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# **The Culture of CrossFit: A Lifestyle Prescription for Optimal Health and Fitness**

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## ***Abstract***

*The increasing frequency of obesity related diseases such as diabetes, heart disease, and hypertension are often the product of a nutritionally inadequate diet along with sedentary lifestyle. The fitness movement called CrossFit, formed by Greg Glassman in 1996, provides an alternative prescription to battling these physical ailments by incorporating high intensity-functional exercise along with a Paleolithic-inspired diet (The Paleo Diet). CrossFit is a distinct lifestyle that encourages participants to strive for an "elite" and "optimal" state of fitness and health. In this thesis I provide ethnographic data collected from participant-observation at a CrossFit gym in Bloomington, IL. I examine scientific research on the exercise and physiology of CrossFit training and the Paleo Diet, and I explore the history of fitness movements in America to place the culture of the CrossFit into historical perspective.*

## **Introduction**

Since 1996, a fitness movement, CrossFit, has begun to sweep across the nation. Developed by former gymnast and fitness coach Greg Glassman, CrossFit workouts consist of compound, functional movements performed at a high intensity. Between 2005 and 2010 the number of CrossFit affiliates grew from 18 to 1700 affiliates (Saxena 2010). CrossFit is now a diet and exercise program, a corporate franchise of gyms and trainers, and a community of practitioners.

CrossFit advocates that participants follow a Paleolithic style of diet consisting of fresh meats, vegetables, fruits, seeds, and nuts. The diet is labeled as the Paleo diet as it mimics the diet of our Paleolithic human ancestry. The rationale for the diet is that human genetics have remained similar to that of our early human ancestors who foraged for subsistence. The argument for having a Paleo based diet is that the modern human diet full of carbohydrate rich, and processed foods, combined with a sedentary lifestyle does not coincide well with our genetic predisposition. Some anthropologists (Cordain 2012) have argued that there is a conflict between our ancient biology and present day culture. Obesity related diseases such as heart disease, Type II Diabetes, and hypertension that were unknown to our human ancestors have become quite prevalent in today's society. The Paleo diet consisting of meats, vegetables, nuts and seeds, some fruit, little starch, and no sugar, also is proposed as a way prevent and cure the various obesity related diseases that plague our population today.

The CrossFit training is also inspired by human Paleolithic ancestors. The movements which CrossFit incorporates into its training programs, such as jumping, throwing, pushing, pulling, squatting, rowing, running, and lifting, are rarely utilized by today's population but were

certainly used by our hunting-and gathering human ancestors. The combination of functional fitness and a Paleo based diet, could be an effective prescription for these obesity related diseases.

In this thesis, I explore the biological and physiological responses that CrossFit induces through its training and dietary methods. I examine proponents' claims about the benefits of the CrossFit exercise and Paleo Diet and their evolutionary basis.

CrossFit, however, is more than a fitness regimen--it has become a distinct community in itself. I study the CrossFit gym ethnographically in order to explore cultural attributes of CrossFit trainers and clientele. Using qualitative data I collect from my own experience and observations training at a CrossFit facility, as well as from interviews with CrossFit coaches and participants, I show that CrossFit has become a distinct lifestyle for its participants that seek to live their lives in a state of optimal health and fitness in a time when fitness and health are becoming a less pressing priority.

In order to understand CrossFit as a cultural and social phenomenon, I first consider the history of diet and exercise reform in America. In the sections that follow, I first turn to the history of exercise and diet reformers in the United States to show that CrossFit is similar to previous health movements that have come and gone throughout history. I then introduce CrossFit and discuss the rationale behind the high intensity functional movements as well as the Paleo Diet and then will review scholarly literature on the biological and physiological responses that CrossFit purports to induce through their training and dietary methods.

### **Health Movement History**

CrossFit is viewed as a radical health movement and even as a cult by many traditional fitness enthusiasts. This is certainly not the first time throughout history when a particular health movement has swept through the nation challenging the current status quo of the field of health and wellness. In the 1800's Reverend Sylvester Graham, inventor of the graham cracker, sparked a new health movement that became widely accepted by some and was also severely scrutinized by many others. Sylvester Graham's movement pushed to reform the American diet and lifestyle, but advocated also for cleanliness, temperance, and vegetarianism among other things.

