Training for life

An ethnographic study of the Norwegian CrossFit box

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Illustration image: Untitled illustration of barbell in CrossFit box, by V. Freitas, 2018a. https://unsplash.com/photos/AfEUC-B04kM.

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Abstract

This thesis examines the culture of a couple of Norwegian CrossFit boxes as well as the process of becoming a CrossFitter. The study is based on six months of fieldwork in Eastern Norway. CrossFit is a fitness brand from the US that offers functional fitness training. CrossFit is a controversial form of exercise, as the media have described it both as unhealthy and as an effective form of training. The global movement has also been branded as a health movement and a new sport. In this study, CrossFit presented more similarities to a new type of sport or fitness gym than to a broadly defined health movement. The focus on "functionality" as opposed to "aesthetics" led to fewer gender-based differences compared to other fitness gyms. Informants had seemingly defined the "need for exercise" before starting CrossFit, but their perception of CrossFit as the optimal solution for this need formed through actual participation in classes as well as experiences of the training results.

The choice to practice CrossFit appears to occur through a process that entails transformative and ongoing practice. In explaining why they exercise and practice CrossFit, my informants usually emphasized multiple overlapping reasons, including health, recreation, and community. A central part of daily life at the box is learning to perform in the workout of the day (WOD). By learning and developing skills, my informants acquire knowledge about their bodies. Novices could experience the WOD as a *rite of passage*, whereby one achieves social status and becomes a part of the symbolic community. The WOD has a disciplinary effect and contributes to transform and develop aptitudes and perceptions among participants.

In addition to the community, nutrition and functional training are important parts of the CrossFit brand. Nevertheless, in my fieldwork, the nutrition aspect of the global CrossFit discourse was unclear or refused. The functional training represented a more standardized and disembedded kind of cultural exchange that featured uniform movements, equipment, and workouts. The workouts are usually measurable, and this contribute to a naturalization of the fitness knowledge. Despite receiving an overwhelming amount of information about fitness, my informants emphasized the individual body itself as the most effective way to gain knowledge. In this way, they translated and negotiated CrossFit into the Norwegian context.

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Glossary

Affiliate: gyms connected to the CrossFit organization

Air Squats: squatting with your body without any objects

Barbell: exercise equipment; long bar on which one can attach weights at each end

Box: name of the CrossFit "gym"

Burpees: a movement that begins in a standing position continued by making the chest hit the ground and ending with a jump

Clean and jerk: two lifting movements whereby an object is lifted from the ground to the shoulder level (clean) and then raised above the head (jerk)

Deadlift: lifting an object from the ground to the level of the hips

Dumbbell: exercise equipment; short bar on which one can attach weights at each end

For time: measuring the duration of a workout

Murph: famous CrossFit workout

Muscle-up: a movement that combines an explosive pull up and a dip, ending with the upper body above the bar.

RX'd: "as prescribed"; the given number of repetitions and weight specified for the workout

WOD: workout of the day

Contents

Chapter 1 - Introduction

I entered the training area as the last class was ending. Some participants were lying on the floor in their own sweat and gasping for air, while others exchanged high fives and comments such as “good work!” Still others grimaced in pain as they finished their final squats. The coach shouted, “come on, last round!” Then, a spectator cheered, “now it’s all mental!” The last person eventually dropped to the floor in exhaustion to joyful cheers from the other participants. The coach walked over and gave her a high five before pointing to the whiteboard and saying, “next class.” A new group of 15 people gathered around the whiteboard, which displayed the following message:

Murph

For time:
Run 1.6 km
100 Pull-ups
200 Push-ups
300 Air Squats
Run 1.6 km

“I recently saw that they did it at the CrossFit Games; it seemed brutal,” Emil told me. The coach, Adrian, then announced, “today, it’s Murph.” Caroline and Petter started to laugh. The coach turned around and saw Andreas lying on the floor, gasping for air and blocking the entrance area so that people had to step over him. The coach smiled and continued the introduction. Murph is one of the most famous CrossFit workouts. It was named after the U.S. Navy Lieutenant Michael Murphy, who was killed in Afghanistan on June 28, 2005. The workout is performed at the box each year on May 29. As we started the warm up, Henrik, who was visiting the box for the third time, exclaimed, “this is brutal! What have I signed up for? Had I known we would do Murph today I wouldn’t have come.” I replied, “yes, this is going to be tough.” I had never performed the workout myself and was rather nervous, yet I was also excited to gain insight into the workout and review my performance.

The coach started the clock, and after three beeps, the group of 15 men and women stormed out the door and onto the sidewalk. We quickly spread out to have two to five meters between us. I ran around the block a couple of times before running back into the box to start my pull-ups, push-ups, and squats. I did not know how many repetitions I had completed overall; I counted only 5 pull-ups, 10 push-ups, and 15 air squats, and then I marked the pool next to me with chalk to indicate that I had completed one round. My t-shirt was drenched with sweat, which was also pooling on the floor. I stopped to count my chalk marks; I had made 12 marks on the pole, which represented one round. Therefore, I had eight rounds left to reach a total of 100 pull-ups, 200 push-ups, and 300 air squats. Although I wanted to lie down on the floor, I instead told myself, "just keep your pace – you can do one repetition more." Eventually, I counted 20 marks on the pole and had finished my last round. I tried to catch my breath as I ran toward the door, and I noticed that Petter was right behind me. We ran the last kilometer side by side, and we sprinted the final 100 meters back into the box. We caught a glimpse of the time – 38:55 – before falling onto the floor and gasping for air. "That was hard," I said to Petter while grimacing in pain. "Yes, that was fun," he answered. We both smiled.

What is CrossFit?

CrossFit is a branded training program that was created by Greg Glassman. Glassman began developing the program in the 1990s while working as a personal trainer in Santa Cruz, California. In 2000, he founded the company CrossFit, Inc. Gyms or boxes that are connected to CrossFit are called affiliates, and they currently total over 13,000. To open an affiliate, one must complete a level 1 certification course that lasts two days and pay an annual fee to CrossFit, Inc. for use of the CrossFit brand. Beyond that, affiliates are largely free to determine the training program and gym design. The CrossFit methodology aims to achieve general fitness by avoiding specialization in sports, strength, or endurance and instead becoming competent in as many areas of "fitness" as possible. CrossFit defines "fitness" in a meaningful and measurable way as "work capacity across broad time and modal domains" (CrossFit 2017). This definition has resulted in the CrossFit Games, a competition that is led by Games Director David Castro that searches for the fittest people in the world. Its impressive and entertaining performances have likely contributed significantly to the growth and popularity of CrossFit.

The workouts in CrossFit consist of "constantly varied functional movements performed at high intensity" (CrossFit 2017). *Constantly varied* means avoiding specialization and aim for the ability to perform well on all physical tasks. Thus, practices at the boxes entail a new workout of the day (WOD) each day, of which members are not informed in advance. *Functional movements* reflect "natural" human movements, such as running, lifting, throwing, and jumping, and are transferable to daily life. *High intensity* is viewed as yielding the best results in terms of developing one's fitness. Accordingly, workouts are often timed. CrossFit additionally involves standard workouts such as "the Heroes," which were created to honor people who have died in the military or other services, and "the Girls," which are benchmarks for comparing results and tracking progress.

The following table presents examples of WODs:

Example 1	**Example 2**
"DT" (Hero WOD) For time. Five rounds off: 12 Deadlifts (155/105 lbs) 9 Hang Power Cleans (155/105 lbs) 6 Push Jerks (155/105 lbs)	***"Cindy"*** (Girl WOD) As many repetitions as possible (AMRAP) in 20 minutes: 5 Pull-Ups 10 Push-Ups 15 Air Squats

(In Example 1, the prescribed weight on the left side is intended for men and the right side for women. In Example 2, there is no differentiation.)

Figure 1. From “man fist bump to man laying on ground”, by V. Freitas, 2018b https://unsplash.com/photos/nlZTjUZX2qo.

CrossFit is a relatively new activity and is considered specialized and controversial. According to the blog unbroken.no by the Norwegian CrossFitters Christer Idland and Einar Svindland (2013), Norway’s first affiliate was established in Bodø in 2007 in a martial arts center that also offered CrossFit. It explains that CrossFit initially cooperated with martial arts and Krav Maga gyms and later spread to the military as well. In Norway, it had 13 affiliates in 2012 and 34 in 2013. More recently, the CrossFit affiliate map for April 2018 reported 80 registered affiliates in the country (CrossFit 2018). In 2017, there were a total of 1,129 registered fitness gyms in Norway (Thidemann and Rekdal 2017). Based on articles from various CrossFit boxes, the size of Norwegian affiliates seems to vary from around 100 members at the smallest boxes to approximately 600 at the largest ones (Karlsen 2014, Stenbro 2016, Kristiansen 2017, Mosnes-Holmen 2017, Kristiansen 2018).

CrossFit has earned a mixed reputation in the Norwegian media. On the one hand, it is often described as an unhealthy and dangerous form of exercise, and it has prompted Norwegian

newspaper headlines such as “Fire personer ble syke av å trene CrossFit på Spenst i Tønsberg. Nå legges tilbudet ned” (Richvoldsen 2015) and “Trener seg syke med CrossFit” (Sandmo og Karlsen 2015). These headlines state that people have become sick from CrossFit training and that some gyms have consequently stopped offering it. Rhabdomyolysis, a disease due to acute destruction of large amounts of muscle cells, has been especially linked to CrossFit. On the other hand, CrossFit has also been presented as effective training that produces extremely fit people. Moreover, it has been promoted by Norwegian celebrities such as Lene Alexandra Øien (Svendsby 2011) and the downhill skier Henrik Kristoffersen (Bentsen 2017). Cross-country skiers such as Petter Northug (Petter Northug jr. 2017) and Martin Johnsrud Sundby (Lersveen 2016) have even stated that they felt out of shape and far below the physical level of CrossFit participants. These perspectives have contributed to a reputation of CrossFit as hardcore training for highly fit people. While CrossFit may be controversial in the media, it is not alone in offering functional fitness classes. For instance, Norway’s largest fitness chain, SATS ELEXIA, offers such training classes as well as functional areas in its gyms. Furthermore, CrossFit Games mission to find the best athlete across different physical challenges is also found in popular Norwegian television shows such as *Mesternes mester*, *Best av de beste*, and *Råskap*, which all feature famous Norwegian athletes from different sports who are tested in a variety of physical elements to find the “truly” best athlete.

Topic and questions

Main inquiries of this thesis are how my informants became involved at the CrossFit box and the processes of becoming a Norwegian CrossFitter. Thus, the research considers why people choose to practice CrossFit and the construction of meaning. I compare motivations to exercise and developments in CrossFit to parts of the wider fitness culture. Practicing and developing techniques and improving physical and mental capacities are central aspects of everyday life at the CrossFit box. Based on my first-hand experience of apprenticeship, I explore this culture by identifying and examining the important learning processes of becoming a CrossFitter. Furthermore, I investigate how the Norwegian CrossFit box were shaped by the global CrossFit brand and how the fitness program affected my informants.

Previous research

Ethnographic studies of CrossFit are limited. However, studies of Norwegian fitness gyms have addressed several subjects. For his doctoral thesis at Idrettshøyskolen, Bjørn Barland (1997) conducted fieldwork among Norwegian bodybuilders and examined their use of steroids, which he has ultimately explained as a search for identity through building the body and a key part of esoteric knowledge in the community. Barland has also analyzed the bodybuilder competition as a *rite of passage* whereby his informants acquired the social status of a "real" bodybuilder (1997:183). He has further described the competition as a modern ritual in which the bodybuilders gathered around fundamental values of growth and cumulative expansion (1997:187). In addition, Gunn Engelsrud (2004) has illustrated an ambivalent experience of wellbeing (trivsel) at the fitness gym. Kari Steen-Johnsen (2007) has researched the introduction of commercial fitness by investigating the translation of Sport Activity Training Centre (SATS) and ELIXIA into the Norwegian context. The study revealed that the introduction of new ideas was dependent on existing institutions, and the entrepreneurs had a major role in translating the global fitness concept into the local context.

In the Swedish context, Christina Hedblom has addressed gym and fitness culture in her doctoral thesis from Stockholm University (2009). Her findings highlight the plurality of reasons for exercising and how "inner" reasons, such as positive feelings, are more acceptable than "outer" reasons, such as an attractive appearance. The study also suggests that movements are taught and learned from a number of sources. Formal and informal gym instructors as well as gym machines are critical for the learning of movements at the gym. Furthermore, she has described the critical perspectives of informants regarding the science behind fitness. Specifically, they often accepted or rejected a scientific claim based on their trust in the mediating sources or the body's response in terms of "feeling right" or generating results.

Based on fieldwork in Italy and England, Roberta Sassatelli (2010 and 2015) has described fitness culture and the commercialization of discipline and fun. She has highlighted at least three general features of fitness gyms. The first is the notion of *fitness*, which can be defined in ordinary language as:

> the ability to perform physical work satisfactory… fitness refers to both *training* in the gym (and the different exercise techniques which are described as keep-fit devices) and the *physical condition* which such training produces (such as energy, agility, slenderness and tone which define a fit body). (2010:22)

The second feature of fitness gyms is the provision of *structured variety* in the form of "organised, ever-changing but allegedly exhaustive supply of marginally different bodywork techniques" (2015:238). Exercising at *fitness gyms* "is an increasingly hybrid endeavour, mixing Eastern and Western techniques. It draws from a truly global reservoir of body techniques and emotional codes that are consequently fast-changing" (Sassatelli 2015:241). As the third feature, "fitness gyms reframe *discipline as fun*… despite the fact that exercise demands concentration and causes tiredness, the focus is on leisure and enjoyment rather than physical effort" (2010:24).

Alan Klein (1993) has studied bodybuilders and masculinity in the US. He has described bodybuilding as a "subculture of hyperbole" with individuals who are "compensating for self-perceived weaknesses" (1993:3-4). In Japan, Laura Spielvogel (2003) has examined the shaping and construction of the female body through aerobics at fitness clubs. In addition, Greg Downey (2005) has performed a phenomenological analysis of Capoeira in Brazil. Through his apprenticeship, he studied the learning of Capoeira and has demonstrated how the bodily training can affect participants' perceptions and social interactions within Capoeira as well as in daily life.

Theoretical approaches and terms

My informants described learning CrossFit as a never-ending process; there were always new insights to learn. The phenomenological approach of Downey's (2005:19-20) study of Capoeira inspired me to explore the effect of CrossFit training on my informants as well as how their bodies were changed in the process. Based on insights from Csordas and Ingold, Downey has asserted that it is not enough to merely describe "how ideals or values are 'written' on people's bodies" (2005:208). Bodies change over the life span, and these changes

involve “processes of growth and decay, and… as it does so particular skills, habits, capacities and strengths, as well as debilities and weaknesses, are enfolded into its very constitution-in its neurology, musculature, even its anatomy” (Ingold 1998:26). Sitting inactive at a desk all day also affects a person’s physiology. Since people evolve over time in relation to their behavior and environment, it is “impossible to distinguish what is ‘biological’ from what is ‘cultural’ in human training” (Downey 2005:209). According to Tim Ingold, “[c]ultural differences, in short, *are* biological” (1998:28), and “biological processes unfold developmentally and are not genetically preprogrammed” (Downey 2005:209).

Mauss (2004:65) has noted that basic tasks, such as swimming, walking, running, and eating, vary across cultures. He has introduced the concept of *techniques of the body*, which he has defined as “ways in which from society to society men know how to use their bodies” (1979:97). *Body techniques* that might feel natural to one person do not necessarily feel natural to others. In expanding on Mauss, the sociologist Nick Crossley has established the term *reflexive body techniques* to refer to “those body techniques whose primary purpose is to work back upon the body as to modify, maintain or thematise it in some way” (Crossley 2005:9). In the CrossFit box, participants are exposed to diverse *techniques of the body* that are important to learn in order to become a competent CrossFitter. My informants learned these techniques through detailed coaching and personal experimentation. Later in this paper, I describe how my body changed after I started CrossFit and elaborate on how the training shaped my informants. I further compare these insights to other body practices to illustrate different approaches to body techniques and learning in fitness culture.

Although CrossFit has spread around the world, it is still most popular in North America, where it was created and has accumulated over 7,200 registered affiliates. However, Europe has around 3,500 affiliates, South America has 1,500, Oceania has 700, Asia has 600, and Africa has almost 200, mainly in the south (CrossFit 2018). Thus, I consider it to be a global movement. Thomas Hylland Eriksen (2014) has argued that viewing globalization processes as homogenization or as a threat to local identity is often simplistic or misleading. Rather, globalization is a dual process, as “[i]t simultaneously leads to homogenization and new forms of diversity, and its large-scale processes are recontextualized and embedded in pre-existing local realities and practices” (Eriksen 2014:153). Tsing (2002:352) has urged critical

discussion of the term "globalization" through three means. First, anthropologists should stop distinguishing between "global" forces and "local" places, as such a distinction obscures the simultaneously local and global nature of all cultural processes. Second, new developments should be examined without assuming either their universal extension or particular adaptation. Third, globalism should be examined as an "interconnected, but not homogeneous, set of projects – with their distinctive cultural commitments and their powerful but limited presence in the world" (2002:353). In this thesis, I use the global and the local as *concept-metaphors*: "domain terms that orient us towards areas of shared exchange… not to resolve ambiguity, but to maintain it. Their purpose is to maintain a tension between pretentious universal claims and particular contexts and specifics" (Moore 2004:73-74). I analyze this tension with its intersections and contradictions between the global CrossFit discourse and the local CrossFit boxes where I conducted my fieldwork. When I discuss the "global CrossFit brand," I refer to the specific promotion of the brand by CrossFit, Inc. and the CrossFit Games. In close relation to this term is the "global CrossFit discourse," but I use this term to include different trends or developments that are not necessarily directly linked to the CrossFit brand as it is promoted by the company. My informants' perceptions of the "global CrossFit community" include the global discourse.

CrossFit is branded as a global health movement that combats chronic diseases and sedentary lifestyles as well as a new sport – "the sport of fitness" – that can distinguish the fittest individuals in the world. In this way, the CrossFit brand can be viewed as what Anthony Wallace have termed a *revitalization movement*: "a deliberate, organized, conscious effort by members of a society to construct a more satisfying culture" (Wallace 1956:265). Tord Larsen has referred to the generation of new categories and identities as processes of *entification*, whereby "something inchoate congeals into a thing (Latin: ens), a unit, a category with discernible boundaries" (2010:155). He has cited the example of "the night eater" as a habit which was redefined as a new kind of illness, thereby establishing "a new category or class of people who thereafter became possible addresses of appeals, and who acquired a new 'identity' in addition to the ones they had before" (2010:154). One can consider the CrossFit movement to be a revitalization movement that has entified a new standard and definition for human fitness. Following Austin's theory of performatives, Larsen (2010:165) has framed branding as *performative* in the same way that Judith Butler has described gender as performative: "in the sense that they establish realities which did not pre-exist the associative

work needed to brand a commodity, a nation, an ethnic group, an artist." When the CrossFit, Inc. describes itself as a healthy, supportive community that trains people for any challenge, it generates realities in this performative sense.

In exploring CrossFit as a global movement, I viewed it as a part of *disembedding* processes, a subcategory of *entification* in Larsen's scheme (2010:167). *Disembedding* entails moving "from a concrete, tangible, local context to an abstract or virtual state" (Eriksen 2014:19), which enables comparison across time and space. Another central part of globalization is *standardization*, or "the imposition of shared standards, which render events and objects comparable and conversion of translation possible" (Eriksen 2014:73). The CrossFit methodology centers on measuring fitness in concrete terms. With its "benchmark workouts" and the CrossFit Open competition, the CrossFit brand contributes to the disembedding and standardization of "human fitness" or "health." It involves a standardization of movements, equipment, and time limits and thus becomes measurable regardless of geographical location.

I situate CrossFit in the context of a broader global fitness trend. I employ the term *fitness culture* as described by Roberta Sassatelli to refer to the "constellation of hybrid, shifting and rather diverse phenomena which are growing across the world" (2010:6). It extends beyond the gym to include informal practices such as jogging, swimming, and exercising at home. However, the fitness gym can still be considered the core of fitness culture in view of its professionalization of trainers, development of equipment, and cultural status (Sassatelli 2010:2). My concept of *fitness culture* also encompasses the CrossFit box. When I mention a *fitness gym,* I am usually referring to a "treningssenter" in Norwegian, which is a place that offers exercising alternatives such as weightlifting areas, machine areas, group training, or other activities. In Western fitness culture, "fitness" has a hegemonic role as a "centripetal force of attraction of a variety of physical activities" (Sassatelli 2010:34). Steen-Johnsen and Engelsrud (2002:256) have described fitness as activities that are geared toward working the body by using machines or instructor-led classes. The specific meaning of fitness in CrossFit is "work capacity across broad time and modal domains" (CrossFit 2017). When I use *fitness* alone, I apply CrossFit's own definition; however, when I use *fitness culture* or *fitness gyms,* I invoke the broader use of the term.

