

This is a self-archived version of an original article. This version may differ from the original in pagination and typographic details. Please cite the original version:

Turtiainen, Riikka and Friman, Usva. 2023. Strength Over Gender? Discussing and Presenting the Ambivalent Female Strength in the CrossFit Games 2019. In *Gender and Power in Strength Sports: Strong As Feminist*, eds. Noelle K. Brigden, Katie Rose Hejmanek, and Melissa M. Forbis, 29–53. Abingdon and New York: Routledge. DOI: 10.4324/9781003370925

Chapter 1

# **Strength Over Gender? Discussing and Presenting the Ambivalent Female Strength in the CrossFit Games 2019**

Riikka Turtiainen and Usva Friman

---

## **Introduction**

---

CrossFit supposedly emphasizes physical capabilities over gender, and in its world championship competition, the CrossFit Games, female and male athletes are given similar attention and appreciation during the competition (Friman and Turtiainen 2019). CrossFit is also actively and visibly promoting its ethos of equality, for example by making its competitions inclusive to transgender athletes, promoting LGBTQ rights within its community, and encouraging gender equality (e.g., James and Gill 2018; Kerry 2017). In practice, however, hegemonic masculinity and ideal femininity are both resisted and reinforced within the CrossFit culture (James and Gill 2018; Knapp 2015a; Podmore and Ogle 2018; Washington and Economides 2016). In this fairly new fitness regimen and strength sport, the body is the medium – and not only what the body does but also how it looks. CrossFit is also, and perhaps even primarily, known as “branded fitness”: a trademark selling opportunities for embodied self-branding and lifestyle promotion. It has often been criticized for embracing neoliberalism (e.g., free-market policies, privatization, competition, efficiency, and growth), as the consumption of fitness products can be seen as

neoliberal work of self-production and as evidence of good neoliberal citizenship. For postmodern individuals, CrossFit can offer a “healthy” lifestyle choice and a way of identity construction and self-production. However, due to its price tag, among other reasons, it is not truly accessible to all (e.g., James and Gill 2018; Nash 2018; Powers and Greenwell 2017; Heywood 2015b).

In this chapter, our aim is to decipher the various positions of power and resistance available to female CrossFit Games competitors against the backdrop of hegemonic masculinity and heteronormativity within CrossFit and the wider sports culture. We ask: How does the CrossFit Games as a sporting event construct the representation of a strong woman? How is gender equality included in its brand? And what kind of opportunities for embodied empowerment and resistance does it offer for the female competitors? We will discuss CrossFit as a strength sport in the context of the CrossFit Games competition and the Games competitors as athletes in this sport. On a more general level, we will refer to CrossFit as a fitness regimen and a brand.

We utilize postfeminism as a critical analytical category, which takes into account the neoliberal context of the current sports world. The term “postfeminism” has been used in many ways since the 1980s: to signal a time after second-wave feminism, to determine a new kind of intersectional feminism, or to refer to a backlash against feminism, along with the perception that the goals of feminism have already been achieved, which makes feminism irrelevant to today’s society. Instead of a historical shift, an epistemological position, or a theoretical perspective, we consider postfeminism as an object of critical analysis. That means that as feminist researchers we take a critical approach to the current postfeminist sports media culture, which opens up possibilities for analyzing the reproduction of female strength in a contradictory light (Banet-Weiser et al. 2020; Toffoletti et al. 2018; Toffoletti and Thorpe 2018; Thorpe et al. 2017; Gill 2007). We combine this approach with a critical understanding of CrossFit as a manifestation of neoliberalism (James and Gill 2018; Nash 2018; Powers and Greenwell 2017; Washington and Economides 2016; Heywood 2015b). According to Kim Toffoletti et al. (2018), neoliberal

ideologies value individual empowerment, personal responsibility, and entrepreneurial subjecthood, encouraging female athletes to adapt media-savvy, body-focused, and entrepreneurial strategies. Therefore, while neoliberal postfeminism acknowledges gender inequality, it simultaneously ignores other socioeconomic and cultural structures leading to inequality, as the postfeminist narratives of female empowerment often overlook the intersections of class, race, sexuality, age, and disability and emphasize professional and economic success. This kind of hyper-individualization construes female athletes as ideal postfeminist subjects who accept full responsibility for their own well-being and self-care (see also Banet-Weiser et al. 2020; Gill 2007).

Previously, feminist sport studies have debated on exclusion, marginalization, trivialization, and sexualization of female athletes. Moving forward, Thorpe et al. (2017) also consider it useful to focus on the new mediated visibility of sports feminism. For women's sports – after being marginalized in the mainstream media for so long – the public visibility is undeniably important, but the postfeminist sport narratives mainly introduce the White, heteronormative, corporate, and neoliberal-friendly versions of it. The most visible platform for these types of postfeminist sport narratives has been digital media. In our analysis, we construe the digital media material through a lens of ambivalence (see also Banet-Weiser et al. 2020). We pay particular attention to the ambivalence of the CrossFit discourse, which both enforces and challenges the hegemonic femininity by simultaneously expanding and limiting the possibilities of the strong female body (Podmore and Ogle 2018; Kerry 2017; Knapp 2015a; 2015b).

CrossFit was the first fitness regimen to be established through digital media, and some claim it would not even exist without the internet and social media (e.g., Friman and Turttiainen 2019; Powers and Greenwell 2017; Heywood 2015a; Knapp 2015a). The CrossFit Games organization is very active in social media – especially on Facebook, where it creates, shares, and discusses content with its 3,682,884 followers. CrossFit is an example of an immersive model of a fitness regimen. According to Heywood (2015a, 21),

*CrossFit Sensorium represents a particular manifestation of embodiment encountered within and beyond the moving image, emphasizing CrossFit as one of the world's first sports to be constituted through digital experience, with specific consequences for the forms of embodied experience it offers to its practitioners.*

Because of the crucial role of audiovisual media in CrossFit – as a fitness regimen, a brand, and the CrossFit Games sport competition – we will focus our analysis primarily on the media content related to the CrossFit Games. Our primary research material consists of the Rogue Iron Game live stream broadcast of the individual female athletes' events in the competition, published as eleven separate YouTube videos (Rogue Fitness). Through a close reading of this material, our aim is to interpret the representations and discourses concerning female athletes' strength in the context of the CrossFit Games competition. We contextualize our reading in women's embodied empowerment as a part of a wider women's strength sports "boom" (e.g., Andreasson and Johansson 2014; Sassatelli 2010) – while simultaneously acknowledging its existence in parallel to the hegemonic Whiteness, masculinity, and heteronormativity defining both CrossFit and sports culture in general.

---

## **CrossFit's Background and Ethos**

---

Originally developed as an effective training program for law enforcement and military personnel (e.g., James and Gill 2018), CrossFit is a fitness regimen and a sport (when related to official competitions with set movement standards, such as the CrossFit Games) combining different types of "functional" movements with aerobic capacity, weightlifting, Olympic lifting, and gymnastics. A typical workout, both in and outside a competition, may include movements such as rowing, wall balls, barbell lifts, and handstand push-ups. Another typical feature for CrossFit workouts is that they are performed at high intensity: the weights are heavy and the repetitions fast. CrossFit is competitive by nature: even outside competition, each workout is scored, and the scores recorded alongside with everyone else taking part in the same workout. Another element typical to CrossFit, setting it apart from other forms of organized competitive

sport, is the element of surprise: in CrossFit competitions, the workouts are not typically announced beforehand, so even the competitors will not know what kind of – or how many – events they will be competing in. Lastly, CrossFit is actively advertised as exercise for everyone, “inclusive of all ages and abilities” (The Open. n.d.). This is because CrossFit is based on the idea of scalability: workouts are designed so that each of them is essentially the same for all participants, whether they are professional elite athletes or hobbyists, and the difference comes from movement standards and weights, which are scaled down based on age, fitness level, and ability. Although not present within official competition divisions, this scalability is one of the reasons why, for example in its country of origin, the United States, CrossFit is not unequivocally considered as a sport.

