

Friends and Foes: Exploring How Community and Competition Coexist
within the CrossFit Games Open

by

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Abstract:

Community is an integral part of CrossFit training and programming. Competition, another prominent component of CrossFit, is intensified for participants of the CrossFit Games Open. The objective of the study is to understand how community and competition coexist within the context of the CrossFit Games Open. This qualitative research project utilizes an ethnographic approach to combine participant observation and in-depth interviews to explore individual and group conceptions of community and competition in the CrossFit Games Open in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Two predominant themes were identified: (1) competing with yourself; and (2) community of competitors. These two themes each contain four subthemes, which are explored with reference to prevailing literature on competition and community. Rather than existing in opposition, community and competition appear to be reflected either internally or externally within participation in the CrossFit Games Open.

Keywords:

CrossFit

Community

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Table of Contents

Abstract/Keywords	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
Chapter I: Introduction.....	1
1.1 CrossFit.....	3
1.2 CrossFit Games.....	6
1.3 Objectives and Rationale	9
Chapter II: Literature Review	12
2.1 Sense of Community.....	12
2.2 Community in Sport.....	14
2.3 Community in CrossFit.....	16
2.4 Competition in Sport.....	19
2.5 Competition in CrossFit.....	22
2.6 Summary.....	24
Chapter III: Methods.....	25
3.1 Research Paradigm and Methodology	25
3.2 Methods.....	26
3.3 Limitations	37
3.4 Delimitations.....	38
3.5 Summary	39
Chapter IV: Results.....	40
4.1 Data Collection	40

4.2 Coding and Themes	42
4.3 Summary	49
Chapter V: Discussion	50
5.1 Competing with Yourself.....	50
5.2 Community of Competitors .	61
5.3 Reconciling Community and Competition	70
Chapter VI: Conclusion	77
6.1 Project Summary.....	77
6.2 Future Research Directions..	79
6.3 Practical Applications	80
6.4 Final Remarks	81
Literature Cited	83
Appendix A – Informed Consent Form for CrossFit Participants	90
Appendix B – Informed Consent Form for Gym Owner	94

Chapter I: Introduction

Since CrossFit's creation in the late 1990s and its incorporation in 2000, the majority of scholarly research on CrossFit has focused on its training methodology and efficacy (Haddock et al., 2016; Meyer, Morrison, & Zuniga, 2017; Murawska-Cialowicz, Wojna, & Zuwala-Jagiello, 2015; Poston et al. 2016; Smith et al., 2013), potential injury risks and rates associated with CrossFit training (Meyer et al., 2017; Mullins, 2015; Summitt, Cotton, Kays, & Slaven, 2016; Weisenthal, Beck, Maloney, DeHaven, & Giordano, 2014), and motivational factors for engaging in and practicing CrossFit (Partridge, Knapp, & Massengale, 2014; Simpson, Prewitt-White, Feito, Giusti, & Shuda, 2017). CrossFit as an organization claims that community is an integral component of what makes CrossFit training effective (CrossFit LLC., 2020c), and there are a few studies that have explored sense of community within CrossFit participation (Bailey, Benson, & Bruner, 2017; Heinrich, Carlisle, Kehler, & Cosgrove, 2017; Pickett, Goldsmith, Damon, & Walker, 2016; Smith et al., 2013). However, there is little published research that has examined or mentioned sense of community within the context of the competitive CrossFit Games, perhaps due to the relative infancy of the CrossFit Games (established in 2007). The CrossFit Games Open, which is the first stage of the CrossFit Games season and will be discussed below, was launched in 2011 and has experienced massive growth in participation and global spread since its inception. Open participation numbers have steadily increased from an inaugural 26,000 registrants in 2011 to over 415,000 in 2018 (CrossFit LLC., 2020a). This thesis intends to analyze the CrossFit Games Open competition using a phenomenological approach and ethnographic research methods.

Community has been highly touted as a core tenet of CrossFit through participant testimonials and other analyses (Bailey et al., 2017; Herz, 2014). CrossFit, LLC. praises its

community as one of the foundational principles that drives its success, proclaiming that “the natural camaraderie, competition and fun of sport or game yields an intensity that cannot be matched by other means” (CrossFit LLC., 2020c). Community is a powerful and seemingly essential component of CrossFit and a driving force behind the development and success of the CrossFit Games (Herz, 2014). One of the reasons for this project is to interrogate this claim.

Competition arises from the structure of CrossFit due to the quantitative scoring and progress-tracking aspects of the program (Bailey et al., 2017; Herz, 2014). Since power output is measurable in CrossFit training (as discussed below in Section 1.1.2), workout results and scores can be compared between athletes. The CrossFit Games Open intensifies this competitive atmosphere by introducing a leaderboard and worldwide fitness comparison statistics.

How do community and competition coexist within the CrossFit Games Open? While sense of community has been explored within the context of CrossFit training (Bailey et al., 2017; Simpson et al., 2017), this exploration has yet to be extended in scholarly research to the context of the CrossFit Games Open. With dramatic increases in participation over the previous eight years as mentioned above, the CrossFit Games Open has been a rapidly-growing fitness phenomenon and business enterprise that has not yet become a common subject of scholarly research. In exploring the social and community dynamics of the CrossFit Games Open, this thesis will hopefully influence how we understand the role of exercise and competition in the “sport of fitness” (CrossFit, LLC., 2020b; Glassman, 2007).

