men are mostly gathered in the weight section. However, times seem to be changing and more women are now using free weights more than ever before. Gyms have expanded from just providing cardio on a treadmill and lifting weights to an explosion of fitness regimens that include spinning, toning and weight classes, kickboxing, strength and conditioning, and endurance classes. The interesting part of gyms is that they create spaces for maintaining gender stereotypes, yet at the same time, new gender identities are developed. Gender stereotypes created by gyms include that women should be

using aerobic movements such as Zumba and sculpting classes, while men should be using free weights and lifting heavy amounts of weight. Despite these gender stereotypes, there is resistance. Women are entering the weight room and lifting heavy weights (Johansson, 1996). There has also been a growth in high intensity interval training such as CrossFit.

The expansion and growth of CrossFit is in part because it is a fitness regime that caters to everyone and anyone can do it. No matter what one's goals are, CrossFit can help a person accomplish them. CrossFit has numerous amounts of programming for those getting back into shape, gaining muscle strength or focusing on competition levels (Cooper, 2017). CrossFit has been able to spark the interests of many people. As evidence, in 2016, there were 4 million members worldwide and 13,000 gyms in 120 countries (Wang, 2016).

CrossFit is not set up like a typical gym; there are not separate sections of weights and endurance equipment. These gyms do not create a gender structure with men in one area and women in another. Unlike other fitness gyms, CrossFit gyms lack mirrors. The lack of mirrors suggests that women will not have to compare themselves to other women in performance or body image (Washington and Economides, 2016). The point of CrossFit is that women and men workout in the same area next to each other. Therefore, women and men either partner up or work side by side, unlike other fitness gyms that create gendered spaces with weightlifting. This structure of traditional fitness gyms also perpetuates power relations between men and women. Aerobic or other female spaces are usually located in the back; therefore, women must walk past the male-dominated space, creating a male gaze upon women and reinforcing domination and subordination (Johansson, 1996). Gender identities are formed through "the processes of domination, subordination and resistance" (Johansson, 1996, p. 39). In a CrossFit setting,

because men and women workout together and often partner up, there is a greater sense of equal space and unity of the genders.

### Fit-Biocitizenship and Biopedagogies

Through the production of knowledge and desire, Greenhalgh's (2015) concepts of fit biocitizenship and biopedagogical fat talk emerge. Greenhalgh states that biocitizenship is "a new kind of political belonging or citizenship connected to one's bodily attributes" (Greenhalgh, 2015, p. 18). Fit biocitizenship focuses on managing and maintaining health and achieving what are defined as the medically normal weight and body sizes. These are duties of health maintenance that individuals need to establish in order to be a good biocitizen. Biocitizenship is shaped by the medical and corporate industries fighting the war on fat. The world is in the midst of an obesity epidemic. In the U.S., the media, government and public health institutions have made fatness a crisis that is destroying the nation's health. Medical institutions are using BMI to normalize a particular body standard and corporations are producing and marketing anti-fat products such as apps to track food and count calories and products to curb appetite. The medical and health agencies use BMI to not only normalize but to place individuals into a weight based identity. The medical institutions classify fat as a chronic disease and the best way to cure this disease is through diet and exercise (Greenhalgh, 2015). It has become the professional duty for doctors and health care professionals to treat, measure, and diagnose all weight-based diseases in all their clients from pediatrics to adults. Health care professionals instruct their patients to normalize their weight through diet, exercise and other regimes that will produce a normal BMI and body image. The war on fat has been justified as a means to restore society's physical health. Every sector of the U.S. has joined the fight against fat. Biocitizenship has been used to produce



a self-surveillance and self-discipline to be a good citizen. Becoming a good biocitizen is achieved by taking care of one's own body through diet, exercise and weight, and by taking care of the nation's well-being by helping others maintain or lose weight (Greenhalgh, 2015).

Power is domination. Power is “a centralized and repressive force exerted by one group over another – a possession which could be acquired and imposed on others through physical coercion” (Pylypa, 1998, p.21). The use of biopedagogies is a form of power. It is associated with Foucault's (1984) biopower in which the governance and regulations of individuals and populations in practices are associated with the body (Wright, 2009). Biopower is not dispersed throughout society's networks and institutions. Instead, it operates by regulating bodies through individuals adopting tactics of self-discipline and self-surveillance (Foucault, 1984). The term biopedagogies is a form of biopower, as it is used to describe the normalizing and regulating mechanisms through communication by the authorities in people's lives, such as physicians, health educators, teachers and coaches (Greenhalgh, 2015). Biopedagogical fat talk serves to inform people of their weight status and to guide them on certain practices they must adopt in order to achieve a normal body weight. Fat talk is a sensitive subject whether addressed positively or negatively and can have a big effect on a person. Fat talk emphasizes that the biocitizen's duty is to convert fat people into good citizens by educating them on how to lose weight. Although the medical community and others such as parents, teachers and coaches take authority in biopedagogical fat talk, it can have very detrimental effects on young adults. Biopedagogy fat talk teaches young people that body weight is an essential part of their identity and social acceptance. Fat talk destroys their self-confidence and creates new weight-based identities. Young people are faced with seeing themselves as “bad” people because they are morally irresponsible for being unable to maintain a normal BMI. They also begin to practice

methods to attain a particular body image and weight by starvation, dieting, excessive exercising in desperation to lose weight, and social withdrawal (Greenhalgh, 2015).

Biopedagogies place individuals under constant surveillance while increasingly promoting self-monitoring through weight control and tactics to control weight. Therefore, individuals are given numerous options to understand, change, and control bodies (Wright, 2009). Biopedagogies brings together Foucault's (1984) concept of biopower along with pedagogy. The merging of these two terms helps explain the meaning of the body and how pedagogical sites have the power to teach and influence individuals to act on themselves and others. These sites are available in fitness locations, social media, television, film and pamphlets in waiting rooms (Wright, 2009).

Foucault (1984) asserts that power is most successful when it hides its course of action by creating desire. Body talk comments involve common language and social norms of friendship to engage with others (Greenhalgh, 2015). The use of body talk is a form of creating self-surveillance among individuals. Women use body talk as a source of bonding, but it also serves a purpose in reinforcing a particular body image (Widdows, 2018). Body talk can be seen in health and fitness. Through the use of body talk, women not only create a sense of belonging, but also use it to celebrate a certain body image. CrossFit gyms use body talk to promote a particular body image through the use of certain words related to muscles, strength and power.

Fitness discourse is filled with an abundance of resources and references that contain morality and discipline. However, fitness also creates pleasure. Fitness creates particular body images; women then internalize these images and self-monitor themselves through the use of media and technology. Self-monitoring is fostered through the use of products to produce self-surveillance in public and private settings. These products consist of scales, diet books, calorie

counting charts, exercise equipment and nutritional listings on packaged foods (Pylypa, 1998).

The associations between fitness with fun establishes power in the most successful way; by creating pleasure, individuals then use fitness as a tool for self-discipline and surveillance.

Fitness, nutrition or dieting create disciplined bodies that produce an appropriate body image.

The gaze of power can be found in all aspects of life such as in gyms, the bathroom scale, media and social media; it is reflected in the comments such as, “You’ve lost weight.” Individuals internalize such comments and experience a sense of happiness, self-control and discipline (Pylypa, 1998). Furthermore, the media uses objects to mirror the idea of a perfect, beautiful body. Individuals then self-internalize these messages and associate beauty and perfection with the body.

CrossFit media is no stranger to associating and comparing female competitors to cars. CrossFit claims they focus on strength and power, rather than bodily aesthetics, but that is not completely true. In a documentary called *Let Beauty Speak* (2013), the video asks individuals what is beauty and many respondents from the CrossFit community define beauty with the gesture of an arm folded showing a muscular bicep. However, the women that are shown in this video have beautiful lean muscular bodies with defined abdominals. Those individuals who commented on the video emphasized that beauty is measured in “joy and pride”, or “CrossFit is sexy but fun.” Co-host Pat Sherwood of the CrossFit games in 2014 referred to women to exotic cars. Sherwood said:

Valerie Voboril is incredible. Now, I have an analogy and I hope this comes off properly: Imagine a parking lot full of cars, exotic cars. You have a yellow Ferraris, a blue Porsche, a Maserati, in the center you have like a Toyota Camry. You walk by you’re distracted by the other cars. Fast forward years later, they’ve all broken down, they’re a pain in the ass with bills,

and you just have year after year of reliable performance from this vehicle you have overlooked. That's Valerie Voboril (CrossFit Games, SoCal 2014).

Valerie Voboril at the time was 36 years old and considered one of the oldest competitors at the CrossFit games. Sherwood compared Voboril to a Toyota Camry, compared to the other SoCal competitors who were seen as exotic cars. Voboril, who does not expose her body and competes in t-shirts, long pants and no makeup, is considered not visually appealing to look at. Women self-reflect and internalize the beauty and aesthetics of CrossFit and monitor their bodies relating it to the desirability and attractiveness of their own bodies (Washington and Economides, 2016).

#### Body Dissatisfaction within Fitness

According to Shiffrar (2011), body dissatisfaction is a negative subjective evaluation of the weight and shape of one's own body. Women are pressured through social media to improve and reinvent themselves in order achieve the Western ideal body image to improve themselves and look better (Gilman, 2013). Technology has made it extremely easy for social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Tumbler, Instagram and Pinterest to allow a rapid creation of image viewing and sharing through computers or hand held devices (Perloff, 2014). Technology images and advertising become constantly available to young girls and women. The media continuously portrays images of these perfect beautiful bodies, usually of white slender women (Killbourne, 2010). However, this is also seen in part of CrossFit's main media images. Images often include white, lean muscular bodies, wearing the commonly familiar CrossFit community attire, which is tiny shorts and a sports bra (Washington and Economides, 2016). When women can't live up to these images, they become dissatisfied with their bodies. However, social media has set them up

to fail because it is impossible to live up to women portrayed with flawless skin, no wrinkles or lines, and no scars or blemishes (Killbourne, 2010). CrossFit social media also displays a familiar body image, such as a lean, muscular toned body with a chiseled six-pack abdominals. A new category emerging in society is the shift from being thin to a more lean and fit body. This new image is still unattainable. This new shift is creating body dissatisfaction.

What is Fitspiration? Fitspiration is a person or thing that serves as motivation for someone to sustain or improve health and fitness (Oxford English Dictionary, 2017). The shift is changing the traditional Western ideal body image into a lean, toned and fit looking image. Fitspiration consists of images and text that are designed to inspire people to pursue a healthy lifestyle through exercise and diet. It has been promoted as a healthy alternative to thinspiration, which is the motivation for being extremely thin. Women are portrayed in images of Fitspiration along with inspiring messages speaking towards weight loss and developing lean muscle or sculpted abdominals. For many women, the image of a lean, fit body can be impossible to attain. However, in order to achieve this body, one must lean out. In order for women to lean out and achieve this tone, fit muscle appearance, one must constantly exercise, watch their weight, count calories and measure and weigh macronutrients. This lifestyle can lead to body dissatisfaction. The numerous inspirational quotes are usually tagged with a hash tag wording “Strong beats skinny every time”(Holland, 2017, p. 76). There were 5.2 million hash tags retrieved on social media with fitspiration tags (Holland, 2017). The images retrieved were women mostly dressed in active gear, working out and eating properly. These social media images are of women promoting overall health through exercise, eating clean, healthy food and self-care (Triggerman, 2015). The fitspiration general philosophy is to provide strength and empowerment, “Thus fitspiration has the potential for considerable positive influence on physical and mental health”

(Triggerman, 2015, p.66). The positive influences that one can achieve from fitspiration are women taking a stand and wanting society to change their views on women's body images. However, fitspiration images in social media raise concerns. First, the women that are depicted in these images represent all the same body type of being not too thin, but having toned figures (Triggerman, 2015). When these images are constantly shown, it perpetuates the idea that only women who are lean and toned can be fit and healthy. This fit image is unattainable for many women. Fitspiration may attempt to inspire women, in which it has been successful to some point, but these images focus on appearance related images (Triggerman, 2016). The idea of fitspiration was to help change society's views of a woman's body from extreme thinness to a woman with muscle, not focused on a weight but performance. However, social media has used a particular body image for women to maintain self-surveillance and self-discipline of their bodies.

### Empowerment through Fitness

What is empowerment? Hargreaves (1994) states that female empowerment is the process through which individuals gain power over their lives and what enables women to find their own interests instead of benefiting others. CrossFit appeals to women because they are able to use their athletic potential towards men (Washington and Economides, 2016). Empowerment also involves resisting the pressures to conform to gender stereotypes in presentation or behavior (Bradshaw, 2002). Whitson (1994, p. 359), states that "the confident sense of self that comes from being skilled in the use of one's body" is a form of empowerment. Therefore, overcoming oppressive constraints of femininity is overcoming power constraints (Bradshaw, 2002). Women who claim they are empowered imply a sense of control over their lives. Empowerment also implies that individuals have personal power and the ability to control or influence others based

on their individual characteristics either through physical strength or “the ability to argue persuasively” (Bradshaw, 2002, p. 7). Women who feel empowered as a consequence of physical activity offer an example of how to resist Western pressures to conform to an ideal body image. Power and empowerment are major themes in past research on women’s experiences with physical activity (Bradshaw, 2002). Power has usually been seen as an authoritative, dominating and exploiting description of masculinity (Bradshaw, 2002). However, many feminists believe that power may have to do with a personal identity of taking control of one’s body, taking pride in achievements and having one’s body respond to challenges that it is capable of and able to accomplish. These accomplishments include empowerment through physical strength, “as a source of confidence and personal security the opposite to the vulnerability of patriarchal femininity” (Wright and Dewar, 1997, p.91). Sports can provide the power to help individuals achieve and take control of their own bodies and lives. Johnson’s (1995, p. 210) views “power as something based not on hierarchy or dominance and subordination but on the capacity to do things, to achieve goals.”