I perceive CrossFit to be part of the growth in self-organizing and commercial training (Breivik 2013:248). Breivik has linked this growth to the rise in individual self-construction that Giddens has discussed. Giddens (1991:2) has described the modern human as reflective; it relates to and constructs itself. Consequently, for the modern human, "[l]ifestyle choice is increasingly important in the constitution of self-identity and daily activity. Reflexively organised life-planning, which normally presumes consideration of risk as filtered through contact with expert knowledge, becomes a central feature of the structuring of self-identity" (Giddens 1991:5). Sassatelli has argued that *fitness culture* is predicated on not only "body projects," as Giddens (1991) has proposed, "but also natural ones; projects that brings out one's true 'nature'" (2010:169). Sassatelli has recounted narratives of the self in fitness, which she has conceived as a contradictory space at three levels:

> with the kind of urban living and desk-bound jobs along which the fitness gyms have developed, with the broader area of commercially sustained body maintenance and modification techniques, and with the very dualistic notion that we need to be doing something just for our otherwise neglected bodies. (2010:169)

I encountered similar narratives among my informants, all of whom viewed an active and healthy lifestyle as positive and, often, as a natural result of the training. CrossFit can therefore be interpreted as a *natural body project* for "enhancing the self without compromising his or her 'authenticity'" (Sassatelli 2010:169).

The CrossFit discourse is highly influenced by perspectives that Fuggeli and Ingstad (2009:30) have described as modern ideas about the free individual with faith in reason and progress. Giddens has cited modernity in a general sense to refer to "the institutions and modes of behaviour established first of all in post-feudal Europe, but which in the twentieth century increasingly have become world-historical in their impact" (1991:14). James Ferguson (2006) has emphasized many of the challenges with using the term "modernity." For example, when defined and applied as an analytic term, it is vague and confusing. He has employed the term as "a native category shared by an enormously heterogeneous population of natives" (2006:177). Thus, modernity "remains the center of a powerful 'discourse of identity' (as Mary Louise Pratt [2002] has termed it) and a keyword that anchors a host of discussions in and out of the academy about an emerging global social order" (2006:177). In

this paper, I engage with modernity not as an analytic category but to describe ideas that my informants expressed.

The production of knowledge and discovery of truths about fitness are central elements of becoming a CrossFitter. Larsen (2010) has highlighted the "middlemen" as one of the most notable characteristics of the modern economy. When society is increasingly divided into expert systems, it becomes necessary to translate between them. He has mentioned coaches who teach "life skills" as an example: "we have outsourced every ounce of our body and soul to therapists, personal trainers and coaches. That is, we have entified every aspect of ourselves" (2010:171). I explore the relationship between CrossFit, as an expert system, and my informants. Finding the "right" or "best" way to exercise is a primary concern for fitness participants; according to Sassatelli, "fitness practices are predicated on the idea that fitness knowledge is somehow *absolute*" (2010:148). Knowledge about exercising is often viewed as important and useful in daily life to provide a nearly objective measurement of the body in terms of health and fitness. In reference to Foucault, Sassatelli has posited that it "amounts to a 'claim to truth'…on the body, which indexes the truth of the body to keep-fit training" (2010:148). Sassatelli has explained that naturalization of fitness knowledge occurs "in the sense that what is *conditioned* and *conditional* knowledge becomes *unconditional*" (2010:148). She has presented the example of the construction of a training program, through which knowledge of various exercise alternatives at the gym becomes knowledge of the optimal way to train for an individual participant. Hedblom has found that, "sometimes the body itself is used as a guide for doubt or acceptance of a theory, depending on whether the movement feels right or generates results. In this way acceptance or doubt can in fact become a solid part of our body" (2009:184). I consider how fitness knowledge has been naturalized among my informants and demonstrate how *the body itself* became a crucial guide in the assessment of this knowledge.

Parts of the literature on rituals have inspired my investigation of the processes of becoming a CrossFitter and the culture of the CrossFit box. Rituals have received extensive discussion among anthropologists (De Coppet 1992:2). They have often been considered a religious practice; however, anthropological analyses of rituals have also focused on secular rituals, such as the Balinese cockfight in the research of Geertz. The similarities between large rock concerts and religious rituals are clear, but the most important rituals in recent time are

probably in the realm of sports (Eriksen 2010:220). Barland (1997:176) has explored bodybuilder competitions as a secular ritual, a *rite of passage*, and an expression of a modern ritual. Talal Asad has proposed that a ritual is now "a type of routine behaviour that symbolizes or express something and, as such, relates differentially to individual consciousness and social organization" (1993:57). Thus, the "meaning" that a ritual symbol have is not necessarily shared by the people who use the symbol. Bowie has argued that different interpretations of symbolic meaning should "alert the anthropologist to the possibility that the action itself, rather than any symbolic meaning, may be the point for participants" (2006:143). Rituals can have many functions "both at the level of the individual and for groups or societies. They can channel and express emotions, guide and reinforce forms of behaviours, support or subvert the status quo, bring about change, or restore harmony and balance" (Bowie 2006:138). By reviewing various definitions of a ritual, Bowie has indicated that a ritual is not "a universal, cross-cultural phenomenon, but a particular way of looking at and organizing the world that tells us as much about the anthropologist, and his or her frame of reference, as the people and behaviour being studied" (2006:138).

My study interprets the WOD as a *rite of passage* for novices. *Rites of passage* "mark the transition from one stage of life, season, or event to another. Everyone participates in rites of passage, and all societies mark them in various ways" (Bowie 2006:147). Arnold van Gennep's use of the term has included "seasonal festivals, territorial rituals, sacrifice, pilgrimage, and indeed any behaviour, religious or secular, that displayed the same basic threefold pattern of separation, transition and incorporation" (Bowie 2006:147). I view the locker room as the first, pre-liminal stage; here, ordinary clothes are removed and replaced with training clothes. The second, liminal stage is the actual WOD. In this stage, one's social position in ordinary life is irrelevant; only the immediate ability of one's body is significant. It is anti-structural and betwixt-and-between. After the workout, one enters the third, post-liminal stage, whereby participants reintegrate into the community. To a novice, performing and participating in the WOD is crucial for the social transition into community belonging.

The WOD in CrossFit is an attempt to standardize the liminal phase by constantly introducing new workouts that are unknown to members. Testing members each day can maintain and enhance the culture. In interpreting the work of Marcel Mauss and the concept of *habitus*, Asad has suggested that "[o]ne might say that Mauss was attempting to define an

anthropology of practical reason – not in the Kantian sense of universalizable ethical rules, but in that of historically constituted practical knowledge, which articulates an individual's learned capacities" (1993:76). Anthropological and psychological research has evidenced that experiences of pain vary depending on the tradition of body training and the pain history of the individual body:

> Thus, from Mauss's perspective, an experience of the body becomes a moment in an experienced (taught) body. As in the case of medieval monastic programs, discourse and gestures are viewed as part of the social process of learning to develop aptitudes, not as orderly symbols that stand in an objective world in contrast to contingent feelings and experiences that inhabit a separate subjective one. (Asad 1993:77)

Asad (1993:84) has directed less attention to the Christian ritual *and* power than to the power *of* the ritual. In interpreting Gerholm, David Parkin has asserted that "rituals, however they are defined, are not just expressive of abstract ideas but do things, have effects on the world, and are work that is carried out – that they are indeed performances" (1992:14). He has further borrowed Lewis' concept of "ruling" in theorizing that "even when neither observers nor participants can agree on, understand, or even perceive ritual regulations, they are united by a sense of the occasion as being in some way rule-governed and as necessarily so in order to be complete, efficacious, and proper" (1992:15). Parkin has argued that people enter *tangled states* through ritual, which entail:

> spatial and bodily states of confusion, admixture, and complexity - which they then seek to disentangle. Through such disentanglement, people reimpose order on themselves and on the parts and places that make them up. These tangled states are not, I imagine, calculated in advance. Rather they arise when participants interfere in each other's interpretations of the ritual "ruling." (1992:23)

The ritual elements of the WOD and the CrossFit Open competition are critical in controlling, shaping, enhancing, and stabilizing the culture of CrossFit. CrossFit training purposely tries to create a liminal phase in its workouts. Following Asad, I analyze the WOD as a ritual that

involves physical pain, and I explore how the transformation can "enable discipline to take effect in different ways" (1993:83).

Bourdieu has focused on the theory of practice and developed Mauss's notion of *habitus*: "The structures constitutive of a particular type of environment… produce *habitus*, systems of durable, transposable *dispositions*" (1977:72) or "the durably installed generative principle of regulated improvisations" (1977:78). Downey has noted that theorists of "practice" have rarely questioned "what happens to the body physically or what a person's subjective experience might be, during habitual action" (2005:207). In opposition to Bourdieu's description of *habitus* as a small set of principles that underlie a variety of activities, Downey has emphasized the lack of overarching unity in Capoeira: "Instead of a unified set of simplified principles, capoeira is a loose assembly of multiple skills, diverse postures, and a few principles, incompletely realised and inconsistently applied" (2005:207). Similar to Downey's point, in my study of CrossFit, there were no shortcuts to learn all the actions and abilities. Nevertheless, many of my informants developed a shared *habitus* in their approach to the training. Atkinson has connected habitus to the shared motivation and meaning among fell runners:

> Fell runners who come to relish intense physical and cognitive agony in the sport indeed share a socially learned personality structure, or habitus (Bourdieu, 1984; Elias, 2002), that configures instances of voluntary suffering in athletic as exciting and personally significant. (2016:101)

In my fieldwork, the liminal phase in the WOD and the following experience of suffering were key building blocks of the "community." Turner has employed the term *communitas* to refer to the egalitarian human bonding that is typical in the liminal phase:

> Communitas breaks in through the interstices of structure, in liminality; at the edges of structure, in marginality; and from beneath structure, in inferiority. It is almost everywhere held to be sacred or "holy," possibly because it transgresses or dissolves the norms that govern structured and institutionalized relationships and is accompanied by experiences of unprecedented potency. (Turner 1991:128)

The liminal phase of the WOD contains pain and suffering. These feelings are difficult to fully convey, yet they are shared and understandable human experiences with which we can identify (Siv-Ellen Kraft 2004:304). According to Atkinson, the group bonding that results from athletic suffering forms a *pain community*: "Within a mutually identified community of participants, the ability to withstand and relish in athletic suffering is embraced as a form of group bonding" (2016:101). The CrossFit brand stresses "community" as a central element of the training. I also examine the "community" in CrossFit as a *symbolic construction* as introduced by Anthony P. Cohen. This symbolic construction necessitates not that people uniformly interpret the world but that they use the same symbols:

> members make, or believe they make, a similar sense of things either generally or with respect to specific and significant interests, and, further, that they think that that sense may differ from one made elsewhere. The reality of community in people's experience thus inheres in their attachment or commitment to a common body of symbols. (Cohen 1989:16)

Thus, I examine how my informants experienced and constructed the branded "community" in CrossFit.

Field and method

My fieldwork was conducted at two CrossFit boxes in larger cities in Eastern Norway. The size of the boxes varied from 100 to over 400 members. I performed my fieldwork from January to June of 2017. I participated in the WODs and felt their effects on my body; this experience was crucial to obtain insight to the CrossFit box and enhance my understanding of informants' experiences of the practice. During my fieldwork, many classes were held throughout the day. The first was a morning class, where people often trained before work. There was then a mid-day class, which was typically comprised of students and people who had a day off or worked in the evening. Later, after the typical work day, a class was held every hour until closing time. The classes each lasted for one hour and consisted of a warm up, technique training, and the WOD. When people entered the box, they would meet others who had just finished the previous class, and they would often make casual conversation and share their experience with the session.

I visited the boxes an average of five times a week. In addition to the classes, I usually stayed at the gym for about an hour to talk with people, stretch, or practice techniques. I also visited the box twice a day at times. I was able to both participate in and observe the classes. In February of 2017, I also engaged in the CrossFit Open competition at the box. Throughout my fieldwork, I read news, listened to podcasts, and watched movies about CrossFit. I obtained formal access to the CrossFit boxes and all of their classes through the management of the boxes. In addition, I was dependent on informal access to my informants, which I acquired by participating in daily trainings and building rapport.

My role

Fitness ethnographers are often considered "insider" ethnographers, and "the fitness culture appears to be of most interest to its practitioners" (Markula 2016:42). Although I have exercised regularly for a long time and have participated in different sports, I had not engaged in the CrossFit variety of exercises before this research. Consequently, I had many techniques and movements to learn. In opposition to the role of an *expert participant* that Spielvogel (2003:17) has outlined, I usually assumed the role of a *novice* (Hagen and Skorpen 2016:56) in wanting to learn CrossFit. This role has been highly useful to gain insight into the learning processes of CrossFit. It has also revealed aspects that are taken for granted in the CrossFit community, since I did not have any experience from before. Because of the sizeable flow of people through the boxes, the number of new gym members, and the relatively short time span that people use the box, I maintained a largely anonymous role in my fieldwork. I became acquainted with several new people at the box and was not conspicuous in this way. The coaches were aware of my position, but I had to explain my project repeatedly to regular members on several occasions. Since new people frequently came to try CrossFit, I also encountered the role of a more experienced participant at the box. Because I had become familiar with typical operations, I could explain expectations and interpret the notes on the whiteboard. I also answered general questions about CrossFit and the environment at the gym, which offered useful data about the perceptions and experiences of novices in CrossFit.

Informants

Throughout the project, I engaged with around 30 main informants on a regular basis. However, I was in contact with many more people. I conducted 12 in-depth interviews during this fieldwork, which yielded valuable data through both extensive conversations and brief reflections. To maintain the privacy of informants, I have chosen to anonymize the location of the CrossFit boxes that I have visited. I have also changed the name, age, and background of each informant. The characters I mention in this thesis have, when necessary, been divided between or constructed from multiple people to maintain anonymity. Nevertheless, I have preserved the relevant information and context to support my key points.

I conducted interviews with 10 men and two women who were coaches, experienced members, and novices. Since the coaches at the boxes where I performed my fieldwork were overwhelmingly male, I have interviewed mostly male coaches. My interviews with regular members were also held predominantly with men, but this disproportionality was not due to a lack of women at the gym. Because of the locker room and team workouts, it was easier to gain access to men, and I chose to interview men with whom I naturally developed a relationship. Fitness practices are "in many ways, gendered and the insider fitness ethnographer tend to examine activities aligned with their gender" (Markula 2016:39). Still, I also had long and fruitful conversations with women at the box that provided invaluable data for this thesis. Since it was easier to build trust and talk with the coaches whom I interacted with often at the gym than with regular members whom I encountered more sporadically, it took longer to develop a relationship with the latter.

In Norway, CrossFit is an expensive form of exercise in comparison to the monthly fee of other fitness alternatives. Membership costs around 1,000 Norwegian Kroner a month, which is two or three times the price of some larger fitness chains in Norway. However, as certain informants noted, considering the price of equipment, clothes, and personal trainers in other activities, CrossFit is not particularly expensive. Still, like other leisure activities in Norway, it requires purchasing capital to participate. My informants varied in terms of their background; I spoke with students, policemen, nurses, an electrician, a carpenter, personal trainers, an economist, and people who worked in marketing, banking, computer, and

technology fields. Nevertheless, they were all interested in fitness and wanted to maintain or achieve a state of fitness.

In Norway, CrossFit participants seems largely in the age range of 20 to 50 years old (Mosnes-Holmen 2018). In my fieldwork, the age group of 20 to 40 years old was particularly overrepresented. CrossFit is equally popular among women and men. I experienced equal gender participation at the boxes, and this seems consistent with other CrossFit boxes. Some exceptions are CrossFit Tromsø (Stenbro 2016) and Grenland CrossFit (Kristiansen 2018), which have reported an overrepresentation of women. The CrossFit Open competition, which featured more than 380,000 participants globally in 2017, involved 2,863 Norwegian participants with an even gender balance. From 2015 to 2018, participation in the CrossFit Open competition has almost tripled in Norway. While the registration for men has more than doubled, that for women has more than tripled and surpassed the number of registered men overall in 2018 (see Table 1).

Table 1: Registered Norwegian participants in the CrossFit Open competition (CrossFit Games 2017)

Year:	Men:	Women:	Overall:
2015	749 (only RX'd)	494 (only RX'd)	1,243
2016	1,018 (only RX'd)	779 (only RX'd)	1,797
2017	1,457 (1361 RX'd and 96 scaled)	1,406 (1191 RX'd and 215 scaled)	2,863
2018	1,614 (1522 RX'd and 92 scaled)	1,702 (1492 RX'd and 210 scaled)	3,316

(RX'd = doing the competition as prescribed, scaled = doing a version of the competition with easier load and movements. Before 2015, it was not possible to separate between countries. Before 2017, it was not possible to differentiate between RX'd and scaled.)

Methodological strategies

My fieldwork employed participant observation (Spradley 1980) as a central research strategy in line with the anthropological tradition. Since my field was in a modern city, it was characterized by a large flow of people who were moving between work, school, and training. This mobility posed challenges in building trust with informants during the six months of fieldwork. Participation in the daily exercises and the struggles at the box were essential to gain access to informants and understand the experience of practicing CrossFit. Participating in the workouts was challenging and demanded my full attention; I could not fake my participation in a workout. My own experiences and feelings in the learning process have been instrumental in producing the ethnographic knowledge. I have tried to use personal data only when it needed to clarify "the processes and circumstances under which my ethnographic knowledge was produced and informed" (McLean 2008:282).

I have also utilized apprenticeship as a research method (Downey 2005:53). Beyond learning the skills, I have also gained insight into the process of learning and "how important physical education might be to shaping perceptions and experience" (2005:203). Although we cannot be certain how a person feels, "we can observe what a physical discipline does to a body, ask a practitioner how it feels, and try to triangulate between these observations to envisage the means through which" (2005:2010) participants perceive. Feeling the advantages and disadvantages of the training on my body clearly influenced my interactions with informants, as it created shared experiences and a sense of common understanding. A large part of my data was gathered from simply hanging out (Hagen and Skorpen 2016:44-45) at the CrossFit box. Informal conversations before, during, and after the workouts in which members shared thoughts and reflections about the training and CrossFit in general were crucial. I also had the opportunity to observe the people and the physical environment at the box.

I conducted the fieldwork in my own culture, so I have – to a certain extent – studied my own social reality. Thus, I may have taken certain values or cultural knowledge for granted (Wadel 1991:18). I have tried to be conscious of my own behavior and cultural values. I have previously participated in sports, so I have a similar background to many of my informants, and I encountered numerous body- and health-related attitudes that I found familiar. Nonetheless, I have also been subject to a cultural shock in my "own culture" (Hume and Molcock 2004:5), as it was time intensive to learn the "language" of CrossFit and adapt to the

WODs. Expressions such as RX'd, for time, AMRAP, clean and jerk, squat clean, push jerk, power clean, and hang power cleans are necessary to know to participate in the WOD. Clean, squat, and jerk are also movements that participants needed to learn and perform correctly to avoid hurting themselves. Prior to my fieldwork, I had never performed many of these movements; in this way, CrossFit represented a clear change from the norm for me.

Interviews (Spradley 1979) were also a vital research method for my fieldwork. I began interviewing after I had already been engaging in fieldwork for a few months and had developed a certain understanding of the training, this could allow conversations to flow easily with mutual points of reference. The most important and useful aspect of the interview was the formalization of the conversation (Hagen and Skorpen 2016:86). I was able to explore the questions more intensively and provide informants with time to speak. It was not difficult to foster conversation with informants or derive their thoughts about the subjects of my thesis. However, because of interruptions and the environment at the box, interviews were invaluable for accessing informants' uninterrupted reflections of the daily training and my observations. They also offered the opportunity to develop a more detailed vision of how coaches perceive CrossFit and the training methodology.

Limitations

The first limitation of this study is that the information I gathered from my fieldwork has naturally been shaped by my subjective experience. A researcher who was totally unfamiliar with fitness culture and lacked any experience with routine exercise or who had more experience with CrossFit would have different interactions in the field and obtain different data. They might highlight other challenges or advantages in relation to the field. My age may also have informed my priorities. As a man, my gender probably affected my interactions with informants and influenced the information I could obtain in the field. If I were a woman, I would probably have reached a different understanding of women's experiences at the box in terms of, for example, body ideals and functional fitness.

