

## CrossFit: Over-Hyped Industry

CrossFit, a high-intensity interval strength and conditioning workout created by Greg Glassman, is touted as the "biggest fitness phenomenon in the world right now" and claims to be: broad; general; all-inclusive; specializing in non-specializing; an intersection of skills needed by firefighters, police, military, emergency personnel, and other tactical fields; and a kind of fitness that will prepare someone for any situation/circumstance (Alfonsi, 2015; Crossfit, n.d.; Lu et al., 2015; Smith, Sommer, Starkoff, & Devor, 2013). Glassman did not invent calisthenics, gymnastics, weightlifting, the "high-intensity" model/theory, exercises mimicking strongman competitions or Highland Games, and ecetera. The exercise components of CrossFit are not earth-shattering--they are fairly mundane, nothing new. It is no great surprise that people can achieve results; it is also no great surprise that people will get hurt, especially if they are not progressed properly (same as with any sport or physical activity). There can be endless controversies, round-table discussions, and debates over the efficacy and safety (pros and cons) of CrossFit exercises ending in stalemate. The same discussions can be had of other exercise program designs as well. CrossFit exercises just are not that special. The participant also bears shared responsibility along with any CrossFit trainer (good or bad, qualified or not).

What is special and what Glassman did invent is a phenomenal business model (with education and licensing fees as primary incomes), a brand that generates an estimated \$4 billion annually, and a community (almost cult-like following both real-world and online) with over 11,000 CrossFit "boxes" internationally (Alfonsi, 2015; Helm, 2013). Understanding the psychology of CrossFit (e.g. sense of community, motivation, compliance/adherence to a program almost to a fault, propaganda, marketing, goal-setting, reward, behavior change, social aspects, mediators of change) and what "drives" a CrossFit participant could help transform many other physical activity programs.

Partridge, Knapp, and Massengale (2014) studied the goal-orientation and motivational climate of CrossFit participants. Achievement goal theory (AGT) allows studies of individuals in their own environment (i.e. CrossFit), and one of the main concerns is how competence is differentiated in an achievement-type setting (Partridge et al., 2014). Competence or achievement goals may be differentiated based on how competence is defined and by how it is valued (Partridge et al., 2014). Competence may be defined by how it is evaluated: mastery or performance (ego) (Partridge et al., 2014). Ego-driven individuals compare their performance against others' in order to determine competence; mastery-driven individuals compare their improvements to their own past attempts at a skill (self-referenced) (Partridge et al., 2014). Another concept in AGT is motivational climate (ego or task).

Partridge et al. (2014) studied the matrix variables MAp (mastery approach focused on intrapersonal or task-based competence), PAp (performance approach focused on achieving normative competence), MAv (mastery-avoidance focusing on avoiding intrapersonal or task-based incompetence), and PAv (performance-avoidance focusing on avoiding normative incompetence). Partridge et al. (2014) found that females reported higher MAv goals and males reported higher levels of PAp goals. Women were often under-represented and less familiar/less experienced with weight-lifting techniques especially in the CrossFit environment which could lend towards higher MAv scores (Partridge et al., 2014). Males were more likely to endorse PAp goals associated with higher performance levels, self-confidence, and self-concept in the achievement domain. While CrossFit is "for anyone", its marketing tends to target males more. CrossFit membership duration was also a factor--members of less than 6 months reported higher MAp and MAv goals (Partridge et al., 2014). Longer members tend towards ego-orientation (Partridge et al., 2014). Partridge et al., (2014) also noted that less experienced participants displayed more mastery-based goals or self-directed goals (mastering new skills/techniques in exercises).

CrossFit is intriguing not for its exercise program design, but rather for studying the psychological aspects and human dynamics. Much more research is needed and with over 11,000 CrossFit gyms, each one is like a petri dish.

As for the CrossFit vs. NSCA lawsuit, let the truth come out. Neither entity is completely without faults. NSCA is like any other organization-entity full of political and/or personal agendas. NSCA is fully capable of error and fully capable of what CrossFit is accusing NSCA of in the lawsuit. CrossFit is also riddled with its own agenda. In the particular legal case mentioned, I support going to court for an evidence-based ruling. Personally, I hold no loyalty towards any organization/affiliation. It is more a matter of "choosing the lesser of evils" and which organization "mostly" reflects one's personal goals (or which organization can further your career the most, get your foot in the door). The NSCA is a business. With respect, my personal opinion is the villainizing of CrossFit or NSCA is to a point of ad nauseum. Any exercise experience is very individualized as are any results or injuries. Exercise participants need to take responsibility for themselves as much as instructors need to take responsibility for correct instruction to prevent injuries and other mishap.

## References

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