Although it may seem encouraging to see power in terms of achieving goals, not all women have the freedom to understand and recognize their own power (Bradshaw, 2002). Therefore, CrossFit involves complexities and tensions in producing ideal body images. For example, a woman participating in CrossFit may find empowerment in building strength and muscle. However, the positive aspect of fitness may be undermined by contradictory messages such as slogans saying “strong is the new skinny” or “get fit.” Rather than being strong and healthy to enjoy life, to get strong or get fit is seen as a means to produce an ideal body image. The reality is that through fitness as a means of empowerment, women are still presented with notions of beauty and attractiveness, rather than fitness itself (Washington and Economides,

2016). Therefore, in not being able to achieve the ideal body image, women are limited in their experience of power and feel dissatisfied with their bodies. The dissatisfaction comes from individuals being unable to produce a particular body image. CrossFit focuses on performance, providing another alternative to the ideal female body image. The new alternative body image continues to follow the same Western ideal image pattern, which is displayed as a lean, fit body (Washington and Economides, 2016). Washington and Economides (2016) claim that CrossFit empowerment to women is an illusion. The empowerment of participating in CrossFit has been thought to change women's understanding of their body through muscular strength and that muscular women can be accepted as part of the mainstream society. However, CrossFit continues to draw on familiar discourses focused on appearances such as attractiveness, femininity and a particular body image (Washington and Economides, 2016).

What is CrossFit? CrossFit is constantly varied movements performed at high intensity. What does this mean? It means that workouts known as WOD's (workout of the day) in any CrossFit affiliate gym use a variety of movements in one single workout. CrossFit incorporates metabolic conditioning, interval training with set work and rest periods, weightlifting, gymnastic movements, and throwing medicine balls to increase speed, power, and strength. The equipment includes barbells, dumbbells and boxes set at different heights. CrossFit was created by Greg Glassman and partner Lauren Jenai Glassman is credited for being "the first person in history to define fitness in a meaningful measurable way: increased work capacity across broad time and modal domains" (Forging Elite Fitness). CrossFit aims to "forge a broad, general and inclusive fitness supported by measurable, observable and repeatable results" (CrossFit, 2018). However, CrossFit doesn't stop at getting results or creating workouts, but it also forges a community with members. Each member, male or female, beginner or advanced, pushes each other during



workouts and gives advice, guidance or simply friendship. CrossFit's goal is to create a community where people can join, not feel intimidated or judged, and to share a bond created within their gym's community. CrossFit claims their purpose is to give women a space where their focus is not based on appearance but on strength and power. Does CrossFit focus on strength rather than appearance? Further, does it provide women with an alternative way to think about their bodies?

Although CrossFit claims it does not focus on appearance, they continue to show beautiful, lean, muscular, fit bodies. CrossFit produces a new ideal body image of a lean, fit, muscular body. CrossFit social media images have an overwhelming image of white, lean muscular women; these women wear tiny little shorts and sports bras (Washington and Economides, 2016). Slogans such as "Strong is the New Skinny" suggest that CrossFit focuses on a particular image. As suggested earlier, Foucault (1980) states that when power is being challenged it will reinvent itself to gain control. Slogans such as "Strong is the New Skinny" suggest the focus is no longer based on a performance, but a body image. However, CrossFit uses the word "strong" in lieu of power about a particular body image. CrossFit says yes, let us be strong and muscular, but still look feminine in our lean, toned bodies with tiny shorts and sports bras. CrossFit emphasizes and uses a fit body as appeal rather than a function. Doing this creates a new image for women to self-internalize and discipline (Washington and Economides, 2016). Women use fitness to discipline their bodies. Women also use fitness as a part of their identity; they are creating an identity by using the notion of health and fitness, food and exercise to balance and maintain their bodies to resemble a lean, slim body shape (Wright, Flynn and Macdonald, 2006). Fitness culture often views a particular size and weight as a responsibility to achieve through constant monitoring and discipline with diet and exercise (Wright et al., 2006).

Foucault's theories of power facilitate an understanding of how power is established in fitness to produce self-surveillance and self-discipline among women to shape and mold their bodies. CrossFit claims to focus on strength and power over appearance and demonstrates the need for addressing health-related issues through fitness and nutrition. CrossFit contributes to the validation of women's physical strength and strong bodies. Furthermore, women are able to change their perception of the Western ideal body image to a new image focusing on strength, muscle and power. This new body image is able to open up possibilities of changing the perception of the Western female ideal body image, but continues to produce standardized ideal bodies; because CrossFit continues to produce ideal standards, it also perpetuates women's bodies being seen as objects and heightens the male gaze. Additionally, CrossFit creates this contradiction as women see their own empowerment through the use of power and strength, while also producing beauty ideals that result in self-surveillance and disciplining bodies. Therefore, does CrossFit help change the perception of women's ideal bodies or is it creating a new ideal body image?

## **Methods**

### Overview

My research was conducted in the El Paso, Texas region. The target participants were females between the ages of 18-45 who were actively training in CrossFit for at least a year. Interviews focused on women's perceptions of their own bodies and the female body more broadly and how CrossFit changed these perceptions. I draw on autoethnography by using my extensive experience with CrossFit and within the CrossFit community to inform my analysis. Through my experiences, I am able to use my own voice to address struggles I have encountered with society's acceptance of the ideal female body. I am hopeful that my data will add to the limited literature available on women's fitness and inform understandings of the woman's body in relation to the confined structures of the Western ideal body image.

### **Location and Demographics**

The City of El Paso, Texas has a population of 683, 577 (World Population Review, 2017) and is located in the far western tip of Texas, bordering New Mexico and Chihuahua, Mexico. Being a border city, El Paso is bilingual and binational with easy access to travel into Mexico. Mexico has always been a place for El Pasoans to cross the border to access cheaper pharmaceutical products and medical, dental and cosmetic services.

Mexican, Hispanic, and Black women tend to be heavier than other ethnic groups (Pompper and Koenig, 2004). There has been mixed data on how Hispanic and Mexican women view their bodies. However, according to Goodman (2004), Latina women are more accepting of a larger, curvy figure (Pompper and Koenig, 2004). Studies have shown that Hispanic women tend to push back against the dominant ideal of white slender bodies (Altman, Hook and Gonzalez, 2018). The mixture of the Latina ideal body along with the dominant ideal female

body image makes El Paso an interesting location for this research topic as El Paso's racial composition is: 14% white, 3% African American, 1% Asian, .5% Native American, and 81% Hispanic/Latino (World Population Review, 2017).

In 2018, Country Health Records ranked El Paso County 102<sup>nd</sup> out of 243 for health and fitness in counties in Texas. The ranking is mainly associated with adult obesity and physical inactivity (Escajeda, 2018). El Paso has numerous fitness gyms ranging from powerlifting, kickboxing and strength and conditioning. There are approximately 13 CrossFit gyms located throughout El Paso, and two CrossFit gyms out of the thirteen have more than one location. The largest gyms include Get Lifted with 150-300 members, CrossFit 915 Sport with 250-300 members, and Stay Ready CrossFit with 150-200 members. When choosing a CrossFit gym, there are many factors that help a person make that decision. A few of those factors are gym locations, coaching techniques, programming and membership rates. My research began at CrossFit 915 Sport where I was granted permission to post recruitment flyers. I also posted the flyer on my Instagram page.

## **Qualitative Data Collection**

Creswell (2018) states that qualitative research is a “situated activity that locates the observer in the world” (Creswell, 2018, p. 7). The use of qualitative research requires interpretive practices to engage with and make the world visible (Creswell, 2018). Therefore, this research is predominantly qualitative and consists of 13 in-depth interviews with females living in El Paso, Texas complemented by field notes from my own training sessions. My interviews consisted of face-to-face semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews allow for some structure that has specific objectives, but also allow the interviewer and participants more

freedom to elaborate on their answers (Singleton and Strait, 2010, p.259). I conducted interviews at participant's homes and mutually agreed locations. The interview questions were structured as open-ended questions with subtopics to allow each participant to freely talk and express her own thoughts and opinions (Singleton and Straits, 2010). The interview guide covered questions based on 1) perceptions of the ideal body image before CrossFit; 2) how their involvement in CrossFit changed their perception of the ideal body image; 3) what bodily changes have occurred while participating in the sport; 4) satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their bodies; 5) their strategies for achieving their ideal body image; and 6) how nutrition has played a role in their fitness routine. The full interview guide is attached as Appendix (I).

As a CrossFit coach and athlete, I drew on methods of autoethnography to complement my interview data. Autoethnography, as Muncey states (cited in Cresswell, 2018 p.70), "defines as the idea of multiple layers of consciousness, the vulnerable self, the coherent self, critiquing the self in social context, the subversion of dominant discourses, and the evocative potential." During my own CrossFit training sessions, I took field notes on what was being said by women about their bodies. I gave attention to what specific words they used when speaking about their bodies and other women's bodies. I also observed what kind of gym attire women used and if they used makeup. The duration of activities that I took notes on were between 1-2 hours per session twice a week for a total of 30 total sessions of gym notes.

## Sample and Recruitment

The sample includes 13 female respondents between the ages of 18-45 years of age with at least one year of CrossFit participation. At least one year of participation allows for enough time for participants to notice changes to their bodies. The beginning age range of 18 was used as a starting point because at this age the body stops growing and enters adulthood. Women between 40-45 years of age are still vitally active and have experienced a variety of changes with their bodies. Therefore, focusing on women up to 40-45 years of age enabled an understanding of bodily changes within an extended range. The mean age of participants was 32 with a range of 21-42 years of age. The average CrossFit years of participation was 5.5 years. A full description of the demographic characteristics of my sample is in Table 1.

<b>Table 1: Demographics of 13 Interview Participants</b>				
<b>Participant's Pseudonym</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>CrossFit Years</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Occupation</b>
Dulce	21	4	Mexican Am.	Daycare provider
Lori	37	8	Hispanic	Physical Therapist
Heather	21	5	Hispanic	Coach
Amanda	38	10	Filipino	Accounting
Alyssa	41	7	Mexican Am.	Pharmaceutical Rep.
Christina	35	4.5	Anglo	Air Traffic
Rosa	27	8	Hispanic, Mexican Am/White	Trainer

Susie	31	7	Mexican/ Lebanese	Asst. Manager
Maggie	33	2	Hispanic/ Armenian	Nurse
Nancy	36	6	Mexican/ Spanish/ African	Medical Asst.
Julia	23	3	Hispanic/ Latina	Nanny
Belinda	42	8	Anglo	Teacher
Helen	34	3	Hispanic/ White	Operational Manager

Creswell (2018) acknowledges that there is a natural saturation point of data that occurs between 3-15 participants. Using 13 respondents ensured data saturation (Creswell, 2018), as the same types of themes were reemerging in interviews. Participants were recruited through a recruitment flyer and my existing contacts at CrossFit gyms, along with snowball sampling. This process involved interviewing a set of initial participants recruited through my contacts at CrossFit gyms and those who responded to my flyer. CrossFit 915 is my personal gym location where I already had established contacts. I was granted permission to recruit participants directly through them. Initial participants suggested additional individuals interested in participating, enabling me to snowball sample (Babbie, 2016).

The average length of the 13 interviews was 60 minutes with the minimum ending at 45 minutes and the maximum at 90 minutes. Participants did not receive any monetary incentives. I offered and paid for coffee when we decided to meet. I protected the confidentiality of all my

participants by guaranteeing anonymity and confidentiality by removing their names and other identifying information from the interview transcripts and field notes (Singleton and Straits, 2010, p.63).



## **Data Analysis**

I recorded all participants' interviews with a voice recorder. Recording the interviews allowed me to transcribe and code my data. After transcribing interviews word-for-word, I uploaded my interviews and field notes into Atlas.ti to code my data. Participant observation data was based on note taking during my coaching and regular workout sessions two times a week between the months of March-July 2019. These field notes consisted of detailed observations of how women interact and behave in these settings.

The process for developing codes began by exploring similar themes that emerged through my observations and interviews. Coding of interviews and notes related to the autoethnographic component involved a combination of inductive and deductive analysis. The deductive component involved developing a list of codes related to themes that I wanted to explore. Inductive reasoning involved an open coding method, which consisted of reviewing transcripts line-by-line and developing additional codes based on patterns that emerge from the data. Open coding allows all potential themes to emerge. By reviewing transcripts line-by-line I was able to identify similar words and ideas that were being repeated over and over by females participating in CrossFit gyms and interviews.

More specifically, to begin the coding process, I took note of similar themes that participants seemed repeat over and over again, in CrossFit gyms and different interview settings. When similar use of certain words used by interview participants and female CrossFitters became clear, I deemed it a probable category to further analyze. I created a codebook for the categories I wanted to further explore, which I used to create categories as well as subcategories. Through this process of developing and creating a codebook, I was able to locate repetitive words and common themes used in my interviews and observations. Through

the coding, I was able to develop 32 codes and out of those codes I was able to identify six main themes related to my research questions. All six themes are used as the basis for presenting my data in the results.