Second, in participant observation, the researcher strives to live as closely to the informants as possible. However, I have had limited access to my informants' lives outside of the box. Joining my informants at school or work was not possible, though it could have enhanced my understanding of the meaning of CrossFit for them. The personal information I received from informants was largely acquired through interviews and conversations in which they could decide which insights to share with me.

Ethical considerations

The body, health, and identity can be highly sensitive subjects. During my fieldwork, I accumulated information about health, life situations, hopes, and dreams. Any doubts regarding the sensitivity of information were discussed with informants (Hagen and Skorpen 2016:184), and this thesis omits any information that informants shared but did not want me to include. Because I participated in a relatively large field, many members were probably not aware of my presence or forgot about my role at the box. Therefore, I took measures to anonymize the field. When informants discussed their personal lives, I tried to make sure that they understood my project and confirmed that they agreed to my use of the information. I also anonymized informants as needed by creating composite people and statements.

Chapter 2 – Reasons for exercising

This chapter examines the motivations of informants to practice CrossFit and exercise. I first explore descriptions of Western *fitness culture* and Norwegian population surveys regarding why people exercise to compare to the CrossFit box. To this end, I discuss the methods of investigating this question and review multiple explanations. Second, I separate the global CrossFit discourse into a health discourse and a sports discourse. Then, I describe the narratives of my informants with respect to their choice to practice in CrossFit and the different emphases on *health* and *performance*. I assess how the notion of "functionality" affects motivations to exercise and compare motivations, gender differences, and the "need for exercise" to the context of other fitness gyms.

Motivations to exercise

In "Healthy cities and instrumental leisure: the paradox of fitness gyms as urban phenomena," Sassatelli (2015) has highlighted how fitness fans often describe fitness gyms as a place that creates a *balance* "against the ills of modern, urban life" (2015:243). Such perspective views desk-bound jobs and sedentary lifestyles as removing the body from the healthy lifestyle of the countryside or the active way of life of our ancestors. Furthermore, fitness training is assigned a *benchmarking function*, such that "the body knowledge acquired in the gym helps define body priorities, and bodywork becomes a 'benchmark' for managing other body practices (food, rest, sex, etc.)" (2015:242). It becomes fundamental for a healthy life and to counteract the effects of negative habits. People are asked to rely on more than simply choice in their motivations to exercise, as:

> consumer choice is evoked in the selection of the particular gym (or preferred type of bodywork) but keep-fit exercise is presented as more than choice. It is presented as a "regime of life" (Foucault 1984) modelled on the notion of "diet" as a balancing practise that involves discipline against the backdrop of a normative, detailed and precise notion of the natural body (Goldstein 1992). (Sassatelli 2015:244)

According to Sassatelli, fitness fans are aware of the critique of fitness culture as "false" or "superficial," and they therefore feel compelled to justify themselves: "it is something necessary that 'should be a part of our everyday lives, because we are naturally designed to be active'" (2015:244).

Furthermore, Sassatelli (2010) has revealed a shift in focus in fitness culture from aesthetics to functional movement. The ideal is "a combination of exercises that burn calories, and build vascular resistance with ones that aim at strength and muscular resistance and others that provide for co-ordination, flexibility and agility" (2010:167). The aim is not the removal of aesthetics but rather a new form of aesthetics – the *aesthetic of active functionality*, according to Sassatelli, wherein the body shall be "not big, but strong. Rather than swollen, muscles must be strengthened, firmed and elongated" (2010:165). The reasons for training then seem to be based on a gender-neutral notion of functionality, which I explore more closely at the end of this chapter. Similar descriptions of reasons for exercising can be found in articles and videos about CrossFit. CrossFit centers on counterbalancing the unhealthy modern lifestyle and utilizing exercise as a benchmark for all aspects of life on the basis of the notion of functionality. These values have seemingly become integral to the narrative of exercise in the wider *fitness culture*.

The Norwegian population surveys by Bakken Ulseth (2002) and Gunnar Breivik (2013) have presented many motivations for exercising. Ulseth has identified seven reasons, namely fitness (fysisk form), recreation (mentalt overskudd), social interaction (sosialt samvaer), joy of exercising (glede), looks and body (utseende og kropp), expressiveness (ekspressitivitet) and performance (ytelse og prestasjon) (translated by Hedblom 2009:58). Breivik (2013:107) has employed data from Norsk Monitor, which surveyed the Norwegian public from 1989 to 2011 in regard to 12 reasons for exercising. The survey used different wording, but with the exception of *expressiveness,* it identified approximately the same reasoning. Fitness and recreation were merged, and they added preventing health problems (forebyggende helseplager), stress relief/relaxation (avstressing/avkobling), improved self-esteem (Bedre selvtillit), maintaining a low weight (Holde vekten nede), feeling of obligation (Syns jeg bør), build up after illness (bygge opp etter sykdom), and excitement/challenge (spenning/utfordring). The 12 reasons in these surveys were also found among my informants,

but it would be problematic, or at least imperfect, to identify just one category as "the reason for exercising."

In anthropological research, long and demanding fieldwork is often viewed as the ideal approach to understand the subjects of study. Using vast surveys to ask people why they exercise does not necessarily provide an accurate depiction of reality. However, it does offer an indication of with which categories people identify or would like to be identified as well as the norms that exist with regard to exercise motivations. Hedblom has claimed that it is easy to apply analytic norms when discussing reasons for activity, but reasons for activity are, "rather than merely bound to a specific reason such as body ideals" (2009:60), multifactorial, such as a desire to improve one's health, have fun, and feel good. In commenting on Ulseth's study, which has revealed a difference between the number of women versus men who reported caring about appearances, Hedblom (2009:60) has highlighted that appearances were not mentioned as the most significant aspect by either gender. She has stressed that many respondents who assigned a high importance rating to *looks and body* were single, which suggests an influence of factors besides gender. Notably, social norms may have affected the responses of participants in terms of motivations to exercise, as "their answers [were] made with a knowledge of social norms, how a gym-goer is supposed to answer someone asking about exercise and the body" (Hedblom 2009:60). Hedblom (2009:75) has emphasized the need for a critical perspective:

> in order not to pre-empt the analysis or cement ideas, we need to take into consideration the interrelation between the preconceived critical research perspectives and the informants' knowledge and use of critical demystifying perspectives when explaining their own behaviour and that of others. (2009:85)

In the Swedish fitness gym, people were aware that they should concentrate on the "inside" – "that is feeling good, health, rehabilitation and nutrition, instead of the 'outside', body appearance and aesthetics" (Hedblom 2009:60). Hedblom has differentiated responses regarding reasons for exercising at Swedish gyms into three categories, namely *mechanical, aesthetic,* and *mixed form.* Mechanical reasons for exercising frame the body as a utility tool and aim to make it function as required. In contrast, aesthetic reasons concern the use of exercise to impart a certain appearance to the body. Most of the Swedish gym-goers in

Hedblom's study reported a mix of both mechanical and aesthetic, expressing multifactorial reasons for visiting the gym.

As noted, CrossFit has been subject to controversy in the media. Most of my informants were aware of this debate, and many strengthens the emphasis on fun and health in their description of the practice. When asked how they experienced people's views of CrossFit, respondents often mentioned that people were skeptical:

> Petter: A lot of weird beliefs – it's actually the whole spectrum. Some people look at me without saying anything, just shaking their head wondering what I'm doing. Other people again think it's cool. But I think it's a large skepticism in general.
>
> David: People are like "oh, you have become one of those." It's a lot of prejudices against CrossFit. My mother-in-law believes it's dangerous, and people believe you have to be totally crazy to do it. Most people also believe it's good exercise but that you need to be a little mad to do it. Which I'm not. (laughing)

Such a feeling of engaging in a form of exercise that others frequently view as crazy or unhealthy is likely to have influenced the rationale of informants regarding their participation in training. However, training alongside my informants for six months offered insight into the diversity of reasons for exercising. The justifications for CrossFit training among my informants are also most accurately described as multifactorial, but I highlight certain differences in reasoning and motivation.

Health and sports discourse

The global CrossFit brand is promoted as a standardized training program for everyone. However, to focus on certain differences in this discourse, I separate health discourse from sports discourse. The health discourse has described CrossFit as a health movement that makes people healthier and happier. At the beginning of my fieldwork in early 2017, the first video that was visible on CrossFit's YouTube channel was called "Coach Glassman on

Disease." In the clip, CrossFit Founder Greg Glassman describes a war against chronic disease:

> You are, CrossFitters, are the leading force in the world today, in the war on chronic disease. In fact, it's the only front were anything positive is happening, anything viral is happening…A spontaneously, self-sustaining and growing community, challenges and successfully fighting chronic diseases it's you and you alone…The American Beverage Association is the enemy...It's that simple. Whatever they want, I don't want. What's bad for them is good for us. And it's easy…I want them out of our space…I want a warning label on the soda. I want it out of our schools, out of your medical schools, I want it out of the children's hospital another CrossFit initiative. It's really easy, it's really a case of god guys and bad guys, it's a righteous cause. (CrossFit ® 2015)

The health discourse portrays CrossFit as fighting against chronic disease, sedentary lifestyles, and poor diets. It claims that the company wants to enhance health by offering an effective and simple fitness program that yields clear results and can teach people to manage the core aspects of a healthy life. According to the health discourse, engaging in CrossFit leads to dramatic gains in fitness, and practitioners become a part of a massive, growing community. Numerous articles and videos present people – mainly from the US – who describe how starting CrossFit positively changed their whole lives. They explain how they have finally found meaning or passion in life, transformed from unhealthy to fit, and became part of an amazing community. These stories mainly frame CrossFit as a health movement that strives to improve the culture.

Intermingled with the health discourse is the discourse of CrossFit as a sport. Here, CrossFit becomes "the sport of fitness," and its purpose is to test the capabilities of the human body and identify the fittest people in the world. The CrossFit Games competition is the primary promoter of this discourse, as it grants the title of "fittest on Earth," and participants have the temporary ideal CrossFit body. In line with the CrossFit methodology, they are tested on every aspect of fitness, and no one is aware of the workouts in advance. The athletes are

challenged with a wide range of movements, obstacles, and exercises, such as ocean swims and massive obstacle courses, that extend far beyond the possibilities of the usual CrossFit box. The CrossFit Games have created many CrossFit celebrities: Tia-Clair Toomey and Mathew Fraser, the winners of the games in 2017; one of the early stars, Rich Froning, who won the games in 2011, 2012, 2013, and 2014; Katrín Davíðsdóttir, Anníe Mist Þórisdóttir, and Sara Sigmundsdóttir, a group of women from Iceland who are always top competitors; the Norwegian competitor Kristin Holte, who earned seventh place in 2017; and many more. Apart from compilations of "ultimate CrossFit fails," videos about CrossFit on channels such as YouTube and Netflix often contain pictures from the CrossFit Games. The impressive performances and entertaining competitions in the games have probably contributed heavily to both the popularity growth and hardcore reputation of CrossFit. Thus, the games frame CrossFit more as a sport than as a health movement.

While these differences are present between the discourses, they often interrelate in the global CrossFit discourse. One example is the qualification for the games, which commences with the CrossFit Open competition. Anyone can participate in the challenge regardless of membership at a CrossFit box, and all those in the CrossFit community are encouraged to participate. The most successful participants from the CrossFit Open competition proceed to the regional competition, and the victors of that round move on to the CrossFit Games. The games are comparable to a world championship, and the participants represent the ultimate end result of the CrossFit methodology. In Chapters 4 and 5, I explore this balance between the health and sports discourses and investigate how the global CrossFit discourse had impacted the CrossFit boxes that I visited. In the next section, I recount the narratives of my informants regarding their reasons for training.

Training narratives

In this section, I examine the main difference between participants in terms of their reasons for engaging in CrossFit. To me, the most striking finding was the disparity between *health* and *performance* reasoning. Although most of my informants cited a mixture of the two, I illustrate their difference with certain samples from the interviews. I employ this distinction to account for divergences in goals and motivations among my informants. First, to represent the

health reasons, I discuss David and Henrik, who were both in their late 30s and used the box one to three days per week. David worked with information technology sales and had been involved with CrossFit for a year and a half, while Henrik was employed as a dentist and had two months of experience with CrossFit. Although every workout has a load and RX'd intensity level, David and Henrik found that this level was "not happening" – in other words, they usually did not complete the workouts as prescribed. In contrast, to exemplify the *performance* reasoning, I address the narratives of Petter and Kristoffer, who performed some workouts RX'd and aimed to complete them all this way. Both men were in their mid-20s and used the box five to six days per week. Petter was a student and had been doing CrossFit for about a year, while Kristoffer was a construction worker with about six months of experience with CrossFit. Both had exercised substantially before starting CrossFit. Finally, I consider the story of Leo, who had over five years of CrossFit experience, as well as the roles of the coaches in these narratives.

David and Henrik were often restricted by work or family and could not participate in CrossFit classes as frequently as they wanted. Nonetheless, they felt that working out two to three times per week was suitable for their fitness level. When I interviewed David and Henrik, they both exhibited extensive knowledge of different diets and high-intensity training, and they emphasized health effects:

> David: I read a lot about high-intensity training. I used to run intervals and stuff. I thought it was more fun than doing self-torture and felt that I got more results from it also, and I thought it's going to be even better if I combine it with some strength exercises as well. Another problem I see with running is that it is easy to get hurt. It is one dimensional. CrossFit has strength, mobility, and the whole package.
>
> Henrik: I have thought about starting at CrossFit before also. Doctors and scientists who also do CrossFit and know a lot about diet, nutrition, disease, happiness, self-realization, and everything recommend it. The way I see it, CrossFit is the most practical and effective way to exercise. I want to combine having fun and a sensible hobby. I'm going to test it for six months and see the results. I also want to stay healthy when I

> get old. I'm not looking for the super body, but it would have been fun that too. I want to say healthy (frisk og rask).

In their interviews about CrossFit, David and Henrik expressed a clear interest in improving their health. By comparison, Petter and Kristoffer cited a strong desire to enhance the performance of their bodies as their main motivation for engaging in CrossFit:

> Petter: I straight out got a beating from the first workout. I thought I was in good shape, was actually pretty satisfied. I beat my buddies in most of the workouts we did together, whether it was running or strength. In my first CrossFit class, we did some clean and jerks, and I was beaten by a girl who was much smaller than me and used the same load as me. Then, I just thought, "well, I need to get better at this." At the same time, it was a nice environment at the box. I talked to the girl afterwards, and nobody looked down on me. We all get beaten by the first session.
>
> Kristoffer: I don't do everything RX'd now either. That's the goal though: manage to do everything RX'd. I don't have any goal about doing competitions. I only do it because I think it is fun. If you get really good, you can always consider competitions, but it's not a goal. It's heavy! I feel if you can do everything RX'd, then you start to get pretty good. It's a nice goal to have.

When I asked Petter and Kristoffer about their perceptions of their own health, they both answered that they thought their health was pretty good. However, when discussing why they started CrossFit and exercising, they did not reference health to the same extent as David and Henrik did, possibly because the latter pair was older and therefore thought more intensively about health, or the former were younger and did not assign as much value to health-related reasons for exercise. Still, training with them at the gym did not change my experience of the different emphasis of health and performance. Most participants would describe the training as fundamentally healthy regardless of "motivation", in this way it was described as a *natural body project* (Sassatelli 2010:169). It is both viewed as something, fundamentally important

and as a personal body project. The diversity of reasons for training was also apparent among the coaches:

> Coach Adrian: I started with CrossFit in 2012. I have trained actively since then, perhaps between 6 to 10 sessions a week. So, I have trained pretty hard, but to me it is a lifestyle and about staying active. I also do some competitions. I do a lot of different stuff like cycling, running, climb, snowboard, everything. To me, it is important to move; we are not created to sit still. The way I train here makes me generally fit so that I can do whatever I want. I will never be best in anything, but I can do what I want. If someone asks me to join hiking or cycling, I do because I can.
>
> Me: Is the training pleasure or duty?
>
> Coach Adrian: Right now, it is a duty because of the competitions. It is really the competitions that trigger me to train this hard, and I don't recommend training this hard to everybody. You need to know your body and when to stop. I've gotten hurt in competitions, but that is when it can happen – when you push yourself to the max. Training is training, and that's important to distinguish from competition. You must stop when it gets too much.
>
> Coach Fredrik: I view CrossFit as a pleasure. I take breaks if the body needs it. Being a coach makes it perhaps a bit of a duty; you feel that you should be at a certain level. To me, it's not a goal to get in shape for competition. I exercise for health primarily. I mean, that's what most people should do – most people should train for health. And I think it's good with some variation among the coaches also.

Some coaches highlighted the *performance* side of CrossFit as their main motivation for engaging in it, whereas others again concentrated on the *health* aspects. Both of the coaches warned that excessive competition or exercise can be unhealthy, but they also expressed

different goals for their training. Thus, the coaches also reflect a divergence in orienting CrossFit toward health promotion versus athletic performance goals.

One day, Petter and I were partners in a strength session and switched between using the same weights. Leo approached and asked to join us. “If you’re going to bully us for the weight, you can go somewhere else,” Petter said jokingly. “I was supposed to lift with them, but I don’t want to do that,” Leo answered, gesturing to the two men next to us who were lifting a weight that seemed to be twice as heavy as ours. Leo joined us and used the same weights as we did. Later, I talked to him in the locker room, and he said. “I often use lighter weight now because I have problems with my back. I don’t care what other people think.” I asked if he was putting away his ego. “Yes, not any big egos here. It’s about the community and competing or training together. It has to be fun and have room for joking around, or there wouldn’t be any point in doing this.” Martin, another member with six years of experience, agreed and added, “yeah, I don’t always do the workouts RX’d. Even if I can, I go a bit down on the weights, enjoy myself, and have fun. Then, I can exercise the day after also, and I don’t feel dead.” Some of the more experienced members emphasized that they wanted to “take it easy” sometimes. In these cases, they were more focused on maintaining their health and having a fun session at the gym. In my experience, novices, regulars, and coaches identified unique as well as overlapping aspects of importance to them. Some stressed health, while others concentrated on performance. Still, most members and coaches would probably situate themselves somewhere in between these motivations.

Removal of aesthetic motivations

The previous section has highlighted the combination of *health* and *performance* within the main motivations for engaging in CrossFit. As part of the functional training, all CrossFit participants must focus on the capabilities of their bodies rather than the appearance; thus, the reasons for performing CrossFit are health- and performance-related rather than aesthetically driven. There are not any mirrors in the box – only in the locker rooms – and, as in Hedblom’s description of Swedish fitness participants (2009:75), respondents found that focusing on aesthetics was detrimental or unhealthy. Based on my six months of participation in the workouts and my observations of members who dedicated hours to practicing techniques, such as the handstand walk, muscle up, and squat snatch, it was not hard to believe that

members cared more about the capabilities of their bodies than their appearance. Such movements are difficult and are not considered shortcuts to a satisfying body appearance. Nevertheless, a functional body and a satisfying body appearance is not necessarily viewed as opposites either. When asked about his thoughts on body image, coach Thomas expressed the following:

> Coach Thomas: Here, there is not a lot of focus on it. We don't have any mirrors, dress codes, or anything. Everything from untrained to very fit boys walk around shirtless. Nobody cares really; it is a focus on your effort in the class. That's what we focus on here – maybe contrary to regular fitness gyms, where there is more of a focus on the body. Here, I think people view looking good as a bonus effect of what we are doing. You just want to get good at CrossFit, and at the same time, you end up looking better as well. It doesn't apply to everybody. There is someone who is in really good shape here that isn't ripped, but they perform really well, and that's what most people work towards.

In my experience, becoming skilled at CrossFit and achieving an attractive body were not viewed as mutually exclusive goals, especially among the men at the gym. However, the training posed distinct challenges for men versus women. Although I had no access to locker room conversations between the women, I listened to an interview (Lossius 2016) with Kristin Holte, the Norwegian CrossFit Games athlete, wherein she explained her shift in focus from aesthetics to performance. I asked coach Ida about this shift in focus:

> Yes, me too. You look at the CrossFitters and they have amazing bodies, right? Six-packs here and there. I felt in the beginning that I wanted to train CrossFit and become like that. I remember I had to choose. I wanted to be stronger, but then I had to gain weight. Did I want to increase my squat with five kilos or do I want to keep my weight? This is something I often ask the girls about [at the CrossFit box]. If you have to gain five kilos to get that new personal record, do you still want it? After thinking about it, they say "yes, I want to do that." The moment you do that, your mentality shifts from how you want your body

> to look to focusing on how your body is functioning. You feel good anyway because you get a bit confidence and empowerment. And I think girls struggle more with their self-image than boys do.