Around the time in which Graham began to preach his health and physiological beliefs cholera was an epidemic in America (Verbrugge 1981:360). Rather than relying solely on antibiotics or other medicine, Graham believed disease could be prevented by practicing daily healthy rituals such as clean eating and bathing. To a sick America, Graham offered an alternative to medicine by organizing people's symptoms into, "a coherent syndrome with a single comprehensible cause and affected a remedy by programming daily habits into a regimen" (Verbrugge 1981:360). Graham sought to fix the cause of the health problems in America rather than simply curing the symptoms and sought to attack the root cause of the illnesses by prescribing daily health rituals as a crucial part of everyone's lifestyle.

Reverend Sylvester Graham believed he was ordained by God to do one thing only, and that was to save people by saving their stomachs (Farmer 1985: 33). The tenets of the "Graham Diet" were simple: eat fresh grains and drink pure water, eat fresh fruits and vegetables, eat fresh eggs, cheese and milk in moderation, and avoid fats, meats, salts, sugars, alcohol, tobacco, and stimulants. Although Graham's philosophies are relatively simple and harmless, many were outraged at Graham's beliefs because Graham's dietary principles were based upon the belief that

eating a diet high in raw foods resembled a more natural diet. But the followers of Graham commonly referred to as "Grahamites" were not strictly interested in improving their lives only in terms of their diets; Reverend Graham constructed the "Graham Diet" not only to optimize health, but to purify one's soul as well. Graham believed eating a diet of fresh, raw foods would cleanse one of alcoholism, violence, premature aging, and sexual desire (Farmer 1985: 33). Graham also believed that masturbation was evil and could lead to insanity. Since Graham had his ideal dietary conditions as well as certain moral beliefs, Graham's principles ultimately extend further than the realm of health alone. Vergburgge states that, "Grahamism was both a practical and symbolic link between physical, social, and moral order" (Verbrugge 1981:362). Graham's health reform movement went against the grain of conventional health beliefs. Vegetarianism, which is essentially what Graham proposed, gained its roots out of Graham's movement which opposed the popular meat and potatoes style of diet that most Americans lived by (Farmer 1985:33). What Graham had started as a dietary reform ultimately resulted into a prescribed way of living as well as a subculture for its followers, just as CrossFit has developed into a culture and lifestyle itself and exists beyond just an exercise regimen.

Many parallels can be drawn upon between Graham's Health Movement and CrossFit. The first and most obvious parallel between the two is that Graham's health movement along with CrossFit both attempt to address the underlying causes of sickness, whether it being diabetes or cholera, by prescribing a collaborative approach to curing these sicknesses. Rather than relying on a medication to cure symptoms after sickness has already set in, Graham's health principles and CrossFit aim to prevent sickness all in all by living out a lifestyle of practicing daily healthy rituals. Rather than simply eating graham crackers to achieve health "Grahamites" lived by the principles Graham laid forth by bathing, eating clean, following his morals, and becoming close with God. Similar to how CrossFit participants do not just do CrossFit exercise but eat a Paleo diet, sleep 6-9 hours every night, avoid alcohol, and even strengthen the mind through certain practices like meditation.

Both Graham's health reform and the CrossFit movement are sets of principles and beliefs that go against the grain of conventional health and fitness wisdom. As previously mentioned the diet during the time of Graham's Health reform was defined by "meat and potatoes". Therefore Graham's vegetarian diet was ridiculed and rejected by many (Farmer 1985). CrossFit faces similar opposition not only in the realm of the fitness training, but the Paleo Diet in which CrossFit promotes is also highly debated upon, which I will cover in greater detail in following sections.

It is likely that CrossFit will continue to face criticism, because alike Graham's Health reform, CrossFit challenges the status quo of what one must do in order to achieve health. Today most individuals are often after a quick fix for health problems such as taking weight loss pills in order to lose weight and burn fat, rather than solving the problem by taking preventative action and simply not eating bad foods and exercising more frequently. However, taking a proactive approach to health and avoiding unhealthy foods all together is often seen as extreme measure in today's society. The individuals who eat healthy and exercise all the time are referred to as "health nuts" or other various terms by those who do not practice the same rituals. The reason in which CrossFit may appear to be such an extreme route to health for so many people is because such a large population of individuals are becoming complacent with living a sedentary

lifestyle and eating a poor diet. If the majority of the population had six pack abs CrossFit training and the Paleo diet may not appear as radical, but because the general population continues to show a decline in health and the individuals who follow the CrossFit way of life are but a small percentage of the population, it is likely that CrossFit will be seen as a radical movement until health and wellness becomes a larger focus of the general population.