## Results

### Overview

My data within the interviews and field notes is useful in order to offer an analysis of self-surveillance and biopedagogical talk inside CrossFit and the ways women discipline their bodies. The following themes related to these overall patterns were 1) changing body images; 2) different body types in CrossFit; 3) body parts; 4) body talk; 5) nutrition in CrossFit, with a sub-theme of shame and guilt; and 6) empowerment. Looking at these issues through the eyes of female participants enables an understanding of how CrossFit participation shapes women's perception of the female body. Through nutrition, training, coaching and social media women are compelled to think about their body image in relation to strength, power and muscle. While this can be empowering, women are also using body talk, fat talk, and self-surveillance to discipline their bodies through fitness in ways that is at times problematic.

### Changing Body Images

Throughout my interviews the topic of body image was a prevalent theme. My female interviewees would reflect on their past body image perception before starting CrossFit and would continue to reflect on their image after participating in CrossFit. Their description of the ideal body before participating in CrossFit often contained key words such as thin, skinny, lean, flat stomach, and thin legs. Heather, Christina, Amanda, Alyssa, Rosa, Susie, Helen, Nancy, Lori, Julia, Dulce, Maggie and Belinda (13 out of 13 participants) all shared at least one of these key words to describe their ideal body image before CrossFit.

	Skinny	Thin	Lean	Flat Stomach	Thin Legs
Dulce			X	X	
Lori				X	X
Heather	X	X			
Christine	X			X	
Amanda				X	

Alyssa	X				
Rosa				X	
Suzie	X				X
Maggie				X	
Helen	X				X
Nancy		X			
Julia		X			
Belinda	X				

Percentage of women who used this description  
46.2%      23.1%      7.7%      46.2%      23.1%

Figure 1. Description of ideal body image

These female participants are describing the Western ideal body image described in the literature as a woman who is tall, thin, lean, with tight muscles and giving the appearance of health and vitality (Mansfield, 2005). Unfortunately, Western society throughout history has developed a deep imprint on the appearance of women's body images. My female participants all provided a similar description of a tall, lean, tight firm muscular body. They perceived this image to be their ideal image prior to CrossFit. Alyssa, a female in her 40's with over 7 years of CrossFit experience describes her body image before CrossFit. She says, "I think that's how we are trained since we are young, to look skinny, to just be skinny. That's all. Society made me think I just wanted to be skinny and be sexy." Belinda, also in her 40's, reflects on this image and states, "I always wanted to be the person in the magazine ads, like skinny. Skinny, fat, you see it everywhere. Like that was the epitome of what beauty was." Nancy, with six years of CrossFit experience also addresses social media as being central to her body image. She says:

I don't know if it's because that's been programmed into me, that you have to be thin to be beautiful and I grew up in the 90's too where it was absolutely important to be thin. Thin was in, in the 90's, and that's when I was growing up so it was just programmed in these TV shows and movies, magazines.

Alyssa, Belinda, and Nancy described what they believed was the ideal body image before CrossFit. While social media plays a part on how they viewed their bodies, they both felt that by being thin they could achieve the Western ideal body image. However, they also realized that their ideal body images were changing through CrossFit participation. They no longer yearned to be skinny, but understood that muscle was the image they were looking for. Alyssa and Belinda talk about these changes to their bodies after participating in CrossFit. Alyssa says, “I started developing muscles and I liked having muscles, and no longer did I want to be skinny. I wanted to be fit. When I see girls with skinny arms I’m like ‘ewe’, because I prefer muscles.” Belinda also addresses this by saying:

So my view of beauty has changed because before it was weight and maybe a size 1 and now that’s sickly looking to me now, and even like marathon runners, you know. I didn't do that very well but I did run them. In the beginning that was the goal because that's what you saw in everybody, even on the fitness magazines. You hardly saw really strong looking women with biceps and triceps and quads for days. That changed after CrossFit.

Both Alyssa and Belinda, as with most of the participants, experienced a shift in their desired body as they progressed in CrossFit. They were able to break away from the Western ideal body image of being skinny and thin to sculpting their body through muscle. Although they reflect a break away from the Western ideal body image, there is still a similar pattern in women developing a sense of self through their bodily appearance. Alyssa and Belinda share how CrossFit made them change their female ideal image. Alyssa, a mother of two, says:

I started developing muscles and I liked having muscles, and no longer did I want to be skinny. I wanted to be fit was a perception for me. But for me, I like to see muscles and

I think it's motivating because, they worked freaking hard, it wasn't a starvation thing. It was hard work to develop the muscles. And I like that. It [CrossFit] changed it [my perception] entirely. I'd rather have muscles and defined legs than just be skinny and pretty. It doesn't tell a story about you. I think the function of it is I know that I feel stronger and I liked that look better. And maybe it's not so much about looks but that I had so much fun developing it. It's the story to develop it.

Belinda, a CrossFit trainer, also relates to a changing ideal body image. She says:

I just felt like that while I was pretty, that didn't signify health or strength. CrossFit's mentality at least for me was focusing more on being healthy and being strong, than fitting into this mold of what beauty is supposed to look like. The magazines, the skinny, I never bought into the Barbie-type beauty. I didn't think that that was necessarily pretty. I thought that looked too fake, but you still see the pictures in magazines even in the bodybuilding ones. They're definitely small, lean, sinuary muscles. So yeah, my idea changed again. It's pretty if you're going to be on a magazine cover, but that's not healthy.

Belinda's and Alyssa's views changed by realizing that their bodies tell a story. For them, their bodies showed their hard work. They recognized that a thin, skinny body image is not a healthy image or is a fake, unrealistic image. Susie, a 31 year-old woman, shared how CrossFit helped change her expectations about having an unrealistic body image. She says:

When I see super, super, super skinny girls, like in magazines or models and stuff, I realized if I would see them in real life, just to see how tiny they are and to see how unattainable that is for me. I will never be a size 0. I just won't. That's not my body type.

But then whenever you see the bodies of CrossFit there are a lot of girls that just have the super muscular arms but for the most part there body size is more like mine than from somebody in a magazine. I think it just feels like you don't feel so out of place.

Susie realized that her body image would never be the unattainable body image found in social media or in magazines. She finds comfort that in her CrossFit gym other women resemble her own body type and because of that her ideal image changed. The body is not only about the appearance, but also what it is capable of doing.

While it may seem that many women are breaking away from the Western mold, they also seem to be struggling with conflicting views deciding what body they want to strive for, whether it be a slim, skinny, or a muscular body. Heather, a college student explains her struggle between muscle and thinness. This struggle reflects an internalization of both the Western ideal body image and the body images she is exposed to in CrossFit. She says:

That's been hard. It's a lot of back and forth for me. Because I am a little bit taller, I'm just a little bit wider than most girls. So it's been hard. Like there's times I just want to get skinny, and sometimes I'm like actually I should I stop CrossFit because I'm getting like too big.

Rosa expressed similar conflict when speaking about her muscular body:

I actually got bigger from bodybuilding, you know, because, in bodybuilding you want to get bigger and doing CrossFit actually got me even bigger than bodybuilding. I don't know. I think to me I'm still a girl; I still want to look feminine, you know. I want to look cute in a cute dress. I love my muscles, but I do wish I were just a little smaller, especially in my upper body.

Although CrossFit has helped change these women's views of their bodies, women were still struggling with pressures to achieve the thin, skinny image. Advertising through magazines and social media has made it easy to reach women. Peloff (2004) states that internalization of the thin idealized standards occurs through media's continuous communication of this image throughout western societies (Peloff, 2004). The participants' views of the ideal female body image before CrossFit were largely based on a thin image, in part because these standards are being promoted through the media. We can get a better understanding of how this influences women's body image through Helen, a tall, lean 28 year-old-female, who said:

I guess because this is before social media and I would just read a lot of fashion magazines and that's all I would see. I would never see anybody with any muscle or any thickness like that, or muscle. On the covers it would always be the teeniest, tiniest, skinniest girls.

CrossFit's social media in general doesn't only focus on a particular body image, but shows the average person with different body shapes and sizes while accomplishing everyday goals. However, the fact that it is a sport and is available on social media, it shows women and elite women athletes who are good at the sport. These women's bodies that are portrayed in the CrossFit media show women with lean muscle mass, sculpted arms, legs, glutes and defined abdominal muscles. Furthermore, CrossFit claims they are not focusing on a particular body image, although it is still a particular type of body displayed throughout their social media outlets, although it is with the intent showing the athlete but not focusing on a particular image. Alyssa, with 7 years of CrossFit experience, was asked if CrossFit social media changed her perception of the ideal body. She said:

I thought about that once that maybe I shouldn't follow so many CrossFitters on



social media because I'm going to feel bad not looking like that. But it's the opposite for me. It motivates me and that's why I follow them on purpose, or watch the CrossFit videos. They're having fun in their workout and then you want to do that. Everybody you follow they'll either put a workout or them doing something and it just pushes me.

Heather, a 21-year-old, also shares how CrossFit social media changed her perception. She says:

I see that not everybody has to be like how you'd figure a female would be, just very skinny. And we're like when you see CrossFit, professional CrossFit athletes, they're a little bit bigger. So you feel like you like it's not bad to look like that. You look at the *Sports Illustrated* magazine where those girls are like really skinny and you're like, 'I'm never gonna look like that.' Then see CrossFit professionals and it's like buffer girls. It's like it's just your environment like who you hang out with.

When asked if social media is discouraging Heather responded, "No. It improves me like in a really good way because you always want to work better. I can see where I'll never be like that. I can see what that plays a role but for me hasn't."

CrossFit social media is not projecting the traditional Western ideal body type, but offering a new image for women. The new image is an image of strength and muscular bodies. Alyssa at first questions CrossFit social media in that it may affect how she views her own body in relation to an image that she may not be able to obtain. Her views changed by watching CrossFit social media in which women have different shaped bodies. Heather's perception also changed by recognizing that she will never be able to obtain the skinny image seen in magazines, but she can look like a CrossFitter by gaining muscle and strength. Women are using CrossFit social media to change their views of the ideal body type to an image of power, strength, and muscle.

However, women are still seeing and desiring to obtain a particular body image.

There is a new fitness shift that is moving away from the skinny, thin body to slogans such as “strong is the new sexy” or “strong is the new skinny.” CrossFit claims that its focus is based on performance, rather than appearance. However, through social media, women are shown images of fit, strong, lean muscular women (Washington and Economides, 2016). CrossFit social media portrays women doing strenuous athletic movements through strength and skills. They are also showing women’s attractiveness through a muscular, lean body image. Helen talks about how CrossFit social media has encouraged her to strive for a certain body image. She says:

Social media has definitely showed me that there are a lot of big muscular girls out there, I think just from the accounts that I followed. I've really seen CrossFit athletes as the females as unattainable bodies. They're just insanely huge. I think it was more of like they don't really give a whole lot of love to like the normal CrossFit athlete... um it's made me appreciate women more. Like, let's say I see a girl and she's got ridiculously huge arms, muscular, a nice broad back and I appreciate her because, I'm thinking she doesn't sit on her butt, she's doing something. I want to know what she is doing because you can just tell and you can appreciate that they put in a lot of hard work and effort. I think a lot of the social media stuff that I've seen, the CrossFit girls they all have ridiculous abs, they have the most beautiful stomachs. So it actually pushes me to do my sit-ups and my crunches and to eat better because they look amazing.

Although Helen recognizes that she will never be able to obtain the ideal CrossFit athletic body, she still focuses on a particular body image. By following social media, she then internalizes a certain body image that creates self-management and self-discipline to develop a

certain image. CrossFit claims that it does not focus on beauty but rather the physical performance of what the body is capable of doing. However, CrossFit creates contradictions when elite athletes' images are constantly available to the public. These women who represent CrossFit athletes have beautiful faces and lean, toned and muscular bodies. *The Box* magazine reinforced this image when it Photoshopped a popular CrossFit elite athlete. The magazine is well known and caters to members of the CrossFit community by providing education, nutrition advice, exercises, and information on competitions and elite athletes (The Box, 2016). Camille Leblanc-Bazinet is a popular athlete known for her strength and beauty. She took first place at the 2014 CrossFit games. She was featured on the cover magazine in October 2014. The magazine cover Photoshopped Camille, who is a beautiful, strong woman who has a little extra fat around her midsection and is not as lean as many other CrossFit women. The reaction within the CrossFit community was outrage that she would be heavily Photoshopped by creating a smaller midsection than what she has (photo available in Appendix C). As Peloff (2014) stated, media drives women to internalize thin standards. This example shows how CrossFit media is reinventing this with a shift from thinness to a lean, fit, sculpted muscular body standard.

Participants all expressed an internalization of some type of the Western body image before CrossFit participation (see Figure 1). Women are aware of Western society's role in reinforcing the importance of physical beauty (Negrin, 2002). Female participants were able to express the constant stress generated through media that promotes and suggests ideas that relate to the ideal female body image one should obtain. Therefore, women are drawn into this image and process it through self-reflecting this onto their own bodies. Women constantly being shown a particular image such as thin, lean, and skinny woman are now seeing a new image of fit, lean and sculpted muscles. Women then internally struggle with their own body image. The image of

a thin, lean and skinny woman has not disappeared, but within CrossFit a new image is emerging in fitness. The new fitness image is sculpted abs and a lean, toned muscular body (Washington and Economides, 2016). CrossFit has changed the way women see their bodies, yet women still have a difficult time fully accepting a muscular body image. Rosa, an elite athlete says, “I do wish I was just a little smaller in especially in my upper body... I just hate looking ripped like cut and lean shredded abs and I just don't, I don't know why.” Debra, a client who joined a casual conversation as we waited for a class to begin, told me, “You know what, I workout everyday and I have huge muscles, but I struggle with that everyday. I love working out, but I wish I could be very lean and skinny.”