Strength is imperative to be skilled at CrossFit and becoming strong often entails gaining weight as well. Women might struggle more to accept the weight gain that accompanies increased strength. Coach Ida shared that she initially wanted to look like the CrossFit Games athletes when she started CrossFit. In a way, this perspective positions CrossFit as able to produce the ideal body. At the same time, she encountered conflicting feelings once she realized that she had to gain weight to become stronger. That gaining weight could be difficult for women, was strengthened by other coaches as well, who admitted that they often hesitate to introduce women to the Zone diet because of the detailed measurement of the food, which they claimed women often found more difficult to manage. Still, the concern about gaining weight was not viewed as rational by experienced CrossFitters, as Coach Fredrik explained, muscle gain does not happen overnight:

> If a woman, for example, doesn't want to get big muscles and stuff, I often ask if she thinks she will look like Marit Bjørgen [a Norwegian athlete who is known for her muscular physique] if she just started cross-country skiing. You don't do that – it is very few people who end up there. Many people look at it as tough, but we still have a 50-50 gender balance.

The concern about excessive muscle gain among certain women indicate cultural ideals regarding the slim female body. Aesthetics still seem to influence motivations to train, at least initially. Based on my experience at the boxes, people emphasized a focus on the capabilities of their bodies, but neither men nor women expressed significant concerns about sacrificing their aesthetics in the process. In fact, they considered the two to be inseparable: a functional body is an attractive body.

Gender-neutral fitness

Men and women may have unique challenges or motivations regarding their participation in the training, but both genders largely employed the same terms to rationalize their choice to exercise. CrossFit's definition of fitness makes no distinction between men and women. Ulseth's (2002:64) study has concluded that fitness centers attract predominantly women, while sport teams appeal mostly to men. Women view *recreation* as more important than men do, while men prioritize *performance* more than women do. Ulseth has noted that the gender differences (kjønnsforskjellene) are not glaring, but they still confirm that men are more competitive than women. Breivik (2013:117) has gathered the motives into four categories: quality of life/health (livskvalitet/helse), instrumental self-realization (instrumentell selvrealisering), joy (glede), and challenge (utfordring). Women mentioned *quality of life/health* and *instrumental self-realization* as more significant, while more men considered *challenge* and *competition* to be essential. According to these surveys, motivational differences between men and women in Norway seem relatively small. Although men and women are mostly motivated by the same reasons to exercise, the slight difference seems to remain stable. Given that both men and women have signed up for the CrossFit Open competition and considering that participation at the gyms is relatively even between genders, CrossFit is situated between fitness gyms and sport clubs in terms of interest. The higher registration of women than of men for the CrossFit Open competition in 2018 could challenge the notion that men are more competitive than women. At the same time, this disparity could be due to greater hesitance among men to participate in the scaled class, wherein twice as many women were registered.

Based on a comparison of the Norwegian CrossFit box to fitness gyms in Sweden and Japan, which are also open to people of various ages and genders, the CrossFit box resembles a more gender-neutral form of exercise. Spielvogel has noted that few women in Japan attended the gym area: "In my year of field research, I never observed a Japanese woman bench-pressing the free weight bar, nor did I see a woman using any machines other than the chest press or leg machines" (2003:72). Similarly, Hedblom (2009:154) has reported the perception of pull-ups and bench press as "guy movements" in Swedish fitness gyms. This perspective contrasts sharply with my observations at the CrossFit box. CrossFit exercise classes dictate that everybody performs the same movements. When bench pressing at the gym, I never heard any

discuss of it being a "guy or girl movement." All CrossFitters are expected to perform the same movements, and there is no equipment that is used only by men or women. The focus on functionality fosters a gender-neutral motivation to perform the activity in accordance with the given rules or definition.

However, the demands of the WOD are not completely gender neutral, as the prescribed weights for the workouts differ for men versus women. Specifically, men are assigned heavier weights in the workout. While a movement such as a pull-up might be prescribed in the workout for both men and women, such movement was often considered easier for men to achieve because of their naturally stronger upper body. This phenomenon is comparable to Hedblom's (2009) description of the lower expectations of women's achievements in the gym compared to those of men. However, as noted earlier, many members must scale the workout, which ambiguates these distinctions to a degree. The training program of the box involves higher expectations of men in terms of load, but movements, repetitions, distance, and time limits are gender neutral. With the exception of the difference in strength requirements in competitions, the CrossFit discourse does not separate between men and women; there is no disparity in expectations of men versus of women. The idea of functional training is gender neutral. Similar to in the broader fitness culture,

> the emphasis on functionality seems to enable several clients to at least keep possible anxieties concerning their own femininity or masculinity under control, and to encourage them to try out new activities which do not conform to very strict, traditional views of gender. (Sassatelli 2010:167)

The growth of CrossFit and the participation of women could actually imply a change in cultural body ideals, as evident in slogans such as "strong is the new skinny." The trend of CrossFit or "functional fitness" could lead such a change. For example, compared to female bodybuilders, female CrossFitters do not need to diverge as much from the socially accepted gender dualism (Johnston 1996). Fitness gyms and the CrossFit box seem to have fewer gender-based differences and an increasingly gender-neutral conceptualization of the fit body. In this way, they have created "a space which accommodates continuous ever-changing gender play" (Sassatelli 2010:167), albeit in continuous conversation with existing body ideals.

Developing the need for exercise

In Norway, exercise is commonly perceived as positive, and it is recommended as health advice to the population (Leseth 2004:8). In the studies of Steen-Johnsen and Engelsrud (2002:275), the informants primarily became fitness participants through practical and rational reasons despite the emphasis of fitness gyms on self-expression and joy. People became members when their "need for exercise" was already defined. The researchers have highlighted how people described exercise at the gym as a potentially fun activity with less meaning than previous experiences with sports or considered it to be an emergency substitute to outdoor activities. On the other hand, Sassatelli (2010:201) has indicated that the "need for exercise" often emerges from the actual practice of working out after one has already chosen to start exercising:

> participation is often the main initial project, while detailed body projects typically come with participation and need to be continuously fuelled. A corollary of this is the many clients "discover" their own "essential" need for fitness in *one* particular gym. Generality is thus construed through particularity. In this process, the very idea of the fitness gym as a precise alternative to other forms of bodywork, is stabilised. (2010:202)

Most of the CrossFit members with whom I spoke reported previous experience with exercise at other fitness gyms before starting CrossFit. Moreover, before becoming involved, they often already maintained ideas about functional training that were compatible with CrossFit. These insights suggest that their "need for exercise" was already defined. Some respondents had read about CrossFit or engaged in similar activities before, which led them to join CrossFit. Exercising was seemingly crucial for many of my informants regardless of CrossFit, as they asserted that an active lifestyle was more important than CrossFit training and, in fact, fundamentally important, at least on a personal, individual level. Leseth has pointed out how categories such as "'lazy/sporty, inactive/active' are effective categories of differentiation in

Norwegian understandings of the body and bodily movements" (Leseth 2004:8). The coaches also cited an active lifestyle as the most important measure to support one's health:

> Coach Adrian: I don't think CrossFit is the ultimate for everyone. The ultimate for everyone is hard to say. We are so different. Some like to play football. Others like video games and stuff. Personally, I think it is a good form of training. You get generally fit in the long term. My motto and what I focus on with my clients is moving. Plain and simple: keep moving your body.
>
> Me: Do you have any training philosophy?
>
> Coach Adrian: No, just to be in motion, really. All forms of exercise are better than no exercise. I walk, show techniques, and stand a lot as a coach. I'm not a typical sofa person (sofasitter).

Respondents highly valued activity and had largely defined a need for exercise prior to starting CrossFit. At the same time, their reason for selecting CrossFit in particular appeared to manifest through its actual practice. Participants had often tried CrossFit after reading about it, out of curiosity, or by joining a friend. Regardless, they all emphasized that they subsequently found it either more suitable to achieve general fitness or function in everyday life or to help them in other sports. Thus, like in Sassatelli's example, the decision to engage in CrossFit emerged from its actual practice. After trying CrossFit, respondents discovered that it was "the best way" to train. They had already defined the "need for exercise," but the need to train in CrossFit specifically was prompted by its actual practice. Through the conditional knowledge that they acquired from the gym, respondents found an effective and fun means of exercising that they perceived as "the best way to train."

The decision-making process

The use of analytic categories in surveys can be useful; however, this approach can also bias the research by implementing preconceived categories that provide only a limited comprehension of people's realities. Sassatelli has framed the choice to become a fitness

participant as a process (Sassatelli 2010:199). When asked why they practice CrossFit, all respondents quickly mentioned *fun* as one such reason. For example, Petter explained:

> That's the main reason for doing it. It's fun. Through the social interactions, it becomes fun. I'm not just there to do a set of bench press and leave. It's all about making it fun and being part of the community.

With this statement, Petter referenced recreation as the main reason to train in CrossFit, as the social aspects of training made it fun. The community was a key element of motivations to train, which Chapter 5 addresses in more detail. However, viewing the training as entertaining seemed contradictory to regular conversations at the gym. For example, when a member who had just entered the gym would ask another member who had recently finished the WOD about the experience, the latter member would often respond with a statement such as, "hard – those burpees were painful! Good luck!" The other member could then reply with "Ah, I don't want to do this." Such exchanges imply that members did not always discuss the training as "fun" despite most people claiming this motivation for practicing CrossFit. While the comments were usually expressed in a joking manner, they nevertheless indicate that training was not always fun. In fact, it was frequently framed as a form of punishment. A warm up can involve exercises such as aiming for a certain distance on the rowing machine or performing different jumps with a rope. If a participant fails the exercise, then he or she must complete, for example, 5 or 10 burpees as punishment. Workouts can require five burpees per minute, so if a participant devotes too much time to finishing the other exercises, then he or she must complete additional burpees. Furthermore, participants who were tardy or had misbehaved could receive a burpee assignment as punishment, and this possibility applied to the coach as well. It was a common occurrence on birthdays that the person would complete an amount of burpees that was equal to his or her age. According to one coach, burpees could be viewed as either "a punishment or a gift." Even David and Henrik, who emphasized health-related motivations, did not expect an easy experience:

> David: I have this theory in my head that exposing your body to extremities when exercising or other stuff is good, but chronic exposure to some form of stress is bad. But short periods with extreme stress, such as exercising or fasting, I think are very good. You train your body's ability to respond to it. I also take cold showers. I believe in that approach. That's why I believe in

> high-intensity training; as long as it doesn't go too far, I believe it's very good to go hard.
>
> Henrik: I think CrossFit is fun. Especially the feelings afterwards. It's perhaps not as fun every time, but it is important to use your head. We are not created to sit in an office without moving. It wasn't fun to live in the Stone Age or in the Viking Age. You did it because you had to, and that's the way we have lived for thousands of years. We are not adapted to a sedentary society yet. Everything can't be pleasurable, and that's what a lot of people are struggling with, me included. When it's not fun, you often don't do it. But we humans have an intellect which makes us able to override it.

Martin, who lifted lighter weights to avoid exhausting his body, was also familiar with pain:

> We often try to avoid pain and stuff that hurts. In a CrossFit workout, people often try to ignore that it hurts. I try to accept it. The situation is that what we are doing is very painful, and you aren't done until you are done. It is just to accept that it hurts. You use a lot of mental energy if you try to work against the situation.

Every physical training regimen that changes the body is likely to involve some degree of pain. This inevitability is implied by the "no pain no gain" slogan, which can also be found among modern primitives or body artists (Kraft 2004). Adapting to the CrossFit training program often involves a balancing act between recreation and discipline:

> Henrik: I think it's fun – very fun. The feelings you get after the workouts are very nice. It doesn't feel as fun every time, but it is important to use your head. I don't think we are created to be sedentary in an office without moving.
>
> Kristoffer: I love it when I'm done and when I notice progress, but practicing something you are bad at isn't cool. Like, practicing double unders isn't cool for me, but you have to do it. Someone said one time that your body doesn't get comfortable

> with doing a thing before you have done it three to five thousand times. Then it goes without saying that you have to work a bit with it.

Conversations at the CrossFit box often revolved around feelings of dread about the session and discussions of how bad it was and how difficult the WOD was or would be. However, people engaged in the training voluntarily and were motivated by the challenge and the positive feelings of accomplishment. People reported a variety of situationally dependent motivations for starting CrossFit that, together, illustrate a complex approach to training that extends beyond health, performance, community, or fun as the only motivation. Similar to Sassatelli's (2010:200) critique of the notion of *rational choice* in mainstream economics, an ethnographic study demonstrates choice "as a process, rather than a cost-benefit decision" and as a "transformative ongoing practice rather than an accomplished, rational calculation" (2010:199).

Fitness culture which CrossFit is a part of contains similar and overlapping narratives about exercising. It focuses on counterbalancing the unhealthy nature of modern existence by using exercise as a benchmark for all aspects of life on the basis of the notion of functionality. In Norway, people commonly explain their reasons for exercising in terms of fitness, recreation, social interaction, joy of exercising, physical appearance and body, expressiveness, and performance. Among my informants, I found multifactorial motivations for exercising that often consisted of a mixture of the aforementioned subjects. The dominant narratives in my informants' accounts of training pursued improvements to *health* or body *performance*, and often a mixture of the two. Informants often discussed multiple and overlapping reasons for exercising. They viewed fun as important while simultaneously considering pain to be a crucial part of the training. Although aesthetics was not a key motivation for training, they were not totally removed either. Because of increases in body mass, women encountered unique challenges in relation to ideas about the fit body. Nevertheless, the focus on functionality in the CrossFit box seems to create fewer gender differences compared to other fitness practices. The choice to practice CrossFit appears to occur through a process that entails transformative and ongoing practice.

Chapter 3 - Learning of skills

This chapter examines the foundation of becoming a practitioner, including the learning and development of techniques and skills. At the CrossFit box, participants must learn a standard set of techniques and successfully apply them in the WOD. Regardless of whether participants want to improve their health or athletic performance, master a new technique, or be the most physically fit individual at the box, their goal is to perform well in the WOD. Advancing one's skills is just as important for novices as for top athletes at the CrossFit box, and effectively increasing one's body awareness is an essential part of skill development. To clarify the culture of the CrossFit box, I more closely investigate these learning processes in terms of how novices learn the basic skills of CrossFit, which learning processes are important for becoming a CrossFit participant, and how these processes affect the body.

Learning the techniques

As in other body disciplines, such as aerobics (Spielvogel 2003), Capoeira (Downey 2005), and fitness gym practices (Hedblom 2009, Sassatelli 2010), the acquisition and refinement of skills is the foundation of becoming a practitioner in CrossFit. As in Hedblom's (2009:154) description of physical activity at Swedish fitness gyms, imitation is an important means of learning different ways to exercise as well as various *reflexive body techniques*. However, according to Hedblom, a majority of her informants regularly exercised alone in the gym area without instructions and were "free or forced to create an individual exercise routine" (2009:112). In contrast, CrossFit classes are central to the training, which involves pre-programmed workouts and continual guidance from the coach.

Every CrossFit class begins in the same way. The coach introduces the day's schedule in front of the class, who stand in half-circle formation around the whiteboard. Because the box must set limits to maintain a small number of participants, class maximums vary from 15 to 20 people. The hour-long classes normally begin with a warm up before continuing with a certain technique or type of strength training, and they conclude with the WOD. In the technique session, participants learn new skills and advance old ones. Both coaches and members

highlighted the importance of developing a strong technique. Some boxes have their own introductory or basic classes for new members to acquire the basic skills, whereas others offer only one regular class in which newcomers receive special attention.

In my first class, I encountered a movement called the *clean and jerk* (see Illustration 1). It consists of two weightlifting movements that are fundamental to CrossFit. The *clean and jerk* is used to lift objects, such as a barbell, kettlebell, or sandbag, up from the floor and over the head. Essentially, the *clean* movement entails explosively lifting the barbell from the ground and up to the chest, while the subsequent *jerk* involves lifting it up from the chest and over the head.

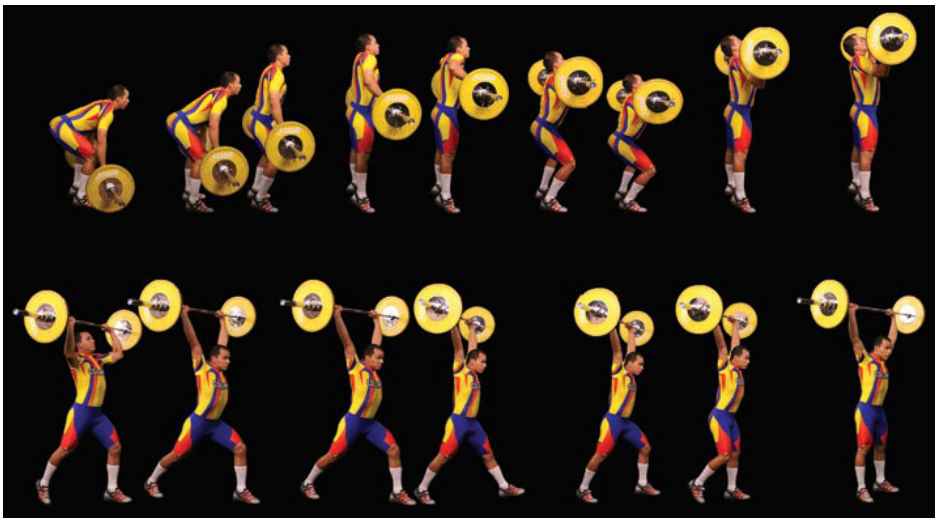

Figure 2. From "Clean and jerk", by Evdcoldeportes, 2009 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clean_and_jerk#/media/File:EVD-pesas-056.jpg. CC BY-SA 2.5 co https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.5/co/deed.en.

In this first class, we were instructed to perform a *clean and jerk* with a barbell. After the warm up, we started the technique session. Since this was a beginner, we began with a thorough explanation of every move. The coach divided the *clean* movement into three stages:

> First, start to lift the stick off the ground. Focus on having the stick close to your thighs. Shoulders back – don't let them hang forward. Next, lift your shoulders high and push off with your

> legs. In the last part, you lay the stick on your chest while spreading your legs and land in a dip. Here, you need to be aggressive.

We first practiced with a stick to familiarize our bodies with the movements before trying with the 15- to 20-kilogram barbell. We completed multiple repetitions of each part and finally performed them all at once. This separation is typical in both warm ups and technique training, as it makes participants more aware of the details of the movement and teaches their bodies to enact certain stages in the movement. As a result, when they later perform the whole movement, their bodies are already accustomed to moving in these stages, which allows them to understand how the movement should be performed.

The initial introduction to the new technique occurred through a verbal explanation from the coach in combination with a demonstration of the movement with the body. The demonstration illustrated the ideal movement, and the verbal instructions explained its key elements. Warm ups often consisted of many simple movements, such as running, that people were already familiar with and which usually required no explanation. The coach would only give the command to start running and follow up with instructions for high knees or butt kicks, for example. If there was a new movement that participants did not know, then the coach would need to demonstrate it. Imitation alone could be enough to teach the class the move; for example, a movement that involved crawling on one's hands and feet usually required just one demonstration. In such cases, coaches often relied on the ability of the group as a whole to learn the basics of the movement through imitation.

Techniques and skills could also be refined by observing other people enacting them. When practicing a technique over time, small differences and details become increasingly apparent in the movements. Participants could watch another person and perceive slight changes that they could try to imitate. Participants were also expected to learn rhythm and movement through imitation, and the coaches encouraged them to watch video clips of people executing different techniques. In a couple classes, the instructor presented videos to the class. Imitating others was a vital means of skill development; thus, imitation can be considered one of the most basic learning processes in acquiring a new skill. Nevertheless, as Downey has illustrated in practicing Capoeira, learning new skills through imitation "may pose serious challenges" (2005:45).

During one interview, a coach explained that she improved her own technique by teaching:

> Yes, you repeat a lot. You say it correctly, and then you show it slowly, and it helps you with everything you do. In the last class, when we did kipping dips, I had not done it in two years because of my shoulder, but I've taught it away, and I noticed I could still do it.

The coach taught the skill despite being unable to perform the entire movement herself, which indicates that verbal instructions can be highly effective for teaching new movements. Based on my observations, if the coach could not perform the movement for some reason, they would demonstrate parts of it or a simplified version. Therefore, while imitation was clearly crucial in roughly illustrating the techniques, more specific instructions were needed to fully understand the movement.