CrossFit was created by a former gymnast Greg Glassman and registered as a trademark in 2000. It is based on Glassman’s (2002) own definition of fitness, taking into consideration firstly “the ten recognized general physical skills” (cardiovascular/respiratory endurance, stamina, strength, flexibility, power, speed, coordination, agility, balance, and accuracy); secondly, the ideal of “performing well at any and every task imaginable”, which means “keep[ing] the training stimulus broad and constantly varied”; and thirdly, the focus on all three of the different “metabolic pathways” used in physical exercise. Because CrossFit is built on the ideal of perfectly versatile fitness, it is branded as “the sport of fitness” (Dawson 2017). In the same vein, the winners of the CrossFit Games are named as “the fittest woman and man on Earth” – also trademarked titles.

The official, licensed CrossFit gyms, known as “boxes”, are the main locations for taking part in the workouts. Currently, there are over 13,000 CrossFit affiliates around the world (Beers 2021). Each licensed affiliate plans their own programming based on the principles and skills of CrossFit, and the training is carried out by coaches who have completed the official CrossFit certificate courses. At the same time, the daily CrossFit workouts known as workout of the day (WODs) are also posted on the official public CrossFit website for anyone to follow (The CrossFit, n.d.a; n.d.b).

---

## The CrossFit Games as a Strength Sport

---

The CrossFit Games are the world championship competition of CrossFit, held every summer since 2007. The competition was rebranded as the Reebok CrossFit Games after making a ten-year sponsorship deal with Reebok in 2011 (and rebranded as Nobull CrossFit Games following another sponsorship deal in 2021). The 2019 Reebok CrossFit Games were held on August 1–4 in Madison, Wisconsin, the United States.

Since 2011, athletes have been able to qualify for the Games through a five-week-long competition called the CrossFit Open, usually beginning in late February. Anyone can take part in the Open by paying a participation fee of twenty US dollars. During those five weeks, a competition workout is announced every Thursday, named after the competition year and week (for example, the first week's competition workout for the 2019 Open was named 19.1). The athletes taking part in the Open have until the following Monday to complete the workout under the eyes of a certified CrossFit judge, after which they will need to upload their scores to the online competition platform to be validated by the affiliate owners. Those taking part in the Open outside the CrossFit affiliates have the option of recording their performances and uploading the video on the online platform to be judged and validated by a certified judge. In 2019, a total of 341,501 people participated in the Open, logging at least one competition score out of five (Henderson 2019). Making the Open available to everyone also makes the Games an event for the entire CrossFit community, and it may be one of the reasons why the competition broadcasts are widely followed by CrossFit hobbyists and enthusiasts. It is worth noting, however, that not all CrossFitters who participate in the Open regard themselves as athletes. In this study, we are interested in CrossFitters who have qualified for the CrossFit Games and can thus be considered as top athletes taking part in a world championship sports competition.

In the past, the top individual and team competitors from the Open were allowed to proceed to the Regionals: the CrossFit Games qualifiers in nine geographical areas. From the Regionals, forty women, men, and teams were then accepted to participate in the Games (The

CrossFit Games n.d.b). In 2019, however, the qualifying process was changed. The Regionals were removed and replaced with new, independent competitions called the Sanctionals, each with their own qualifying process and open to athletes from all regions (The CrossFit Games n.d.a). The fifteen Sanctional events were held between December 2018 and June 2019, and the winning individuals and teams from each event were invited to participate in the CrossFit Games. In addition to the Sanctionals, individual competitors were also able to qualify for the Games through the Open, either by placing in the top twenty globally or by becoming a “national champion” by finishing as the first of their country. Additionally, CrossFit was able to directly invite up to four athletes to participate in the Games. As a result of the new qualifying process, and the opportunity to qualify as a national champion in particular, more athletes than ever before were allowed to participate in the Games. While in 2018 there were forty women and forty men competing for the title of the fittest on earth, in 2019, no less than 134 women and 148 men were qualified and registered to attend the CrossFit Games in the individual competition, of whom 117 women and 143 men participated.

The 2019 Reebok CrossFit Games lasted for four days and consisted of twelve different competition events for the individual athletes. Although the competition began with 117 female and 143 male competitors, the number of competing athletes was cut down to fifty after the first day, twenty after the second day, and ten after the first event of the third day (halfway through the competition events). Most of the qualified athletes could not even perform the tasks in the first workout, as it seemed to be intentionally designed to separate the true elite athletes from those who qualified for the Games because of the new, more lenient standards. It is worth noting our analysis focuses on the athletes who proceeded further than the first day in the competition, as we are interested in the representation of a strong woman in the context of the most elite CrossFit athletes.

As mentioned earlier, unlike in most other sports, the athletes taking part in the CrossFit Games do not know the number or content of the events they need to perform on each day of the competition beforehand, although they can of course presume the competition events will

include movements typical to CrossFit and test them in the areas defined as central to fitness in the CrossFit ethos. In 2019, the athletes were also not told about the number and schedule of the athlete cuts before they happened.

In the Games, and in CrossFit in general, women and men participate and compete in the same events, although there may be differences in time caps, weights, or the number of repetitions. Out of the twelve events in the 2019 Games, four (events 3, 5, 6, and 9) were identical for female and male competitors, and two of them (events 3 and 9) were performed with all the athletes grouped together. In two events (5 and 9), the highest-performing female athlete received a higher score than the highest-performing male athlete, although they were not officially competing against each other.

---

## Material and Method

---

In this chapter, we analyze the representations and discourses concerning strong female athletes in the context of the CrossFit Games. For this purpose, we have performed a close reading of the *Rogue Iron Game* live stream broadcasts on YouTube of all the women’s events in the 2019 Reebok CrossFit Games (Rogue Fitness). There was a total of twelve competition events scheduled for four days (Table 1.1):

Table 1.1 Women’s competition events at the 2019 Reebok CrossFit Games.

Day	Event	Description	Athletes
Thursday	Event 1: First Cut	4 rounds: 400 m run 3 legless rope climbs 7 squat snatches (130 lb.)  Time cap: 20 minutes	117
	Event 2: Second Cut	800 m row 66 KB jerks (12 kg) 132 ft. handstand walk	75

		Time cap: 10 minutes	
Friday	Event 3: Ruck	6,000 m ruck run 20-30-40-50 lb. pack Time cap: 40 minutes	50
	Event 4: Sprint Couplet	172 ft. sled push 15 bar muscle-ups 172 ft. sled push Time cap: 6 minutes	40
	Event 5: Mary	20 min. AMRAP: 5 HSPU 10 pistols 15 pull-ups	30
Saturday	Event 6: Sprint	Sprint course	20
	Event 7: Split Triplet	5 rounds: 1 pegboard ascent 100 double-unders 10 DB hang split snatches (55 lb.) 10 DB hang clean and jerks (55 lb.) Time cap: 20 minutes	10
	Event 8: Clean	1-rep clean  215-220-225-230-235-240-245-250-255-260 lb.  *5-rep tiebreak at 195 lb.	10
Sunday	Event 9: Swim Paddle	1,000 m swim 1,000 m paddle Time cap: 50 minutes	10
	Event 10: Ringer 1	30-20-10 reps of: Air bike (calories) Toes-to-rings Time cap: 7 minutes	10

	Event 11: Ringer 2	15-10-5 reps for time of: Burpees to rings Overhead squats (95 lb.)  Time cap: 5 minutes	10
	Event 12: The Standard	30 clean and jerks (Grace) 30 muscle-ups 30 snatches (Isabel)  95 lb.  Time cap: 12 minutes	10

Through a close reading of the event broadcasts, our aim was to analyze the representations and discourses concerning the strength of the female athletes competing in the Games. We analyzed the visual representations of strength through both the video material of the competition and how women’s strength was discussed by the live and studio commentators included in the broadcast, as well as by the athletes themselves as they were interviewed after events. Next, we will present the results of our analysis in three themes: (1) looking strong, (2) strong and dominating performance, and (3) women’s strength versus men.