Biocitizenship, as used by Greenhalgh (2015), suggests that interpersonal relationships are a way to connect one's bodily attributes to a sense of political or social belonging. Through this political belonging, there is a sense of social responsibility to maintain a certain body that is a lean, fit body (Greenhalgh, 2015). Women are entering a gym to help reshape their bodies. However, in CrossFit, they struggle with their body image as they are torn between thinness and muscle because of the desire to look feminine but also fit. Women will continue to struggle with their body image as they refer back to the Western ideal body image and at the same time try to break this image by reshaping their bodies through muscular gain.

### Different Body Types in CrossFit

All 13 female participants had similarities in their description of what they saw as the Western ideal body image before participating in CrossFit. They used key words such as thin, skinny, and lean in describing the Western ideal body image. After participating in CrossFit, all 13 participants changed their perspective on the ideal body image. The women I interviewed

came to a realization that there are many different body types, not just one physique. All participants expressed greater appreciation of their body and what it is capable of doing. They also recognized that each person is capable of developing muscle strength and power regardless of body size. Susie, a 31-year-old, talks about her views on different body types after participating in CrossFit. She says:

I guess I'm more aware of the different types of bodies there are. There are different ethnicities. There are different bodies. Like you can be, for example a size 18 and that's just your size, but you can look really good. You can be a size 0 and that's just your size. That's just the way you look. You know. There are all different shapes and sizes that go to the gym. Like literally from super skinny to larger, in-between, and you just recognize that really it doesn't matter.

Susie, like many of the female participants, became more aware that women have different body types, which are accepted and appreciated for their diversity. Female participants also were able to appreciate and love their bodies, despite still expressing some dissatisfaction as previously discussed. Helen, with four years of CrossFit experience, shares how CrossFit helped her appreciate her body and change her views on the female body image. She says:

It kind of made me embrace my body because you don't have to have a particular shape to do CrossFit. You could be any size, any weight, any height and you can do the workout. It's kind of good standardized. You don't have to look like a twig. So I've definitely learned to love different types of bodies instead of like my idealized body type. Women, I don't think that they have to be super skinny for me to find them beautiful. They can be thick, they can have muscles, and it's just really opened up my eyes that females look different. There's no same body type on any person. We're all different and

each of them are beautiful.

These women all expressed that their body image had changed after participating in CrossFit. CrossFit is not about reaching or maintaining the ideal thin, skinny image, but about being healthy and accomplishing achievements (Itu, 2018). Women in CrossFit understand that they can embrace their body for what it is capable of doing, as well as transforming it into strength and health. Belinda, a mother of two, says:

CrossFit's mentality at least for me was focusing more on being healthy and being strong than fitting into this mold of what beauty is supposed to look like. CrossFit exemplifies big sacrifice. I think it just exemplifies what your body can do. Like what your brain and your body can do when they're working together.

Amanda, a pro body builder, says:

It broke barriers in my mind that I didn't know that I could and there's something about achieving small goals each day that makes you build that character and confidence. So like even lifting a deadlift five more pounds than I would have last week was amazing. Doing a snatch at a hundred pounds, you know you never really think that 'oh that's a goal,' but it is.

Both Belinda and Amanda provide good examples of how all-13 women felt about participating in CrossFit. CrossFit aims to enable women to discover their strength through participating in the sport. The sport shows that women are capable of lifting weights, gaining muscle mass, and becoming strong individuals both mentally and physically without focusing entirely on their body image, but more on their own accomplishments. Whether those

accomplishments are small or large, these women are able to do things they never thought they were capable of doing. Sarah, a woman with seven-year experience, says:

You're accomplishing stuff... You find a lot of courage to even getting past 5 pounds and then you realize you developed strength and you developed confidence and you develop how your body feels. So you notice your body changing, which is really cool. So it ended up more like what can I do with weight and how much weight can I improve as opposed to losing weight on your body.

Sarah explains the transition from wanting an ideal thin body to focusing on developing strength rather than thinness. CrossFit has helped many other women appreciate their bodies and understand that there is not only one body type. A shift is occurring from the traditional Western ideal body image of a thin body to a new image of a firm, lean, muscular body. Still, CrossFit is reinforcing a particular body image and women are describing happiness as being generated from their appearance. Rather than displaying what CrossFit claims to focus on, such as strength and power, these women are finding happiness with their appearance. When Helen says "You don't have to look like a twig...they can be thick, they can have muscles," she is rejecting the Western ideal image of a thin female, but accepting a shift to a new ideal image of a muscular body. Susie also shares that by participating in CrossFit she was able to gain a sense of happiness through a certain body image. She says:

I can see it, especially in my belly, and my butt and thighs feel more firmer and perkier. I could be imagining it, but I really do feel it. But I also feel good. Like I feel better in my clothes and they fit better. Even like when I walk, I walk even more confident. It just feels good. With CrossFit, I noticed definition and I really liked that. I started

getting my abs back. I was always pretty skinny before, but you're just skinny. You know what I mean. Once I did CrossFit, I was like 'Oh I have muscle on my arms,' and you're proud of that. You're like 'Oh hey I have muscle...I like the muscles.' Even my back too, omg, I like this.

Susie shows her happiness that comes from participating in CrossFit and seeing how CrossFit changes her body. Although Susie is happy to see her body change from being skinny to developing muscles, her narrative is an example of how CrossFit is reinforcing a particular body image and also reinforcing the idea that a woman's sense of self comes from her appearance. The sense of happiness is developed through sculpting muscle, toning, firming up, and losing body fat. This is similar to the Western ideal body image of a tall, lean, thin female, but it has now transformed into a lean, muscular, sculpted body.

### Body Parts

All 13 interviewees each individually named body parts to describe their dissatisfaction with their body. However, when I asked if there was anything they did not like about their body, all participants focused mainly on one body part, the stomach region. They used keywords such as abs, stomach, midsection, and waist. Heather, a 21-year-old college student, and Christina, a 34-year-old female with 4.5 years of CrossFit experience, both provide an example of focusing on a body part. Heather said, "I just want to keep getting better, so like less fat on the stomach, maybe just a little bit more abs." Christina said, "Yeah, I don't like that I have these fat rolls still. Those are hard to get rid of. I don't necessarily want abs, like I'm not that dedicated of an athlete to have abs. Like just having this [points at stomach region] a little bit flatter would be nice."



The midsection region wasn't the only body part women spoke about. Five females (Dulce, Heather, Alyssa, Nancy, and Rosa) spoke about their legs, buttocks, and arms. Nancy, a 32-year-old, shares her dissatisfaction with certain body parts. She says:

I don't like my arms and my stomach. That's it. Oh, and my butt. My arms are really big. There's no definition at all. If I try to shake them out for anything, like there's what I call chicken wing syndrome. Flappy and its not attractive. My stomach, it's also not attractive either, like it's lumpy, frumpy, and then also with the booty.

Female participants focus on certain body parts in part because Western society has created an ideal body image that women internalize. There have been shifts from the thin, skinny image to another ideal image connected to firmness. That means one should not have any cellulite, be lumpy or bumpy, or have a wobble or jiggle (Widdows, 2018). CrossFit welcomes different types of bodies, however, through the media and CrossFit gyms, women are being shown a certain body type. CrossFit's body type is not the Western ideal image of a thin, skinny body, but a lean body with sculpted muscles and chiseled midsection. Women then internalize this body image and reflect that image on their own bodies. When Nancy speaks about her "chicken wing syndrome," she expresses that in order to be attractive she must produce a firm body. Women's views are developed through society's reproduction of the ideal body image. It is through self-surveillance that women realize what they see of themselves compared to what they think they should look like, creating dissatisfaction with certain body parts (Fitzsimmons and Cone, 2011). However, women were also able to find some satisfaction and a lot of dissatisfaction with certain body parts while participating in CrossFit. These patterns are summarized in Figures 2 and 3. As shown in Figure 2, eight out of 13 participants described a body part they were satisfied with while participating in CrossFit.

	Arms	Legs	Trapezius	Calves
Alyssa		X		
Amanda			X	
Belinda	X		X	
Christine				X
Dulce	X		X	
Helen	X	X		X
Julia	X			
Susie		X		

Percentages Satisfied with a Body Part

50.0%      37.5%      37.5%      25.0%

Figure2: Satisfaction with Body Parts

While participants all stated that they were developing muscle, they also focused on body parts such as the trapezius, arms, and legs. Helen, a manager for a company, explains how CrossFit changed her body and how she is more satisfied with the outcome. She says:

I physically finally grew calves. They're not huge because I had small calves. I notice that my legs got very toned. I always just kind of had like big legs, but nothing toned, but they got nice and toned. My arms, I've always hated my arms. I felt I had the chicken flap, and that started tightening up.

Helen shows that through the development of muscle, she is finally satisfied with her body. She also expresses that toning and tightening up her arms and removing the chicken flap has given her satisfaction with her body. Although she is satisfied with her body, when Helen uses words such as firm and toned, she is expressing an ideal body type that is perhaps not a thin image, but a new image that the body must be firm. Firmness and a toned body are ideals that highlight the materiality and physicality of current beauty standards (Widdows, 2018). Through the constant sharing of advertising and media images portraying a firm, sculpted body, though we may be critical of these images, it becomes a part of our own imagining of what is good enough and healthy. Therefore, media and social media create self-surveillance and women

internalize these images to create a desire for a certain body type. Of the participants I interviewed, 8 out of 13 felt satisfied with body parts while participating in CrossFit. All still expressed some dissatisfaction with their bodies.

	Legs	Arms	Stomach /Abs	Trapezius	Glutes	Stretch marks stomach	Stretch marks calves, glutes, thighs, breast	Cellulite	Weight Loss
Dulce	X		X						
Lori			X						
Heather			X						
Christine			X						
Amanda									X
Alyssa	X							X	
Rosa			X	X					
Suzie									X
Maggie			X						
Helen	X				X		X	X	
Nancy		X	X		X				
Julia	X				X				
Belinda						X			

Percentages of Dissatisfaction with Body Parts  
 30.8%   7.7%   53.8%   7.7%   23.1%   7.7%   7.7%   15.4%   15.4%

Figure 3: Dissatisfaction with Body Parts

Participants may associate some of their body dissatisfaction with CrossFit. By CrossFit displaying a specific body image such as a lean body with six-pack abs, sculpted muscles, firm glutes, and large muscular legs, throughout social media and advertising, women internalize this message and reflect it onto their body image. This image is widely known throughout the CrossFit community and gyms. Dulce, an avid volleyball player, says what she thought she needed to look like to participate in CrossFit. She says, “When I started it, I thought okay, you have to have a six pack to be able to do this [CrossFit] and you have to have amazing legs and all of that.” Heather and Helen also described what a female CrossFitter looks like. Helen says,

“They have thicker legs, a wider back, you could see your muscles look like defined muscles.”

Helen also describes the CrossFit body as “a nice muscle build, not over-the-top like body builder muscle, but just like a nice physique, nice toned legs, flat stomach, sculpted arms.”

Women are constantly seeing other CrossFit women either at their gym or on social media with a lean body, defined midsection, sculpted muscles, firm glutes, and large, muscular legs. The image of a lean, toned muscular body is something that is embraced in the CrossFit world. After coaching a 9 am class, I was sitting down on the couch in the relaxing area off to the side of the workout area and talking to some of the female members. We were conversing about weekend plans and CrossFit talk, which usually consists of the workout, past workouts or elite athletes. A female trainer started walking in my direction and speaking in a loud voice and says, “Hey, Noemi, remember when you asked me for ab advice?” I looked at her puzzled, not remembering asking that. I responded with “I did?” She replies, “Yeah remember, you said Hey Ruby, I want abs. What do I need to do?” I laughed and said, “You’re right, I did ask you that and you said I needed to workout three times a day.” I remembered asking Ruby for abdominal advice because she has the most chiseled six-pack abs I’ve ever seen. She is very lean, with a firm body, sculpted muscles, and abs. She definitely fits into the perfect CrossFit body image most women are looking for. I myself fell into wanting this CrossFit body because that CrossFit body represents strength, firmness, and beauty. Lean muscles, six-pack abs and firm legs and glutes are the ideal CrossFit body many women focus on, including myself. The reason for this image is that CrossFit bodies are displayed throughout social media. One huge problem with social media is numerous amounts of postings on Instagram and Facebook. Through social media images, women are constantly being exposed to perfect CrossFit bodies. The images involve women mostly dressed in active wear with a sports bra or small tiny shorts and exposing their lean and

sculpted midsection, arms, glutes, and legs. They are also shown working out and displaying healthy food option images. The lean, fit, thin, low body fat percentage bodies are on display through social media. These types of CrossFit body images are continuously seen on social media and cause women to frown upon their own bodies and become unhappy (Peloff, 2014). However, when we look at these images, many of us do not just happily move on to the next image. Instead, women become obsessed and unsatisfied with their own bodies. *American Fitness* explains that the “repeated exposure to these idolized physiques leads us to believe that lean, toned bodies are normal, attainable, expected and central to attractiveness the end result overwhelming dissatisfaction with one’s own body” (Grabe, 2008, p. 67). CrossFit contradicts themselves by claiming they do not focus on any type of body image when they clearly promote a specific body in advertising and social media. Therefore, media and social media perpetuate self-surveillance and women internalize these images using them to create a desired body image. Not being able to achieve this image leads to body dissatisfaction. Female participants’ body dissatisfaction focused on certain body parts as presented in Figure 3. These particular body parts are CrossFit portraying throughout gyms and social media. Therefore, women are focusing on specific body parts in order to achieve or maintain the CrossFit body.