In order to appreciate and contextualize the growth of the CrossFit community and the competition embedded within it, an introductory review and analysis of CrossFit and the CrossFit Games is necessary.

1.1 CrossFit

Founded as CrossFit, Inc. in 2000 (since rebranded as CrossFit, LLC.), CrossFit is a rapidly-growing training methodology and exercise program created by Californian trainer Greg Glassman (Bailey et al., 2017; Dawson, 2017; Meyer et al., 2017; Summitt et al., 2016). While it began as an exercise program design, CrossFit has also evolved into a form of branded fitness (Powers & Greenwell, 2016) through its business model.

1.1.1 CrossFit: The Business

Since its humble beginnings in Santa Cruz, California (Knapp, 2015a), CrossFit has ballooned into a billion-dollar fitness juggernaut (Bailey et al., 2017; Dawson, 2017). Part of CrossFit's success can be attributed to its open-source training resources and affiliation business model (Herz, 2014). All of CrossFit's resources, training guides, and workouts are available to anyone on the internet (Glassman, 2007). Online message boards greatly contributed to CrossFit's initial proliferation, spreading training resources around the world. Military, police, and firefighter communities in particular latched onto this new high-intensity training program and began touting its efficacy and effectiveness in developing elite fitness and general physical preparedness (Haddock et al., 2016; Herz, 2014; Meyer et al., 2017; Poston et al., 2016). Individuals interested in opening a CrossFit gym – or box, as it is usually called – need only to obtain a CrossFit coaching certificate, create a website, and pay an annual affiliate fee of US\$3000 (Heinrich et al., 2017; Herz, 2014). CrossFit HQ, the Santa Cruz-based corporate headquarters of CrossFit LLC., will then list that box on its main website as an official CrossFit affiliate.

CrossFit's affiliation business model has allowed it to grow exponentially. After taking five years to reach 500 affiliates, CrossFit added 1,000 affiliates every three months in 2013

(Dawson, 2017). CrossFit, Inc. now boasts a membership of over 13,000 affiliates globally (Bailey et al., 2017). Although the majority of CrossFit affiliates are in the USA, a large portion of CrossFit's global expansion can be seen in Europe, Australia, and South America (CrossFit LLC., 2020b). There are over 500 affiliates in Canada, and 11 in Winnipeg (CrossFit LLC., 2020b). In 2016, four million people participate in CrossFit worldwide (Wang, 2016).

1.1.2 CrossFit: The Training Methodology

While the fundamental components of CrossFit's exercise programming are neither novel nor revolutionary, the combination and training style of the movements are somewhat unfamiliar. CrossFit bases its program on performing functional movements at high intensity, constantly varying the movements and time requirements (Glassman, 2007). Functional movements are multi-jointed exercises that are related to daily physical tasks of life, e.g., standing up from a chair, picking up a box, or running after a bus. These example tasks can be translated to a squat, deadlift, and sprint, respectively. Glassman began incorporating functional movements into exercise programming by experimenting with and blending movements in gymnastics, weightlifting, and metabolic conditioning (Powers & Greenwell, 2016). CrossFit programming draws protocols and equipment from multiple sport disciplines: running, rowing, swimming, power lifting, gymnastics, Olympic lifting, Strongman, and others (Heywood, 2015). The combination of these movements and training styles developed a hybrid program that Glassman claimed was capable of producing fitness levels far superior to what each training style could achieve on its own (Powers & Greenwell, 2016).

The aim of CrossFit is to develop "a broad, general, and inclusive fitness" (Glassman, 2007, p. 1). To accomplish this, Glassman needed a working definition of fitness. He describes fitness as "increased work capacity across broad time and modal domains" (CrossFit, 2014).

CrossFit athletes train a wide variety of movements through varying workout durations, attempting to improve performance across ten components of fitness: strength, power, speed, endurance, stamina, flexibility, coordination, balance, agility, and accuracy (Glassman, 2002; Partridge et al., 2014). By training functional movements at high intensity and through constant variation, athletes adapt to a wider range of anaerobic and aerobic training stimuli to increase the capacity to perform work (Glassman, 2002; Poston et al., 2016).

An athlete's work capacity can be measured by their performance on a given task or workout. If athlete A can perform 60 air squats in a minute, and athlete B can perform 40 air squats in a minute, then athlete A has demonstrated a higher work capacity in that task, being able to perform more work in the same amount of time. Similarly, if two athletes were to perform an example workout in which they had to complete 3 rounds of 10 deadlifts, 20 burpees, 30 kettlebell swings, and athlete A completed the workout in a faster time than athlete B while performing the exact same volume of work, then athlete A had a higher output and demonstrated a greater work capacity in this workout. According to CrossFit's definition of fitness, athlete A demonstrated a higher level of fitness than athlete B through both of these tasks.