In order for both Graham's Health reform and CrossFit to have emerged, a particular environment had to precede both of the movement's births. As previously mentioned Graham's movement started as an attempt to end and prevent the cholera outbreak. Graham's solution, however, was not simply taking a pill but by living a healthy lifestyle. CrossFit emerged as a methodology in order for individuals to reach optimal health and fitness levels in a time where health and wellness are left on the back burner. Although both health movements emerged as a result in declining health in the nation, both movements fail to gain full acceptance as solutions to these health issues because of the deeper culture involved within the two movements that requires individuals to make extreme sacrifices in order to achieve health.

### **The CrossFit Exercise Program**

CrossFit is a broad and all inclusive fitness regime. Greg Glassman trained athletes in the "CrossFit" fashion long before it emerged as a popular style of fitness training. Glassman developed the CrossFit training principles with metabolic conditioning, Olympic lifting, gymnastics, and sport being the foundation of the CrossFit exercise template. Glassman defines CrossFit as "constantly varied, functional exercises performed at high intensities" (Glassman). Glassman's CrossFit has become a fitness movement that rivals conventional fitness programs and has also changed the fitness industry itself.

The fitness programming practiced in the various CrossFit gym affiliates throughout the nation is highly effective. In fact, "In a seven week test conducted in 2005 at the Canadian Infantry School in Georgetown, New Brunswick, CrossFit participants scored higher in most fitness categories when compared to the previous physical training program" (Saxena 2010). If the CrossFit fitness training yields the beneficial health outcomes and the movement continues to gain popularity, the fitness norm could shift from people heading to a local gym to hop on a treadmill for an hour, to people filling up local CrossFit affiliate gyms to participate in burpees and kettle bell swings in the daily workout of the day (W.O.D).

The workout of the day (W.O.D) consists of one or more categories of CrossFit's foundational exercises. The CrossFit foundational exercises are metabolic conditioning (cardio), Olympic lifting, Power Lifting, and gymnastics. The WOD will usually have at least two of the foundational exercise categories within the WOD. The WOD is designed for the participants to go against the clock. Most WODs will be designed to have participants perform a certain amount of rounds of particular exercises within a given time, or to perform a set number of exercises or repetitions as fast as possible. Below are some examples of WODs:

#### **WOD Example 1**

Complete as many rounds possible

In 10 minutes of:

- 10 Push Presses

-20 Air Squats-

#### **WOD Example 2**

Complete...

- 50 Jump Ropes

- 40 Push Ups

- 20 Ring Dips

-30 Pull Ups

- 10 Box Jumps

....As fast as possible

The workouts being completed against the clock not only makes exercising competitive for the participants as they seek to beat the clock, it also allows for the workout to be performed at a high intensity.

### **High Intensity Training**

On the more radical front of high intensity training, Dr. Doug McGuff and John Little (2012) explain the benefits of high intensity training above all other various forms of training. Emergency physician Dr. Doug McGuff writes his work not through the lens of a fitness trainer but rather writes his work from a biological evolutionist's perspective. McGuff explains all the scientific processes that occur in order for the body to positively adapt to the stress induced from high intensity weight training. The basis of McGuff and Little's arguments is that individuals must train to complete muscular failure in order to provide the body with an adequate stimulus in order for the body to produce a significant adaptation to that stress, and also that proper recovery is crucial for that muscular adaptation to take place (2009). Not only do McGuff and Little believe that high intensity training is the superior form of exercise, they also have determined that high intensity training can contribute to multiple sustained health benefits. McGuff and Little state that "low intensity, steady-state (popularly referred to as "cardio") activity does not tap the fast twitch muscle fibers that possess the most glycogen. Consequently, the muscles are never emptied of meaningful levels of glucose, with the result that the circulating glucose has nowhere to be stored-except as body fat" (McGuff and Little 2009:31). McGuff and Little explain this more broadly from thinking about the physique of a marathon runner from Kenya compared to that of an Olympic sprinter. The two types of running are substantially different. Marathon running involves an extensive duration of constant effort, whereas sprint running involves short term running at a very high exertion. The marathon runner has a less muscled build due to the excessive amount of low intensity training for long durations of time whereas the sprinter has little to no body fat and displays greater muscle tone due to the high intensity nature of his training (2009). Although McGuff and Little's training beliefs are at the extreme end of the high intensity training spectrums, there is certainly some truth behind their claims.