### Body Talk

Body talk and fat talk were very apparent in all my interviews, whether it was women talking positively or negatively about their bodies. Body talk was being used to talk about their bodies and address other females’ bodies. Fat talk involves comments or everyday conversations surrounding topics of weight, diet and exercise (Greenhalgh, 2015). I observed a significant amount of fat talk on the days I was coaching my CrossFit classes. Before the class started one

day, a young female in her early 20's and I were casually talking. She told me that it was her birthday that past weekend and said, "I feel and look fat." She went on to tell me that she had an abundance of cake over the weekend. I also observed one Monday morning while aiding a CrossFit class and at the end of a brutal workout a young female in her late 20's still on the ground catching her breath tell me, "Ugh, I ate so badly this weekend. We went out of town and you know when you go out of town you just eat and say, 'Ok one more.' I didn't want to come in today but I ate so badly I had to come in today."

These women are not the only ones communicating using body talk, but the coaches use body talk as well. I experienced this when I had joined a class to workout. The male coach had asked me if I was going to join his class and I had responded with a "Yes." I told him that I hadn't lifted in a while, and he responded with, "You need to put some meat on your bones."

By expanding on Greenhalgh's use of body talk, CrossFit also creates similar patterns of communication to create a sense of belonging and creating a certain body image. The CrossFit body image is developed and created by communicating certain words related to muscle, strength and power. By the male coach responding to me that I needed to put some meat on my bones, he was reinforcing a certain body image. The thin body image is not acceptable for a CrossFit body; in order for me to participate and compete in strength and power, I need to gain more muscle and weight to my body. In my 10 years of participating in CrossFit, many women have come up to me and have asked what I am doing or what they can do to either lose weight or gain muscle. I have invited them to the CrossFit gym I was coaching at, and many of them have said, "Oh no, I'll wait until I lose weight to try out CrossFit." My response to that is always, "Come in and work out with me and you'll enjoy it. CrossFit will help you achieve your goals." Women are often intimidated to join a CrossFit gym because of how CrossFit portrays the image of a

CrossFitter. Nancy, a mother of two, explains how she felt when she first started CrossFit. She says:

I knew I was walking into an environment where people knew what they were doing whether they were seasoned veterans or they were way more experienced than me. Then also I was 30 pounds overweight and I'm walking into an environment also where people are fit, where people are thinner than me. I remember coming in and thinking that everybody was going to be super fit.

Julia, a college student, had a similar experience when she first began CrossFit. She says:

The owner is my cousin. And my brother, when he worked here, they would always try to get me to come to the gym and I didn't want to. But finally I decided to come in and try it... I was intimidated, and I think that's why a lot of people don't try CrossFit because they're intimidated. I remember coming in and thinking that everybody was going to be super fit.

Dulce, an avid volleyball player, also shares her experience of what she thought she needed to look like to participate in CrossFit. She says, "When I started it I thought, okay you have to have a six pack to be able to do this [CrossFit] and you have to have amazing legs and all of that." Dulce, Nancy, and Julia show that by CrossFit portraying a certain body image through media, social media, and advertising, women feel excluded from participating in activities due to the fact that they do not have a certain body type to participate in that sport or activity.

Therefore, women are being overlooked from participating or not being accepted because their body does not match the CrossFit body image. Participants such as Amanda, a 38- year-old female, described a CrossFit body as "Large traps, large trunks, so their shape is different from

any other athlete.” Body talk within CrossFit is the norm, especially when conversations address or surround topics of body image, weight, and food. The effect it creates is that women become aware of a certain body image, a certain weight, and then discipline the body through exercise and nutrition.

Fat talk can also be seen as biopedagogical via people such as coaches, physicians, health and physical educational teachers (Greenhalgh, 2015). Biopedagogical fat talk is essentially a way to create an extreme concern to achieve a certain body type. The use of biopedagogical fat talk creates a harmful lasting existence to maintain, self-internalize and self-discipline in order to create a certain body image. The CrossFit community uses biopedagogy to reproduce what is seen as an acceptable body image by CrossFit standards. Coaches, gym owners, and even customers all communicate how to mold your body into a lean, sculpted, and strong body. The creation of a CrossFit body involves the introduction of nutrition aimed at leanness and dropping body fat. Coaches and gym owners aim to teach CrossFit customers and athletes what they must do to succeed in creating this image.

In my interviews, women described how they internalized messages about nutrition and the importance not only of weight control, but also sculpting and building muscle. Through the encouragement of their gym and coaches, Amanda addresses how CrossFit uses biopedagogy by saying, “CrossFit teaches you and you learn. They educate you a lot about dieting. I was taught that it was a part of it and during my training in CrossFit and then when you do realize it, how much it changes the game.” Maggie who works in the medical field also acknowledges this by saying, “My gym actually focuses on nutrition and I did one nutrition challenge. It was actually kind of cool to see how much fat, protein, and carbs you needed to eat. It’s just because they had



these challenges at the gym and I said I should do it. Why not? That's what initiated it." Susie described such challenges:

It was like you go into teams and you get points for working out, and you had to keep track of a journal of what you ate. Then you would have to keep within your guidelines of what you ate, and if you got out of your guidelines of what you ate in the Paleo diet, then you would get points taken out. It was like you could only eat x amount of calories or whatever.

CrossFit gyms use nutrition challenges as a tool to encourage self-surveillance and monitor bodies. When a CrossFit gym owner provides knowledge and education on how to lose weight or maintain a body image by collecting body measurements using a measuring tape, stepping on a scale to retrieve weight and getting body fat numbers, it is a way to promote self-monitoring and self-surveillance. To be a good biocitizen, one not only monitors themselves by taking care of their body, but also takes charge in their social responsibilities in taking care of others through dieting and exercising to reach a certain weight (Greenhalgh, 2015). Therefore, to further expand on Greenhalgh's (2015) definition of a good biocitizen, CrossFit gym owners and coaches are using their knowledge they have received through certifications and nutrition classes, and are taking charge to change female body images. Through the knowledge owners and coaches have acquired, they use this in order to build discipline and maintenance through diet and exercise. Belinda, a female in her early 40's, says, "Yes, I still look at numbers because I want to make sure I don't pull back to where I was in my youth, that I didn't work this hard to blow it. I pay attention. I'm cognizant." Belinda is referring to using a scale to help keep her body in check. She does this so she does not gain the weight she has worked hard to keep off. Technologies such as a scale are used to promote self-surveillance in a private setting (Pylypa, 1998). I return

to how nutrition plays a role in biocitizenship and self-surveillance in the nutrition section.

### Nutrition in CrossFit

Nutrition played a vital role for all my interviewees, as women used nutrition as a way to assess their body image. Nutrition information is available from all kinds of sources such as books, the internet, and classes given by gym owners. Furthermore, nutrition plays an important role in disciplining the body to achieve a certain image. Most CrossFit athletes are taught and understand the importance of proper and improper nutrition and how it affects the body. Foucault's (1991) use of governmentality shows how institutions and procedures exercise power over a target population. The internalization of institutional messages leads to self-surveillance, which is how institutional structures allow for the shaping and guiding of behaviors of people. Nutrition became an important part of how female CrossFitters learn to maintain their body image. They all learned through their gyms how to use nutrition to their advantage. The gym would provide nutrition challenges and through these challenges there would be rewards and prizes to those who were the most successful in losing weight and dropping body fat. However, the biggest reward is providing knowledge to individuals to lose weight and maintain their body image. Although nutrition is internalized as a positive addition in their lives, it is also reinforcing a particular body type. In my years of coaching, I have witnessed several nutrition challenges. All these challenges come with different names such as Paleo diet, Whole 30 or simply a nutrition challenge. Each challenge will have a handout that explains the challenge, helpful tips for success, and the breaking down of macronutrients and what foods fall into different categories. The handout will also have what they call no-no's or waistline enemies. These are "bad" foods that need to be avoided at all times. There is also advice on how to win the challenge

(see Appendix B for booklets). Finally, at the end of the session, each member who is participating will have their chest, waist, and hips measured; weight and body fat measurements recorded; and before and after pictures taken. Those who want to learn how to eat right and lose weight are welcome to join. Lori, a 34-year-old, shares her experience participating in nutrition challenges. She says:

Actually doing the Paleo challenge when the gym had it was the first time. It was just an introduction and I got familiar with it. I was like, okay. Then I did Whole 30 on my own and that just showed the significance of nutrition's impact on my fitness, and just the physique. Because I lost a lot, I was the smallest I ever was.

Alyssa, an avid runner, explains the impact of these challenges on her:

Well, I watch what I eat now. I have to because I don't want to get big as far as not bulky but fat big. Or arm muscles on top of fat or vice versa. I have to make sure that I'm eating right. By eating everything clean, now I know what type of foods do what to my body. I know what carbs do, and what carbs are for my body, when to eat them and fat and protein. Being in a CrossFit class and coupled with figure competition, people would start asking me about nutrition. So that encouraged me to get my nutrition certification license, so I can have more of an educated response when people were asking me. So I guess CrossFit coupled with that made me want to educate myself in nutrition.

Lori gives an example of how the practice of gym owners educating their clients serves as biopedagogy in the form of nutrition classes. Part of the message centers on losing weight to become good citizens. Lori used the knowledge she gained to focus on maintaining weight loss.

Alyssa also used her knowledge to become aware of how to take care of herself so she does not become overweight. She then became a good biocitizen by taking it a step further by educating herself so she can help others achieve a certain body image. However, nutrition was not only about losing weight for participants. It was also about providing a state of happiness. Through the nutrition challenges, the female participants were able to see how their body changed and that created a state of happiness for them. Susie, a 31-year-old woman, shares her experience with participating in challenges. She says:

Actually, when I was doing Paleo challenges at the gym, or fitness challenges, or whenever I was eating really well and working out consistently, like there was a goal I needed to get to and stick to it. Everything that I wore I just felt super good in it, and people were like, ‘Omg, you look so good.’ I think also because in my face too, you could just see it I was very happy to be that way.

Susie uses fitness challenges to associate her changes in her body image that not only created positive feedback but also created a state of happiness. Susie’s happiness was focused on a goal to change her body. When she received compliments, it reinforced her fitness challenges as positive to continue changing her body. Susie’s transformation also perpetuated a sense of self-surveillance. Foucault (1988) acknowledges that surveillance of body weight or body image comes from the individual as well as in the medical institution, others, and media. Internalization of messages in nutrition programs promote self-surveillance and self-discipline. Alyssa, a mother of two, provides an understanding of how nutrition helps generate a sense of self-surveillance and disciplining of her body. She says:

I feel like I’ve gotten a lot of cellulite now, and that’s because I haven’t been as dedicated as I have in the past. So my goal is to get rid of the cellulite, but I know I have

to work to get rid of it... it's a reflection of my inaction for me. It shows as we get older it's very different. It forces me that if I don't do it this is what happens. I have to make sure that I do it so my body maintains as much as it possibly can.

Alyssa is expressing her views of her body and how nutrition can help get rid of her cellulite and produce a certain body image. She is self-monitoring and self-internalizing that cellulite is a failure to discipline the body. Therefore, through discipline she will be able to produce a particular CrossFit body image.

### Shame and Guilt in Nutrition

Proper nutrition can be achieved in several aspects of one's life, and although it is seen as a positive aspect in CrossFit, the focus on nutrition can also lead to food guilt or shame. The women I interviewed all mentioned guilt when discussing their nutrition. Heather, a 21 year-old trainer, shares her experience when asked about her nutrition. She says:

I'll be like, 'Man, I want pizza,' and then I'll have pizza and then I'm like, 'Oh I'm gonna get fat because I ate a pizza.' Yeah, I guess I do feel defeated at that time...I guess guilty. I'm like, I'm not losing anything. So I guess you can say that's what it is. Okay, just like everyone's working hard and you just kind of feel like you're taking a step back when you start eating unhealthy.

Dulce, an avid volleyball player, says:

I get really inspired to workout and eat really healthy, and then something happens and then I'm like, ok I'm going to eat whatever I want this time, and then go back to not eating super healthy. Then a weekend comes and I'm running late for something, so I'm just going to grab something and then that'll last about for a week and

then I'll feel bad about myself, because I feel like I've worked so hard in that month to eat good and then I messed it up.

Both Heather and Dulce express food guilt when talking about their nutritional experiences. Although many of my interviewees have experienced or associated their nutrition with some type of food guilt, this is not something that just occurred. Food guilt is associated with society's media influences (Damassa, 2013). Nutrition is seen in every aspect life, whether through the media, social media, or advertisements. Nutrition can have a positive impact on overall health by helping to control and even preventing diabetes or helping avoid a certain nutrient deficiency. However, one interviewee expressed how fitness and nutrition play a role in making a person feel guilty. Belinda, a female with 8 years of CrossFit experience, says:

There's been an association and I think with CrossFit and Whole 30 and Paleo and whatever, there's a lot of association between food and guilt, or we don't eat necessarily to fuel our body. We eat because we're sad or happy, where food has been used more as a drug than fuel. And so I worry sometimes that I'll slip into those, you know, your brain remembers with ease.