---

## Analysis

---

### **“You Don’t Gotta Tell Her to Row With Her Legs!” What Does a Strong Female Crossfit Games Athlete Look Like?**

The first theme we analyzed in the CrossFit Games broadcasts was the external, superficial layer in the presentations of the female athletes’ strength. During the competition, the CrossFit Games athletes were required to wear the apparel provided to them by Reebok, the Games’ sponsor. In the case of the female athletes, this generally meant mini shorts and small tops alongside the occasional tights and T-shirts. There were differences between female and male clothing since

men were usually wearing long shorts and T-shirts (see also Kerry 2017, 229). In the previous Games, athletes were also forced to compete in Reebok Nano shoes, but in 2019 this policy was changed, and athletes were allowed to use their own (often sponsored) shoes, such as Nike Metcons or Inov8 CrossFit shoes (Lofranco 2019). In the Games broadcast, the live commentators were occasionally paying attention to the female athletes' outfits, which were the main way of identifying an athlete they were currently describing for the audience. For example, in the first heat of the first event (First Cut), the field announcers seemed to be confused about who is currently in the lead, resulting in one of them asking from the other "What's she wearing, what's our leader wearing?", after which the other announcer noticed her wearing a "peach sports bra and blue pants".

Even if the 2019 Games were the most multicultural to date (due to the revised qualification system allowing for participation from a wider range of countries worldwide than ever before), the stereotype of a female CrossFitter is still clearly of White European ancestry. In the context of CrossFit, the standard image of a strong woman is a White female with distinctly visible muscles, long hair, wearing mini shorts and a sports bra – and remarkably often a pair of pearl earrings (Figure 1.1; about "the female uniform of CrossFit", see also Washington and Economides 2016, 143). CrossFit boxes are generally not known to be very diverse spaces, and women of color especially are underrepresented in the sport – and in fitness culture in general – due to various sociocultural reasons resulting from racism and marginalization (Sanchez 2019).



Figure 1.1 Athletes in the first heat of the fifth event (Mary), wearing “the female uniform of CrossFit” (Washington and Economides 2016, 143).

Source: Rogue Iron Game – Ep. 12 / Mary – Individual Women Event 5–2019 Reebok CrossFit Games, Rogue Fitness 3.8.2019, time: 8:17, YouTube: <https://youtu.be/scAX-qp0EIg>

The only noteworthy exceptions to the female athletes’ prevalent style in the 2019 Games were the Muslim competitors wearing hijab clothing. Pasent Medhat (Oman) and Shahad Budebs (the United Arab Emirates) wore the Islamic veil, long tights covered with shorts, and long-sleeve shirts covered with tank tops while running, rope climbing, and snatching during the first event (Figure 1.2). It is important to have media portrayals of female Muslim athletes depicting them as active agents, as in Western media they are often problematically portrayed as passive victims needed to be saved from their own culture (Ahmad and Thorpe 2020). Unfortunately, this kind of representation was left very brief in the 2019 games, as both Medhat and Budebs were only able to participate in the first competition event, after which they (alongside forty other women) were eliminated from the competition. As such, even though the 2019 Games were theoretically the largest and most diverse to date, the athletes surviving the cuts were still a rather homogenous

group, enforcing the hegemonic image of a female CrossFit athlete.



Figure 1.2 Shahad Budebs performing her first legless rope climb as an early heat leader in the first event (First Cut), while the announcers are calling that “she means business”.

Source: First Cut – Individual Women Event 1–2019 Reebok CrossFit Games, Rogue Fitness 2.8.2019, time: 23:36, YouTube: <https://youtu.be/YcT6locbMPY>

Some of the female athletes, such as the previous year’s (2018) second fittest woman on earth, Laura Horvath (Hungary), chose to wear a simple T-shirt and long tights for the competition. This more covering outfit was also more popular during events in which the athletes were required to lift heavy weights (such as event 8 Clean), likely because it prevents the bar from rubbing against the skin. Interestingly and importantly, although being limited to the competition apparel sponsored by Reebok, the athletes were able to make their own choices of what to wear for each event, based on both comfort and functionality. When given this kind of a choice, female athletes may highlight their heteronormative femininity as an act of freely chosen expression (Toffoletti et al. 2018, 3) in the name of neoliberal postfeminism, whereas in the past, sexualized images of women in male-dominant sports media were considered as objectification.

In other words, empowerment can also take the form of celebrating a sexually empowered self. Women are more powerful than ever, and as ideal postfeminist subjects the female CrossFit Games athletes can “have it all” if they choose to do so. However, the neoliberal postfeminist ideology celebrates consumerism and does not pay attention to the structural inequalities (Toffoletti and Thorpe 2018, 25–26, 28; see also Banet-Weiser et al. 2020; Gill 2007). Therefore, the choice is never entirely uncontrolled when for instance cultural context, sponsors, and revenue model options always have an influence on the female athletes’ actions.

Roberta Sassatelli (2010, 99) separates embodied performance from athletic performance. According to the distinction, performance in fitness culture is embodied when its emphasis is not on the capacity to perform the exercise but instead on the modification and transformation of the body. However, Powers and Greenwell (2017) have argued that embodied branded fitness, such as CrossFit, is about not only how the body looks but also what it does. In the case of professional CrossFit, it can even be seen the other way around: practicing CrossFit has visible effects on the body, yet body transformation is considered as secondary to gaining muscle strength and sporting capacity (cf. differing findings e.g., Washington and Economides 2016, 150). The best female CrossFitters undoubtedly exercise with the competition in mind (Sassatelli 2010, 99), but at the same time, their appearance plays a key role in the CrossFit culture. The highest-performing members of the CrossFit community – most apparently the CrossFit Games athletes – are promoting certain lifestyle and moral choices through embodied self-branding. For these reasons, CrossFit has been described as the ideal neoliberal body practice (McCarthy 2019; James and Gill 2018; Powers and Greenwell 2017; Heywood 2015b, 32).