Measurable work output through structured bouts of exercise is the way in which CrossFit as an organization – and Glassman originally – asserts it is able to objectively measure physical fitness through the lens of its fitness definition. Being able to measure one's work capacity and level of fitness through this specific and varied programming fosters a competitive environment within the CrossFit box. Whiteboards are now scoreboards, workouts are timed, scores and records are kept, and participants compete against each other in the workout of the day (Bailey et al., 2017). Local competitions began to emerge early in CrossFit's development

due to this innate competitive atmosphere (Simpson et al., 2017), and in 2007, the CrossFit Games were born (CrossFit LLC., 2020a; Herz, 2014).

1.2 The CrossFit Games

The CrossFit Games season is a three-stage journey, beginning with the CrossFit Games Open – commonly referred to as simply “the Open” (CrossFit LLC., 2020a). The Open is an online qualifier in which anyone in the world can compete, submitting workout scores online which are subsequently ranked on a leaderboard. There are five workouts released over the course of five weeks in February and March. Each workout is released on Thursday night, and participants must complete the workout and submit scores by the following Monday night. Although each workout is similar within the style of CrossFit, individual workouts in the Open test different movements, time domains, and repetition arrangements. Participants can complete the workouts at a CrossFit affiliate with their scores verified by one of the coaches, or can complete the workouts at home and submit video proof of their scores. After the five weeks of the Open, athletes are ranked within their region based on their finishes in the workouts. At the time of this project (with recent changes discussed below), the top 20 or 30 athletes in each region were then invited to compete in the next stage of the CrossFit Games season: the regional competitions (Regionals).

Regionals consisted of eight regional competitions worldwide, with the majority of the Regionals taking place in North America due to the prevalence and popularity of CrossFit within the USA in particular. These Regionals were live three-day tests of fitness in May in which athletes competed in six events that test a broad range of fitness, similar to the Open. Regional workouts were generally much more difficult than Open workouts in order to test the fitness of

these elite athletes even further. The top five men and women of each Regional qualified for the opportunity to compete in the CrossFit Games in the summer.

The goal of the annual CrossFit Games is to find the Fittest on Earth (CrossFit LLC., 2020a). From 2007 to 2016, the Games were held in California. In 2017, the Games moved to Madison, Wisconsin, for the next three years. Through a four-day competition in which CrossFit athletes from around the world gather for a long summer weekend of 12-15 events, the top CrossFit athletes compete against each other in a well-rounded test of fitness (CrossFit, 2014). The events of the CrossFit Games are unknown to the athletes until right before the competition begins (Dawson, 2017). At this stage, there are 40 men and 40 women competing for the title of Fittest on Earth. These numbers have been whittled down from the previous 660 athletes competing at the Regional level. In the worldwide Open, participation numbers have steadily increased from an inaugural 26,000 registrants in 2011 to over 415,000 in 2018 (CrossFit LLC., 2020a).

Competition in the CrossFit Games is sex-segregated. The men compete for the title of Fittest Man on Earth, and the women compete for the title of Fittest Woman on Earth. All athletes complete the same events, but men and women do not usually compete alongside the opposite sex in the events and are not scored against each other. The weight loads for the women are usually scaled to approximately 70% of the loading for the men. For example, one event in the 2017 CrossFit Games included overhead squats with a barbell weighing 155 lbs for the men and 105 lbs for the women. The movement standards, event structure, and distances remain the same.

Scoring at all stages of the CrossFit Games season is relative. Athletes do not earn a score based on their absolute performance on an event, but in their placing in the event relative to the

other athletes (CrossFit LLC., 2020a). In the Regional and Games stages, the athlete with the highest score ranks highest. The first-place finisher in an event normally earns 100 points towards their total, second place earns 94 points, third place earns 88 points, and this linear allocation of points based on relative placing continues downward to the athlete in last place in the event. Placing consistently high in events throughout the entire competition relative to the other athletes will result in a high standing at the end of the Regional or Games competition.

In the Open, scoring is inverted to accommodate the much larger number of competitors, but maintains relativity. The highest-ranked finishers in the Open have the fewest points. One's ranking in an Open workout within their region determines one's score from that workout. If an athlete had the top results in their region for Open Workout 17.1 (identified by competition year and workout number: 2017, 1st Open workout), they would earn one point. If they performed 34th best in their region in Open Workout 17.2, they would earn 34 points. Their point total through the first two workouts would then be 35. After five weeks of Open competition, the athlete's point total would determine their ranking within their region and potentially an invite to compete at Regionals. Less than 0.2% of athletes were able to qualify for Regionals, so the results of an average CrossFit Games Open participant might look something like this:

Open Workout 17.1: 1804th place (1804 points)

Open Workout 17.2: 1334nd place (1334 points)

Open Workout 17.3: 755th place (755 points)

Open Workout 17.4: 1187th place (1187 points)

Open Workout 17.5: 886th place (886 points)

Final points total: 5966 points

Final ranking in region: 1027th place

In this example, there are varied results for this athlete across the five Open workouts. Because each workout contains different exercise elements and time requirements, Open participants will perform better in workouts that challenge their individual strengths. In comparison with Open Workout 17.1, this example athlete had a much greater performance in Open Workout 17.3 relative to the other competitors in the region. This athlete had the 755th best performance in the region in 17.3, but only the 1804th best performance in 17.1. Even though this athlete may have far exceeded their own expectations and perceived abilities in 17.1, their score is determined by their ranking on the leaderboard relative to all of the other athletes in her region. In order to perform well across the Open, an athlete must be well-rounded in their training and abilities.