Especially with more advanced movements, imitation alone is insufficient. I encountered this lesson upon learning the *clean and jerk* about one month after I started my participant observation. I had done the movement before and thought I basically understood it. During the warm up, the class and I imitated the movement with the stick. Shortly after commencing the workout, the coach approached me to inform me that I was performing a *push press* instead of a *jerk*. In brief, a *push press* involves pushing the barbell straight over one's head, whereas a *jerk* entail bending the knees and body underneath the barbell and standing up. With slight confusion, I responded, "okay," and I realized that I was using my arms too much. I attempted more repetitions, but the instructor came over again and said, "you're still doing a push press. You have to dip under the barbell in the jerk, not just stand there and do a push press." As he spoke, he demonstrated the movements with his body. Slowly, the differences became clear to me again. I continued the workout, and when I returned to the movement, I remembered to dip, and the coach gave me thumbs up from the other side of the room. Although I had performed the movement before, my body was not accustomed to it. However, my technique was challenged by the use of heavier weights than in the warm up, and I did not remember the movement. We imitated the instructor during the warm up, but the movement appeared the same to my untrained eye, and I did not understand the difference between a *jerk* and a *push press*. Thus, I needed a combination of verbal instruction and visual imitation to understand it.

In comparison to the fitness gyms that are described in the literature from Sweden (Hedblom 2009), Italy, and the UK (Sassatelli 2010), learning body movements at the CrossFit box depends more on the coaches and on increased body awareness through feeling the right movement. Hedblom has proposed that machines in the gym visualize "available movements in [their] construction" (2009:136) and makes gym-goers "feel the general form of the movement." (2009:136) Compared to the use of machines, CrossFit, which uses free weights, necessitates more dependence on coaches to teach the movements. Another difference between CrossFit and fitness gyms involves the use of mirrors. At fitness gyms, people may be dependent on mirrors to perform the movement correctly (Sassatelli 2010:115). Since CrossFit emerged from a dissatisfaction with "normal" gyms, boxes exclude the mirrors in order to encourage a focus on performance rather than aesthetics. In this regard, learning via imitation may be more difficult in CrossFit, as there are limited possibilities to imitate the coach. However, some of my informants reported that they could no longer perform in front of a mirror, as they would lose focus. Mirrors can also pose other challenges. Sassatelli has addressed the concept of *mirror work*, which she has defines as:

> the work that a subject has to undertake to use mirrors in ways that are appropriate to the scene, to fit their notions of self and to negotiate with received body ideals in a game of revelation and concealment of body details. (2010:116)

Removing the mirror can not only prevent distractions or an excessive focus on aesthetics but also urge participants to depend on "feeling" the right movement and accept correction from coaches.

Improving techniques

"Have you been whipped?" asked Kristoffer. I stood in the locker room with visible red bruises on my arms and legs.

"Yes, I'm struggling a bit with that jump rope," I answered, and we both laughed.

"I can do four, and then I fail," said Kristoffer.

“I can do one and suddenly 20. Sometimes, I get in the flow and can do it until I get tired, and then I can only do one again,” commented Alexander.

We were in the locker room discussing our ability to perform the *double under* movement. This movement involves jumping once while passing a jump rope twice under one’s feet. When I first learned it, I could already do the *single under* movement, whereby the rope passes once per jump. Since I then needed to be able to jump a sufficient height and move the rope quickly enough, the *double under* demands a higher degree of rhythm and coordination. Similar to the participants in the conversation above, I could sometimes perform the movement, but I still had not learned it fully. Thus, I oscillated between believing I had learned it and failing to accomplish it. I did not begin to get comfortable with the movement until a couple of months into practicing it, but I slowly started to manage it without tripping too often, and I learned the rhythm and coordination with my body. By performing some singles and switching to doubles with shorter and shorter intervals, I achieved the necessary coordination for the movement. The coaches had explained that I should jump as high as in singles and demonstrated it for me, but I needed to practice the movement on my own in the WODs in order to master it.

Imitation and verbal instructions are insufficient to teach difficult movements; sometimes, participants must practice it repeatedly and experiment with their own bodies. After a session of practicing the *double under* movement, the coach said, “now, you can practice this for a couple of weeks. After you have been working on it for a while, we can see what your bad habits are. That is much better than me standing over you all the time.” With this comment, the coach emphasized the need for repetition in the process of skill development. In addition, by suggesting that we should practice independently, the coach communicated the need for personal experimentation with the movement. As I experienced for myself, constant instructions for improvement are overwhelming. If a participant receives verbal instructions for improving a demanding movement, he or she must practice independently. If imitation or verbal instructions cannot teach the movement, it is necessary to experiment with one’s body.

Coaching

In CrossFit, every class is guided by a coach. The coaching role is often comparable to that of a personal trainer, as the coach engages in continual and close interaction with the members. This relationship is often viewed in contrast to independent work outs at the fitness gym without any professional supervision. Although the CrossFit company requires only a level 1 certification to open a gym, the boxes where I conducted my fieldwork had more rigorous requirements for coaching positions:

> CEO: At level 1, you learn a light introduction to coaching, but if you don't have any other training background, you've a long way to go before you become a good coach. If you really want to become a good coach, you should at least have level 2. In this box, the standard is high; not everybody can become a coach. First, you have to be a member and train here, see how we do it, and teach our classes. Then, they can become assistants. If they manage the task well, they can start to get their own classes.

In interviews, coaches elaborated on the difficulties of coaching:

> Coach Kristine: It's very rewarding, but the most rewarding is what I get from the members. I only need a member who says they were satisfied with the class, and I'm not tired anymore. It's not like working three hours at an office. Mentally, I'm completely exhausted. I'm very focused, very social, you have to look for the details, and the music is loud. If everyone comes to the class tired, it sucks energy. Many come straight from a long working day. You want them to have fun, but at the same time they have to do the job properly. So, there are many parts that must fall into place.

During my fieldwork, I managed to learn some difficult movements through my own experimentation. However, this experimentation did not occur in a vacuum, as I possessed background knowledge from the coaches and from my observations of other participants who were performing the movement. Coaches imparted knowledge by physically demonstrating and verbally explaining movements, but they often had to influence our perceptions as well.

During the process of learning the *double under*, I had watched people do it, received instructions from the coach, and still could not perform it consistently. The coach explained that we should jump just as high as when the jump rope makes one pass per jump, but we should move the rope more quickly. In this way, the coaches had an impact on the way in which people experimented, as they would focus on moving the rope quickly instead of jumping higher. For other movements in which the coaches wanted us to keep our backs straight, they would tell us to keep our elbows high or push our knees out. The simple command of "keep your back straight" can be difficult to translate to your body, so they would specify concrete actions to achieve a straight back. Gradually, participants were able to determine when their backs were actually straight.

The coaches were aware of the difficulty of learning new movements. They often offered comments to people regarding their technique and subsequently allowed them to practice it independently for a while: "Then people know what to work on, and I don't walk around disturbing them." They would also explain that a technique such as a "hook grip", a method for holding a barbell by gripping the thumb between the barbell and the remaining fingers, initially feels awkward, but it eventually becomes natural. Thus, coaching frequently "act[ed] indirectly, creating experiences and shaping perceptions that guide a student's own discovery of a skill" (Downey 2005:45). The acquisition of new skills then relied on imitation and instructions from the coach as well as individual attempts to determine the feeling and rhythm. In this way, participants were guided toward experimentation and discovery of the movement of their own bodies.

Co-learning

After one workout, I discuss certain techniques with fellow participants.

Morten: You don't kip at all.

Me: It feels like I'm doing it, but I understand that it's not right. Show me!

Morten: Well, I cannot do it perfectly either, but… (jumps up in the pull-up bar and performs a couple of repetitions).

Kristoffer: Wow, I've not seen it performed like that before. You are almost doing a muscle-up.

Morten: Yes, that is how you are supposed to do it. (Meanwhile, me and Kristoffer prepare for a couple of repetitions ourselves, after which we practice the muscle-up).

Me (after a couple of failed attempts): It looks so easy when you do it.

Morten: You use way too much power to get speed. Try to jump into the bar.

Members often discuss different techniques. The interaction above changed the way I performed the movement. In this case, Morten prompted the conversation because he had seen me perform the movement incorrectly. From his demonstration for me and Kristoffer, we both noticed an aspect of the movement that we had previously neglected. In other cases, if participants were uncertain of how to perform a movement, they would usually ask other participants for instructions. People frequently remembered various instructions and tips from coaches, and these insights were shared and discussed. I noticed that my knowledge of how to perform certain movements was strengthened further by discussing it with other participants. If someone had seen a movement in a video clip, this might also be discussed. A sizeable portion of learning occurred in this way in addition to the teaching by coaches.

Learning to lift

My own experience with CrossFit training revealed a clear effect on my body. To better understand the feeling of performing Capoeira, Downey (2005:34) treated Capoeira as "a field for developing distinctive skills, and considering how those skills might shape experience." Downey has recounted how training in Capoeira also affected him in everyday life. He shared one instance in which his foot was caught on an iron panel:

> I remember distinctly sensing that my foot was caught and that I was falling, but, for some reason, tipping past vertical seemed no cause for alarm. Maybe because I had done innumerable

> cartwheels and negatives and my body knew how to catch myself right before landing. (2005:36)

The practice of Capoeira influenced his reaction when falling, and he has suggested that physical training could have far-reaching effects on participants' perceptions in everyday life as well. I noticed how the learning of various CrossFit techniques through physical training impacted my body's reaction and movement patterns.

As I have described above, the first technique I encountered was the *clean and jerk*. This movement pattern is used to lift objects up from the ground and over the head. Two months into my fieldwork, the CrossFit Open competition was held. In line with the "constantly varied" nature of a CrossFit workout, the competition added a new type of equipment: the dumbbell. For one of the workouts, we had to do a *power clean* with the dumbbell. Although I had not completed a *power clean* with the dumbbells, I had performed some *clean* with the barbell. Each object requires a slightly different set up and execution, but with the dumbbells, my body was aware of the stages through which it needed to progress. Learning the new movement was thus much easier, as I already had a foundation, and my body assumed a standardized movement pattern when lifting the object from the ground.

Figure 3. Man lifting a dumbbell. From "Person lifting black barbell", by V. Freitas, 2018c. https://unsplash.com/photos/Gqae1CkM9ig.

A couple of weeks after concluding my fieldwork, I visited my parents' farm. One of the buildings has a massive garage door that needs to be open manually with some force. There is a handle by the ground that we must use to lift the door to the level of our heads to access enough room to use a stick to push the door the rest of the way up. I had opened this garage door many times and did not give it much thought. However, the first time I needed to open this door after my fieldwork, I grabbed the handle, lifted it to my chest, and pushed it over my head. As I stood there with my arms holding the door straight over my head, it hit me that I had just done a *clean and jerk*. My body went through the exact same motions: I had *cleaned* the door up to my chest and *jerked* it from my chest to lock it over my head. In this way, the training had fundamentally affected my reaction to lifting an object from the ground and over my head.

This chapter has discussed certain key learning processes in becoming a CrossFitter. Participants learned skills and movements through imitation, verbal instructions, and personal experimentation. As such, they increased their awareness of their body through the detailed separation of movements and coaching. Compared to other fitness practices, CrossFitters do not use machines or mirrors to learn new movements. Participants were dependent on the coach and on personal experimentation to correctly refine their techniques. Discussions and shared knowledge among participants often supported learning processes. Experimentation and practice are imperative to discover the movements of one's own body, and the training can fundamentally change how one's body moves in both workouts and everyday life, even in such a seemingly simple action as picking an item up off the ground.

Chapter 4 – Finding the right knowledge

A central part of becoming a CrossFit participant concerns developing knowledge about the body. This chapter explores how my informants related to the branding of nutrition and training by CrossFit, Inc. as well as their experiences with navigating fitness knowledge. First, I explain the range of views of the branded recommendations about nutrition and exercise among my informants. Second, I determine how my informants acquired knowledge and how it contributed to the naturalization of fitness knowledge. To this end, I examine how my informants centered their approaches to body-related knowledge around their subjective experiences. Lastly, I discuss how the coaches worked as translators in the introduction of the CrossFit brand to Norway. To this end, I explain how the Norwegian CrossFit box relates to the various incarnations of CrossFit and has been shaped by the global CrossFit brand.

Functional training

The most important part of CrossFit would probably the training itself. According to the definition of the training by CrossFit, Inc., the workouts consist of "constantly varied functional movements performed at high intensity" (CrossFit 2017). This section gauges the degree of standardization of CrossFit exercises. I will use CrossFit founder Greg Glassman's article "What is fitness?" from 2002 as a point of comparison. The *constantly varied* aspect of the workouts has been explained as follows:

> fitness requires an ability to perform well at all tasks, even unfamiliar tasks, tasks combined in infinitely varying combinations. In practice this encourages the athlete to disinvest in any set notions of sets, rest periods, reps, exercises, order of exercises, routines, periodization, etc. Nature frequently provides largely unforeseeable challenges; train for that by striving to keep the training stimulus broad and constantly varied. (Glassman 2002:2)

Furthermore, the workouts are comprised of *functional movements*, a category which differentiates, to an extent, between "wrong" and "right" movements:

> Curls, lateral raises, leg extensions, leg curls, flyes and other bodybuilding movements have no place in a serious strength and conditioning program primarily because they have a blunted neuroendocrine response. A distinctive feature of these relatively worthless movements is that they have no functional analogy in everyday life and they work only one joint at a time. Compare this to the deadlift, clean, squat, and jerk which are functional and multi-joint movements. (Glassman 2002:7)

Functional movements are often explained in contrast to "unfunctional" movements, such as those in bodybuilding or the act of sitting on a machine with a fixed pattern of movement. The focus in bodybuilding on isolated movement patterns to build muscles for aesthetic purposes is oppositional to the aim of CrossFit, which concentrates not on aesthetics but on the performance of functional movements. Functional movements refer to actions that people perform in "everyday life," such as running, lifting, jumping, and throwing. Lastly, the workouts are performed at *high intensity*, as "[i]ntensity is essential for results and is measurable as work divided by time—or power" (CrossFit 2017). According to this definition, all of these aspects are essential to improve one's general fitness.

The boxes are free to design their own workouts, which many of them do. There are also free training programs that the boxes can follow, or they can buy a program. Thus, the day-to-day activities of the boxes are varied. At the CrossFit box, *constantly varied* implies different mixes of sets, repetitions, movements, and times each day with the equipment available at the box. After I had exercised at the box for six months, I expected to encounter certain movements, such as running, rowing, box jumps, deadlift, clean and jerks, pull-ups, and more. I did not expect to or actually encounter exercises such as cycling, swimming, or flipping tires, and I did not learn any new sports. I would not assume that it is unthinkable or that it has not happened before, but practicalities necessitate that most CrossFit workouts for regular members use familiar movements and equipment, such as the barbells, kettlebells, row machines, pull-up bars, and jump ropes. Still, the members do not know the combination of movements and equipment in advance.

While the WOD is the foundation of CrossFit training, people also practiced or trained on their own before or after classes. Some stretched, others engaged in strength training, and still

others practiced techniques they sought to finish learning or improve. People had different aspects that they wanted to "work on". There was also variation in how many activities people performed outside of the box. Many of my informants did not work out regularly outside of the box, but some did swimming, running, or exercised at work:

> David: I don't get to exercise as much as I want to. But I try to get some exercise at work too. There is a gym there, and in 30 minutes I manage to work out and take a cold shower. I don't go hard, it's just to get the body moving. I also want to start running to work.
>
> Petter: I do some training on my own. Now I use a personal trainer. I want to get better at the Olympic lifts. I also follow my own mobility and strength program.

Some of my informants also participated in other sports. However, for most of them, the WOD and the box comprised the majority of their training. When people practiced independently, they were usually learning the required movements or building strength, flexibility, or endurance to perform the workouts. The WOD served as a meeting point where everybody would do the same exercise, but unique "challenges or weaknesses" led people to have diverse training focuses outside of the WOD.

Regarding the actual training, my informants exhibited numerous similarities that were due to the WOD at the box. The training was characterized by standardization, and movements such as double unders, snatches, and muscle-ups were typical CrossFit movements that appeared regularly in the workouts. If you want to compete at a high level, you need to master these movements. The numbers of repetition and length of the workout varies more, but because of the need to measure progress, there is also standardized workouts. Although one of the boxes I visited designed its own workouts, it used standard CrossFit movements and benchmark workouts. The CrossFit benchmark workouts are standardized workouts that are frequently prescribed at the box, and the CrossFit Open competition introduces new standardized workouts every year.

The CrossFit Open competition sets the standard for important movements. When the competition was held, the CrossFit boxes that I visited used these workouts as the WOD regardless of whether the members were registered for the competition. Old workouts from

the competition were also commonly used as the WOD. Prior to the CrossFit Open competition, everyone was asked to join the competition through social media and at the boxes, regardless of their fitness or skill level. A scaled version of the workout was possible, which made it easier to complete for people who could not manage the most difficult movements. The boxes were clearly affected by the CrossFit Open competition, and for participants who were focused on performance and competition, it could be an important and time-consuming event:

> Petter: I love the Open concept, but it was insanely time consuming. The first four workouts I did two times each. The last week with the fifth workout, I just told myself, now I'm tired of this, I have used five weeks and woken up at three o'clock in the night to see what the workout was. You almost don't focus on training that month, just performing in the Open workouts. It's a love and hate relationship. I love competition and it's cool with the international rankings. But it takes a lot of time, and it was the same for the people I hang with. Used a lot of energy on it, which means we must have felt that it was a little bit fun.

Before the CrossFit Open competition in 2017, the Games Director Dave Castro posted a picture of dumbbells with the caption "you've been warned" on Instagram. An old video of the CrossFit founder Greg Glassman was also posted that advocated for dumbbells as effective strength training tools. The use of dumbbells at the gym increased significantly after this post, and they were incorporated into various warmups and workouts. The head coach also said that the workout program at the gym was adapted to the CrossFit Open. The dumbbells had not been used in the competition before, which may explain why the boxes had few of them in the correct weight. Every year, new movements are introduced to the competition, which has evidently shaped the workouts at the gym. In addition, many familiar movements are performed frequently at the gym. During my fieldwork, I did not encounter anyone who claimed to regularly use typical "bodybuilding movements" or machine training. Although some people shared that they liked to train at ordinary gyms as well, which could indicate some use of bodybuilding techniques or machine training, these movements were absent from the CrossFit box.

Natural and functional movements

The coaches frequently mentioned natural and functional movements. When the whole class sat in the squat position during a warm up, the coach explained, “here, you should be comfortable. Could you sit like this without a chair? We don’t need chairs then…Is there anyone who is struggling?” Some people laughed because they were indeed struggling. The instructor continued: “This is something you should practice at home for 5 to 10 minutes a day. You can do it while you’re watching television.” This movement was explained as one that people should be able to do that is used in multiple actions. While the concepts of “natural” and “functional” were incorporated by the box, their limitations and ambiguity were recognized, as evident from an interview with the coaches:

> Me: How active are you in your everyday life?
>
> Coach Fredrik: In comparison to today’s sedentary lifestyle, I have an active everyday life, but I’m not a farmer, you know.
>
> Me: What’s the perfect lifestyle then? Is it the farmer?
>
> Coach Fredrik: No, I don’t think it exists. So, it’s difficult to answer what the terms “functional” and “natural” mean.
>
> Me: What do you think about when you talk about natural and functional movements?
>
> Coach Christer: I think natural movement is very important because CrossFit is not very good at that. Like, during the last five years now, I’ve gotten stronger than I’ve ever been, but I haven’t been moving like I used to. I used to play football and it’s multidirectional. When you do CrossFit, there is no side to side, just up and down. So, I try to integrate more twisting motions in the training.

In addition to his opinion that CrossFit did not effectively incorporate natural movements, the head coach also noted his belief that the CrossFit training pyramid is farfetched. In the pyramid, sports are on the top and are accordingly the last step that people should practice. He argued that most people would not have time to engage in sports if they followed this guide. In CrossFit, it is possible to use special shoes or a lifting belt to help with lifts. During a team

session, my partner used a belt and let me try it. He explained, “the belt helps with my stability in the movement. It’s like a security for being straight in your back. You shall not lean yourself on it, but I know a lot of people do.” The belt is often used by more experienced members and is a familiar sight in CrossFit competitions. There are also a variety of shoes that can facilitate heavy lifting. However, opinions are varied regarding the use of the belt and lifters, as Kristoffer has explained:

> I use an all-round shoe. I don’t use lifters and I’m not going to buy it either. I feel it’s a bit of cheating to use lifters. You lift up the heal and get better mobility. In my opinion, it’s better with a normal shoe because you get more versatile. You’re not dependent on anything to do the movement. It’s the same with a lifting belt, I use as little extra stuff as possible. Firstly, you get to use a lot of core without the belt, and secondly, you don’t get dependent on it. For example, when we do deadlifts, people can maybe lift 20 kilos more because they use the belt, but it’s really a false thing. If you didn’t have the belt you wouldn’t have made it, and I think that’s wrong.