Although the physiological benefits from high intensity exercise such as CrossFit training may seem only beneficial for people wishing to achieve results in athletic performance or body physique, but high intensity training is proven to be the most effective form of training, even for improvements in endurance (McGuff and Little 2012). CrossFit workouts may be tremendously intense, but the physiological effects from high intensity training also produce improvements in endurance as well. Paton and Hopkins conducted a study in which they assessed the effectiveness of endurance athletes on high and low intensity training practices. The participants in the study either performed exercise intervals at low intensity, sub-maximal effort and supramaximal effort levels. Paton and Hopkins found that, "Not surprisingly, the highest-intensity training produced the greatest enhancements in the supramaximal tests. Maximum-intensity intervals appear to be the most effective form of high-intensity training for improving maximum incremental power" (Paton and Hopkins 2004: 25).

More specifically, CrossFit Endurance integrates traditional CrossFit training along with endurance training which is specifically geared towards endurance athletes, but still incorporates the high intensity fundamentals of CrossFit's core training principles. After all, the main aim of CrossFit is to be well rounded in all aspects of fitness, but CrossFit has its advantages in general fitness and wellness pursuits as well as sport specific pursuits as well.

### **The Paleo Diet**

Along with a high intensity functional exercise regimen, CrossFit recommends the Paleo Diet to its clients to ensure maximal results from the training. The Paleo Diet is based from a diet that is similar to that of what our Paleolithic ancestors would have eaten—that is, Lean meats, vegetables, nuts and seeds, some fruit. Starches and sugars are avoided in the Paleo Diet.

The low carbohydrate aspect of the the Paleo Diet has led to it being evaluated for patients with type II diabetes. For example in one study, a control group ate a currently recommended diet for diabetes while the other group ate a strictly paleolithic diet. Johnson et. al found that

"The advice for patients with type 2 diabetes to follow a Paleolithic diet resulted in lower HbA1c (blood sugar), TG (triglycerides), DBP (diastolic blood pressure), weight and waist circumference, and higher HDL (high density lipoprotein), as compared to a Diabetes diet according to current guidelines. In addition, fasting glucose and SBP (systolic blood pressure) tended to decrease more after the Paleolithic diet. Changes in glucose tolerance were not significantly different between diets. The two diets differed mainly in that the Paleolithic diet was lower in cereals and dairy products, and higher in fruits, vegetables, meat and eggs. Further, the Paleolithic diet was lower in total energy, energy density, carbohydrate, dietary GL (glucose levels), saturated fatty acids and calcium, and higher in unsaturated fatty acids, dietary cholesterol and several vitamins" [2009:1230].

Although Johnson et al recognize that a Paleolithic diet may have a different impact on people with diabetes, their research indicates that the general population can benefit greatly from a Paleo based diet as well. Johnson et. al state,

"All populations appear to develop diseases of civilization if they consume Western foods and have sedentary lifestyles. It therefore seems prudent for modern-day humans to remember their evolutionary heritage and to increase their intake of vegetables and fruits and to decrease their intake of animal fats and domesticated grains. The Paleolithic diet might be the best antidote to the unhealthy Western diet" [2009:2].

Supporters of the Paleo Diet believe such a diet is adequate for human nutrition because of our genetic makeup. Dr. Loren Cordain, professor at Colorado State University and the author of *The Paleo Diet*, explains how the rise of agriculture is a recent development in terms of human history and that our DNA is yet to fully catch up with the change of food selection. Cordain states

"The Agricultural Revolution began 10,000 years ago-just a drop in the bucket compared to 2.5 million years that human beings have lived on earth. Until that time-

just 333 generations ago- everyone on the planet ate lean meats, fresh fruits, and vegetables. For most of us it has been fewer than 200 generations since our ancestors abandoned the old lifestyle and turned to agriculture. Many modern foods are at odds with our genetic makeup which is the same of our Paleolithic ancestors-and this is the cause of many of our modern diseases" [Cordain 2011:5].