Since only an extremely limited number of athletes qualified for Regionals, the CrossFit Games season ends with the Open for the majority of participants. At this point, most athletes shift from competitor to spectator in the sport of fitness as the elite CrossFit athletes move on to the next stage of competition.

It should be noted that the CrossFit Games season underwent format changes immediately following the 2018 Games, removing Regionals as a middle qualifier in a three-stage process. The majority of Games athletes were able to qualify directly from the first stage: the Open. Regionals were replaced by CrossFit-sanctioned events organized by third parties – these events became known as Sanctionals – that offered additional qualifying spots to the Games. The CrossFit Games season underwent further revisions in 2020, returning to a more familiar Regionals-like format for Games qualification.

1.3 Objectives and Rationale

A paradox emerges from the dichotomy of the reported community environment within CrossFit and the structure of relative scoring in the CrossFit Games Open. The community

environment encourages annual participation in the CrossFit Games Open; yet, given the competitive nature and relative scoring of the Open, an athlete's chances of placing highly on the leaderboard decreases if more athletes participate. This necessitates an examination of the factors influencing participation in the CrossFit Games Open and their possible effect on sense of community within the gym environment.

The objective of this thesis is to explore the relationship between community and competition within a CrossFit affiliate in Winnipeg, Manitoba during the period of the CrossFit Games Open. Specifically, this study explores: (1) what are athletes' perceptions of community within CrossFit?, (2) why do athletes choose to compete in the CrossFit Games Open?, and (3) how do community and competition coexist in CrossFit?. Through an ethnographic approach that includes participant observation and in-depth interviews, this research project examines the relationship between sense of community and competition in the CrossFit Games Open. By investigating the intersection between belonging to a community, participating in CrossFit, and competing in the Open, we can come to better understand the role that sense of community may play in individual athlete experiences of high-intensity exercise competition.

I was not a member of a CrossFit gym before this project, but I had been involved with CrossFit training for the previous three years. I had completed the CrossFit Level 1 Certificate Course, and actively incorporated CrossFit programming into my own fitness activities and lifestyle. My experience with the training methodology and programming helped me understand the experiences of the participants and eased my transition into the role of participant observer in this ethnographic study.

Exploring sense of community within a CrossFit affiliate during the CrossFit Games Open has not previously been investigated in scholarly literature, although it has been suggested

as a future area of research by Bailey et al. (2017). Academic explorations into the Open are currently fairly limited in number. Martínez-Gómez et al. (2019) and Mangine et al. (2020) both studied physiological and training history predictors of Open performance. Box, Feito, Petruzzello, and Mangine (2018) examined mood state changes within Open participation and briefly touched on aspects of community within the Open, but this was not a primary focus of their study. The aim of this thesis is to fill that knowledge gap by exploring sense of community in CrossFit, competition in CrossFit, and how the CrossFit Games Open blends these concepts into a collaborative coexistence that perhaps intensifies the experience and value of both.

Chapter II: Literature Review

This chapter summarizes the prevailing scholarly literature that encompasses: (1) sense of community, (2) community in sport, (3) community in CrossFit, (4) competition in sport, and (5) competition in CrossFit. The objectives of this review of literature are to examine research on sense of community, concepts of community and competition within areas of sport and their relation to CrossFit, as well as some unique findings associated with community in CrossFit. This literature review will also expose some gaps in scholarly research surrounding the CrossFit Games and the Open, further justifying the necessity and opportunity to explore such a topic through this thesis.

Searches involved in this literature investigation were primarily executed through the University of Manitoba's online library catalogue. SPORTDiscus, Scopus, SAGE Journals Online, and Taylor & Francis Online Journals were the main journal databases utilized in the literature search. Most of the key words involved in the search included CrossFit, CrossFit Games, community, competition, sport, and sense of community. Studies involving CrossFit and the CrossFit Games are predominantly concentrated within the past five years. Research into sense of community in sport is similarly a newer topic of study, so publishing dates for most of the literature included in this review are fairly recent, ranging from 2007 to 2018. For this review, literature on community in general includes research as early as 1955.

2.1 Sense of Community

Sense of community (SOC) has been a prevalent concept within scholarly literature and the field of community psychology for over 40 years (Goodwin et al., 2009; Legg, Wells, Newland, & Tanner, 2017). Early definitions of community varied across disciplines and scholars, but Hillery (1955) summarized the prevailing literature at the time and described

community as having a minimum requisite of three essential elements: (1) a geographic area, (2) social interaction, and (3) one or more common ties (Hillery, 1955; Mahmoudi Farahani, 2016). Community itself is inherently social, requiring common purpose and interactive cooperation between its inhabitants/participants. Residing within a shared geographic area is a component of community, but alone is insufficient in creating community.