The degree to which a movement or action is viewed as natural or functional varies. I heard comments such as “isolation of the muscles should be illegal – it’s bad,” but I did not hear many discussions of which movements qualified as functional or natural. My informants more often discussed the overall training as natural and functional, for example by noting that “we are made to move” or wanting to improve function in everyday life. Thus, there is also a diversity of views within the CrossFit community regarding natural and functional movements and the overall training. Nevertheless, from a holistic perspective, the training represents a standardization of exercise.

Nutrition

Nutrition is a key part of training, as it can either amplify or diminish its effects. CrossFit is regularly associated with the Paleo and Zone diets. The former aims for a diet that more closely resembles that of prehistoric humans in the Stone Age or Paleolithic era. It assumes that processed food is unhealthy and inferior to “clean” food, such as vegetables and meat. In

my research prior to my fieldwork, I watched YouTube videos and read online articles that linked CrossFit to the Paleo diet. I also read a Norwegian book entitled *Tilbake til røttene* (2013) in which the author, Thomas Rode Andersen, explains the positive changes that CrossFit and the Paleo diet have prompted in his life. Therefore, I expected that I would meet many people who were on the Paleo diet during my fieldwork, and I was surprised to encounter the opposite:

> Me: Do you follow any diets, like Paleo or Zone?
>
> Petter: I stay away from them. I try to have four meals a day, with 30 grams of protein, 40 grams of carbohydrates, and some fat, then I'm about half of the way. In addition, I eat some fruits and stuff.
>
> Henrik: I think Paleo is a bit restrictive. I've adapted it to myself, but it's a good starting point. Normal people who buy cornflakes, bread, and stuff at the store are usually a bit skeptical, but there is no reason for it. There's a lot of good science about eating more fat and less carbohydrates.

When I talked with new people who had just entered the box for the first time, many believed that they had to begin a Paleo diet as part of the CrossFit concept. In actuality, none of the coaches promoted this diet. Rather, it is the Zone diet that is promoted by CrossFit, Inc. and Greg Glassman:

> Dr. Barry Sears' Zone Diet (http://www.drsears.com/) still offers the greatest precision, efficacy, and health benefit of any clearly defined protocol. The Zone diet does an adequate job of jointly managing issues of blood glucose control, proper macronutrient proportion, and caloric restriction the three pillars of sound nutrition whether your concern is athletic performance, disease prevention and longevity, or body composition. We recommend that everyone read Dr. Sears book *Enter the Zone*. (Glassman 2002:12)

In his article, Glassman also opposes dietary recommendations that he perceives to be misguided: "Effective nutrition is moderate in protein, carbohydrate, and fat. Forget about the

fad high carbohydrate, low fat, and low protein diet" (2002:12). His description of "world-class fitness in 100 words" offers the following advice: "Eat meat and vegetables, nuts and seeds, some fruit, little starch and no sugar. Keep intake to levels that will support exercise but not body fat" (2002:1). The Zone and Paleo diets present some similarities. The coaches with whom I spoke said that the Paleo diet was stricter in terms of permitted foods, while the Zone diet allows all foods but categorizes them as favored or unfavored and strictly regulates portions.

Few of my informants claimed to follow the Paleo or Zone diet. I was usually told, "it's a nice starting point, but I think it's a bit restrictive. I've adapted it to myself." A similar but more common response was, "I've tried it, but it didn't quite work for me." One of the coaches explained to me that the Zone diet was created first, and the Paleo diet emerged a bit later. However, the popularity of the Paleo diet has diminished. The CrossFit level 1 course dedicated more discussion to the Zone diet than to the Paleo diet. Although workouts were standardized, there was no uniform diet that my informants followed. People diverged more in their eating habits by eating "regular healthy food" or "whatever suited them." The coaches, on the other hand, reported more influence from the Zone diet. Still, some coaches recommended neither the Zone nor the Paleo diet, and no informant claimed to follow a strict diet:

> Coach Ida: I don't advertise for Zone or Paleo. I'm not educated in nutrition or anything. I've just been really interested in it. I don't promote it because I don't think it works for me, and in my experience, it doesn't work for a lot of people at the box either. It becomes too much focused-on food. The Zone diet has a lot of focus on measuring, and especially the girls can have a problem with that.

> Coach Adrian: I haven't read too much about Paleo to elaborate too much. But there are many people who have showed that it works, but, again, everyone's different. The explanation of the Zone diet is pretty good. The Zone diet uses average population metering, so it's not perfect for everyone. But again, I think it's

> positive, if you get a nutritionist to put up the right program for you and cover your calorie needs for the day, then you are done. But I'm not a nutritionist, so I cannot reaffirm anything…I use Zone, but I don't follow the table 100%. I eat clean food, such as fruit and vegetables.

Some of the coaches had previously followed the Zone diet and believed that they were still influenced by it despite not following it completely. The CrossFit boxes that I visited were probably more heavily influenced by the Paleo and Zone diets compared to other types of fitness gyms. Many members at the CrossFit box could, in practice, have similar diets. Nevertheless, there was no shared diet, and people assumed different viewpoints. Many of the coaches emphasized that they were not nutritionists by profession when they addressed dietary issues, thus indicating that they did not possess the same degree of expertise in nutrition as they did in exercise. When I commenced my fieldwork, I was ready to eat and train in the same ways as my informants, but I did not identify an obvious diet to follow. I was unable to observe people in their daily lives or witness the foods they actually ate. Although most or all participants would claim that one's diet is highly important or fundamental for positive health and performance in CrossFit, they did not strictly adhere to the branded CrossFit recommendations. The views of training and nutrition in the local CrossFit boxes that I visited present clear intersections and contradictions with the global CrossFit discourse. CrossFit training in Norway is clearly influenced by the branded training program, but unlike in the US, where Steven Kuhn (2013) has observed a close relationship between CrossFit and the Paleo diet, the views on nutrition in Norway represent a local adaptation to the CrossFit brand. I explore this insight further toward the end of the paper, but I first consider how my informants developed their fitness-related knowledge.

Objective and measurable knowledge

> The CrossFit program is driven by data. Using whiteboards as scoreboards, keeping accurate scores and records, running a clock, and precisely defining the rules and standards for performance, we not only motivate unprecedented output but derive both relative and absolute metrics at every workout. This

> data has important value well beyond motivation. (CrossFit 2017)

A key element of CrossFit is the possibility to measure one's performance. This data produces knowledge that my informants viewed as rich "objective" knowledge about their fitness. The WOD was a testing ground of fitness for members who emphasized both *health* and *performance*. My informants could also use digital devices, such as the Beyond the Whiteboard (BTWB) application and heart rate monitors, to acquire further "objective" knowledge about their bodies. Breivik (2013:248) has described a *sportification* in terms of increased forms of goal-oriented and measurable training and competitions. In not only top organized sports but also wider, unorganized forms of activity, more people are using stopwatches and heart rate monitors. Clear goals and measurable training are also key parts of CrossFit. Sassatelli has addressed the naturalization of fitness knowledge among her informants in Italian and UK fitness gyms "in the sense that what is *conditioned,* and *conditional* knowledge becomes *unconditional*" (2010:148). She has recalled the example of participants who create personalized training programs, thereby transforming knowledge about gym-bounded training alternatives at the gym into knowledge of the optimal way to exercise for each participant.

My informants followed standardized workouts while simultaneously making individual adaptations. The diversity of views regarding nutrition demonstrates that not all knowledge is "proven" to work. The CrossFit Games provide the ultimate testing ground and proof of CrossFit effectiveness as well as an example of the capabilities of the human body. The CrossFit Open competition affects the CrossFit boxes in various ways, and it also influences the definition of fitness for CrossFit participants. Petter explained after the competition, "my goal was just to do it RX'd. I didn't care about the time. I just want to be able to do the movements. Like a muscle-up, it's not common to do that, but here, it is expected!" In the same way, the results from the WOD create knowledge about their fitness that my informants viewed as "objective." Through *entification* (Larsen 2010:155), CrossFit has created a new category of fitness and *disembedded* what it means to be fit. When I asked if he had changed his view of exercise after starting CrossFit, Kristoffer mentioned noticing weaknesses and strengths in terms of fitness:

> Kristoffer: No, exercises have always been a big interest and a big part of my everyday life. I've not changed my view on exercise, but I've perhaps changed my view on what's the most effective way to improve your general fitness (gjennomtrent). It pays off to have a combination of everything. It shows that if you only lift weights, you don't get in good shape overall.

Coach Kristine explained how the workouts revealed the body's natural weaknesses when she addressed the class after teaching a difficult movement for the WOD:

> This is a good thing with CrossFit and what scares a lot of people: it exposes your weaknesses. We are all born with faults, whether it's the hips, or whatever it is, so everyone has something to work with. We never get perfect.

Exposure to and testing of different exercises and movements in the WOD, as bounded to equipment availability at the box and the usual time limit of 20 minutes, becomes proof of their overall fitness. This testing of fitness is similar to Sassatelli's description of the naturalization of fitness knowledge among her informants. Conditional knowledge that they attained in the gym became unconditional knowledge about the optimal way to train. Here informants usually described this knowledge from the gym as "new," "deep," "better," and "true" as well as an objective and complete *knowledge of the body* (Sassatelli 2010:146). Furthermore, members who wanted to follow their progress more closely and obtain a more detailed measure of their fitness level used BTWB or other digital measuring tools.

Digital measuring

In the early days of CrossFit, boxes first used whiteboards to keep score of the results at the box. The sites that I visited still used the whiteboard to record the workout and some results, but BTWB had largely taken over the mapping of results. In this application, users can compete with their previous results as well as with other people both inside and outside of the box who use the application. The application collects and categorizes results from participants for benchmark workouts, which it then uses to measure results and calculate a personal fitness level. In addition to comparing their results to those of other members who are completing the

WOD nearby, users can further compare their results to anyone who has logged a workout in BTWB and can see their "weaknesses" and "strengths." Many of my informants used the application to track their progress:

> Petter: Simply brilliant – you get that update on your progression that you don't think about every day. It is hard to tell if you get any better from day to day, or week to week. It happens so gradually. For me, being a competitive person, it's cool to see the leader board and follow the others, but it depends on what you use it for. You can also choose to only show the score to yourself. I display my results to the box, so they can see what I do also.
>
> Kristoffer: I think it is very impressive. You can log everything, and it becomes measurable. You can follow your own progress in everything and watch your weaknesses and strengths. I think that is very good. It's a bit depressive if you have gotten worse at something and move down in level. But lately I've mostly gone up, so that's cool.

Mapping one's fitness level in BTWB could actually necessitate skipping the WOD. When I met Kristoffer in the locker room once, he explained that he would not participate in the WOD that day and would instead complete 100 meters and 200 meters at the rowing machine. He had not logged enough of these kinds of exercises in the application, which led to unclear results, and he wanted to obtain an accurate measurement of his fitness level. He further noted that he should participate in the Open competition for this reason. In addition to the application, some informants used stopwatches to measure their heart rate:

> Me: Do you use your stopwatch all the time?
>
> David: Yes, it measures a lot of different stuff. It measures my heart rate during the night, body temperature, and stuff like that. Then it gives you advice in relation to exercise and activity. I don't exercise so much that I need it, but I think it's cool. I notice when my muscles are sore, it actually measures it. And it is cool with body temperature also. If you are about to get sick

> or something, you can notice it and take it easy and not push as hard.
>
> Me: Have you noticed that your body is getting tired because of the watch?
>
> David: Actually, yes, but I probably would have noticed it on my own also. Like, when I haven't slept in the night and feel like crap, it's perhaps no point in working out too much. But I think it can be easy conducting self-deception, so it's good to know exactly how much you have been sleeping. You are sleepy, but you do not know how the night has really been. You could be tired when you wake up but have slept pretty well. I feel that you get an objective measure of your sleep quality, it gives you a score.

The different measurement tools helped members acquire knowledge about the ideal way to achieve health or perform well. When I asked some of the coaches how they viewed their health or activity level, they referred to measurable testing:

> Coach Thomas: I measured my blood pressure and stuff not so long ago, and the doctor said I didn't need to be concerned about cardiovascular diseases for the next 15 to 30 years…I'm getting older, so I do a general health check once a year. I've also had a low resting heart rate around 45 strokes. I've been down at 38 before. So, I will describe my own health as relatively good.
>
> Me: How much do you move a day in general?
>
> Coach Christer: I have worn one of those step counters here. It was like 20,000 steps. (Laughing) I had to take it off. Walking back and forth three classes in a row, you are moving a lot and showing stuff.

Measuring the body through the WOD, the CrossFit Open, BTWB, and stopwatches was important to attain real knowledge about the body for members who emphasized both *health* and *performance*. Such measurement is a naturalization of fitness knowledge; by testing the

body in various ways, they could discover truths about their overall fitness. Many members recalled being shocked by seeing the prescribed workouts at the gym and performing a workout for the first time, and they realized their true fitness level. Some members did not use the application, and some novices hesitated because they felt they needed to be in better shape to use it. It was not unusual to hear that novices were nervous to begin CrossFit in the first place or join the CrossFit Open competition for the same reason. However, many of my informants mentioned that tracking their results motivated them, and they all described progress as an important motivational factor. While CrossFit produces extensive "measurable" knowledge about the body, my informants also highlighted more subjective experiences when discussing the knowledge, they had gained from CrossFit. The next section examines this more subjective type of knowledge.

Subjective knowledge

On the one hand, my informants reported achieving objective knowledge about their fitness. They also perceived the workouts to be a clear indicator of your fitness. The WOD provides standardized equipment and movements that people are encouraged to master as a minimum. At the same time, it offers room for individual adaptations in terms of training days per week, daily training intensity, or specific practices. As Chapter 2 has illustrated, experienced CrossFitters such as Leo and Martin would perform the workouts more slowly or with lighter weights than they were capable of because they did not want to overexert their bodies. This sense of caution is in opposition to the idea that one should always push oneself to the maximum in CrossFit. Marte, a student in her early 20s, explained how she had to learn to exercise less: "When I first started I thought I should train almost every day and just go hard. But I got so tired. So now I exercise fewer days a week and I feel that I perform much better."

While CrossFit offers a standardized alternative for exercise, participants must still make and learn individual adjustments. A frequently discussed subject is CrossFit's effectiveness in relation to other fitness alternatives. When talking to my informants about exercise and nutrition, they often emphasized their own subjective experiences. They occasionally mentioned scientific papers, videos or articles in terms of "good" or "bad" ideas, but they ultimately assigned the most importance to knowledge resulting from individual experience.

In the context of Swedish fitness gyms, Hedblom has reported that the rejection or acceptance of a scientific claim was usually:

> related to trust in the mediating source of this information. And sometimes the body itself is used as a guide for doubt or acceptance of a theory, depending on whether the movement feel right or generates results. In this way acceptance or doubt can in fact become a solid part of our body. (2009:184)

Perspectives regarding nutrition among my informants especially presented similarities to those Hedblom found among her informants in Sweden with respect to the need to have a critical perspective and use the body itself as a judge of wrong and right knowledge:

> Me: What do you think about all the information about exercise and health?
>
> Kristoffer: There's a lot of opinions about everything. Like CrossFit, many athletes swear by the Paleo diet and think it's the best, while others think it's stupid. So, I do what I feel fits me and what I have tested. I don't listen to everything that's said. There's no answer. It's clear that a lot of stuff is proven to work, but I feel it becomes vague. It comes from so many different places.

In confronting an overwhelming amount of information about fitness, Kristoffer would use his own body as a judge for his actions. Kraft (2004:316) has also described the use of the body itself as a guide to find the truth in similar ways in the case of body artists who consider speaking with the weight of the body to be key to finding truth. To these body artists, pain was natural and not a cultural product. It offered a form of speaking that escapes the relativizing tendencies that is realized through bodily experience and believable through the intensity of the experience. Similar to the narratives in both Kraft's and Hedblom's descriptions of body practices, my informants used the body itself as to means to discover the "correct" knowledge. This represented an emphasis on using *the body itself* and finding their own way. Although large quantities of information about exercise could be difficult to manage, they mostly figured out which advice worked for them. Informants based many decisions about exercise and nutrition on their own experimentation. The knowledge acquired

from personal experience was ultimately an important part of their motivation for practicing CrossFit.

The Norwegian context

The introduction of fitness trends is not new in Norway. In the process of translating the SATS concept into Norwegian culture, Steen-Johnsen (2007:357) has noted certain factors to include in an analysis of the translation of fitness into the Norwegian context. The first is the necessity to adapt to existing institutions, and the second is the importance of the entrepreneur's knowledge of the local context. In this section, I explore how the owners and the coaches I encountered in my fieldwork viewed the relationship between their box, Norwegian culture, and the global CrossFit discourse. Similar to the entrepreneurs of SATS, all of the coaches I spoke to possessed knowledge about the training scene and reported previous experiences with sports such as football, handball, skiing, swimming, and martial arts. In addition, Sassatelli (2010:91) has reported that fitness instructors are typically fitness fans and are interested in fitness before they start a professional career. The coaches came into contact with CrossFit in a variety of ways and found it to be a fun and effective way of training. The founder of one of the boxes had been active in multiple sports and first encountered CrossFit through the recommendation of a friend. He subsequently earned the level 1 certificate and opened the box with some friends. When I asked the coaches if they had changed their perspectives of health and fitness after starting CrossFit, the coaches framed their transfer into CrossFit as a minor change:

> Coach Thomas: No, not really. I've always been active, exercised, and focused on nutrition. They were small changes, but there wasn't anything I did in the training or with my nutrition. I've always been conscious of that, and it was similar to some of the training I had done before.

> Coach Vegard: I was doing CrossFit at the gym, and I didn't even know it. I did stuff like bench press, deadlift, and pull ups. When you only have an hour, you start to jump from exercise to exercise. And that's what CrossFit is, isn't it? I was going

> around the gym and sweating everywhere. When I tried CrossFit, I was like, I have done this before, actually.

The coaches had experience with a wide range of activities and viewed CrossFit as a continuation of this range to some degree. Many of the informants offered a similar explanation regarding their encounters with CrossFit. Furthermore, the relationship between members and coaches were often close. As the CEO noted, the coaches were mainly recruited from the box, and they had to prove themselves far beyond the level 1 certificate before they were hired. According to Sassatelli, the consumption of fitness is an ambivalent practice, "with consumers increasingly asked to be active producers of cultural forms that are nevertheless largely circulated and managed by producers who need to consume much of the very same sort they produce" (2010:200). The boxes that I visited had already been established for several years, so none of the coaches had only a level 1 certification. Although a coach could open a CrossFit box with a level 1 certificate, such a coach was not viewed as a "real" coach by the coaches I interviewed. Most of the coaches also had longer or shorter experiences with foreign CrossFit boxes. During interviews, they highlighted a variety of aspects to differentiate Norwegian boxes from foreign boxes:

> Coach Kristine: I've coached in different places, and I would say it's harder to get people with you in Norway. Getting people to laugh in is not easy, for example. On Saturday, I yelled at the group. We were 15 people, and when people were done, they went outside to sit down. Eleven people walked out, while four people were struggling through the rest of the workout. In the US, this would never have happened. We try to prevent it here also, but some people think that it's awkward. You don't need to cheer. We shall not change the culture, but there's a unity that's hard to build because we are much more individualistic. People want unity, but they don't want to give.
>
> Coach Thomas: The quality of the coaches in the European boxes I've visited varies a lot. I've been to a couple of boxes and twisted myself in pain by watching the technique of the coaches and participants. I remember watching someone

> deadlifting where I just could imagen the back damage. So, the quality is variable.
>
> Coach Vegard: I did CrossFit for a couple of years in US, and I think it's a big difference in the Norwegian culture versus US in terms of strength training. That's why there are hardly any male Norwegian CrossFitters; they are not good enough. They are not strong enough because they haven't done it from such a young age, like 15 years old. Norway has just naturally more endurance sports, cross-country skiing and stuff. We obviously have to program more strength training here. Whereas in the US, you probably focus more on gymnastics and maybe a little bit more mobility because everyone has done those bad deadlifts and too much bench-press, so they are very stiff. But they still have the strength, which takes a lifetime to acquire, so it's different.