The stereotype of a female CrossFit Games athlete with her tight-fitting, revealing clothes and strikingly feminine appearance maintains and reproduces heteronormative imagery. However, at the same time, she is also exceptionally strong and muscular. Washington and Economides (2016) have analyzed CrossFit media (e.g., videos on the CrossFit’s official YouTube channel and social media accounts of top-performing female CrossFit athletes) and argue that CrossFit expands the range of possibilities for the female body while simultaneously

enforcing heteronormative femininity. CrossFit juxtaposes strength and femininity in a way that can be construed as empowering in postfeminist understanding. According to Washington and Economides (2016), CrossFit creates a space for negotiation and reconsiders the limits of hegemonic femininity by challenging strength as a domain reserved for male bodies. However, it is important to remember that while celebrating women's physical strength and strong female bodies, CrossFit also enables the sexual objectification of those female bodies (Washington and Economides 2016, 145–148, 156). Knapp (2015a) has made the same conclusion when studying the CrossFit Journal, the content of which both reinforced and challenged hegemonic femininity while constructing an image of the ideal woman in the context of CrossFit. Furthermore, the practices at CrossFit boxes both reproduce and resist ideal femininity (Kerry 2017; Knapp 2015b).

We also recognized this ambivalent discourse in our own analysis. Most of the female athletes in the 2019 CrossFit Games were emphasizing hegemonic femininity through their appearance, but, at the same time, they were also actively showing and performing their strength. For instance, during the running section of the first event (First Cut), Ksenija Kecman (Bosnia and Herzegovina) posed to the camera showing her biceps, and the competition winner Tia-Clair Toomey (Australia) flexed her muscles as she celebrated her clean win in the eighth event. The live broadcast commentators reviewed the female athletes' performances with phrases such as "looking really strong". In the second event (Second Cut), Dani Speegle (United States) was described as one of the most powerful athletes in the field, and as her muscular thighs were shown on the screen, one of the commentators pointed out how "you don't gotta tell her to row with her legs". Occasionally, the camera angles were focused on the athlete's muscles (Figure 1.3).



Figure 1.3 Broadcast camera angle focused on Samantha Briggs' muscular back while she is performing handstand push-ups during the fifth event (Mary).

Source: Rogue Iron Game – Ep. 12 / Mary – Individual Women Event 5–2019 Reebok CrossFit Games, Rogue Fitness 3.8.2019, time: 18:41, YouTube: <https://youtu.be/scAX-qp0EIg>

The commentators did not, however, speak directly about the athletes' appearance except when discussing the (dis)benefits of certain types of physique in particular events or movements. They stated, for example, that size mattered when it came to the assault bike and that Kristin Holte (Norway) did not benefit from her small body size in the tenth event (Ringer 1). During the fifth event (Mary), the analysts discussed how the athletes' body shape might affect their capacity of doing handstand push-ups, pistol squats, and pull-ups:

*Smallest, most gymnastically savvy, lightest people are going to crush this event as long as they have the fitness behind it, they have a massive advantage when it comes to this. So, we have seen, you know, maybe Amanda Barnhart behind the rest of the field, or Sigmundsdóttir, you know, Annie is moving slow. Like they're just taller, there's bigger athletes and you are at a mechanical disadvantage when you come to events like this, but you need to have them. There's the same reason why we put a barbell by itself out on the competition floor, so there's some balance in there. But it's ok to say that you know they're gonna struggle here just off the fact – it's not that they're not fit enough, they're just not built for this event.*

Podmore and Ogle (2018) have explored how women's participation in CrossFit sets a certain context for their embodied experiences, including the development of their body images, and perceptions of culturally constructed ideals of beauty and gender. Their study participants gained a sense of empowerment through their engagement (from ten months to six years) in CrossFit. According to them, lifting heavy weights eliminates the "weakness of the feminine", but CrossFit simultaneously produces an appearance-focused ideal of female strength and muscularity. Postfeminist renegotiation of ideal femininity is a part of a wider continuum of women's strength sports "boom" (e.g., Andreasson and Johansson 2014; Sassatelli 2010), which has popularized slogans such as "strong is the new skinny/sexy/beautiful" and "girl power". Like CrossFit, these slogans both challenge traditional gender norms and reinforce hegemonic conventions, as they place a demand on female body to be strong while remaining traditionally appealing (Washington and Economides 2016, 149–150; see also Heywood 2015b). Female bodybuilders have of course challenged hegemonic femininity already in the 1990s, but rather than representing the current ideal body type, they were seen as parts of a grotesque subculture. Only the recent development of the modern gym culture and the so-called fitness revolution have generated the current trend of women's fitness bodies with their emphasized femininity (Andreasson and Johansson 2013; Sassatelli 2010). It will be interesting to see if CrossFit and its top female athletes are able to transform the paradigm of a "too muscular" woman into the ideal of a strong woman, emphasizing the body's physical capability over its appearance.

## **“I Had to Get a Few More Handstand Push-Ups – Just Because I Could!” Strong and Dominating Performance**

A professional female CrossFit athlete embodies a powerful, muscled, and dominant physique (Knapp 2015a) as well as CrossFit's reputation as an extreme fitness practice (McCarthy 2019). James and Gill (2018) argue that CrossFit provides access to a femininity that highlights women's ability to be physically exceptional. The commentators of the 2019 CrossFit Games

live stream broadcasts were following this discourse, and the female athletes were rather faithful to it too, enforcing the brand's image of CrossFit athletes being exceptionally fit when compared to athletes in other sports.

Tia-Clair Toomey won the first event quite clearly, so according to the commentators she was "assaulting this event". They were commenting on her squat snatches: "130 pounds on the barbell and Tia Toomey continues to just tear through those". After the event, studio host Sean Woodland remarked that Tia was having fun and the event was just practice for her. The comments underscored Toomey's dominance as an athlete and glorified her physical capacity. The other competitors received admiration because of their strength and performance as well. Karissa "Kari" Pearce's (United States) upper body pulling strength was described as "phenomenal", Jamie Green (United Kingdom) was looking "very strong", and as analyst Annie Sakamoto articulated it: "that's what we want to see". Occasionally comments were targeted at the whole group of competitors, such as in the fifth event Mary, during which the analysts commented on how "this event is not this easy, it is criminal how easy these women are making this look right now". Moreover, the commentators highlighted the extremeness of the athletes' performances by being frequently astonished about how "comfortable" and "good" they were looking during the events.

Related to this, the commentators also brought up the importance of mental strength; the dominating performance requires that the mind and the body are coming together. As such, the strength required from athletes in CrossFit competitions is not purely physical in nature but also mental. Some of this mental strength comes from the support and encouragement received from and offered to the fellow competitors. Brogan Bailey and Bruner (2019) have studied the organizational culture of CrossFit by interviewing its members, concluding that a key element behind CrossFit's success is its strong sense of community (see also Whiteman-Sandland et al. 2018). The CrossFit community is based on voluntarism, performative regulation, and the purpose of cultivating a better self, and it is quite often talked about as a "tribe", "cult", or "family" – also in the organization's own communication (e.g., Dawson 2017; Pekkanen et al.

2017). In training, CrossFitters exchange cheers, high fives, and fist bumps, and the slowest and weakest participant is always encouraged with the loudest cheers (Friman and Turtiainen 2019). This sense of community and solidarity among CrossFitters amidst extreme physical challenges is often described with the term camaraderie (Kerry 2017, 228; Dawson 2017).

This “spirit of CrossFit” is not limited to box communities but is also present in competitions, although in a different capacity, as the athletes are competing against each other. In the 2019 CrossFit Games it appeared, for example, in the way Tia Toomey was coaching other athletes after having finished her own performance in the seventh event Split Triplet. The reciprocal respect of the competitors was commonly seen in the post-event interviews. The athletes flattered each other by acknowledging the high-class performances of the competitors in general. Kari Pearce brought up (in the interview after the fifth event) the fact that there were “so many talented girls” in the competition, and Tia Toomey admitted after their head-to-head clean battle (in the eighth event) that “Amanda [Barnhart] is really strong”. CrossFit is often compared to extreme sports like obstacle course races, and becoming a CrossFitter (or a Tough Mudder racer) demands social, financial, and temporal investments (McCarthy 2019; Powers and Greenwell 2017, 524). Similarly to what Weedon (2015) has depicted in the context of Tough Mudder, the camaraderie aspect of CrossFit is a display of togetherness, human strength, and perseverance, but it also provides an outcome of material, corporeal, and symbolic enactments.