Cordain demonstrates that contemporary diet is based on food produced from agriculture which humans have been consuming for relatively short periods of time compared to millions of years in which humans have hunted and gathered and consumed a Paleo based diet.

Although there are very few people still practicing hunting and gathering as a way of living, there is much to be learned from this particular way of obtaining subsistence. Until the rise of agriculture around 12,000 years ago, the primary way of human subsistence was through hunting and gathering methods. Essentially humans have been growing crops on a large scale for a blink of an eye in terms of human existence. According to Fransetta et. al

- "Numerous authors have argued that a discordance between our contemporary diets and the Paleolithic-type diets to which evolutionary forces adapted our core metabolism and physiology over a period of millions of years of hominin evolution contributes in a major or critical way to the pathogenesis of the so-called diseases of civilization: atherosclerotic cardiovascular disease and its sequelae, insulin resistance and type 2 diabetes, metabolic syndrome, age-related sarcopenia and osteoporosis, hypertension and its sequelae, some types of cancers and many others"- [2009:9480]

Most of the human genome has adapted from hunting and gathering peoples who have ate a certain diet for thousands and thousands of years. The diet and lifestyle many live by today is consequently leading to an increase in these various obesity related diseases. While the hunting and gathering tribes may have ran many miles or exerted tremendous amounts of force in order to obtain food for survival, the majority of people in Western societies have very sedentary lifestyles and still consume a very high amount of calories despite the inactivity.

Although there are few people who still practice traditional hunting and gathering methods today, groups such as the San !Kung who still practice these subsistence methods have continued to evade themselves from obesity related health ailments. Due to the dietary nutrition of the San !Kung people, obesity is entirely nonexistent in along with diseases such as hypertension, diabetes, and coronary heart disease which are commonly associated with obesity (Truswell and Hansen 1976:171). It can be assumed that since this study done by Truswell and Hansen was conducted in the 70's, fewer and fewer people are still practicing hunting and gathering subsistence methods and thus having this protection from those various obesity related diseases.

The differences in health between the San Kung! and non hunting-gathering people can even be observed just within the boundaries of Botswana alone. There are many parts of Botswana that would be considered industrialized and the majority of the population have jobs, homes, etc. When comparing the San !Kung people of Botswana to the general population the differences in general health in terms of diet and body composition, are quite apparent. While the San !Kung are constantly on the move and never establish a permanent home, the people in Botswana who reduced mobility and settled down in one particular area, rely on foods such as

corn meal and milk. Consequently, because of the shift from a traditional San Kung diet to that of a western diet high in carbohydrates and processed foods, obesity can be seen time after time among the contemporary society of Botswana who do not practice the traditional San Kung hunting and gathering way of life (Hitchcock 1982: 235). This difference in lifestyle and diet among the San Kung of Botswana and the rest of the general population is a clear representation of the negative health effects that go along with a sedentary lifestyle along with a diet lacking substantial nutritional value.

Today American news media report nearly daily on the obesity epidemic. Obesity has become such an issue in America; tax proposals on things such as sugar have been discussed by law makers in effort to end the obesity problem. In American society more people are obese than not, and heart disease, which is almost entirely lifestyle related, is the number one cause of death in the U.S. (Cordain 2011: 5). The Centers For Disease Control and Prevention fears that for the first time in human history recent groups of children may not even outlive their parents' generation because of the increasing cases of obesity and obesity related ailments in which modern medicine can still not treat and cure entirely (Zuk 2013).

From both the diet and movements CrossFit advocates to its clients', a type of a Paleolithic prescription to modern day health issues presents itself. With these modern day obesity related diseases occurring at such a high frequency and even impacting our youth, it becomes more evident that a CrossFit style of exercise regimen and a Paleo based diet could be aid in curing and preventing these obesity related diseases.

However, there are many critics that believe the Paleo Diet is not the only path to health and wellness. Many of those who do not support the Paleo Diet believe that we have introduced foods such as grains and dairy products into our diet long enough for us to make adequate adaptations in order to utilize and digest these certain foods.

