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Essay 3-Annotated Bibliography

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4/5/10

“The Personalities of CrossFit”

Hidden in the middle of a strip mall, right between a Radio Shack and a hair dresser, lies the most unassuming building. With large windows encompassing the entire front side of the building, one passing on the street a few yards away can see an anomaly in the layout of the “office space.” Held in this esoteric space lies the CrossFit Blacksburg gym, easily distinguished by the eight or so pull-up bars and squat racks seen from outside the building. Consumer electronics or high-dollar shampoo is not sold here. Computer nerds tend not to enter, and the old ladies who get the hair cut on Friday afternoons walk past the gym with not-so-subtle snobbery. The members of the gym, who are prone to CrossFit (verb) barefoot and shirtless, are definitely out of place, strewn out in sweaty clusters outside on the sidewalk post-workout. Ask any CrossFitter (noun) basking in the sun what they are doing and they will respond with a wry smile and a cordial, “Oh, just getting some Vitamin D.” A different breed, indeed.

The parking lot is off the right of the entire strip, where all members (who don’t run or bike to their workout) keep their cars amongst the RadioShackers and the HairDressed for the duration of their stay at the gym. Almost comically, it is not very difficult to ascertain CrossFit cars from, well, *normal* cars. As you see CrossFitters exit their cars to traverse the parking lot towards the gym, one notices that their cars typically are pick-up trucks, Jeeps, Subarus, or any other form of a rugged 4x4. Typically, every single truck or car in the parking lot with a U.S. Army sticker or U.S. Marine graphic belongs to somebody in CrossFit. The ruggedness is no-so-hidden among the Acura’s and Lexus SUV’s belonging to the old women tending to their hair.

Walking into the gym, the smell of rubber hits you before you can fully take in the simplicity of the room. Wall-to-wall flooring consists of weightlifting mats designed to absorb hundreds of pounds of weight dropped on them. Usually standing in the back of the room on her computer is Amy. Amy and her husband, Neil, are the proud owners of this particular CrossFit affiliate, of which there are now almost 2,000 across the world. Short and powerful, Amy is a very intimidating athlete with impressive strength numbers and incredible flexibility. Neil looks to be in his late 30s, with graying facial hair and lanky arms that deceive his strength and work ethic. On this particular day, Neil is hanging upside from gymnastics rings that were just tied to the ceiling. *Typical.*

On each side of the entrance sits beige couches that people are sitting and chatting on before their workout. On the left there are four Cadets from Virginia Tech talking about military things that are way beyond my span of knowledge or interest. The rightmost couch houses Chuck, a 40-some-year-old rugby player, his wife, Monica, and a quiet lady who seems to come in and go out without saying much. It’s a vast range of personalities in the gym, all having physical health a priority.

On this particular day, a Friday afternoon at 1 pm, nine people are present for the workout. At exactly one o’clock, Amy announces loud and confident to our crowd that we need to get started with some hip flexibility stretches known as the Walking Samson Stretch and the Plank Lunge Series. Almost as amazing as Amy’s knowledge of the human body is her ability to command the undivided attention of all nine in the gym, who all act quickly on her every word. As we all do walking stretches with our arms extended upwards across the length of the room, you hear the cracks of backs and see the winced faces of those who are still sore from yesterday’s workout. A guy named Mike walks in nine minutes late and is told to do 45 burpees, which is a cute name for a horrible exercise that combines a pushup, an abdominal extension and contraction, and a jump. Fifteen burpees are awful to do, and the fact that he is told to do 45 makes everybody in the room grateful for their own punctuality.

After a few minutes of stretching, we are all told to circle up around Amy, who grabs eleven thin PVC pipes and passes them around the group. She explains that today we are going to do something called the Burgener Warmup and a Snatch Balance technique to work on our Olympic lifts and flexibility. About five minutes goes by in which she explains the movements, and another ten goes by in which we are all tormented into contorting our bodies in every which way to work on the positions of the Snatch. The whole sequence is fairly miserable but challenging, as you tend to compete with yourself over time to get more flexible and work for the approval of Amy. As we are all down in our flexed positions, Amy comes around and puts pressure on different parts of our bodies to mold us into the correct form for the exercise.

After our Cash In, as is the terminology at CrossFit, we all work on strength. Today, the workout is 20-15-10 Front Squats, meaning that you increase weight over three sets, the first being twenty repetitions (reps), the second set being fifteen reps, and the third set being ten reps. After the first set, pretty much everybody was hunched over trying to catch their breath, and Amy was in the corner smiling sadistically, as she tends to do. See, Amy works out does the W.O.D. (workout of the day) everyday for herself, and then seems to do a second workout through demonstrating the movements to CrossFitters throughout the day. Her smirk is not condescending; it is one of understanding of the pain we are going through. We all joke around and laugh about how difficult twenty reps of anything would be. A dirty joke emanates from somewhere in the corner, and the whole crowd lets out a chuckle in between racking and re-racking weights on the weight bars.