In the 2019 Games, Tia-Clair Toomey dominated in several competition events. One of them was the Swim Paddle (event 9) she led together with another Australian athlete Matt McLeod. The commentators noted that Toomey did not have the cleanest technique, but she was really strong and efficient under the water. They were even joking that Toomey and McLeod were so supreme that they “could have had Piña Coladas with them on the paddle board when chatting with each other about what they ate for breakfast”. When the pair came out of the water, they raced each other to the finishing line. The commentators joked that Toomey was thinking “somebody needs to compete against me”– so that it would at least feel like a race even though she had left all the other women far behind her.

The athletes too referred to their own strength and physical capacity in their post-event interviews. For example, Danielle Brandon (United States) acknowledged her superior shoulder stamina after winning the second event (Second Cut) consisting of an 800 m row, 66 kettlebell jerks (12 kg), and a 132 ft. handstand walk. Afterward the studio cast were wondering if she was “for real”. On the next day, Amanda Barnhart (United States) won the fourth event (Sprint Couplet) consisting of a 172 ft. sled push, 15 bar muscle-ups, and another 172 ft. sled push. While Barnhart’s dominating performance with the sled made the commentators wonder whether she had wheels under her sled, during her post-event winner’s interview Barnhart herself just smiled and simply stated that “I got good leg power so it’s kind of my jam.” Furthermore, when Kari Pierce won Mary (event 5) with a performance that beat all the male athletes too, she explained how she could very well have slowed down in the end of the heat but decided to do a couple of extra handstand push-ups instead “because I could”. She further explained how her quads and calves had started cramping in the middle of the event, so instead of breaking up the pull-up sets and having to jump up to the bar twice, she simply decided to do all the remaining sets unbroken (in addition to doing strict handstand push-ups instead of kipping throughout the event). “She’s terrible!”, the commentators summarized her incredible performance and her “humble bragging” interview through laughter. They stated that they knew Pierce has a lot of upper-body pulling strength and stamina, but her accomplishment was still “unbelievable” and “insane”.

Instead of enforcing the stereotype of women’s weakness, these responses to Pierce’s performance can be interpreted as pure appreciation as she was so much ahead of the other competitors. The commentators were not expecting competitors to reach this level of performance, but that did not seem to be related to their gender – they were not expecting such superior performance from anyone. On the last day of the competition, Katrin Davidsdottir (Iceland) won two fast events (10 and 11; Ringer 1 and Ringer 2) in a row. After dominating on the air bike, toes-to-rings, burpees, and overhead squats, she too showed her self-confidence in the interview: “That’s what I do at the gym. I will go as hard as I possibly can, and I trust I will

recover.” In addition to their dominating athletic performance during the competition events and enforcing their dominance during the interviews, the women also performed their dominance to the camera, particularly in their victory poses (Figure 1.4). These poses and statements can be considered as expressions of confidence and self-esteem, which are attributes related to self-empowerment in postfeminist, neoliberal times (Toffoletti and Thorpe 2018, 25, 28).



Figure 1.4 Tia Toomey performing dominance in posing for the audience and the camera while celebrating her victory of the eighth event (Clean).

Source: Clean – Individual Women Event 8–2019 Reebok CrossFit Games, Rogue Fitness 4.8.2019, time: 49:26, YouTube: <https://youtu.be/mC7nN8OShvY>

In the beginning of the eighth event (Clean), commentator Sean Woodland announced that “there is nothing better than big weights on a big stage”. This was the event that measured the competitors’ strength and Olympic lifting technique. Quite in the beginning of the event one of the commentators got excited: “Every time I see these fittest women on earth do this I still [. . .] marvel at their strength and skill.” The event quickly built up as a duel between Tia-Clair Toomey and Amanda Barnhart, both on whom lifted 260 pounds, originally meant to be the final

weight. The commentators were asking: “Okay, what do we do now Dave?”, referring to Dave Castro, who was the director of the CrossFit Games at the time and the programmer of the events. “Who wants to see them keep going?” Finally, Toomey managed to lift 265 pounds while Barnhart failed in her performance. The commentators were celebrating Toomey throughout the event, but they also depicted Barnhart’s technique as “beautiful” and her leg strength as “outstanding”. Tia-Clair Toomey made the audience shout before her lifts (Figure 1.5), and the atmosphere in the CrossFit Games Colosseum was stunning even through the broadcast.



Figure 1.5 The current competition leader Tia-Clair Toomey encouraging the audience to make some noise for her as she is preparing for her 225 lb clean in the eighth event.

Source: Clean – Individual Women Event 8–2019 Reebok CrossFit Games, Rogue Fitness 4.8.2019, time: 23:42, YouTube: <https://youtu.be/mC7nN8OShvY>

Even the most elite CrossFit athletes may occasionally find themselves struggling, and that is also needed in order to understand the requirements behind dominance in competitive strength sports. In the 2019 Games, after the sixth event (Sprint) and the final athlete cuts, the previous year’s (2018) eighth fittest woman on earth, Brooke Wells, was filmed sitting on the ground and

crying after having realized her competition was over. As Morrison (2018) comprehensively summarizes it, “Crossfit may be solely equated with weightlifting and high-intensity interval training, but the heart of the sport is vulnerability.” In the Games broadcasts, vulnerability was presented alongside physical strength and dominating performances, in both physical and mental forms. Vulnerability is a feature not attached to the ideal of neoliberal postfeminism. On the contrary, postfeminist rhetoric emphasizes women’s autonomy, choice, and empowerment, and as active subjects, female athletes are seen to be “personally responsible for their own successes or failures” (Toffoletti et al. 2018, 7; see also Toffoletti and Thorpe 2018). Yet, in the context of the CrossFit commentaries, the athletes who struggle are also celebrated as strong feminist subjects (cf. Thorpe et al. 2017, 372).

In the media, CrossFit has acquired a status of an extreme sport, based on intensive, high-volume, and high-repetition workouts (McCarthy 2019). According to Powers and Greenwell (2017, 530), in extreme sports, participants push themselves beyond recommended exercise requirements, testing the limits of human strength, endurance, and tolerance. CrossFit’s founder Greg Glassman has stated in 2005 that CrossFit can kill you (Cooperman 2005) and that there are certain risks in practicing it. There has been public discussion around the strong association between CrossFit and rhabdomyolysis, a condition in which muscle fiber breaks down rapidly, for example, after strenuous exercise. The products from the muscle breakdown, such as myoglobin, are released into the bloodstream and can lead to kidney failure and, in extreme cases, even death. This has occurred during CrossFit competitions to well-trained participants too (Tibana et al. 2018). People participating in CrossFit are also prone to overtraining and exercise-related injuries due to the nature of the sport, namely the high training intensity and volume.