Belinda understands that nutrition and fitness create an association between food and guilt. CrossFit nutrition challenges, coaches, gym owners, and medical staff labeling food good or bad, healthy or unhealthy perpetuates self-monitoring. Foucault (1977) describes this kind of self-monitoring as the normalizing gaze, or a type of surveillance that gives permission to qualify, classify and punish.

Nutrition was a consistent topic throughout all the interviews. The female participants used nutrition as a way to get their body back into shape by losing weight, to fuel the body, and to address health issues. However, there was a strong sense of guilt after not choosing the proper

or right foods to eat. Maggie, a 33 year-old female, talks about how nutrition is used for fuel. She says:

I see it more as fuel. I used to see it as, I better not eat that, and now I see it like, what's going to allow me one get through the day better, and fuel to be able to workout. I'm not so worried about, oh if I eat that I probably wont burn this much and hold this much. I see it more like feed yourself because it's a fuel. Not so much as a limiting but a performance factor.

Sport or fitness nutrition is built on the understanding that the primary macronutrients of carbohydrates, fats, and proteins proportionally and consistently consumed can supply an amount of fuel needed to perform exercise routines (Quinn, 2019). CrossFit coaches, organizers, and gym owners focus on macronutrients and how these nutrients can help your body lean out or optimize your performance. CrossFit programs and nutrition challenges use phrases such as “fueling the body” to change a person’s way of thinking. Instead of looking at it as a diet, words such as “fuel” create a certain mindset about nutrition and the body. Therefore, fueling is about focusing on using macronutrients to illustrate how to drop the weight, lean out, and build muscle in order to excel. Nancy, an avid dancer, uses her nutrition to lose weight. She says, “I had gained a lot of weight when I was pregnant. I gained 60 pounds total. And the combination of diet and exercise after I had the baby helped me drop the majority of my weight. So I’ve seen a drastic change in my body.” Maggie, a 33-year-old woman, expressed a similar sentiment: “I did one nutrition challenge. It was actually kind of cool to see how much fat, protein and carbs you needed to eat... I had an idea of what I was eating. I was able to lose some weight.”

Although the majority of my interviewees used nutrition as a way to either lose weight or fuel their body, some participants used nutrition to address health concerns. Amanda, a

CrossFitter and bodybuilding competitor, states, “When I did the Paleo challenges, the headaches are gone and I cut out all the bread the sugar and suddenly I would wake up and my head was clear and wasn't tired. I wasn't getting the eczema patches.” Christine, a traffic controller, says, “I needed to change and also I have a medical clearance at work and I was at the point where I was going to have to be on blood pressure medication and they’d been telling me that I was pre-diabetic for a very long time.”

Nutrition can be seen as a positive force in my participants’ lives. CrossFitters embrace nutrition to believe that if they are able to control their nutrition, then they are able to change their body. CrossFit using wording such as “fueling the body” or “it is not a diet, it is a lifestyle change,” is changing the way people view dieting. CrossFit may not use the term diet as part of their vocabulary; however, when someone is counting their macros, measuring their food and body, taking body fat measurements, or stepping on a scale, it is still a form of reinforcing diets and establishing self-discipline and surveillance. There is a contradiction between CrossFit wanting to change the lives and bodies of their female members through nutrition but still reinforcing the same ideas, that women need to look like a certain body type and that this body type can be created through nutrition.

### Empowerment

As many female participants began to look past the Western ideal body image and placed their focus on strength and muscle, they embraced their changing bodies while feeling empowered by their performance in CrossFit. Women recognized that through muscle gain and strength, they were breaking stereotypes and developing an understanding that their bodies were capable of anything. Lori, a physical therapist, shares how CrossFit helped her break



stereotypes. Lori says:

I love CrossFit. I love lifting. I do get excited sometimes when I lift heavier than the guys. It's just my little like, hey go girl... You always grow up having that stereotype where they tell you guys are stronger than girls and girls can't do what guys do. So just to prove, just to see that you know what, I can lift just as heavy as the guys. I could be your equal. I'm good. So that's just kind of like, I'm trying to break that stereotype. When I can catch up and we're almost that close to and I'm almost up to his level, I'm excited, that makes it like, I guess I did it. I could do it. We're good.

Like many of the female participants, Lori used CrossFit to break stereotypes instead showing that women are able to lift weights and can become stronger like men. Lori is breaking stereotypes such as “guys are stronger” and “girls can’t do what guys do” by associating CrossFit with undoing gender. Butler (2004) states undoing gender refers to the social interactions that reduce or eliminate gender difference. Women are undoing gender when they participate in CrossFit. Connell (cited in Chan, et al., 2010, p. 429) explains undoing gender is the “observation that the contestation of gender hierarchy, which requires the collective agency of women, can change the conditions of accountability of individual actions.” By undoing gender, women are removing the pressures created by the male patriarchal gaze and empowering themselves by claiming back their bodies. By Lori addressing stereotypes women deal with, she is stating that one way of breaking out of these norms includes women looking at their bodies through the development of muscle strength. It is through muscle strength that female participants are finding out what they are capable of. For example, Nancy, a mother of two, says:

Lifting heavy weight and doing movements like that used to be something that was only a man was supposed to do. And even now, I'm sure once CrossFit first came on the

scene, like you see that they almost have room for a woman to do those movements... It just feels good to be able to do things you never thought you were able to do. I'm doing it.

CrossFit appeals to women by promoting a sport that makes women comfortable with their bodies and encourages empowerment. The gym exposes women to barbell work and tears down barriers on what women can and cannot do. Through the variety of workouts and hard work, women are learning that they are able to achieve anything. Achievements such as being able to do a single-pull up to deadlifting a large amount of weight are now attainable for anyone. Though the journey may be different for each individual woman, all participants were able to find empowerment in their own goals and their bodies. Susie, a 31-year-old with seven years of CrossFit experience, talks about how CrossFit makes her feel empowered. She says:

I'm just going in there like this is fun, and I like the sound when you're doing a squat clean and you can hear the weights clinging and then the sound of when you drop the weights on the floor. It just feels like good. That's probably the only time you feel like a SUPERHERO. I feel like a superhero. I've got this weight over my head and now I'm going to do this. So you kind of imagine yourself like a badass, for like an hour of your day.

By Susie using the word superhero, she asserts that lifting weights is something that can only be seen in comic books or movies. However, by participating in CrossFit, she is able to break away from stereotypes and break barriers that women are capable of lifting heavy weights. Empowerment can be seen as a positive force that encourages women to express themselves physically and mentally (Eskes, Duncan and Miller, 1998). Using words such as "badass" and "superhero" helps redefine beauty and break stereotypes. All the female participants expressed

that CrossFit changed their thinking and made them excited to break the mold of what women should be doing and what women can do with their own strength and bodies. CrossFit can be about loving and appreciating your body and the potential of one's own power, instead of trying to fulfill societal standards (Reiland, 2015). It also helps create a sense of power not only in the gym but in all aspects of life. Amanda, a CrossFitter and physique competitor, shares how CrossFit helped break barriers not only in the gym but also in her life. She says:

Oh, it changed tremendously. Like I gained a lot of confidence, I broke barriers in my mind that I didn't think I could and there is something about achieving small goals each day that makes you build that character and confidence. Doing a snatch at a 100 pounds, you know you never really think that, 'Oh, that's a goal,' but it is. It builds my confidence and it's built my sense of self. And things you can't do as well. You just kind of know your body and become more self-aware and self-confident. It breaks like mental barriers of looking at things. So now I've learned ... and that carries over to all aspects of your life. Like, hey, I didn't think I was going to get my master's degree, but let me try. And you try and then you do it.

CrossFit was able to show Amanda that she could break barriers inside the gym as well as in her life. It helped build her awareness that she was capable of achieving anything she set her mind to. Heywood (cited in Dworkin, 2001) argues that women weightlifting reflects self-empowerment as a part of a third wave feminism. Therefore, by participating in CrossFit, women were able to achieve small goals whether it was getting one pull-up, lifting weights over their head, or getting a master's degree. These women develop physical and mental strength by participating in CrossFit.

## **Discussion**

Results show how women are using fitness as way to help shape and sculpt their bodies. Body talk, media and biopedagogy in fitness have led women to develop self-surveillance and self-discipline to shape their bodies. Interviewees shared their perception of their ideal body image before and after participating in CrossFit. Interviewees were able to reflect on how they believed their bodies should look, often referring to a particular body image or body parts they saw as central to the ideal body image. The women believed that prior to CrossFit participation their bodies should be skinny and thin with a small waist. These women were describing the Western ideal body image. The Western image is a “White middle-class woman, tanned, healthy slenderness with no unsightly bumps, bulges, or cellulite, and bodily and facial perfection” (Duncan, 1994, p. 50). Women also viewed social media as playing a part in developing this image. Women internalized images presented in the media and social media in a way that contributed to constant surveillance of their bodies in public and private spaces. Duncan (1994) argues that the media contributes to women’s internal struggle of self-consciousness through bodily monitoring based on physical appearance.

Women reported that after participation in CrossFit, they would still focus on particular ideals for certain body parts, such as the stomach, legs and buttocks, even though women felt that CrossFit was able to change their overall perceptions of the ideal body image. CrossFit was reproducing another form of an ideal body image. The image CrossFit was reproducing was a particular body image of lean, toned, and sculpted muscles of arms, legs, buttocks and abdominals. All my interviewees gave me a description of what a CrossFit body was supposed to look like. When women were not able to achieve this image, they expressed the need to change their nutrition or work harder to accomplish this goal. However, by CrossFit using phrases that

encourage strength, power and muscle, women then internalize these messages to create a certain image. CrossFit uses phrases such as “strong is beautiful”, “strong is the new skinny” and “if your handbag weighs more than the weight you lift, you’re not lifting heavy enough”. Although these phrases may seem motivating and encouraging to women, they also target a particular image. CrossFit is encouraging a new ideal body image of the lean, muscular body. What does this say about how women internalize these images and self-reflect and self-discipline their bodies in order to obtain a certain image? CrossFit women believe that this new image is revolutionizing and changing the way women’s bodies are viewed, but in reality they are creating another ideal image of a firm, toned body. If CrossFit is revolutionizing and changing how the community is seeing women’s bodies, then why are women who participate in CrossFit still dissatisfied with their bodies? Women poke and prod at particular body parts because they are constantly being exposed, through social media and media, to body images of lean, muscular women. Women internalize these images and become dissatisfied with their bodies when they are unable to obtain the CrossFit image. Therefore, they continue to discipline their bodies through rigorous training and nutrition.

Through the exposure to biopedagogies from institutions and individuals, women engaged in self-surveillance and self-discipline of their bodies. Women who participated in CrossFit reported that books, media, gym owners and coaches all helped provide the knowledge and discipline they needed to create the ideal body image. Moral discourses contributed to women internalizing a particular body image that would require self-surveillance and discipline to achieve. Foucault’s (1980) concept of normalization offers an understanding of how individuals internalize moral discourse. Normality means staying on track and being a good citizen, including by maintaining a particular body image, while deviance is the opposite and is

frowned upon society by shaming you for not being able to stay disciplined. Normality and deviance create body images that fit societal needs. In CrossFit, normality involves women looking lean, toned with sculpted arms, legs and stomachs. In order to maintain and achieve such an image, women must discipline their bodies through clean eating, measuring the proper amounts of macronutrients, and measuring their body by either stepping on a scale or using body tape measurements. Normality enables one to become the model citizen, or a good person in disciplining their body. Deviance is seen as a lazy, bad person unwilling to discipline their body to achieve normality.

An issue that is being created by CrossFit is how owners, coaches and trainers are educating their clients on nutritional facts, healthy eating habits, and helping them abandon fad diets. However, they are still establishing diet trends through the use of certain nutritional plans, such as the paleo diet, carb cycling and macronutrient measuring. These types of diets are similar to what Western traditional ideal standards also create, and CrossFit uses similar patterns to help change women's eating habits to create a particular body image. The issue that is developing within CrossFit is they are creating a new ideal body image. The reason for that is that most men are owners, coaches and trainers in CrossFit gyms. Therefore, ideal images are being developed through the male gaze and reproduced in CrossFit gyms. Mulvey's (1975) conceptualization of the male gaze focuses on the constant surveillance of women's bodies and how women repeatedly internalize the constant surveillance of their own bodies in private and public spaces. Gym owners and trainers use their knowledge of what a woman's body should represent as a CrossFitter and through exercise, nutrition challenges and seminars, reproduce a particular body image and project that image on women. Furthermore, CrossFit needs to stop advertising by providing sample meal guidelines, what one should and should not eat, repeatedly labeling food

bad or no-no's, because this creates self-surveillance and self-discipline to obtain a certain weight and body image. CrossFit needs to change the way they advertise on social media. CrossFit is constantly advertising beautiful white, lean, muscular women in a sports bra and tiny shorts. Advertising should fully represent women of all types of bodies and ethnicities. CrossFit also needs to integrate and educate gym owners and trainers on women's body image, body dissatisfaction and the effects it can create for women. More research needs to expand on biopower by addressing the self-surveillance in nutrition and nutritional challenges in CrossFit gyms provided for their clients. These challenges and seminars create the disciplining of ones body by creating a particular body image through nutrition.

In this research, it was clear the women I interviewed all expressed some form of empowerment. Some women use fitness such as CrossFit as a regime to break away from the pressures of conformity to gender stereotypes and behavior (Bradshaw, 2002). The women interviewed were seeing themselves as breaking away from such stereotypical behavior by developing muscles and strength. For instance, Lori, a physical therapist, addresses these stereotypes. She says:

When I lift heavier than the guys, it's just my little like, hey go girl... You always grow up having that stereotype where they tell you guys are stronger than girls and girls can't do what guys do. So just to prove, just to see that you know what, I can lift just as heavy as the guys. I could be your equal.