Marlene Zuk discusses the notion of "Paleofantasies" which is the idea that we are stuck with our ancient DNA and have to adhere to it accordingly. Zuk admits that "it's reasonable to conclude that we aren't suited to our modern lives, and that our health, our family lives, and perhaps our sanity would all be improved if we could live the way early humans did (2013). However, Zuk argues that "we cannot assume that evolution has stopped for humans, or that it can take place only ploddingly, with tiny steps over hundreds of thousands of years. In just the last few years we have added the ability to function at high altitudes and resistance to malaria to the list of rapidly evolved human characteristics, and the stage is set for many more. We can even screen the entire genome, in great gulps of DNA, looking for the signature of rapid selection in our genes" (2013).

Although there exists evidence both for and against a Paleolithic diet being optimal for health and wellness, the exact science on the Paleo Diet is still up for debate. However, it remains clear that following the Paleo Diet and a regular exercise routine will certainly lead one to better health. The CrossFit template does however run under the primary objective of getting one to their optimal fitness goals rather than just reaching a general state of wellness. Therefore the Paleo Diet can certainly be placed in the category of the more "extreme" diets.

CrossFit does not advocate for the Paleo diet strictly to ensure the highest results from training, but rather to ensure an optimal state of health and well being for the CrossFit cliental. Although many argue against the Paleo Diet and believe that foods such as grains, dairy, and

legumes are crucial to one's diet, there is enough evidence to support the Paleo Diet being healthful as well.

### **CrossFit Culture**

The physiological response induced by high intensity training has been around forever, CrossFit did not invent that. However, what sets CrossFit apart from all other fitness firms is that CrossFit creates a sense of community and belonging that constructs an atmosphere in which the clients are begging to go back and push themselves again and again. As a personal trainer at a typical corporate based gym, I rarely see members chomping at the bit to come back and sweat profusely from a tough work out. CrossFit has not only managed to emerge as a fitness program that produces extreme motivation in its cliental but also has made a name for itself in volunteer work and charity work. To provide an understanding of the culture of CrossFit I plan to use data I collect from my own experience and observations working out at a CrossFit facility, as well as interviews with CrossFit coaches and participants.

To understand the community aspects and culture behind CrossFit, it is important that CrossFit's catch all of "forging elite fitness" is understood. When Glassman created CrossFit he had the goal in mind to develop a fitness program that would not only motivate participants to exercise but also to constantly work toward achieving a higher level of fitness. For instance CrossFit's mascot "Pukie the clown" is an image of a clown vomiting on the floor after an intense CrossFit workout. Participants who push themselves hard enough to vomit after a WOD are said to have been paid a visit by Pukie. The CrossFit mascot Pukie is a prime example of the mentality of CrossFit. CrossFit almost makes an effort to stand out from conventional fitness centers not only due to the differences in equipment and appearance, but also in the overall mindset and goals of the fitness being conducted.

Though the CrossFit is commonly tagged as a style of training, CrossFit is certainly not solely a genre of fitness programming. CrossFit has become its own community and a way of life for those who chose to embed themselves in the lifestyle. However the CrossFit community would never have emerged and experienced the success it has had so far if fitness training did not yield adequate results in an improvement in work capacity, metabolic conditioning, and cardiovascular endurance. The community and physiology of CrossFit have merged together after CrossFit began to sponsor the CrossFit Games which hold CrossFit competitions for the "fittest men and women on Earth." A closer look at these CrossFit Games will help characterize this fitness community in their own words.

### **CrossFit Games: The Fittest Men and Women on Earth**

As CrossFit has continued to grow since its birth in 2000, so has the desire to find out who the best at this type of fitness training is. In 2007, the first CrossFit Games was held in order to find the "fittest on earth" (2012: Games.CrossFit.com). The CrossFit Games consists of a weekend filled with multiple CrossFit workouts in order to determine the fittest man and women on earth. In recent years CrossFit has opened up the availability to reach the CrossFit game to anyone who wishes to attempt it. The CrossFit Games Open allows individuals from all around the world to either submit their workout scores by being observed from an official scorer or participants can submit videos of their completed workout to CrossFit headquarters for scoring. The top scores from the open will then advance to regionals and the top scores from there will

advance to the CrossFit games in Carson, California. The CrossFit Games also has several age divisions so participants of all ages have a shot at making the CrossFit games.