As an example, Sara Sigmundsdóttir had to withdraw from the Games in 2018 because of an injury but not until she had competed with a broken rib through nine events, including a Marathon row. There were some minor accidents in the 2019 CrossFit Games too: Kari Pierce got cramps on her legs (event 5) and fell from the rings (event 10), and Katrin Davidsdottir hit her stomach during burpees (event 11). In the broadcast, the commentators maintained the

discourse that pain and the possibility of injuries are an essential part of CrossFit. When Bethany Shadburne (United States) tore her right hand a bit in the fifth event (Mary) and was showing her broken palm to the camera, they acknowledged the injury but argued that “it’s probably gonna be worth it because she’s gonna be safe [from the cuts]”. In the end, the ultimate female CrossFit Games athlete is simultaneously strong and vulnerable, both physically and mentally. She is not afraid to show her vulnerability, but she is also expected to push through it.

## **“The Men Can Wait! Sit Down and Shut Up – I’m Watching Some Lifting!” Women’s Strength Versus Men**

In theory, CrossFit workouts are the same for everyone, but in practice, outside competitions, they are commonly scaled to a person’s capability. Most of the time, also the standard versions of the workouts, known as the “RX” in the CrossFit lingo, are programmed differently for women and men: the women’s standard usually contains lighter weights and sometimes fewer repetitions (particularly in the case of calories on a machine such as the assault bike or rower). In the Reebok CrossFit Games 2019, eight of the twelve competition events differed somehow for the female and male competitors, while four events were identical (and two of them were performed simultaneously by the women and men).

Women and men competing simultaneously or back to back in identical or extremely similar events set CrossFit competitions apart from other (strength) sports. James and Gill (2018) state that CrossFit separates biological sex from physical capability and women can become the ideal CrossFitters similarly to men. Instead of gender, it creates a distinction between CrossFitters and non-CrossFitters. The sport being the same for women and men is something that is also emphasized as a part of the CrossFit brand (Warkentin 2018). Despite, or perhaps because of this, in the Games broadcasts, female athletes’ strength and performance were remarkably often discussed in relation to male athletes. For example, in the first event (First Cut), consisting of four rounds of a 400 m run, three legless rope climbs, and seven squat

snatches (130 lb.) with a time cap of 20 minutes, analyst Annie Sakamoto pointed out how Tia-Clair Toomey was “holding the pace similar to some of the gentlemen’s pace earlier”, calling the feat “really impressive”, since “for the ladies, the three legless rope climbs, it’s a bit tougher than it is for a lot of the guys”. This is only one example of the ways in which female athletes were sharing the same workload with the male athletes and performing at the same level as they were being brought to the viewers’ attention and commended by the analysts throughout the competition.

Women’s equal workload in relation to the men was brought up by the commentators during the third event, Ruck. In Ruck, which was the first event of Friday, the second day of the competition, the female and male athletes were competing at the same time on the same course doing the same work: each individual had to complete a 6,000 m run with a rucksack on their back. They all started the event with a 20 lb. ruck and added another 10 lb. weight to the rucksack every 1,500 m, finishing the final lap with a 50 lb. rucksack. The time cap for completing the event was 40 minutes for every athlete. At the start of the event, one of the announcers commented how “I think it’s really cool to see the women out there with men, shoulder to shoulder, doing exactly the same workout, exactly same work”. This is only one example of the ways in which CrossFit presents female athletes as equal to male athletes: competing together “shoulder to shoulder” and, most importantly, doing equal work, proving themselves just as good as, if not even better than, the male athletes. It is worth noting, however, that even in CrossFit, despite equal expectations and admiration toward female and male competitors being an important part of its brand, equal standards are still an exception rather than a common occurrence in competitions. As such, celebrating the shared standards in the competition broadcast does highlight not only the role of CrossFit as a pioneer for equality – as might be the goal of the brand – but also the fact that usually the standards are indeed different for the two genders.

In fact, while discussing the third event as it was about to begin, analyst Annie Sakamoto pointed out how Samantha “Sam” Briggs (United Kingdom) had previously beaten most of the

male athletes in similar events in the previous competitions and how it could very well happen again here. The analysts described Briggs' dominating performance in these types of events, particularly in relation to men: "go ahead, add some weight, in fact I'll take some of the guys' weight while I'm at it and keep running". The analysts also recalled one of the earlier Games competitions in which male athlete Brent Fikowski was interviewed after a running event, explaining to the interviewer how Briggs had "almost passed him". At the same moment, Briggs had just happened to be walking past Fikowski, pointing out to the camera that she had, in fact, beaten him. This humorously presented occasion revealed some problematic undertones related to female athletes displaying stronger performance than men: while it is claimed to be celebrated in CrossFit, at the same time the male athletes are still being shamed for losing to women, even if under the guise of humor. Instead of celebrating the female athletes' strength, the attention and shame are directed at the male athletes beaten by women. After all, even though the female athletes (and everyday CrossFitters) are encouraged to compete at the men's level, women are never supposed to actually win.

The shame is limited not only to the male athletes but also to the male analysts (and, by extension, the men watching the broadcast). This became visible especially in the eighth event (Clean), in which the ten remaining female athletes competed for a maximum one repetition clean. The first lift was 215 lb., the women took turns lifting, and after each round, the successful athletes would add another 5 lb. to the bar until the final round of 260 lb. Already at the beginning of the event, the male analysts discussed the women's clean weights, asking "Are you sure that's not the men's opening weight, 215? It's insane!" The analysts further pointed out how these were the sort of weights the male competitors were lifting four or five years ago at the Games and what the women had been previously lifting as a deadlift, certainly not a clean.

Eventually, the event became a match between just two athletes: the reigning champion Tia-Clair Toomey and Amanda Barnhart. These two were not only able to lift the heaviest bar included in the original event (260 lb.) but allowed to continue lifting even after that, Toomey then being the only one able to clean the next, 265 lb. bar. While the two women were making

these heavy lifts look easy, the male analysts discussed their performance in the broadcast. After Barnharts' 230 lb. lift, one of them commented to the other, "You look offended right now!", to which he responded, "I don't know if I'm impressed or I'm insulted, I can't really, I'm in a glass box of emotions right now, I can't quite figure out how I feel about it." Later, he continued: "Although if they do get to 275 I will ask them to stop." The two men laughed, and the other commented, "Your ego can't take that." In a postfeminist point of view, female athletes are not objects or victims, and they are able to do whatever they want (Thorpe et al. 2017, 370). However, there are sport discourses maintaining certain inequalities as unnoticed. The commentators were joking, and their comments were meant to be compliments, but at the same time they contained an assumption that it is "more natural" for men to be strong and that it is shameful for a man to be able to lift less than a woman – even when that woman is a professional elite athlete.

Interestingly, at the 2019 games, there were two events containing an equal workload for women and men in which a woman outperformed all the men in the competition. The first was the fifth event, a CrossFit "benchmark WOD" known as Mary, consisting of a twenty-minute AMRAP (as many rounds as possible) of five handstand push-ups, ten pistol squats, and fifteen pull-ups. The female event winner Kari Pearce performed a total of 695 repetitions, while the male event winner Noah Ohlsen (United States) performed 677 repetitions, but this was not even mentioned in the broadcast. The ninth event of the competition, called Swim Paddle, consisting of a thousand-meter swim and a thousand-meter paddle (fifty-minute time cap) was won by Tia-Clair Toomey, who raced the male event winner Matt McLeod (Australia) to the finish line, beating him by a few hundredths of a second. In the latter case, the announcers were laughing about the final sprint competition between the two, pointing out how they were not even competing against each other (Figure 1.6).



Figure 1.6 The two Australian winners of the ninth event (Swim Paddle), Tia-Clair Toomey and Matt McLeod, racing each other to the finish line despite not even competing against each other in the event shared between female and male competitors.