Many of the participants such as Lori used CrossFit to break stereotypes by lifting weights and becoming stronger than some men. Empowerment focuses on accomplishments through physical strength and by women taking control of their bodies. They take pride in their achievements and being able to have their body respond to such challenges that the body is

capable of achieving (Wright and Dewar, 1997). However, my research also acknowledges the complexity of empowerment. CrossFit claims to bypass appearances and focus on the strength and power in women. However, CrossFit still emphasizes the importance of body image, from the Western ideal image to a new ideal image of lean muscles and beauty. Washington and Economides (2016) state that CrossFit has created the illusion of empowerment by allowing women to think they have a choice to choose it as their fitness routine over any other workout. What is clear from the interviews is that women know how outside social influences shape their perceptions of their body image. The participants also know the relationship between diet and exercise to discipline the body, by shaping and molding it into a particular image. Interviewees also associate their fitness and health practices of eating and exercising, linking them to weight and body shape. Women view and negotiate their fitness regime in different ways. For some, it becomes an obsession to achieve a particular body and some women will go to extremes of diet and exercise to obtain the ideal CrossFit image. These types of obsession lead to dissatisfaction with the body, which can lead to eating disorders. Others use fitness to shape and mold their body image for the appearance of attractiveness and making them feel good and happy seeing their bodies change.

Social media, biopedagogy and fitness culture are promoting and influencing women to engage in self-surveillance and self-discipline. In order to help gym owners and coaches understand how women and individuals deal with their bodies, CrossFit training and seminars should invite body image therapists to discuss and help understand how body image can affect their clients. The intention of a body image therapist is to help gym owners and trainers to have a better understanding of women's bodies, so that they may be able to help evaluate and determine if they are somehow measuring their bodies against ideal body images. By educating trainers



through CrossFit certification classes, this will help owners, trainers and coaches from perpetuating a push for unattainable body standards. Most women want to know how they can change their bodies to fit and obtain a certain body image. However, through the use of a body image therapist, gym owners and coaches can use their knowledge to ask particular questions to help women understand why do they want to change their bodies. This can encourage women to recognize their body is not an object to manipulate and mold into a certain body image, but that women's bodies change, fluctuate and vary in all different shapes, sizes and colors. It is important to understand that women should love and respect their bodies and that CrossFit gyms do not want you recreate a certain body image, but to create happiness and love for their body and how to use that body to achieve your own goals in fitness without changing it.

## **Conclusion**

In summary, for women who are constantly scrutinized by society for their appearance, CrossFit claims to allow women the potential to think differently about their body with the development of muscles and strength rather than focusing on appearance. However, through social media and other tactics of biopedagogy, CrossFit continues to emphasize the appearance of beauty and a fit body, which creates forms of bodily dissatisfaction for women. Through the use of self-surveillance and self-discipline, women are using fitness to create a particular body image. Through the use of technology such as scales and social media women continue to self-discipline in the privacy of their own home. Women use fitness routines such as CrossFit to empower themselves, gain confidence, and break social norms. However, the empowerment of women in fitness is not completely free from the oppression of a focus on bodily appearance. In fitness, women will continue to battle the normalization of following fitness routines such as dieting and producing an ideal body image. In this research, I questioned if CrossFit was changing women's perception of body image and how they viewed their own bodies. However, that question is far more complex than to answer with a simple yes or no. A Foucauldian framework (1973) shows how women discipline their bodies through self-surveillance and self-discipline in order to produce an ideal body image with the help of media and technologies. Through power of institutions and the biopedagogies they use, women are encouraged to discipline their bodies to achieve a particular body image.

There is a plethora of research that focuses on men and fitness. My research contributes to the lack of research on women's fitness. It also helps show how women use fitness as a tool to discipline their bodies but also as a source of empowerment. The findings in my research will play an important role on providing awareness of how the Western female ideal body image has

established power through the use of fitness to discipline women's bodies and create a particular body image. Society's greater demand for health and beauty has allowed power to hide in new fitness activities. CrossFit has created a sense of empowerment by changing how women see their bodies. Through the use of building lean muscle, power and strength, CrossFit has opened new opportunities to help change the perception from the Western ideal body image to a new image. However, my research shows that CrossFit continues to produce ideal body images focused on nutrition, beauty, lean muscles and empowerment. While CrossFit may contribute to female strength, it also allows for women to focus on their bodies to develop a particular body. By the use of biopedagogies such as coaches, gym owners, and trainers, women are trained to develop an awareness and self-discipline of their bodies. Women are given techniques of how to change their body and create a particular body image. By contributing to a limited amount of research, my research reveals critical areas such as biopedagogies, nutrition and dissatisfaction in fitness that need to be addressed to understand how power is reproduced in fitness to create docile bodies through self-surveillance and discipline.

## **Changing the Future**

Within the past few years, movements have taken shape in trying to change how women see their bodies. The Fat Acceptance Movement (FAM) has been around since the 1960's. This movement is addressing issues such as fat people facing discrimination on a daily basis in public spaces, employment and in seeking medical care. The FAM message is that beauty and health come in all shapes and sizes (Greenhalgh, 2015). Today, we see anti-diet, body positivity and intuitive eating movements on the rise. With intuitive eating, which is eating and listening to one's body, individuals begin to understand the fundamental principles of eating when hungry and stopping when satiated (Dyke and Drinkwater, 2013). Other movements such as the anti-diet movement focus on behavior rather than weight loss; it is about making peace with food and not giving food the power to control one's life (Broadbent, 2016). Health topics and anti-diet movements have made ripples in social media along with podcasts such as Love Food, Harder to Kill and Decolonizing Fitness. However, many still question and become offended by the anti-diet or body positivity movements. The reason is society has been conditioned to think that diets and weight loss are the best ways to lose weight and solve the obesity epidemic (Severson, 2019). However, the anti-diet movement is not an attack on health professionals or individuals, but it promotes overall wellness instead of size.

Why is it difficult for people, especially women, to accept their body? It is difficult for many people to accept their body because society emphasizes that by not following normative roles, one becomes deviant. The way the anti-diet works is by offering other ways to improve health if the body is feeling achy. Other ways to help improve health are by seeking out a physical therapist and taking supplements and vitamins. Many concerns about fat are based on obesity. Obesity was named a disease by the American Medical Association (AMA). However,

AMA research stated, “the evidence did not show a direct cause and effect relationship between obesity and morbidity and mortality” (Severson, 2019, p. 5). Therefore, the obsession with fatness is not applied to the health of the individual but rather based on weight and beauty standards. The obsession with fatness is focused on an ideal beauty standard rather than the actual health of the individual.

Promoting a positive body image within society is a difficult task and acceptance of all types of bodies will take some time and require individuals to understand that happiness does not come from weight loss or conforming to a particular body image. It is more about taking that extra step forward and rather than worry about weight, letting people be kind in the ways they speak about their bodies. The goal is to have compassion and address mental and physical health as the main priority. Being physically active should be a part of socializing, managing stress and promoting healthy sleep patterns.

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## List of Tables

Table 1: Demographics of 13 Interview Participants				
Participant's Pseudonym	Age	CrossFit Years	Ethnicity	Occupation
Dulce	21	4	Mexican Am.	Daycare provider
Lori	37	8	Hispanic	Physical Therapist
Heather	21	5	Hispanic	Coach
Amanda	38	10	Filipino	Accounting
Alyssa	41	7	Mexican Am.	Pharmaceutical Rep.
Christina	35	4.5	Anglo	Air Traffic
Rosa	27	8	Hispanic, Mexican Am/White	Trainer
Susie	31	7	Mexican/ Lebanese	Asst. Manager
Maggie	33	2	Hispanic/ Armenian	Nurse
Nancy	36	6	Mexican/ Spanish/ African	Medical Asst.
Julia	23	3	Hispanic/ Latina	Nanny
Belinda	42	8	Anglo	Teacher
Helen	34	3	Hispanic/ White	Operational Manager

## List of Figures

	Skinny	Thin	Lean	Flat Stomach	Thin Legs
Dulce			X	X	
Lori				X	X
Heather	X	X			
Christine	X			X	
Amanda				X	
Alyssa	X				
Rosa				X	
Suzie	X				X
Maggie				X	
Helen	X				X
Nancy		X			
Julia		X			
Belinda	X				

Percentage description of ideal body image

46.2%      23.1%      7.7%      46.2%      23.1%

Figure 1: Description of Ideal Body Image

	Arms	Legs	Trapezius	Calves
Alyssa		X		
Amanda			X	
Belinda	X		X	
Christine				X
Dulce	X		X	
Helen	X	X		X
Julia	X			
Susie		X		

Percentages Satisfied with a Body Part

50.0%      37.5%      37.5%      25.0%

Figure 2: Satisfaction with Body Image

Dissatisfied									
	Legs	Arms	Stomach /Abs	Trapezius	Glutes	Stretch marks stomach	Stretch marks calves, glutes, thighs, breast	Cellulite	Weight Loss
Dulce	X		X						
Lori			X						
Heather			X						
Christine			X						
Amanda									X
Alyssa	X							X	
Rosa			X	X					
Suzie									X
Maggie			X						
Helen	X				X		X	X	
Nancy		X	X		X				
Julia	X				X				
Belinda						X			

Percentages of Dissatisfaction with Body Parts

30.8%    7.7%    53.8%    7.7%    23.1%    7.7%    7.7%    15.4%    15.4%

Figure 3: Dissatisfaction with Body Part

## **Appendix A**

### Interview Guide

1. Tell me about yourself
  - a. How old are you?
  - b. Are you currently working?
  - c. What's your occupation?
  - d. Do you have children? If so how many?
  - e. What's your ethnicity?
  - f. Are you married? Single?
2. What other types of fitness (gym, your own workouts, swimming, etc.) did you participate in before Crossfit?
3. Tell me about Crossfit?
  - a. How long have you been participating in Crossfit?
  - b. Have you taken breaks from participating in Crossfit? Why?
  - c. Why do you continue to attend or participate in Crossfit?
  - d. What brought you into your Crossfit gym?
4. Before Crossfit how did you feel about your body?
5. What was your perception on your ideal female body image before Crossfit?
  - a. How did you develop that ideal body image?
6. Did you enjoy participating in your fitness routine previous to Crossfit?
  - a. What particular part of your fitness routine did you enjoy?
7. In what ways did Crossfit change how you feel about your body?



8. Has your involvement in Crossfit changed in your perceptions on your ideal female body image?
  - a. If so in what ways?
9. While participating in Crossfit have you seen any physical changes to your body?
  - a. Can you tell me a little bit more about what these changes are?
  - b. How do you feel about these changes
10. Have other people made comments about your body

Probes: What were these comments that they said?

If so who said it?

Probe: Were they Crossfit members/Non Crossfit members?

  - c. What was your reaction to it?
11. Do you workout or team up with men at your Crossfit gym?
  - a. How does it feel to partner up or workout with men?
  - b. Before Crossfit have you ever workout along side men?
12. Have you ever felt uncomfortable working so closely with men or partnering up with them?
  - (a. Did Crossfit change your perception about working so close to men? Why or Why not?)
13. What can you tell me about the differences between training at your Crossfit gym to your other fitness routines prior to Crossfit?
14. Is there anything you don't like about your body?

- a. If so, what are they?
  - b. What do you think generated these ideas of not liking this about your body?
- 15. How does your cultural background help shape your views on the female body?
- 16. How did nutrition play a role in your fitness routine before Crossfit?
  - a. Was your nutrition important to you before Crossfit?
- 17. In what ways has your nutrition changed while participating in Crossfit?
  - If Yes (ask)
    - a. Why has it changed?
    - b. What brought about this changed?
- 18. Before Crossfit how did you feel about your own body image?
  - a. Are you happy with your body? Why or why not?
  - b. Can you tell me a little more about what makes you happy with your body?
- 19. If there's something that has changed about your body as result of Crossfit what is it?
  - a. Probe: Positive or Negative of something that has changed about your body?
- 20. How has being part of a Crossfit gym community shaped how you view your body and other women's bodies?
  - a. Do you feel these bodies are realistic perceptions of a women's body image?
  - b. How you ever felt defeated that you weren't able to achieve your idealistic body image?
  - c. If yes, has participating in Crossfit ever made you feel defeated in this way?
- 21. Since you've been participating in Crossfit is that ideal body image a realistic goal?

- a. Are these goals unrealistic to achieve?
  - b. If yes, why do you feel this way?
22. Do you feel the same way or different about elite level Crossfit athletes, is this an attainable goal for you or the average person?
- a. (No or Yes) Why do you feel this way?
23. Has Crossfit social media helped change your views on the perceptions of your body and other women's bodies?
- a. If yes how has it affected your views?
24. By following Crossfit on social media has it encouraged your passion for your fitness goals?
- a. Why?
  - b. Does Crossfit Social media discourage your fitness goals?
25. What can you tell me about your Crossfit gym, are they helping you achieve your goals or are they not engaged with you as a person?