The CrossFit Games has given CrossFit the exposure to continue the movement's growth. ESPN provides coverage on the CrossFit Games which has ultimately moved CrossFit into the category of a sport. Each year more and more CrossFit participants have entered the CrossFit open for their shot to make it to the CrossFit games. This year more than 138,000 CrossFit participants signed up for the CrossFit open, up from 69,240 who participated in the 2012 CrossFit open (Tabata Times: 2013). This year's CrossFit games will be highly anticipated by the CrossFit community as the two time defending CrossFit Games champions, Rich Froning (men's division) and Annie Thorrisdotter (women's division) will attempt to defend their titles and win their third consecutive CrossFit Games. To put into perspective how fit the athletes at the CrossFit games are, some of the challenges these athletes compete in throughout the CrossFit game will include triathlons, power lifting, Olympic lifting, and gymnastics all condensed in one weekend consisting of multiple workouts each day. If CrossFit continues to gain momentum not only as a health movement but as a competitive sport as well, CrossFit may find itself in the same category of other popular sports such as football or baseball.

### **CrossFit and Capital**

CrossFit has not only emerged as an elite training style, but the revenue it has been generating has increased sharply year by year. The physiology of CrossFit has been around for years, so how did Glassman create such an effective business model for CrossFit? Whether it's the camaraderie, the differentiation from conventional fitness centers, or the CrossFit mascot "pukie" the clown", CrossFit has been marketed successfully enough to allow the CrossFit brand name to continue to increase its worth. Former software entrepreneur Tim Huntley believes that CrossFit will someday become a 500 million dollar company. Huntley explains how CrossFit has grown over 70% over the past few years and if it continues to grow at the rate it is currently the company could reach a worth of \$500 million in the next 5-10 years (2012).

CrossFit generates revenue primarily by two main income sources. One is the affiliate model in which affiliates worldwide pay to use the CrossFit name on their gym. The other income source is through CrossFit's training certification program. In order to become a CrossFit certified trainer, individuals must complete a CrossFit Training seminar, which usually run around \$1,000. CrossFit has begun to generate revenue outside its two main business ventures and has begun to incorporate other large name brands into its name. CrossFit has teamed up with several large name brand names such as Reebok, Gold's Gym, Progenex, and Rogue Fitness. CrossFit and these few brand name companies have developed a symbiotic relationship in allowance for increased revenue by both parties.

### **My Local CrossFit Affiliate: Fit Bodies CrossFit**

At the turn of the New Year 2013, I enrolled as a member of FitBodies CrossFit in Bloomington, IL. As a personal trainer and fitness enthusiast myself, proper exercise and a healthy diet has always been a high priority of mine. Although I have never officially belonged to a CrossFit affiliate, I have always incorporated the CrossFit training principles into my own fitness programming. At first it was rather hard for me upon joining FitBodies CrossFit because this meant I had to not only pay \$100 a month to train, but also be critiqued by other trainers, and being a personal trainer myself these were both tough pills to swallow.

FitBodies CrossFit is run and operated by Tom and Janelle Ragusa who are not only CrossFit trainers but are also avid CrossFitters themselves. The inside of FitBodies CrossFit gym appears quite different from the conventional workout facility. Unlike conventional fitness centers, there are no TV's, no treadmills, or no machines. At FitBodies the gym, a large warehouse about the size of a high school gym is filled with barbells and free weights, kettle bells, pull up bars, medicine balls, row machines, rings, and ropes. The atmosphere inside FitBodies also grabs ones attention as the first thing you notice when you walk in is a whole lot of space and the absence of machines and treadmills. All of the participants perform the daily W.O.D. (workout of the day) which is written on a chalk board. Members and coaches cheer and push each other along the way. Loud, up tempo music fills the walls as participants perform their workout. The camaraderie and high energy atmosphere at FitBodies perpetuates the intensity in which CrossFit training seeks to produce through its training. The workouts are structured so that each participant will push themselves beyond his or her physical and mental limits each time they step into FitBodies. Tom and Janelle emphasize the community aspect of CrossFit and believe that this certain aspect of CrossFit is crucial to the CrossFit movement's success. Tom and Janelle explain how the movements and structure of the workouts along with the Paleo diet have existed long before CrossFit did, but it's the culture and community of CrossFit which have propelled the success of the health movement. Tom and Janelle were asked by a young woman who is currently seeking to open her own CrossFit affiliate what the key to a successful CrossFit gym was, both answered that establishing the family-like dynamic in the gym is the most important thing one can do to run a successful CrossFit affiliate. Tom and Janelle even structure their class times around times of the day which will allow for their classes to be more full so that the feeling of community and camaraderie remain high.