Source: Rogue Iron Game – Ep. 21 / Swim Paddle – Individuals/Teams – 2019 Reebok CrossFit Games, Rogue Fitness 4.8.2019, time: 55:09, YouTube: <https://youtu.be/1mkW4yEzB9k>

As an athlete, Toomey’s performance was often compared to Mathew “Mat” Fraser (United States). Both were the current reigning CrossFit Games champions: at the time of the 2019 Games, Fraser had won the Games three times and Toomey twice. While discussed together, Toomey was often being overshadowed by Fraser, who was described as a legend, even though he only had one Games victory more than Toomey. In the clean event, for example, Toomey, who is a professional CrossFitter and weightlifter, not to mention an Olympian, was described as having a “Fraser face going on” as she was focusing on her lifting. Since the previous Games, Toomey and Fraser had also been training together, which in the broadcast was described to have had a positive effect on Toomey’s performance – but never the other way around.

Overall, there seems to be much ambivalence in the way the female competitors are viewed: they are not truly impressive until they are performing at the level of the male competitors, but at the same time, they should not beat the male athletes either.

---

## **Toward Greater Strength in Equity: Conclusions and Discussion**

---

In this chapter, we have examined the CrossFit Games 2019 media broadcasts in order to analyze the representations and discourses concerning the strength of the female athletes in the competition. We have focused our analysis on the different ways the image of a strong woman is constructed in the broadcasts and what kind of opportunities for embodied empowerment and resistance it offers for the female competitors. At the same time, we have reflected these readings of empowerment against the ever-present hegemonic masculinity, heteronormativity, and postfeminist, neoliberal ideology, as well as against CrossFit's primary essence as a commercial brand. Utilizing neoliberal postfeminism as a critical analytical category has allowed us to recognize the ambivalent features of these representations of female strength.

In the 2019 CrossFit Games, the representation of a strong woman reflected both hegemonic and alternative femininity. The professional female CrossFitter embodied a dominant physique dressed in "the female uniform of CrossFit", including tight-fitting mini shorts and a sports bra. She was typically a White woman with long hair and exceptionally visible muscles who was actively showing and performing her strength. The discourses around the strong woman in the Games broadcasts were also glorifying the female competitors' exceptional performance. However, female CrossFitters' strength was remarkably often discussed in relation to the male athletes, emphasizing the gendered expectations behind the branded equality. Overall, the female CrossFit Games competitors were presented as simultaneously strong and vulnerable, both physically and mentally.

Following the 2019 CrossFit Games, 2020 was a year of big changes for CrossFit – as a company and a brand, a sport, and a community. In the summer of 2020, amidst the Black Lives Matter protests against racial violence and police brutality in the United States, CrossFit founder and CEO Greg Glassman made dismissive and insensitive comments related to the Black Lives Matter movement and the murder of George Floyd in the hands of police officers. As a result,

many CrossFit employees, athletes, affiliates, sponsors, and partners began cutting ties with the brand and posting statements disassociating themselves from Glassman, some boxes choosing to end their affiliation completely and some athletes announcing they would be boycotting the 2020 Games. Additionally, the New York Times published a report on the culture of sexism and sexual harassment fostered by Glassman within the company (Rosman 2020). All of this was devastating and infuriating news to the CrossFit community, which had been, for a great and important part, built around what had been believed to be a shared ideal of equality. Icelandic CrossFit Games 2015 and 2016 champion Katrin Davidsdottir was one of the top athletes who announced her boycott on Instagram:

*I AM OUT. I will not be competing in the 2020 CF Games. And until further changes have been met, I will not represent this sport. [-] This is not who I am. My moral compass & the values I stand for make it an easy decision for me to make: I AM OUT.*

(Davidsdottir 2020)

In July 2020, an affiliate owner and IT entrepreneur Eric Roza bought CrossFit and took the position of the company CEO, stating on Twitter that there is “a mandate that CrossFit provide a culture of inclusion that works tirelessly to eliminate racism, sexism, and bias” (Roza 2020). This change ended most of the boycotts. The official CrossFit website now states the Foundational Principles for DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion) at CrossFit, emphasized by a quotation from Roza: “Black lives matter, absolutely. Brown lives matter, absolutely. It’s core to everything I believe as a person. Racism, sexism are absolutely abhorrent. We’re not going to tolerate them within CrossFit” (CrossFit, n.d.).

While in this chapter we have focused on female CrossFit Games athletes and their representations in the competition broadcasts, it is also important to see the bigger picture. Who has the opportunity to be seen as strong women in the sport, what kinds of female bodies are presented as admirable, and what are the norms and limits framing their performance? And who, on the other hand, are being devalued and excluded, their paths into competition stages and potential success cut in the early stages? There is still a need for more critical, intersectional

readings on women's strength in CrossFit – from the perspective of not only gender but also race, class, and sexuality.

## References

- Ahmad, Noor, and Holly, T. 2020. Muslim Sportswomen as Digital Space Invaders: Hashtag Politics and Everyday Visibilities. *Communication and Sport*, 8(4–5), 668–691.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/2167479519898447>
- Andreasson, Jakob, and Thomas Johansson. 2013. Female fitness in the blogosphere: Gender, health, and the body. *Sage Open*, 3(3). <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244013497728>.
- Andreasson, Jesper, and Thomas Johansson. 2014. The Fitness Revolution: Historical Transformations in the Global Gym and Fitness Culture. *Sport Science Review*, 23(3–4), 91–112.
- Banet-Weiser, Sarah, Rosalind Gill, and Catherine Rottenberg. 2020. Postfeminism, Popular Feminism and Neoliberal Feminism? Sarah Banet-Weiser, Rosalind Gill and Catherine Rottenberg in Conversation. *Feminist Theory*, 21(1), 3–24.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1464700119842555>
- Beers, Emily. 2021. CrossFit Brings More than 500 Affiliates Back in Last Eight Months. *Morning Chalk Up*. <https://morningchalkup.com/2021/10/18/crossfit-brings-more-than-500-affiliates-back-in-last-eight-months/>
- Brogan Bailey, Alex J. Benson, and Mark W. Bruner. 2019. Investigating the Organisational Culture of Crossfit. *International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 17(3), 197–211. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1612197X.2017.1329223>
- Cooperman, Stephanie. 2005. Getting Fit, Even if It Kills You. *The New York Times*. December 22. [www.nytimes.com/2005/12/22/fashion/thursdaystyles/getting-fit-even-if-it-kills-you.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2005/12/22/fashion/thursdaystyles/getting-fit-even-if-it-kills-you.html)