Sarason (1974) is credited with the first attempt to identify and label a “psychological sense of community” (p. 3), describing SOC as a subjective experience strongly connected to feelings of belongingness (Lyons & Dionigi, 2007). Building on Sarason’s (1974) work, McMillan and Chavis (1986) proposed a functional theory of SOC that focused on a foundation of group cohesiveness research and described the various elements that collectively produce SOC. In this initial theory, SOC is defined as “a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group and a shared faith that members’ needs will be met through their commitment to be together” (McMillan & Chavis, 1986, p. 9). Through this definition, four components of SOC are determined: (1) membership, (2) influence, (3) integration and need satisfaction, and (4) shared emotional connection (Lyons & Dionigi, 2007; McMillan, 2011; McMillan & Chavis, 1986; Ohmer, 2010).

Membership in a community involves an identification and connection with a larger collective (Ohmer, 2010). This connection includes a sense of belonging and feelings of acceptance (McMillan, 2011). Through a common membership, members of a community hold a personal investment in the wellbeing of the community as a whole, and subsequently influence and are influenced by the norms of the community (Lyons & Dionigi, 2007; McMillan, 2011). Members feel close to a community because the community offers needs fulfillment and validation (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). A shared emotional connection occurs between members

from quality time spent together in which activities and events are valued (McMillan, 2011). These common goals, attachment and belongingness, and emotional connection in a group describe and define a SOC among members.

Although McMillan and Chavis' (1986) theory of SOC has been debated and contested in community psychology research (McMillan, 2011; Nowell & Boyd, 2010), it “remains the most commonly used theoretical approach in research related to SOC” (Legg et al., 2017, p. 40). This theory’s core elements provide a stable foundation for conceptualizing SOC and will be considered as this review of SOC extends to recent scholarly literature that has explored the effects of SOC in the context of sport.

2.2 Community in Sport

In order to explore community within the realm of sport, there needs to be a working definition of community that can be applied to sport. Legg et al. (2017) echoed Hillery’s (1955) description of community in reporting three primary approaches to conceptualizing community research: “(1) community as geographic space; (2) community as a social network; or (3) community as a type of relationship” (Legg et al., 2017, p. 41). If the first approach’s concept of geographic space is broadened to include social spaces that people give meaning to and gather meaning from, then a CrossFit box can also be considered a geographic space related to community. Social spaces have been reported as an element of SOC in sport (Warner & Dixon, 2011), so it is possible that the structure and organization of the CrossFit box contributes to the development of SOC, and this discussion is continued in Section 2.3. For the second and third approaches, understanding social networks and relationships as intertwined with the structure of most sports is helpful in conceptualizing community as an important presence and outcome

within the goals and context of sport. These approaches can be used in conjunction for this discussion of community in sport.

While studies of SOC have been prevalent in other fields of research, analyzing SOC in sport specifically required the development of a theory of SOC in sport, spearheaded by Warner and colleagues (Legg et al., 2017). Warner and Dixon (2011) found that sport administration, leadership opportunities, social spaces, common interest, and competition all contributed to building SOC in sport. SOC is heavily influenced by the actions of sport administrators, who have the ability to execute fair administrative decisions and promote equity and fairness for all members (Legg et al., 2017). Leadership opportunities arise within a community of athletes, and this can strengthen SOC. Athletes come together in social spaces for a common interest and purpose, further intensifying feelings of camaraderie and community. Interestingly, competition also plays a factor in the development of SOC in sport. Fair competition in particular has been reported as being an important component of SOC (Legg et al., 2017). Friendly competition can be valuable for “personal growth and accomplishment” (Legg et al., 2017, p. 48). However, competition has the potential to serve as a positive or negative force in the development of SOC in sport (Warner & Dixon 2011), such as when a team stacks lineups for a competitive advantage (Legg et al., 2017).

Expanding upon Warner and Dixon’s (2011) SOC factor of common interest, the distinctiveness of a community can elicit feelings of shared responsibility, interdependence, cooperation, and common goals that contribute to SOC and overall quality of life (Goodwin et al., 2009). Being a member of a community enhances sense of belonging and emotional security (Lin, Chalip, & Green, 2016). Benefits associated with incorporating SOC into sport can extend

to providing community participation and social opportunities to parents and families as well (Lin et al., 2016).

While the camaraderie and teamwork aspects of sport that contribute to SOC are more apparent in team sports and activities, SOC can also be a factor for participation in and adherence to physical activity in general. For both group fitness class participants and individual gym-goers, SOC allows “fitness facilities to become social groups or clubs where participants can create and foster personal attachment to others and the service provider” (Pickett et al., 2016, p. 210). Physical activity is an area that focuses on self-improvement and health-related goals, so it is natural that feelings of common interest and the value of social spaces would be present in the gym environment. Meaningful interactions with fellow gym/class members enhance the perceived value of these social spaces and, in turn, contribute to the creation of SOC (Pickett et al., 2016).