Here, the quality of techniques, the challenge of building a community, and the need to focus more on strength were points of difference from certain foreign boxes. When asked how closely they followed Greg Glassman or the war on chronic diseases, coaches provided varied responses:

> Coach Adrian: I don't pay much attention to Glassman, but I follow the war on soda. I think it's cool to have the balls to do that. Sugar just isn't good. But it's the same for other sports drinks also; nothing is good if you get too much of it. Except for that, I haven't paid so much attention to him. I think he is really good at getting the message out – changing the world in the way he is about to do now. He is a really good talker.
>
> Coach Ida: I think the war on soda is cool. They [the CrossFit company] have gone to war against another big company, which also probably has 90 lawyers. I wonder how much of an effect it has. In the US, it is very important. It is a huge problem, and they fight hard against obesity. I wonder how many extremely obese people do CrossFit. How many of those

> do you get? It's important to reach them also…But they also do it to get attention I guess. They want to spread the CrossFit brand. I think it's exciting to follow them. But I love Pepsi max, I really do. (Laughing)
>
> Coach Fredrik: We are not that much affected by that. I experience it [the war on soda] as more of an increased awareness of the damages of too much sugar. I think it's more important in the US because the soda industry is much larger over there. He [Glassman] has a lot of good ideas and has had a bunch of them. The war on soda gets a bit too much for me. He has a bunch of statements and stuff about the science of CrossFit that stretches it a bit too far. But he started something good, and it's much work that probably is good in the US, but it doesn't quite hit me.

All the coaches seemed impressed by the achievements of Glassman and the CrossFit brand, but they differed in the extent to which they followed him and their views of the war on soda. My participation in the classes reinforced this perception. I never heard about the war on soda, and coaches generally did not preach about what people should eat or drink outside of the box. The focus in the classes was on explaining the workouts and providing instruction for the techniques. Nevertheless, if asked about nutrition, coaches would provide advice, and they all maintained carefully formed ideas about nutrition, though most emphasized that they were not nutritionists by profession when discussing dietary matters. They expressed expertise mainly in the training and were careful to claim any overall authority on health. When asked about their experiences of perceptions of CrossFit among Norwegian people and whether they knew which aspects attracted Norwegians to CrossFit, they emphasized the mixed reputation in media:

> Coach Thomas: A lot of people look at it as very extreme, and many are afraid to try it. I've often heard that it looks so tough and that people want to get in better shape before they start. But CrossFit is for everybody. It's possible to scale the workouts. We have people who have gone down 60 and 80 kilos after starting here. So, we have many sunshine stories. I've great respect for everyone who wants to come in the door and try it,

> because I think is hard for many people. When you search on YouTube, you see the Games and what those beasts are doing, and I understand it can look a bit terrifying.
>
> Coach Kristine: In Norway, I think CrossFit attracts a mixture of people, but I feel that it attracts more and more adult people who want to do x-run, or who like to do triathlon or are active in one way or another. A lot of people in Norway like to challenge themselves, and they get a new challenge in CrossFit. I think that's why a lot of people start. They get a new motivation in their training because it is a new challenge and something new they can try to get good at. At the same time, it attracts more and more youth or social media fans because they have seen the CrossFit Games and documentaries from Netflix.

According to the owners and coaches in my fieldwork, CrossFit was viewed as hardcore, and many people were afraid to try it. Nonetheless, they found that many members – themselves included – were attracted to CrossFit because it offered a new challenge and was similar to some of the training that they had done before. The coaches viewed it as reasonably difficult to introduce CrossFit to Norway because it is more challenging to build a community, there is a stronger focus on technique, and people have less experience with strength training. The reservation from preaching about every aspect of health may indicate that the box has been subject to more influence from the sports discourse than from the health discourse. This disparity could signal an adaptation to Norwegian culture. For example, regarding the nutrition aspect, if all coaches had followed or more actively promoted the Zone or Paleo diet to members, more members would probably have used them. However, it could also have resulted in fewer members, as some members were skeptical of claims of overall authority over health- and fitness-related information. The high level of competence that was expected of the coaches may explain why they emphasized that they were not nutritionists by profession, and it evidences the expectation of professionalism at fitness gyms in general (Sassatelli 2010:87).

The Norwegian CrossFit boxes that I experienced were most heavily influenced by the training of the global CrossFit brand. The characteristic WOD and the development of the

required techniques were the key aspects to separate CrossFit from other training alternatives in Norway. There is a growing interest in functional fitness, which a member described as follows: “I used to be a member at SATS ELEXIA and participated in some classes similar to CrossFit – circuit training and stuff. It was fine, but CrossFit is the next level.”

This chapter has illustrated how my informants adapted to the global CrossFit brand. The training represents a standardized form of cultural exchange, with similar movements, practical limitations at the boxes, regular benchmark workouts, and the CrossFit Open competition. The CrossFit brand contributes to an entification of human fitness, and a standardized and disembedded form of measuring training. However, the nutrition aspect of the global CrossFit discourse was unclear or refused at the boxes, and few of my informants claimed to follow any strict form of the diets that are often associated with CrossFit. These findings can be viewed in relation to the coaches’ avoidance of any overall claim to authority on nutrition and health, which also concentrated their expertise in the training. The emphasis on ultimately having expertise in the training could be situated within the wider culture of the CrossFit box to focus more on the sports aspect than the health movement aspects of CrossFit.

The chapter has also demonstrated how my participants acquired “objective” knowledge about their bodies. By measuring their performance in the WOD, using digital devices, and participating in the CrossFit Open competition, my informants gathered unconditional knowledge regarding their fitness, which in turn strengthened their belief that CrossFit is the optimal way to exercise. Informants expressed knowledge in light of a critical perspective and an emphasis on the subjective experiences of the body, and they ultimately viewed the body itself as the most effective way to attain individual knowledge. The coaches appeared to work as cultural translators of CrossFit in Norway, thereby mediating the introduction of CrossFit to the Norwegian context.

Chapter 5 - Embracing the challenge

In this chapter, I elaborate on how my informants learned to perform the workouts, and I analyze the practice of CrossFit in light of ritual theory. I first consider how novices could experience the WOD as a *rite of passage* and how it transforms and develops aptitudes. Furthermore, I examine the CrossFit Open competition and compare the values and ideas that it expresses to other parts of the fitness culture. Then, I demonstrate how these values and ideas were manifested among my informants and how they developed a shared *habitus* in their attitude toward training and challenges. Through this analysis, I illuminate how the culture and the "community" was branded, experienced by coaches and members, and created at the box.

The WOD as a rite of passage

Novices might experience the WOD as a *rite of passage* and a part of an important learning process. Barland (1997:176) has reported that a bodybuilding competition can act as a *rite of passage* for a novice, who can acquire a new social position at the gym after participating in the competition. For CrossFit novices, the WOD can similarly change their social status at the box. When asked if individual exercise was also necessary alongside the WOD, one coach responded as follows:

> No, we train for general physical preparedness, that's all CrossFit is – never said anything about competition. People think we are programming for competition, but we are not. It might look like competition, but it's just making you fitter. You need to work on strength, endurance – you need to work on some speed, balance, coordination, and gymnastics. So, yeah, if you can do the WOD RX'd and beat everybody in the gym, then you are ready for the next step. And people don't know that, so that's what we need to remind people. If you want to take the next step, come beat me in class. Then we can talk. Otherwise, just keep working hard, and work on your weaknesses.

The RX'd workout sets the standard for the workout. If a person can complete every step RX'd, it evidences competence as a CrossFitter as well as a large investment of time and effort in body development. This connection would also apply in the CrossFit Open competition and the benchmark workouts for which several thousands of participants have logged results. Excelling in any of these challenges automatically imparts status as a fit individual in the given area.

In the WOD, people were not aware in advance if they would perform gymnastics, running, heavy lifting, or an assortment of activities; they only knew it would be a workout, and they would probably be expected to complete it as quickly as possible. Compared to the CrossFit Games competition, the CrossFit boxes that I visited engaged with a much more limited use and range of equipment. There were certain limits in this regard depending on the gym's equipment and facilities. However, participants needed to be ready for any activity in the context of the gym. Since workouts were not known in advance, participants could not prepare a detailed plan for activities from day to day. Rather, they had to learn to accept this environment and their lack of control over determining the workout. The WOD can arguably be viewed as an attempt at a standardized daily ritual that constantly tests and transforms participants. The WOD offered a new trial each day and aimed to make people fully prepared.

The purpose of the constantly changing WOD is to create a liminal phase that tests the body and develops composure. Sassatelli (2010:50) has framed the changing room as a liminal place by assigning a delicate ceremonial position to the acts of undressing and dressing, whereby "clients find themselves between what is relevant in the training spaces – the gym core – and what is relevant in everyday life" (2010:51). The boundaries between the pre-liminal, liminal, and post-liminal phases are easily blurred in the context of the WOD. The period before the workout represents the pre-liminal phase in this study, but it also overlaps with the liminal phase once the novices become aware they shall perform a WOD.

The period before the WOD was characterized by uncertainty. In explaining her adaptation to CrossFit, one coach admitted, "I was nervous before every workout and had sweaty hands, but you get used to it." During my fieldwork, I was able to experience a feeling of not knowing what the workout would be. When I first started, I thought it was exciting to receive a new workout every day. This eagerness could have derived from my habit of exercising regularly

before trying CrossFit, as I thought it was especially fun to try new activities. When I talked to novices who had not exercised for a long time prior to starting CrossFit, they often expressed more dread before the workout. However, after the first couple of weeks, I also began to dread the WOD. I knew it was going to be difficult, and I had a feeling of uncertainty in my body when I did not know the contents of the workout. Although the members did not know the workout schedule at the box, the WOD was posted online every morning, so it was possible to discover the workout on the day of its assignment.

After a couple of months, I became more familiar with the basic movements and could roughly anticipate the difficulty of the workout. I could then more easily foresee the workout before going to the box. I experienced that knowing what the workout was had a substantial effect on my "mental preparation". When I knew the workout, I could start to prepare myself for the oncoming challenge. Thus, I stopped wondering what the workout would be and could plan how to complete the workout. I could quickly determine if my muscles were already sore after a workout earlier in the week or if I felt fresh, and I would start asking myself how the workout would be. Is it going to be hardest for my shoulders, grip or legs? Which movements is going to be crucial? How can I get a steady pace? Where should I save myself and when should I go all out? I experienced such questions, and they were expressed by many of my informants as well.

While it was possible to check the workout before going to the gym, it was often comprised of a combination that we had not yet tried, so some uncertainty still accompanied it. Predictions or reflections on workouts were common before and after sessions. People who had just arrived at the gym would ask the members who were done about the workout, and the people who had finished would share their experiences. My impression was that most people would check the contents of the workout before they went to the gym, but some people shared that they usually or sometimes preferred to come to the box without knowing the workout in advance. It was also considered as a fun element, as evident from the following expressions from one of my informants regarding why he likes CrossFit:

> Kristoffer: It's very versatile. You never know what you are going to do. I think that's cool. You are never completely comfortable with what you are doing.

> Me: Have you become comfortable with not knowing what you shall do?
>
> Kristoffer: Yes, I think it's okay. You just have to do it, and then you quickly notice what you are not so good at and what you have to work on. You are just thrown into it. I think it's cool.

The liminal phase was thus a source of both dread and fun and created shared experiences among participants. Although people dreaded the sessions and discussed its anticipated difficulty, they still looked forward to the workouts. In my experience, when informants were already informed of the workout and knew they were not skilled at it or had done similar exercises and found them challenging, they would dread the session. As a famously difficult and long workout, the Murph was almost always dreaded, as it would be challenging for everyone. Participants often looking forward to the workout when they were confident in their abilities for it or found it to have fun movement combinations. They also explained that if they had been sedentary the whole day and their head felt overstimulated, it was nice to simply move their body in the WOD. Although the feelings prior to workouts varied from day to day, participants had to learn to accept the uncertainty.

In this liminal phase of the WOD, the only significant aspect was the performance, and the only restrictions were certain standards for the execution of movements. Otherwise, participants could decide how many breaks to take or how many repetitions to perform at once, though they tried to be as fast as possible. To perform in the workouts, one must adapt to the workout setting, including learning to perform in the class and combining multiple techniques with high pulse while pushing one's limits. Novices who are unaccustomed to exercise in a class setting can experienced this as challenging. Since CrossFit searches for *general fitness*, CrossFitters are expected to excel in all areas. The focus on measuring can allow CrossFitters to exhibit their exact capabilities to everyone. A woman who was preparing for a workout mentioned concerns to me in this regard, admitting, "I get so nervous by looking at the time of other people; they are so fast." Another participant immediately responded, "focus only on yourself; you can only work on yourself". This exchange points to the social status of doing well in WOD, at the same time we see how participants try to support each other. To novices, the WOD offered a *rite of passage* through which they could

enter the CrossFit community, it created shared experiences among participants and contributed to community building in the gym.

Pain and suffering

While stretching, one person joked around extensively and complained that it was painful. The coach asked where he was hurt, and he responded, "generally everywhere." "General pain is good – that's just healthy," the coach laughed. This reflected a common attitude toward pain during workouts. "Let the pain and suffering begin" was the conclusion to Castro's announcement of the first CrossFit Open workout. Learning to practice CrossFit entails more than simply learning to perform certain movements; it is also necessary to develop skills to be able to perform the WOD, and participants must develop a certain mindset. My informants described CrossFit as a fun activity but did not expect it to be easily achieved, and they embraced the necessity of pain, as I have described in Chapter 2. Coach Thomas highlighted the necessity of some amount of suffering when we talked about first-time CrossFitters:

> You have to want something with your health or training. If you just show up thinking you shall get something served on a silver plate without doing anything, you are very wrong. You have to want it, but if you want it, it is for everybody. You have to feel the discomfort of going outside of your own comfort zone.

CrossFit centers around high-intensity training and competing against the clock. Admittedly, the coach shouted, "come on – last round!" far more often than "remember not to push yourself too hard!" Participants were expected to push through the pain to improve and learn to perform the workout without hurting themselves while still being fast and effective. Moreover, there was a separation of "good" and "bad" pain. The pain from exerting one's muscles in a workout was considered good, but back pain resulting from poor weightlifting technique was bad. Thus, pain was "both something negative and constricting as well as a positive and sought-after feeling" (Hedblom 2009:150).

Atkinson has linked the suffering of fell runners to the liminal experience in the sense that "fell running sessions provide participants with ordered contexts for self-exploration through

the suffering process" (2016:101). Marcel Mauss (2004:95) has extended the importance of ritual to the learning of *body techniques* by noting how tests that derive from stoicism and initiation rituals aim to acquire composure, resistance, seriousness, presence, and dignity, for example. He has cited his own experience with climbing (Mauss 2004:96), where learning composure allowed him to sleep at high elevations on small mountain shelfs. He has first and foremost described composure as a breaking mechanism that prevents uncoordinated movements. The need to testing oneself "and publicly demonstrate social character in meritocratic manners" has long been associated with alternative and lifestyle sports subcultures (Atkinson 2016:107). In this section, I liken the WOD to a form of ritual that teaches members to manage uncertainty and develop composure. CrossFit participants must develop their abilities in order to handle the assigned workout and not be overwhelmed by the task**.**

Another challenge involves becoming so competitive that one forgets the technique in his or her eagerness to complete the WOD as quickly as possible. "Leave your ego at the door" was a frequent motto in the box that was easy to understand when I had a group around me cheering as I finished a workout. I wanted to perform well, and it was easy to just try to complete it as quickly as possible and hope my technique was acceptable. When I had not quite learned a movement, it was essential that I proceeded through the correct stages, especially when dealing with heavy weights, as they present a higher danger of injury. The coaches circulated to correct movements during the workout and, in worst-case scenario, would stop someone if they feared an injury. Nevertheless, participants ultimately reserved personal responsibility and had to take care not to overexert themselves. The coaches could not control the intensity levels of the whole class. When people cheered someone on, the person would usually increase their effort. This effect could be viewed in both positive and negative terms, as one woman expressed after a cheerful finish: "I love it when it goes well, but I hate it when I have a bad day." To Sassatelli, concentrating on one's own body and controlling one's own performance are organizational demands that require extensive work on the part of participants: "Self-surveillance is, in many ways, one of the central elements of fitness training" (2010:115). The removal of mirrors can help participants stay focused on themselves, but there are still other people watching, which is an element with which they must become familiar.

Participants also considered the ability to push oneself as a skill or "mental strength". Concentration was important to avoid self-injury and perform well, and it was crucial to be focused on the immediate task at hand. This lesson became especially clear to me during one workout. I had been conducting fieldwork for a few months and was learning the necessity of finding a steady pace to become faster. It was a beginner-level class, and we were instructed to complete five rounds of multiple exercises culminating in a 200-meter run. I decided not to push myself the first round but instead find a pace with which I was comfortable. I came in last place in the second round, and I remember thinking, "come on, don't look at the clock, stay focused…just do one movement…one repetition…" Slowly, I improved my position, and I ended up finishing first. Other times, I remember people finishing around me, and saying to myself, "come on, focus," but being unable to concentrate and just wanting to quit. While this feeling also varied from day to day, I improved at finding a rhythm and maintaining focus. For example, setting break times could make it easier to push oneself. A coach demonstrated this effect as we were cheering on a student named Christer to finish his workout. Christer took a break from a movement, and the coach said, "three, two, one, go," after which Christer lifted again. The next time Christer took a break to breathe, the coach said, "okay, three seconds pause…That was 10 seconds, more than enough, go now," and Christer started again. Becoming acquainted with one's body and determining how to push oneself was vital for performing the WOD. Eventually, I noticed that merely entering the gym helped to situate me in the proper mindset, even if I had felt tired earlier in the day. The liminal phase of the WOD involved a variety of challenges that participants had to perform in a class setting while learning to push themselves to a safe and appropriate extent.

During the WODs, my informants experienced new movements that they could not perform adequately or at all. Similar, in other activities, such as Capoeira or boxing (Downey 2005:131), adapting to CrossFit is difficult and emotionally demanding, as "changing habits and everyday actions, although possible, is actually very difficult: embodiment is no easy path of access to a person…One change one's body only by transforming one's character at the same time, behaving consistently in new ways" (Downey 2005:131). Some of my informants noted that the knowledge they had gained in the box translated to other parts of life. As Chapter 3 has recounted, CrossFit training changes the way the body moves, and it affected how I lifted objects outside of the box as well. Sara offered the following anecdote about how the mindset of CrossFit helped her at school:

> In my exam period, I noticed that I didn't have the time to read all subjects I should. Then I just thought, "well, I just have to read what I can." Every time I thought about what I didn't have the time to do, I got stressed, just like a Murph. But then I just learned to do in life what I did in Murph: one step at a time; one task at a time. That helped me a lot.

Sara applied the same mindset to finishing her reading that she did to the CrossFit workout. Meanwhile, Leo explained that the training helped him handle crises in real life:

> For example, if something should happen to my kids when we are out playing in the woods, and I was sitting there with a beer belly and smoker's cough, I wouldn't have been able to save my kids – walk for help or whatever was necessary. It's no doubt that being in physical shape makes you better prepared to handle crises – at least your physical capacity, but it has to do with your head also. If you are used to feeling pain, you can handle stuff in a different way.

Leo also highlighted how not only his physical shape but also his mental state had learned to perceive pain. Most of my informants would probably identify improvements in health that also impact other aspects of life as effects of CrossFit training. The transformative environment of fitness gyms can change subjects as much as they change bodies (Sassatelli 2010:200). In CrossFit, participants must learn to deal with pain and discomfort. Through the constant focus on practicing techniques and performing in the WOD, participants learn to manage uncertainty, pain, and effective body techniques.

The CrossFit Open competition

> Where grassroots meet greatness: compete with hundreds of thousands of athletes in five workouts over five weeks. Do it for fun, your affiliate family, fitness or to reach regionals and fight for a chance to make it to the 2017 Reebok CrossFit Games. (CrossFit Games 2017)

The CrossFit Open competition is a global event that welcomes anyone who wants to compete in CrossFit. In the boxes that I visited, the CrossFit Open was instrumental in constructing and maintaining a sense of a global CrossFit "community." As Chapter 4 has demonstrated, the boxes could construct their own workouts according to various theories throughout the rest of the year, but in the time around the CrossFit Open, all attention was directed to the competition, and boxes immediately adopted new elements that were introduced there. The CrossFit Open competition informs the focus of the boxes and their definition of being fit.

The competition consists of five workouts. At least one workout is the same as in the previous year, which makes it possible to measure one's progress by comparison. The competition involves measurable exercises that one can perform inside of the box and expresses scientific ideals of measurable, observable, and repeatable results in the search for the fittest people in the world. Each year, a new movement or type of equipment is introduced, which encourages participants to practice a wide variety of movements and try different types of equipment to improve their weaknesses. In 2015, the *muscle-up* movement was introduced, while the *dumbbell* was featured in 2017. These additions represent new, concrete challenges for participants.