## Appendix B

### Nutrition Challenge Booklets



### 21 Day Bikini Body Detox



#### Why Detox

- Break bad habits and change the way we think about food
- Reset our bodies to get rid of or reduce cravings
- Lose weight and feel better!
- Learn new and healthy ways to prepare your food that you will continue to use post-diet



---

– ALCOHOL

### The Rules

- For 21 Days there is absolutely no cheating allowed! (Not cheat meals, cheat days, cheat drinks, etc.)
- All meals and snacks should include foods on the approved list of protein, carbs and fats
- “Off Limits” foods include:– Processed foods (chips, candy, soda, most things with a box or label)– Sugars & Artificial Sweeteners – Grains (bread, pasta, corn, etc.) – Legumes (beans & peanuts)– Dairy & soy– Vegetable oils



---

### Helpful Tips to Being Successful

- Mentally Prepare yourself
- Clean out your pantry!
- Pre-Plan your meals
- Have snacks on hand
- Don't allow yourself to cheat
- Don't Weigh Yourself!
- Know appropriate



---

2 portion sizes & what to eat

## Protein

**Best:** Fish, Chicken, Turkey, Eggs, Lean Meats (Beef, buffalo, lamb, venison)

**In Moderation:**

Pork, fatty red meats

**Limit:** Processed meats (Bacon, sausage, deli meat)



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### Carbohydrates (Vegetables)

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**Best:** Dark leafy greens, low glycemic veggies

**In Moderation:**

Fruit, high glycemic vegetables (carrots, squash)

**Limit:** Tropical fruits, starchy vegetables (sweet potatoes)



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### Fats

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**Best:** Oils (Extra-virgin olive, coconut) Avocado, Olives

**In Moderation:** Nuts (Almonds, macadamia nuts, walnuts, pecans, Hazelnuts, cashews, sunflower seeds, pumpkin seed).

**Limit:** Grass-fed butter

### Challenge Scoring

- \$20 buy in – winner gets the pot!
- Scoring is based – 60% on weight & measurements– 40% food journal – One bonus point for every cardio WOD done (max 1 per day)





# Nutrition 101

## A 4 Week Plan

(Y)OUR  
GOAL

- Lose Weight
- Lose Body Fat
- Lose Inches
- Food: What, When, Why
- Feel Better
- Healthier Lifestyle



## THE FOUNDATION PROPORTIONS

- **Protein 30%**

Part of all your body's cells and it is a vital building block in the growth, maintenance and repair of muscles

- **Carbohydrates 55%**

Our bodies fuel

- **Healthy Fats 15%**

Used to build nerve tissue, regulate hormones, help with brain function and to control inflammation. Fat also helps your body absorb vitamins A, D, E and K



# PROTIEN

NUTRITION 101

\*\*\*For BEST results, always eat from the BEST category

**Best:** Lean meats like chicken & turkey, eggs, salmon, fish & lean red meats such as 90/10 ground beef or sirloin

**In Moderation:** Protein shakes, fatty red meat, pork

**Limit:** Processed meats (Bacon, sausage, deli meat), soy/ tofu, and beans



# CARBOHYDRATES

NUTRITION 101

\*\*\*For BEST results, always eat from the BEST category

**Best:** Dark leafy greens, asparagus, brussel sprouts, broccoli, cauliflower, bell peppers, mushrooms, tomatoes, and berries

**In Moderation:** fruits like apples, pears, peaches, grapes. Starchy veggies like squash, carrots, sweet potato

**Limit:** Tropical fruits like bananas, oranges, pineapples

**AVOID:** All Grains (Bread, Pasta, Rice, Oatmeal, Quino), Cereals, White Potatoes, Corn, Beans, Junk Food, Table Sugar



# HEALTHY FATS

NUTRITION 101

*\*\*\*For BEST results, always eat from the BEST category*



**Best:** Olive Oil, Coconut Oil, Seafood (Salmon), Avocado

**In Moderation:** Nuts & Seeds (Almonds, macadamia nuts, walnuts, pecans, hazelnuts, cashews, sunflower seeds, pumpkin seeds)

**Limit:** Grass-fed butter, Almond Butter

**Avoid:** Dairy products, Butter & Margarine, Vegetable Shortening, Peanuts & Peanut Butter

# WAISTLINE ENEMIES

NUTRITION 101

\*\*\*For BEST results, AVOID these food items



- **Sugar**
  - Limit in all forms. Look for ingredients that end in "ose" (sucralose, dextrose, etc)
  - Max 1 packet artificial sweetener per day
  - NO SODA!
- **Alcohol**
  - For best results no alcohol. This is sugar with a different name!
  - Max 2 SERVINGS of alcohol per week (only tequila, or wine)
- **White Carbs**
- **High Sodium Foods**
- **Foods High In Saturated Fats**
  - Fatty beef, cheese, Fried foods, processed baked goods, processed meats

# MEAL TIMING

NUTRITION 101



- 6 small meals is ideal
- If that is not realistic, 3 larger meals with 3 snacks is okay
- Try to time your meals/snacks within ~2 hours of each other
- Eat breakfast or mini breakfast within 30 min-1 hour of waking up
- Have a small meal immediately after your workout (Protein+Carbs) or a protein shake with water

# WATER

NUTRITION 101

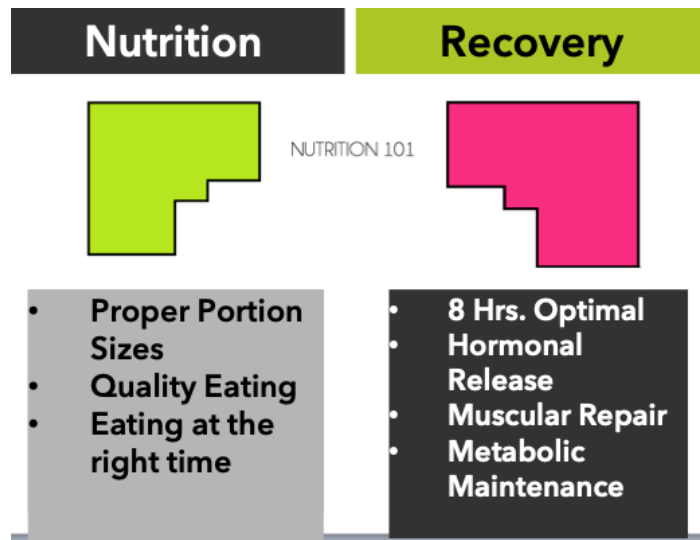


- Our bodies are 60% water
- Drinking water helps control appetite & flush out toxins
- Goal= at least ½ Gallon Per Day

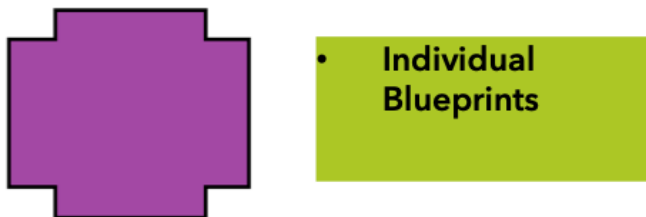
EXAMPLE			
	PROTEIN	CARBS	FATS
6:00 a.m.	Wake up		
6:30 a.m.	Green shake - 1c Spinach 3 stalks of celery 1/2 lemon 1/2 apple		1 scoop protein 1 tbsp coconut oil 2c water
8:00 a.m.	2 boiled eggs 1/2 grapefruit 1-100 cal almond pack		
11:00 a.m.	3 oz. chicken 6 spears of asparagus 1/2 small tomato 1/4 avocado		
12:30 p.m.	Workout		
1:30 p.m.	3-4 oz. tilapia 1/4 sweet potato 1/4c broccoli		
4:00 p.m.	3 oz. ground turkey 1c kale 1/4c cherry tomatoes and mushrooms 1 - 100 cal almond pack		]sauteed in EVOO
6:00 p.m.	3-4 oz. shrimp 1 1/2c fresh spinach 1 pack mandarin oranges in water 2 tbsp. lemon olive oil vinaigrette		

## Your Full Potential





## GENETICS



NUTRITION 101



# Tips

NUTRITION 101

- Mentally prepare yourself
- Clean out your pantry!
- Prep your meals ahead of time
- Have snacks on hand
- Don't allow yourself to cheat
- Don't weigh yourself!!



## THE PLAN

- 60 Day Plan
  - 14 Day Foundation
  - 21 Day Strict
  - 21 Day Lifestyle

**YOU  
GOT  
THIS**

## 4 WEEK CHALLENGE RULES

### • NO List

1. **Sugars** - Soda, Candy, Sports/Energy Drinks, Pastries, Juices
2. **Dairy** - Cheese, Yogurt, Milk products
3. **Fried Foods** - fries, fried chicken, anything dipped in oil
4. **White Starches** - White Rice, potatoes, White bread, flour tortillas, pasta
5. **Added sugar products** - Dried fruit, cereal, sugar added coffees/lattes/cappuccinos.
6. **Artificial Sugar Drinks** - anything with "-ose"

### • OK List

1. **Fruit** - 2 servings of fruit per day
2. **Gluten Free whole grain products** - oatmeal, brown rice, quinoa.
3. **Coffee** - Non Dairy Creamer and Splenda only.

### • Cheats

1. **ONE** cheat MEAL a week. Must fit on one plate.
2. **Alcohol** - One NIGHT a week. Limit to 2 glasses of wine, or 2 non-sugar mixed drinks.

### ADDITIONAL RULES

1. make your bed every morning
2. water before coffee





# THE FOUNDATION GOALS

- **Establish Good Habits**  
Learn to change
- **Walk Before You Run**  
Start slow and stay successful
- **Prepare Your Metabolism**  
Prepare your body to compensate.

# THE FOUNDATION RULES

## 14 DAYS

### • NO List

1. **Sugars** - Soda, Candy, Sports/Energy Drinks, Pastries, Juices
2. **Fried Foods** - fries, fried chicken, anything dipped in oil
3. **White Starches** - White Rice, potatoes, White bread, flour tortillas, pasta
4. **Added sugar products** - Dried fruit, cereal, sugar added coffees/ lattes/cappuccinos, yogurts.
5. **Artificial Sugar Drinks** - anything with "-ose"

### • OK List

1. **Fruit** - 1 serving of fruit per day
2. **Dairy** - Milk, Cheese,
3. **Whole Grain products** - whole grain bread, whole grain cereal.
4. **Coffee** - Creamer and Splenda only.

### • Cheats

1. **ONE** cheat MEAL a week. Must fit on one plate.
2. **Alcohol** - One night a week. Limit to 2 glasses of wine/OR 1 beer/ OR 1 mixed drink.

### ADDITIONAL RULES

1. **make your bed every morning**
2. **water before coffee**



# STRICT PHASE RULES

21 DAYS

- **NO List**

1. **Sugars** - Soda, Candy, Sports/Energy Drinks, Pastries, Juices
2. **Fried Foods** - fries, fried chicken,
3. **White Starches** - White Rice, potatoes, White bread, flour tortillas, pasta
4. **Added sugar products** - Dried fruit, cereal, coffees, yogurts.
5. **Dairy** - Milk, Cheese, Yogurt
6. **Gluten** - Anything made with wheat

- **OK List**

1. **Fruit** - 1 serving of fruit per meal
2. **Coffee** - almond milk, 1 Splenda

- **Cheats**

1. **NONE**. Yep, ZERO. It means No.
2. **Alcohol** - See above.

## ADDITIONAL RULES

1. **make your bed every morning**
2. **water before coffee**



## Appendix C

### Camille LeBlanc-Bazinet Before and After Photoshop



**Before Photoshop**

**After Photoshop**

Images retrieved from (“*Camille LeBlanc-Bazinet: Strong, Real and Less Than Perfect*”)

The picture above shows two images of 2014 CrossFit Games competitor Camille Leblanc-Bazinet. The image on the left shows Camille Leblanc-Bazinet wearing her hair picked up in a ponytail and wearing a hot pink sports bra and neon green booty shorts. She is also wearing two pink and black knee sleeves. In this image, the background shows a pull up rack and Camille is turning her head to the right looking over her shoulder, with her placed by her side and legs slightly apart. Camille has muscular arms and thick muscular legs. Her midsection has a square shape to it and has some abdominal muscles peaking out on the top of her midsection. Camille also has noticeable extra fat around her lower midsection.

The image on the right is Camille Leblanc-Bazinet, posing for a 2014 issue of *The Box* magazine. The background scene is ocean water. In this photo, Camille is wearing a bathing suit with a pink top and small grey bottoms. Her hair has been left down and she is smiling directly at the camera. Camille’s arms and legs are no longer muscular but have been slimmed down to give the appearance of a lean, toned arms and legs. Her midsection no longer gives the appearance of a square but has been slimmed down to give the appearance of a slim, tiny waist. Camille is posing with her arms to the side and her legs slightly apart, while ocean water foams around the lower part of her legs.

## **Vita**

Noemi Dimuzio was born and raised in El Paso, Texas. She graduated from high school and enlisted in the United States Navy where she advanced in ranks and received the decorated Navy and Marine Corp medal award. After four years of military service, she enrolled and graduated from the University of Texas at El Paso with a bachelor's degree in history with a minor in secondary education. The author's love for sports and nutrition guided her into a coaching career and competitions in CrossFit for over 8 years. During her coaching period, she started a meal prep business in 2013 to help clients and customers have access to nutritious ready-to-eat meals. In the fall of 2017, Dimuzio was introduced to sociology through Dr. Campbell who encouraged her to apply for the graduate program. Upon her entry in 2017, she was motivated by the prominent and empowering female professors, and the author decided to further analyze female gender and its performance in CrossFit participation through a qualitative research lens. While she pursued her master's degree, she spoke at UTEP 2018 Women's History Conference and continued her coaching in CrossFit. Dimuzio wishes to devote her life to research and giving back to her community.