This literature review section has demonstrated how SOC and social spaces have been shown to be an integral component of meaningful sport and recreation experiences (Lyons & Dionigi, 2007; Pickett et al., 2016; Warner & Dixon, 2011). It is important to consider these previous insights as I extend concepts of SOC in sport to the discussion of community in CrossFit.

2.3 Community in CrossFit

Beyond the testimonial evidence and CrossFit’s own promotion of its community culture (CrossFit LLC., 2020c), several studies have examined SOC within CrossFit and how community influences CrossFit experiences (Knapp, 2015b; Pickett et al., 2016; Simpson et al., 2017). Claudino et al. (2018) conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis of the scientific literature related to CrossFit. Although most of the prevailing literature explores physiological

factors in CrossFit participation, Claudino et al. (2018) found “preliminary evidence of a higher sense of community, satisfaction, and motivation among CrossFit participants” (p. 12).

Whiteman-Sandland, Hawkins, and Clayton (2016) discuss the induction of new members into a CrossFit gym and the community structure inherent within introductory CrossFit classes. Most CrossFit gyms require new members to go through an on-ramp program that introduces the basic movements and structure of CrossFit, incorporating heavy coaching, exercise scalability, and progressions for the participants. This on-ramp program takes new CrossFit participants through six sessions together in which they have the “opportunity to form social relationships” (Whiteman-Sandland et al., 2016, p. 2) and potentially grasp a sense of belonging through a new social identity as “on-rampers” (Whiteman-Sandland et al., 2016, p. 3). New CrossFit participants are inducted into the CrossFit community immediately and share in their experiences as a collective novice class.

While the efficacy and structure of CrossFit programming may contribute to the success of CrossFit, the social environment and SOC embedded within the program have been reported as important factors in increasing exercise initiation and continued participation (Heinrich et al., 2017). CrossFit participants build a community of exercisers within their home affiliate and express strong commitments to their CrossFit family and friends (Simpson et al., 2017). Individual exercise adherence and motivation to continue CrossFit is strongly affected by the expectation of others “to see them at the gym” and the fact that participants “look forward to time with ‘CrossFit friends and family’” (Simpson et al., 2017, p. 7). According to Simpson et al. (2017), community in CrossFit creates a social support system that keeps members accountable and encourages best efforts. CrossFit participants push through their physical limits in their shared experience of communal exercise and intensity (Knapp, 2015b), increasing community

belongingness and adherence to the program (Simpson et al., 2017; Whiteman-Sandland et al., 2016).

Some members of the CrossFit community have participated in sociological studies in gender representation (Knapp, 2015a, 2015b; Washington & Economides, 2016), interactions between coach and athlete (Heywood, 2016; Nash, 2017), and transformative experiences within CrossFit facilities (Dawson, 2017). Studies of gender in particular help describe characteristics of CrossFit participants. Although gender norms of ideal femininity and hegemonic masculinity have sometimes been reinforced in CrossFit settings, these norms have also been resisted (Knapp, 2015a, 2015b). CrossFit encourages equal rates of gender participation, but the heavy focus on strength training and weightlifting allow the activity to be framed as masculine (Partridge et al., 2014). In spite of this, female CrossFitters engage in the same workouts as males and set goals related to self-improvement and movement mastery (Partridge et al., 2014). This focus on performance and ability over appearance is encouraged among participants by CrossFit's emphasis on functional fitness (Washington & Economides, 2016) and resistance of traditional perceptions of femininity (Knapp, 2015b). Males tend to compare their performances to others more than females do (Partridge et al., 2014), but the focus remains function instead of appearance. These elements of common interest and competition contribute to SOC in CrossFit (Warner & Dixon, 2011).

In line with Warner and Dixon's (2011) theory of SOC in sport, a CrossFit gym's physical structure contains social spaces for its participants with a common interest in physical fitness and healthy living. In CrossFit's construction of a social space, the physical training space usually resembles a warehouse (Dawson, 2017) and is often "characterised by a rugged, stripped-down workout environment [...] and a friendly atmosphere" (Bailey et al., 2017, p. 9). While

traditional fitness spaces allow individuals to create virtual boundaries that separate themselves from other members, a CrossFit box allows little room for autonomy or anonymity (Dawson, 2017). Within this bare space, the group training environment requires that CrossFitters engage in active participation, “which is integral to the creation of a CrossFit community” (Dawson, 2017, p. 364). These social spaces seem to play an important role in the creation of SOC in CrossFit.

SOC in sport is not only an outcome of CrossFit’s training model, but “an important driver of perceived value and progress for fitness participants” (Pickett et al., 2016, p. 212). The role of SOC within CrossFit is one of reciprocity: regularly participating in CrossFit training creates and encourages a social environment that values support and community (Simpson et al., 2017), and the presence of SOC, in turn, inspires participants to further appreciate the value of physical activity and the benefits of exercise adherence (Whiteman-Sandland et al., 2016). Recognizing SOC as a fundamental component of CrossFit is crucial in the study of community in CrossFit and the CrossFit Games.