In the *entification* of a new kind of fitness, CrossFit is clearly influenced by values of the Enlightenment. Based on my reading of the CrossFit Open competition as a ritual, the competition itself expresses a central part of CrossFit culture. Asad has explained that "as history became substantialized and singularized, it assumed the form of a universal force that pushes mankind along the path of progress, punishing error and inadequacy – very much as the God of the Old Testament did" (1993:123). Barland (1997:179) has examined a Norwegian bodybuilding competition as a modern ritual and outlined some of the fundamental social and cultural structures that underpin the competition. Barland (1997:187) has used Odd Are Berkaak's theory about the *megalomane* to illustrate how bodybuilders gather around fundamental values, such as growth and cumulative expansion. The *megalomane* appears where the authoritarian center is missing; the empty center must be filled, and in this search for communication without references, the exaggerated aesthetics appear. Bodybuilder competitions emphasize the same elements – symmetry, definition, and muscle mass – but they are qualitative, floating terms that can never be defined. The president in the Norwegian Bodybuilder Federation welcomed by hoping it would be the best event so

far. The goal is not concrete; it shall just be better than last time, and that is up to the participants. The competition exhibits ever-growing muscle mass and the ground-breaking body in its limitless potential for growth.

Similar values are expressed in the CrossFit Open competition, which states that the CrossFit community is one that rises to the occasion and constantly strives for improvement (CrossFit® 2015: April 21). The CrossFit Open is viewed as punishment for those who are not generally physically prepared. In view of CrossFit as a branded health movement, disease, old age, or nature could be perceived as punishments for those who do not follow the progress of CrossFit. The CrossFit Open competition, like bodybuilding, arguably expresses and manifests similar basic ideas and values about pushing one's limits (grensesprengende) as well as the importance of growth and progress. As expressive elements of rituals, the competitions may indicate certain fundamental elements of fitness culture. A belief in eternal progress seems to be central to sports; for example, the Olympic motto "citius, altius, forties" ("faster, higher, stronger") expresses this notion (Breivik 2013:31). The CrossFit Open competition appeals to this idea of the ever-evolving body and its limitless potential. One difference that could relate to the shift toward functional fitness (see Chapter 2) is that the bodybuilder does not perform any concrete action but presents an illusion and a feeling of the body's potential (Barland 1997:187). In contrast, the CrossFit Open competition strive to demonstrate the exact capabilities of the body.

Bodybuilder competitions and sports seem to express the same ideas of progress and expansion. Atkinson has described fell running as a post-sports physical culture "in which modernist ideologies and practices are not celebrated outright, and in which corporeal dichotomies between the sacred and profane, the raw and the cooked, the athletic and uncontrolled body are challenged through various form of athletic suffering" (2016:108). In his description of "traditional sports," these practices usually discipline the physical body as a resource for achieving external goals. In contrast, fell running avoids this strict use of the body as a resource to such an extent that "[t]emporary moments of dizziness, panic, suffering, and letting go through athletics can become the primary focus of fell running for its participants" (2016:108). Fell running often occurs in remote areas where runners are often alone for long periods (Atkinson 2016:97). This experience of suffering is viewed by many, but not all, as a pleasurable one, as "one is first forced to 'let go' of oneself and then begins to

seek out the experience of existentially unplugging through fell running" (2016:108). As demonstrated, CrossFit involves a variety of ideas and motivations. As a brand, it is both a health movement and a new sport. Trying to improve either health or athletic performances, CrossFit is mostly influenced by modernist ideologies about managing or improving external goals, yet participants could also embrace the suffering process or challenge that the workouts represented.

Weaknesses and progress

The conversation at the box often revolved around dreading the session or discussions of its intensity and the difficulty of the WOD. However, participants described it as fun and were motivated by the challenge as well as positive feelings of achievement. I experienced this effect myself: while "complaining" that a workout was going to be difficult, I still looked forward to performing it. Specific techniques were usually not fun to practice, but it was highly satisfying when I started to master them. If I could execute them in the WOD, it was even more satisfying. Thus, while I might dread some workouts because I could anticipate their difficulty, I was also eager to testing my skills and capabilities in the WOD, especially famous workouts such as the Murph and the CrossFit Open competition.

The day-to-day lives of some of my informants clearly revealed how progress in purely *performance*-related goals could be secondary to progress in terms of *health*. Nevertheless, progress was important in either case, as stagnancy was not a valid option. Progress seemed to be central to people's motivations to continue exercising, and a lack of progress was demotivating. Before an open workout, I encountered an informant who had not managed one of the movements and therefore wanted to abstain completely from the competition. Thus, the lack of progress or achievement could separate between who continued to participate and who did not. The values of progress and improvement clearly manifested among my informants. Most novices had previous experience with sports or other fitness gyms. Compared to other activities, they often experienced CrossFit as challenging their body in new ways. After one workout, I asked a man in his late 20s if he was happy with the workout and felt that he was on track with progress. He answered:

> Yes, I am happy with the workout, but of course I am not where I should be. (Laughing) One never gets there. There is always something more you can practice. When you have learned to be good at one thing, there is another thing you can practice. And you have to do this while you are maintaining the other stuff.

Being unable to perform a movement indicates a weakness to improve. Regardless of progress level, self-improvement is a never-ending process. Errors are permissible only if they fuel active improvement, and the central concern is addressing weaknesses and remaining active. This conclusion was confirmed many times by my conversations at the box. If I had a bad session or had struggled with an aspect, I was often sympathetically encouraged to continue working on it. Progress was also a vital part of the motivation for my informants. Lars, who had practiced CrossFit for a couple of years, quit for a while, and then restarted shortly before I met him, also highlighted the importance of progress. In a conversation on the subway, I recalled my previous experience with sports and explained that it was easier for me to have a goal with the training. He agreed and said:

> I'm totally dependent on it. Now, I have clear goals that keep me motivated. CrossFit is perfect in that way – always a lot you can do. Now I want to improve my snatch, which means I also have to work on my squat.

One day in the locker room, I talked to David about the WOD. He clearly expressed a focus on health in his training but noted that he did not notice any results in his performance. The workouts featured a wide variety of activities and he did not have much time to spend at the box, so he lost track of his progress. However, in my later interview with him, I asked if he engaged in CrossFit out of a feeling of duty or pleasure:

> David: I think it is really fun! And I think it is cool that I get actual results. I know I said to you earlier that I didn't get results, but I do get noticeable better results.
>
> Me: Just hard to keep track between the different workouts?
>
> David: Yes, it's far between. But, actually, here the other day, I did 10 hang ups and some toes to bar and stuff, which I've been

> struggling with. I have hated the workouts with these movements. But I have started to get better.

Both Lars and David cited progress as an important motivational factor and a reason why CrossFit is fun. Sassatelli (2010:135) has addressed the shared internal *habitus* of fitness participants; people who quit described feeling "tense," "embarrassed," "alone," and "bored," which contrasted with people who continued to exercise and described it as a learning process that shifted attention from body defects to "concentrate on performing bodywork with a cheerful, 'positive attitude'" (2010:135). Some of my informants expressed a shared *habitus* of being motivated by progress and excited by challenges in their approach to the training.

Community

CrossFit's focus on community may account for the regular comparison to a religion. Angie Thurston and Casper ter Kuile from Harvard Divinity School have written a report entitled "How we gather" (2015). It describes a changing US in which millennials are becoming less religiously affiliated, but which is uniting through multiple new organizations "that deepen community in ways that are powerful, surprising, and perhaps even religious" (2015:4). The report identifies CrossFit as one such organization and highlights how, in addition to its fitness approach, CrossFit is successful because of its *community* building through focusing on *personal transformation* and holding each other *accountable*. Among my informants, camaraderie was mentioned as one of the main reasons to continue exercising, and it was often juxtaposed with previous experiences of "boring" fitness gyms or "fun" sports.

> Herman (late 30s): I missed the community and competition from when I did soccer and handball. I don't like SATS and stuff, so I went straight to CrossFit. It has to be fun and have room to joke around, or I wouldn't do it.

The concept of community (fellesskap) was used in the boxes that I visited. The liminal aspects of the WOD and the shared experiences build *communitas*, in the words of Victor Turner. This phenomenon has been observed among bodybuilders (Barland 1997:182) and fell runners, among whom Atkinson has written that the liminal state creates a cultural feeling

of "common humanity and equality rather than recognized hierarchy" (2016:106). In an interview, Petter provided a description of the feeling of exercising together:

> We support each other no matter which level you're at. That's what so cool about the partner workouts, where you exercise with new people. I've been partnered with everything from women of 60 to some of the fittest CrossFitters in Norway. It doesn't matter – we help each other forward, and we become a unit.

In the WOD, everybody participates on equal ground and contends with the same challenges. If a person cannot complete the workout RX'd, he or she can scale the workout. Thus, everyone can be challenged at his or her own "level." In my experience at the gym, all members – young or old, novice or experienced – mentioned the importance of the community as a significant motivational factor. Social interactions made exercising more fun and were a key driver to continue training:

> Leo: You have to write about the community. This is something I can tell you since I'm a little bit older. With work and family, it's not as easy for me to hang out with my buddies as it used to be. Therefore, it's nice to just come here a couple hours during a week and just have that community.
>
> Petter: I really like the social aspect. You find likeminded people who think it is fun to push themselves in workouts, and when we are done, we just hang and have fun like everybody else. We don't run around quite with a headset but talk and have a good time. The last year has been pretty busy at school, and I haven't had the time to hang that much with friends, so it's perfect to come here and train for an hour and a half, be social, and exercise at the same time.
>
> Henrik: It's just exercise. I could have done it at home, but I like going to the classes and getting pushed a bit. People are nicer here than at normal fitness gyms. It gets more effective when you do it this way. I thought it should be more people at

> my level and more social stuff outside of the box, but maybe that comes when you have been here for a year or two.

In addition to the feeling of community that informants expressed, the community is also branded as an important part of CrossFit and a key factor of its success. Simulating the camaraderie that is found in sports can cultivate a fun environment that yields superior results:

> The community that spontaneously arises when people do these workouts together is a key component of why CrossFit is so effective, and it gave birth to a global network of CrossFit affiliates that number over 13,000. Harnessing the natural camaraderie, competition and fun of sport or game yields an intensity that cannot be matched by other means. (CrossFit 2017)

Since the "community" is branded as a key aspect of CrossFit, my informants may have gained an increased awareness of this aspect of the training. Fitness centers are increasingly promoted as "community" or "sociable places, where one can meet people" (Sassatelli 2010:67). Still, my informants assigned significance to their experiences of the community. One day, I was partnered with a man in his 30s who had been involved in CrossFit on and off for a couple of years and was trying to get back into shape after traveling for a while. For the workout, we were instructed to, among other tasks, complete some outdoor running. My partner determined the speed, and he ran quickly. We were the first team finish running, but before we were halfway through the session, we were suddenly last. "Oh, I'm in bad shape," my partner burst out as we ran out the door again. Meanwhile, the instructor shouted after us, "come on, five minutes left!" "My poor heart – if I were alone, I would walk," my partner said to me once we were outside. I answered that he should choose a speed with which he was comfortable, and we kept pushing until the time ran out. Once we had regained our breath after the workout, he told me:

> I liked being pushed like this. The alternative is training alone on a machine at a normal gym. Here, the instructor looks at you and gives you tips, and other people cheer you on. Not much attention is needed for me to push a little extra.

The “community” is comprised of the people at the box – a community of likeminded people – and is often viewed in opposition to the solitary exercise that occurs at “normal” gyms. Respondents described it as making exercise fun and satisfying certain needs for socialization. The community also offered opportunities for improvement by pushing participants a bit harder. Whether members had been practicing CrossFit for two months or five years, they highlighted the community as important. As the examples regarding nutrition and training have evidenced, these elements are fundamental to becoming a CrossFitter, but some of the actual practices vary. Both new and old members described the fun socialization and mutual encouragement as positive aspects of the community. Both new and old members found the community to be significant, which may indicate divergent meanings behind the community. Here, a symbolic construction of “community” is relevant. A shared use of the community as a symbol “is not necessarily the same as the sharing of meaning” (Cohen 1989:16).

Informants expressed that the branded community aspect of CrossFit was central to CrossFit. Pushing oneself was considered necessary to improve one’s fitness, and the community could help with it. The training is painful but necessary to improve one’s fitness. In the study of body artists who created modern tribal communities, Siv-Ellen Kraft (2004:304) has noted how pain is a shared human experience that is well suited to the construction of an ahistorical tribal community. Pain is private, unique, and difficult to express, yet it is a common and imaginable human experience with which we can identify. This position renders it suitable as a fundamental element of an imagined or symbolic community. Everybody can relate to pain, especially CrossFitters who experience the pain of a WOD and the difficulty of learning skills. People may function at different levels, but they can all relate to the struggle and pain, which creates shared experiences and contributes to community building in the gym. The community emerges symbolically through the branding and, in practice, through shared experiences and mutual references. This community makes the workouts enjoyable and simultaneously satisfies needs for both social interaction and exercise. Establishing a “community” or “culture” does not happen effortlessly, however. Based on my fieldwork, an analysis of the practice of cheering can illuminate some of these challenges and expose the ritual characteristics of the workout.

Cheering

A part of the ritual practice in the WOD is to cheer on the last person who is finishing. This gesture demonstrates mutual support and encourage improvement. The cheering is context dependent and varies from class to class, but it occurs regularly, and "everybody knows" that it is a part of the CrossFit culture. According to a novice, "the good CrossFitters usually cheer." One can here talk about a *tangled state* (Parkin 1992:23) of the ritual; were participants negotiate uncertainties and establish order. Creating a community or sociability often demands hard work, as Sassatelli (2010) has also observed in Italian and UK fitness gyms. Accordingly, it does not always happen spontaneously but "is largely the result of collective work, performed by clients (with the result that a certain clientele will, to a degree, define the tone of a club) and by trainers (whose job in many ways is relational and emotional)" (Sassatelli 2010:68). My informants had predominantly favorable perceptions of cheering but did recognize that it could be negative or awkward:

> Kristoffer: I think it's cool. I don't do it that much myself, but it's fun that people support you no matter what kind of shape you're in. Even if you are the last one, you get cheered on all the way through. I think that is a positive thing. It's perhaps some people who don't like it, but for me, it's good. You get pushed, and then you go a bit harder.
>
> David: If I'm completely exhausted, it doesn't help anything. Then it's just annoying. It's a part of the package, and I think it's fine, but it's not my favorite part. I notice that I don't cheer as much for others. I think it's cool in the team workouts – then you are a team and push each other. But cheering on the last guy finish can be a bit strange.

During my fieldwork, I observed that cheering practices varied from class to class. Cheering could provoke resentment on "bad" days but elicit joy on "good" days. In my experience, people who had been practicing CrossFit for several years and people who were highly familiar with each other engaged in the most cheering. When someone first started, more people often joined in; thus, one person could have a substantial effect on the cheering from class to class. In addition, the coaches obviously had a major role in the community building

at the box, and they would sometimes encourage people to cheer or share high fives. However, they did not have a straightforward experience with cheering either:

> Coach Vegard: Some people don't respond to the cheering and yelling, and some people do and hurt themselves. Sometimes people just want to take it easy too. But people are also excited about the cheering, and that's what I love as well. It's so good when you are having a bad day and do a WOD and someone is cheering you on the last part, and you're like, "thank you – I needed that." It's not to get a better score. It's just nice that someone cheers you on and give you a pet on the back. I think that's cool – the camaraderie. I think it's important if you want to stay in the game for a long time.

Depending on the context or the member, cheering could be either fun and helpful or annoying and embarrassing. Nevertheless, as a feature of the community, it was mostly discussed in a positive regard and strengthening the symbolic construction of the branded CrossFit community. Cheering can be framed as a form of ritualized practice that produces solidarity, a feeling of community, and a sense of "belonging." Sassatelli has noted that "cheerfulness in training has clearly a normative slant" (2010:206), as the encouragement of a cheering community reinforces values regarding improving and pushing oneself.

This chapter has examined how my informants were transformed by the training as well as the construction of the CrossFit culture. Participating in the WOD and developing the required skills were fundamental steps to becoming a CrossFitter. The WOD, as a liminal phase, generated uncertainty from day to day and encouraged a focus on making the body perform. In this phase, people developed composure and could learn to experience pain in new ways. Values regarding progress and growth were explicit in the CrossFit Open competition and clearly manifested among some of my informants, who developed a *habitus* toward the training that situated weaknesses within a learning process and derived motivation from challenges. The WOD fostered a sense of shared experiences and it was constructed a symbolic community, which provided vital motivation to continue exercising.

Chapter 6 - Conclusion

This thesis has explored Norwegian CrossFit culture and the process of becoming a CrossFitter. In Norway, CrossFit is often perceived as a controversial form of exercise, yet the development of functional fitness is not limited to CrossFit. Compared to other fitness gyms, CrossFitters express similar and overlapping narratives about exercise, which often concern counterbalancing the unhealthiness of modern lifestyles by using exercise as a benchmark for all aspects of life on the basis of the notion of "functionality." Still, compared to other fitness gym contexts, the focus on functionality in the CrossFit box seems to produce fewer gender-based differences in terms of the prescribed movements and exercises.

CrossFit does not focus on aesthetics as a motivation for training, but they are not totally absent either. Because of increased body mass and strength due to the training, women could encounter unique challenges regarding ideas about aesthetics. Nevertheless, the functional training was mostly perceived as contributing to an attractive body by both men and women. My informants expressed multifactorial motivations for exercising that often-implicated interrelated subjects, such as health, recreation, community, and performance. Informants seemingly defined the "need for exercise" prior to starting CrossFit but only viewed CrossFit as the optimal solution for this need after actually participating in the classes and experiencing the results of the training. Ultimately, it is difficult to determine the exact reason that people engage in CrossFit, but the choice seems to involve an ongoing process.

Participating in the WOD and developing the requisite skills is the foundation of becoming a CrossFitter. Techniques are learned through imitation, verbal instructions, and personal experimentation. Participants developed an increased awareness of their body through the detailed separation of movements and specific coaching, and they were dependent on the coach and personal experimentation to correctly develop their skills. In addition, the learning process was often supported by discussions and shared knowledge among participants. The training could ultimately affect participants movements and perceptions in fundamental ways.

When viewed as a ritual, the WOD had a strong disciplinary effect on participants. The training transformed my informants and contributes to the construction of a CrossFit culture. As a liminal phase, the WOD ensured uncertainty from day to day and urged a focus on making the body perform. By performing it, people could develop composure and learn to experience pain in new ways. Novices could complete the WOD to obtain social status and recognition at the box. The focus on performance in the WOD makes the ideal CrossFit body one that can handle any physical challenge. Values of progress and growth are evident in the CrossFit Open competition and among my informants, some of whom developed a *habitus* toward the training that viewed weaknesses as part of a learning process and derived motivation from progress and challenges. The shared experiences of the training cultivated a sense of community at the box, which was a key motivation to continue exercising. A symbolic community can be constructed through shared experiences and symbols, as exemplified by the ritualized practice of cheering.

The global CrossFit discourse consists of interrelated dialogues regarding CrossFit as a health movement and as a new sport. The Norwegian boxes that I visited seemed to derive more influenced from the sports side and generally refused the nutrition aspect of the CrossFit brand or found it unclear. Few of my informants claimed to follow any strict form of the diets that are often associated with CrossFit, and the coaches did not claim any overall authority on nutrition and health, thereby indicating that their expertise was in the training. Such emphasis on expertise in the training could reflect the wider culture of the CrossFit box in terms of its greater focus on the sports aspect of CrossFit than on the health movement aspects. The functional training represents a more standardized and disembedded form of cultural exchange that features similar movements, practical limitations at the boxes, regular benchmark workouts, and the CrossFit Open competition, which together has created an entified form of human fitness.

According to my informants, they acquired “objective” knowledge about their fitness by using digital devices to measure their performance in the WOD and engaging in fitness competitions. Conditional knowledge about one’s performance thus became unconditional knowledge of one’s fitness, which contributed to a naturalization of fitness knowledge and strengthened the belief that CrossFit is an effective way to exercise. At the same time,

informants viewed knowledge of fitness from a critical perspective and ultimately considered the individual body to offer the most suitable way to gain or judge the legitimacy of knowledge. The interpretation of CrossFit was not straightforward among participants, and what it means to be a CrossFitter appear to be in continual renegotiation and transformation. The ethnographic approach in this study was crucial in "taking claims about bodily change seriously" (Downey 2005:211) and to "appreciate how people become fitness participants, and how their participation" (Sassatelli 2010:199) in the WOD acquires meaning.

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