After the Front Squats, with quadriceps burning, we proceed to move on to the Split Jerk (SJ), five sets of 6 reps. Everybody keeps glancing back up at the whiteboard which keeps track of our workout and our weights as we call it out to Amy, and all gauge how strong we are relative. I tend to be on the weaker side of the strongest group in there, but the ranges of everybody are widely spanned. The SJs pretty much leave everybody gasping for air, and some shirts are stripped already and smiles become grimaced determination. About thirty minutes into the hour, the atmosphere of joviality about the beautiful weather turns into total business as we set upon the last part of our workout.

The last exercise is one that we have done already, but that everybody hates anyway. It is called an AMRAP, CrossFit code for As Many Reps as Possible. We have 5 minutes to do as many rounds of different amounts of different exercises, today being 3 Overhead Squats, 6 Pullups, and 9 pushups. The clock goes off and after about one minute people start slowing down from their initial sprint and settle into a rhythm, and the only noises made other than grunts and weights knocking is the collective groan let out when Amy announces we are halfway into the five minutes.

The five minutes of pure, unadulterated physical exertion leaves everybody sprawled on the ground for a few minutes, as some try to regain their breath and some are just lying down, reveling in their ability to sweat on the rubber mats. People start to gather their things and make their way out, some putting back on their work clothes to return after lunch, some putting on their wool Corps uniforms to return to Virginia Tech Corps life. I decide to hang back to talk to Amy, who keeps interest in my progress and has fun getting on my case of limited flexibility. I like to think she knows I can take it, instead of constantly criticizing my range of motion. I’ve never really seen her ever sit still, so my impromptu questioning is actually my shooting questions at Amy as I lay in pretzel positions, stretching on the ground.

A no-nonsense lady, I know Amy will be less than welcoming to accept a formal invitation of an interview, so I draw her interest by telling her about my plans to go eat a huge stack of pancakes from IHOP. She balks at my idea and tells me, without a hint of joking, for me to “not be a [expletive deleted] idiot” through rolled eyes. I play dumb and ask her what she means, hoping that she won’t remember the previous conversations about nutrition I’ve had with her. She starts by saying that there is no real benefit to eating carbs, and that carbs are not good, to screen for expletives, again. I laugh at her hatred towards refined carbohydrates, and tell her I think I’m going to start incorporating some whole starch into my diet. Seeing me as a walking nutritional time bomb, she immediately asks why I want to do this. I tell her I want to improve recovery post-workout and be able to study the night following a workout, which is tough to do when you push yourself to your limits during CrossFit that day. A look of relief spreads across her face, almost as if trusts me with some secret, dangerous weapon. It is now ten minutes after the end of the last workout and Amy gravitates towards the corner to prepare for the next workout and begin paperwork for the dozen or so others who are coming in an hour to try CrossFit. A different breed indeed, these CrossFitters

I walk outside shirtless and barefoot and lie in the sun on the sidewalk out front, and decide whether I’d rather walk into Kroger to grocery shop or proceed to class with my newly acquired aroma. I go to Kroger to buy a sweet potato, a can of coconut milk, and a can of pink salmon and decide I’ll check how I feel before I make any decisions about coming back tomorrow.

**Annotated Bibliography**

Phinney, Stephen D. “Ketogenic diets and physical performance.” 17 Aug 2004. Online. Accessed 2 March 2010. <http://www.nutritionandmetabolism.com/content/1/1/2>.

[**This scientific article published in Nutrition and Metabolism expounds upon the perception of low-carbohydrate diets and its potential evolutionary benefits as well as its divergence from the popular low-fat diets that exist today. The entire article gives significant weight to something that even most CrossFitters consider “soft science.” It goes into detail of the pathway of ketosis in the human body and an individual’s athletic performance without the presence of simple carbohydrates in the diet. It seems to be unbiased in nature, and even discredits the eucaloric diet for competitive athletics long-term.]**

Sisson, Mark. “Primal Living in the Modern World.” 30 June 2008. Online. Accessed 3 March 2010. <http://www.marksdailyapple.com/dear-mark-ketosis>.

[**This article is an informal piece written by a proponent of a brand of the Paleo Diet and CrossFit that he calls The Primal Blueprint. Written by Mark Sisson, his writings in the past have featured CrossFit as being an exercise regimen that is unsustainable over a lifetime due to its intensity. However, he is a large figure in the dieting aspect of living healthily as shown by this writing. Mark claims that in a range of 100-150 grams of carbohydrates per day from fruits and vegetables, you will deny fat gain and be able to sustain large amounts of exercise.]**

# Booth, Frank W., Chakravarthy, Manu V., Spangenberg, Espen E. “Exercise and gene expression: physiological regulation of the human genome through physical activity.” The Journal of Physiology. June 28 2002. Online. Accessed March 1 2010. <http://jp.physoc.org/content/543/2/399.full>.