FitBodies CrossFit coaches Tom and Janelle Ragusa do not only provide the exercise essentials to their clients, Tom and Janelle also have extensive knowledge on health, nutrition, and many other facets of health and wellness. Tom and Janelle set up various challenges which allows participants to strive toward for their optimal state of health and well being. A whole foods and meditation challenge are Tom and Janelle's latest projects for their clients. Tom and Janelle provide a wide array of resources for their clients so that each participant's experience extends far beyond the realm of fitness but essentially allows for participants to strive for an all around more fruitful way of life. Although CrossFit's main aim is to "forge elite fitness", Tom and Janelle have displayed that although some FitBodies participants may not be reaching the CrossFit games anytime soon (myself included) each and every member are given the tools, coaching, and knowledge to allow themselves to reach their own personal level of optimal health and wellness.

From my experience as a personal trainer at a conventional fitness center, witnessing the motivation and high energy atmosphere at FitBodies CrossFit firsthand revealed to me just how different CrossFit gyms are compared to conventional fitness centers. No FitBodies member shows up to a class to simply break a sweat and call it a day. FitBodies members seek to, and are encouraged to, test their own physical limitations each and every day during their training sessions which is seen rarely at traditional gyms. The camaraderie of other members cheering me on to finish strong as I fought for a few more reps during a W.O.D at FitBodies was an

exhilarating feeling in which I never have experienced at any other fitness facility. From a personal training perspective, the team-like bond that is felt among FitBodies members is ultimately priceless and has revealed to me just how strong the CrossFit community is.

I had the chance to sit down and discuss the CrossFit way of life with Tom and Janelle, the owners of FitBodies CrossFit. Both Tom and Janelle share a profound love for the sport and lifestyle of CrossFit but their business is ran with the underlying goal of not only helping their clients become better CrossFit trainees, but rather to live an all around better life.

Not only do Tom and Janelle strive for a healthy community of practitioners within their own CrossFit, they believe their job extends out to the entire population. Tom and Janelle believe that the seeds of health planted in a CrossFit lifestyle can be passed on to the entire community to cultivate a larger movement of health. They believe that each member can successfully spread components of the benefits of CrossFit such as high intensity exercise or the Paleo Diet to anyone, CrossFit participant or not. Both tom and Janelle are completely confident that their all encompassing approach to health through CrossFit has a profound and lasting effect on each individual that participates at FitBodies CrossFit.

### **Conclusions**

CrossFit's birth, alike any reformation movement, arose as a combatant to the status quo. Similarly, Sylvester Graham's health reform in the 1800's also took off as a means of acquiring better health in a time where poor health was a pressing issue. However, both CrossFit as well as Graham's health reform are much more than a metaphoric pill one takes after becoming ill or unwell. Both of these health movements are revitalization efforts that encompass improvements in all aspects of life in order to obtain a better health and ultimately a better life. Sylvester Graham's movement sought to revitalize people to become more pure in the eyes of God through a series of specific, daily health practices, similar to how CrossFit aims to provide a template of living in order for its practitioners to not only obtain better health but rather to aid in individuals in reaching their genetic potential. The "Grahamites" followed health practices laid out by Dr. Reverend Graham's in order to reach salvation and purity of the soul. CrossFit participants follow a CrossFit lifestyle in pursuit of salvation but rather in means of health and elite fitness. CrossFit and Graham's health reform both were after an idea of perfection. Graham's followers were after moral perfection whereas CrossFit participants chase physical perfection. The social norm today often depicts perfection as an unobtainable goal. Neither Graham or CrossFit claim that by following their specific lifestyles will automatically take one to his or her spiritual or physical perfect self, however both health movements operate under the notion that each individual is certainly capable of attempting, and becoming closer than before to reaching these optimal milestones.

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