A few studies have explored SOC in CrossFit (Claudino et al., 2018; Pickett et al., 2016), but this aspect of community has not been explored in the context of the CrossFit Games. Due to the competitive nature of the CrossFit Games, the reported SOC in CrossFit may manifest itself in different ways in the context of the CrossFit Games. In order to incorporate the competitive side of CrossFit into this research, competition in sport must be examined.

2.4 Competition in Sport

The structure of most sports inherently creates a competitive environment: teams battle for the higher score by the end of the game, and individual athletes attempt to outperform competitors. Competition in sport is a contested concept, often supported and encouraged within

sports itself, but sometimes facing scrutiny and calls for elimination in physical education and school settings (Hochstetler, 2015; Shields & Bredemeier, 2009). The movement to remove competition from sports is driven by the belief that competition promotes ego-centric and win-at-all-costs attitudes surrounding sports (Shields & Bredemeier, 2009), which are common negative consequences of competition.

In defense of competition, Shields and Bredemeier (2009) argue that true competition is about pursuing excellence and enjoyment. Athletes engaged in competition should focus on performing at one's highest level of ability, and not on the final scoresheet. Concentrating all efforts on winning can distort motivations for competition and potentially introduce moral corruption into otherwise rule-abiding athletic methods (Gilbertson, 2016). Sports can therefore be an ethical challenge (Shields & Bredemeier, 2009) in which the pursuit of true competition will build character and moral virtue among competitors. Despite the efforts of Shields and Bredemeier (2009) in promoting true competition, the desire to win remains exceptionally strong among countless athletes, coaches, and executives.

There is a similar approach to competition and competitiveness that should be explored in partnership with the reasoning of Shields and Bredemeier (2009). Gilbertson (2016) introduces a response to the common belief that competitiveness is measured by an individual's desire to win. This standard definition of competitiveness lends itself to the possibility of a hypercompetitiveness or vicious competitiveness, in which the athlete may disregard moral standards of play to do whatever it takes to win. In response, Gilbertson (2016) offers virtuous competitiveness, which is not necessarily associated with the desire to win. Instead, virtuous competitiveness is more concerned with an athlete challenging and being challenged by opponents in the interest of developing both her own and her competitor's abilities (Gilbertson,

2016). This approach “suggests that virtuous competitiveness is a relatively stable trait” (Gilbertson, 2016, p. 419). Rather than a learned behaviour, an individual’s desire to win and level of competitiveness are more likely tied to personality and could lean towards viciousness or virtuosity (Gilbertson, 2016).

Values profoundly connected to competition and sport include “concern for excellence and recognition of excellent performance” (Simon, 2014, p. 116). While winning is the goal for many athletes and teams in sport, an internal value critical to success in sport is the pursuit of excellence. Simon (2014) suggests that “even if a competitor’s main concern is winning rather than achieving excellence, such an athlete must intend to play better than the opposition” (p. 116). In order to play better than the opposition, athletes must improve themselves and their play, thus concerning themselves with achieving excellence within their discipline. In winning a competition, an athlete can demonstrate earned excellence in their sport and incite an external recognition of that excellent performance.

Winning a competition is a convenient method of determining the better athlete or team, but does it capture a complete representation of athletic superiority? Dixon (1999) argued that the winning team may not always be the better team, as there are several variables that can influence a competition. Such variables include refereeing errors, cheating, and bad luck. Therefore, there may be more to determining excellence in sport than simply winning. While physical prowess is a critical component of athletic superiority, mental attributes like strategy, poise, and toughness also contribute to this concept of athletic superiority (Dixon, 1999). Incorporating broader concepts of excellence into athletic superiority and de-emphasizing winning as the ultimate sporting goal “may help to foster the cooperation that is part of healthy competition” (Dixon, 1999, p. 24).

Competitiveness need not always include a strong desire to win or the possibility of viciousness in competition. The concepts of virtuous competitiveness and pursuing excellence are alternative views, resisting certain notions that the desire to win is essential for competition, and may well fit within the structure of the CrossFit Games competition in general and the CrossFit Games Open in particular.

2.5 Competition in CrossFit

There is limited literature on CrossFit competition and the CrossFit Games despite its global growth. In studying post-workout mood response following each week of participation in the Open, Box et al. (2018) found that increased unpleasantness and fatigue immediately followed bouts of high-intensity exercise “due to the physiological demands required” (p. 78) and that “both the intensity and duration of a workout within the CrossFit Open appear to be likely factors that modulate the post-workout mood response” (p. 78). Mangine et al. (2020) investigated “the influence of experience and physiological fitness on performance in the workouts of [the Open]” (p. 113) to explore and identify predictors of Open performance. Both of these studies examined quantitative variables surrounding Open participation.

Herz (2014) is one of the few to detail the rise of the CrossFit Games and the sport of fitness, and provide insights into the experience of CrossFit competition. Although not an academic study, Herz’s (2014) account of the CrossFit Games and other books on the subject are the most thorough published works available at this time.