# [This journal article is based around the idea of human evolutionary programming relative to physical activity and a person’s ability to manipulate his or her genome to maintain optimal athletic performance. This topic is strongly rooted in CrossFit and Paleo eating, and the result of the experiment examines whether a sedentary lifestyle allows for genetic differences in humans. There is no noted bias included, and it is a respectable source as an offshoot of the Physiological Society. Notable results from the experiment shows that a difference in lifestyle does, in fact, alter you gene expression for disease control and health maximization.]

# “What Your Cholesterol Levels Mean.” The American Heart Association. March 25 2010. Online. Accessed 5 April 2010. < <http://jp.physoc.org/content/543/2/399.full>>.

# [The American Heart Association is a well-known organization geared towards the prevention of cardiovascular-related diseases. As such, it is important to see a perspective unaffiliated with contemporary methods of weight loss and total health as it applies to the Paleo Diet, specifically. The AHA shows in detail the desired blood triglyceride level and recommends ways to attain healthy levels, including exercise and eating a good diet. The AHA tends to be biased towards popular opinion, as they are in the business of fund raising, and fund raising does not occur for companies too far against the norm. It is good to see an opinion backing up the importance of diet and exercise; however, it is necessary to maintain skepticism about the AHA.]

# Shai, Iris et al. “Weight Loss with a Low-Carbohydrate, Mediterranean, or Low-Fat Diet”. The New England Journal of Medicine. 17 July 2008. Online. Accessed 1 Apr 2010. < <http://content.nejm.org/cgi/content/full/359/3/229>>.

# [This article does an excellent job of distinguishing between the Mediterranean and low-carbohydrate diet and comparing both diets against the low-fat diet that is prevalent today. The authors clearly state in the abstract that the Mediterranean and low-carbohydrate diets are more effective at total weight loss than a low-fat diet. The article is also historically-based, drawing on background of evolution and prevalent diets of today, to compare to the results of a 2 year study in which almost 85% of participants complied. No conflict of interest was present in the study and the overall results look to be free of overall bias.]

Guyanet, Stephan. “For those not scientifically inclined”. Whole Health Source. 31 May 2009. Online. Accessed 1 Apr 2010. < <http://wholehealthsource.blogspot.com/2009/05/for-those-not-scientifically-inclined.html>>.

**[A casual article by an intelligent source, the information presented in “For those not scientifically inclined” is very much for the audience towards which the ethnographic study is geared who would tend to be uninformed of the scientific background. Guyanet does an excellent job of explaining some of the more complex concepts simply but some of his broader topics cannot have too much emphasis placed upon them due to the excessive use of conditional terms such as ‘probably’ and ‘likely.’ This undermines overall confidence in an otherwise well written, casual soliloquy.]**

Suny Downstate Medical Center. "Low-Carb Diet Reduces Inflammation And Blood Saturated Fat In Metabolic Syndrome." ScienceDaily. 4 December 2007. 5 April 2010 <http://www.sciencedaily.com­ /releases/2007/12/071203091236.htm>.

**[This article is an exposition on the effects of a low-carbohydrate on the group of symptoms called Metabolic Syndrome. According to the article, one in three Americans is afflicted with Metabolic Syndrome, the cluster of symptoms including high blood pressure, high cholesterol, high amounts of abdominal fat, high blood triglycerides, and overall lack of exercise. The article addresses vague inflammatory agents in one’s diet in contrast with typical nutritional information regarding caloric restriction. The authors place high priority on the idea that your body does what you eat, meaning that if you want to be physically fit, you need to clean your diet of inflammatory agents such as trans fats and high omega-6 fats.]**

Westman, Eric C. et al. “Low Carbohydrate Nutrition and Metabolism”. The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition. Aug 2007. Online. Accessed 2 Apr 2010. < <http://www.ajcn.org/cgi/content/full/86/2/276>>.

**[The article by Westman et al. addresses the “persistence” of the epidemics of obesity and Type 2 diabetes, showing that in order for these issues to be addressed, contemporary nutritional information must be forgotten. Defining a Low-carb diet as one between 50 and 150 carbs/day, the article takes great pains to explain the physiological effects and biochemical pathways of a low-carb diet. Addressed are the issues of hunger control and satiety on a low-carb diet, which are satisfactory in both cases relative to a traditional Western diet. After going specifically into a low-carb diet and metabolism, the authors state that insulin sensitivity can be increased with an overall low-carb diet. The entire article seems strictly scientific, lacking bias or slant.]**

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