- CrossFit. 2021. *CrossFit's Commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion*. January 27.  
[www.crossfit.com/dei](http://www.crossfit.com/dei)
- Davidsdottir Katrin. 2020. *Instagram Photo*. June 13. [www.instagram.com/p/CBWgPEtj7Au](http://www.instagram.com/p/CBWgPEtj7Au)
- Dawson, Marcelle. 2017. CrossFit: Fitness Cult or Reinventive Institution? *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 52(3), 361–379. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1012690215591793>
- Friman, Usva, and Riikka Turtiainen. 2019. Playing the CrossFit Open 2018. *Well-Played, Sporting Mindset Special Issue*, 8(3), 33–62. <https://doi.org/10.1184/R1/9914447.v1>
- Gill, Rosalind. 2007. Postfeminist Media Culture: Elements of a Sensibility. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 10(2), 147–166. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367549407075898>
- Henderson, Scott. 2019. So how Many People Participated in the 2019 CrossFit Open? *Morning Chalk Up*. April 1. <https://morningchalkup.com/2019/04/01/so-how-many-people-participated-in-the-2019-crossfit-open>
- Heywood, Leslie. 2015a. The CrossFit sensorium: Visuality, Affect and Immersive Sport. *Paragraph*, 38(1), 20–36. [www.eupublishing.com/doi/full/10.3366/para.2015.0144](http://www.eupublishing.com/doi/full/10.3366/para.2015.0144)
- Heywood, Leslie. 2015b. ‘Strange Borrowing’: Affective Neuroscience, Neoliberalism and the ‘Cruelly Optimistic’ Gendered Bodies of Crossfit. In *Twenty-First Century Feminism: Forming and Performing Femininity*, eds. Claire Nally, and Angela Smith, 17–40. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- James, Eric P., and Rebecca Gill. 2018. Neoliberalism and the Communicative Labor of CrossFit. *Communication & Sport*, 6(6), 703–727.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/2167479517737036>
- Kerry, Victoria J. 2017. The Construction of Hegemonic Masculinity in the Semiotic Landscape of a CrossFit Cave. *Visual Communication*, 16(2), 209–237.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1470357216684081>
- Knapp, Bobbi A. 2015a. Gender Representation in the CrossFit Journal: A Content Analysis. *Sport in Society*, 18(6), 688–703. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17430437.2014.982544>

- Knapp, Bobbi A. 2015b. Rx'd and Shirtless: An Examination of Gender in a CrossFit Box. *Women in Sport and Physical Activity Journal*, 23(1), 42–53.  
<https://doi.org/10.1123/wspaj.2014-0021>
- Lofranco, Justin. 2019. CrossFit Removes Footwear Restrictions at the CrossFit Games. *Morning Chalk Up*. April 15. <https://morningchalkup.com/2019/04/15/crossfit-removes-footwear-restrictions-at-the-crossfit-games>
- McCarthy, Brigid. 2019. Reinvention Through CrossFit: Branded Transformation Documentaries. *Communication & Sport*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2167479519852288>
- Morrison, Christine. 2018. CrossFit: Smells Like Team Spirit. *The Fine Line*. February 16. <https://thefinelinemag.com/crossfit-community-women/>
- Nash, Meredith. 2018. Let's Work on Your Weaknesses: Australian CrossFit Coaching, Masculinity and Neoliberal Framings of 'health' and 'fitness. *Sport in Society*, 21(9), 1432–1453. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17430437.2017.1390565>
- Pekkanen, Anna, Elina Närvänen, and Pekka Tuominen. 2017. Elements of Rituality in Consumer Tribes: The Case of CrossFit. *Journal of Customer Behaviour*, 16(4), 353–370. <https://doi.org/10.1362/147539217X15144729108144>
- Podmore, Miranda, and Jennifer Paff Ogle. 2018. The Lived Experience of CrossFit as a Context for the Development of Women's Body Image and Appearance Management Practices. *Fashion and Textiles*, 5(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40691-017-0116-y>
- Powers, Devon, and Greenwell, DM. 2017. Branded Fitness: Exercise and Promotional Culture. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 17(3), 523–541.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1469540515623606>
- Rogue, Fitness. 2019. Reebok CrossFit Games. *Full Event Live Stream YouTube Videos*. August 1–4. [www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLMBACjeGtKQa\\_VfWsf22OxDoP4r4YtwOC](http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLMBACjeGtKQa_VfWsf22OxDoP4r4YtwOC)
- Rosman, Katherine. 2020. CrossFit Owner Fostered Sexist Company Culture, Workers Say. *The New York Times*. June 20. [www.nytimes.com/2020/06/20/style/greg-glassman-crossfit-sexism.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/20/style/greg-glassman-crossfit-sexism.html).

Roza, Eric. 2020. *Twitter Post*. July 24.

<https://twitter.com/RozaEric/status/1286687603329241088>.

Sanchez, Carlos Davila. 2019. Women of Color in the Box: Safe Spaces in Crossfit and Hiit. In *Feminist Applied Sport Psychology*, ed. Leeja Carter, 151–158. London: Routledge.

Sassatelli, Roberta. 2010. *Fitness Culture. Gyms and the Commercialisation of Discipline and Fun*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Sigmundsdóttir, Sara. 2019. *Instagram Photo*. August 4.

[www.instagram.com/p/B0uFZ6SIMOk/](http://www.instagram.com/p/B0uFZ6SIMOk/).

The CrossFit. n.d.a. *About affiliation*. October 31, 2019. [www.crossfit.com/affiliate](http://www.crossfit.com/affiliate)

The CrossFit. n.d.b.. *Workout of the Day*. October 31, 2019. [www.crossfit.com/workout](http://www.crossfit.com/workout)

The CrossFit Games. n.d.a. *Sanctionals: Overview*. October 31, 2019.

<https://games.crossfit.com/sanctionals/overview>.

The CrossFit Games. n.d.b. *The Regionals*. October 31, 2019.

<https://games.crossfit.com/regionals/overview>

The Open. 2019. *The CrossFit Open website*. October 31. <https://open.crossfit.com>

Thorisdottir, Annie. 2019. *Instagram Photo*. August 3. [www.instagram.com/p/B0tdKhhnQmY/](http://www.instagram.com/p/B0tdKhhnQmY/).

Thorpe, Holly, Kim Toffoletti, and Toni Bruce. 2017. Sportswomen and Social Media: Bringing Third-Wave Feminism, Postfeminism and Neoliberal Feminism into Conversation. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 41(5), 359–383.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0193723517730808>

Tibana, Ramires, Nuno Sousa, Gabriel Cunha, Jonato Prestes, James Navalta, and Fabricio Voltarelli. 2018. Exertional Rhabdomyolysis after an Extreme Conditioning Competition: A Case Report. *Sports*, 6(2), 40. <https://doi.org/10.3390/sports6020040>

Toffoletti, Kim, Jessica Francombe-Webb, and Holly Thorpe. 2018. Femininities, Sport and Physical Culture in Postfeminist, Neoliberal Times. In *New Sporting Femininities: Embodied politics in postfeminist times*, eds. Kim Toffoletti, Holly Thorpe, and Jessica Francombe-Webb, 1–19. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

- Toffoletti, Kim, and Holly Thorpe. 2018. Female Athletes' Self-Representation on Social Media: A Feminist Analysis of Neoliberal Marketing Strategies in "Economies of Visibility". *Feminism & Psychology*, 28(1), 11–31. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0959353517726705>
- Turtiainen, Riikka. 2019. Discourses of Women's Sport: Pop-Up Comments in Live Sports Streams. Presentation in IAMCR Conference, Madrid, July 7–11, 2019.
- Warkentin, Mike. 2018. Why Men and Women are always Equal in CrossFit. *The CrossFit Journal*. <https://journal.crossfit.com/article/equality-warkentin>
- Washington, Myra S, and Megan Economides. 2016. Strong is the New Sexy: Women, CrossFit, and the Postfeminist Ideal. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 40(2), 143–161. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0193723515615181>
- Weedon, Gavin. 2015. Camaraderie Reincorporated: Tough Mudder and the Extended Distribution of the Social. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 39(6), 431–454. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0193723515570676>
- Whiteman-Sandland, Jessica, Jemma Hawkins, and Debbie Clayton. 2018. The Role of Social Capital and Community Belongingness for Exercise Adherence: An Exploratory Study of the CrossFit gym model. *Journal of Health Psychology*, 23(12), 1545–1556. <https://doi.org/10.1177/135910>