The competitive nature of CrossFit summarized earlier established the roots necessary to expand CrossFit into an annual competition to find the fittest men and women on earth. Beginning on a ranch in Aromas, California in 2007, the first CrossFit Games involved 60 total athletes in a simple three-event weekend competition (Herz, 2014). Participation in the Games

quickly swelled to hundreds of athletes by 2009, and criteria for participation in the Games included sectional qualifiers in 2010. The Games adopted its Open/Regional/Games format in 2011 to accommodate a rapidly-growing interest in participation and competition throughout CrossFit affiliates, and this format was still in place for the 2018 Open and this project.

With the success and popularity of the CrossFit Games comes marketing and branding power. CrossFit partnered with Reebok in 2011 to further market the CrossFit Games as the ultimate test of fitness (Herz, 2014; Powers & Greenwell, 2016). This partnership significantly increased the prize money for the athletes and expanded coverage of the Games for television audiences. With more capital on the line for the athletes, the competition ramped up in intensity and media relevance.

Despite the CrossFit Games' commercial swelling, the Games organizers claim to remain committed to community (Herz, 2014). Herz (2014) describes an example in which, during the 2012 Games, a 151-pound athlete named Chris Spealler faced a 150-pound medicine ball that had to be lifted to the shoulder eight times and carried 100 feet for three rounds. Eventual four-time CrossFit Games champion Rich Froning won the event heat, but the loudest cheers from the crowd came when Chris Spealler finished his final medicine ball carry (Herz, 2014). According to Herz (2014), Spealler represented what CrossFit is about: achieving more than you physically thought possible, supported by the greater CrossFit community. This Games moment resonates as an example of Gilbertson's (2016) virtuous competitiveness within athletes and spectators. In this story, Herz (2014) argues that pursuing excellence proved to be a greater achievement for Chris Spealler than whether or not he was able to win.

2.6 Summary

Reviewing research on sense of community, community and competition in sport, and community and competition in CrossFit has illuminated common themes across disciplines, especially in community research. The evident scarcity of research into the nature of the CrossFit Games informs this thesis project. It is the objective of this thesis to fill this gap in the research literature with an exploration of the coexistence of community and competition within the CrossFit Games Open.

Chapter III: Methods

3.1 Research Paradigm and Methodology

The goal of this thesis was to explore the relationship between competition and community within the CrossFit Games Open and how these two components coexist and perhaps even complement each other as exercise is reframed as competition.

A qualitative research design was used to investigate this research topic. Ontologically, I approached the research from a critical realist perspective, which assumes that certain truths exist in the world, but individuals often see these truths from different angles (Braun & Clarke, 2013). A critical realist researcher recognizes that independent truths are accessible from subjective perspectives, so knowledge is socially influenced. While critical realist researchers can only partially access truth from their own social position, it is important to acknowledge that “some ‘authentic’ reality exists” (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 27). Utilizing this approach allowed me to investigate fundamental aspects of community in CrossFit competition while valuing individual perspectives on the topic.

From this critical realist perspective, my epistemological approach was rooted in contextualism. This concept does not assume a single reality, but views knowledge as context-specific (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Like critical realism, contextualism is interested in searching for the truth while recognizing that no single method is able to uncover the truth. My ontological and epistemological frameworks led me to a qualitative research design that combines the view of the researcher and the perspectives of the individual research participants through an ethnographic approach in an attempt to more fully uncover the participants’ realities.

Ethnography is a popular and relevant approach to use in the analysis of community and culture and the differing perspectives within a given culture (Flick, 1999). As discussed in the

literature review, community is a part of the inherent structure of CrossFit classes (Whiteman-Sandland et al., 2016). Utilizing an ethnographic framework allowed me to collect data in a naturally occurring setting through personal engagement in participant observation (Hammersley, 2017). Through this ethnographic approach, I had the opportunity to experience CrossFit community and competition and combine my perspective with those of regular participants in CrossFit and the CrossFit Games Open.

As outlined in Chapter II, an exploration of community factors within the CrossFit Games Open remained to be pursued in scholarly research. Since individuals contribute to their own and the greater community, this qualitative design connected my ethnographic perspective as a participant observer with the perspectives of the other participants through in-depth interviews.

3.2 Methods

The aim of this section is to explain the methods I used to answer the central research question of this thesis. In utilizing an ethnographic approach, fieldwork is an essential component in the collection of primary data (Whitehead, 2005). Chapter II reviewed the community environment within CrossFit, and through this project I became a member of the CrossFit community to study from the inside. This thesis examines the relationship between sense of community and competition within the CrossFit Games Open, so I also competed in the Open as part of my participant observation. I hoped to gain an understanding of the perspectives of CrossFit Games Open participants through field notes and in-depth interviews.

This section details how I set out to collect data through participant observation and in-depth interviews. Additionally, I will describe my methods for participant recruitment, interview questions, and data analysis.

3.2.1 Data Collection

Two primary methods of data collection were used in this thesis: (1) field notes gathered from participant observation in a CrossFit gym in Winnipeg and registration in the CrossFit Games Open, and (2) in-depth interviews with CrossFit Games participants from within the same CrossFit gym. Combining and analyzing results from these two methods allowed me to explore perspectives of community and competition within the CrossFit Games Open.

Participant observation is a method widely utilized in ethnographic studies in which the researcher takes part in the daily activities, interactions, rituals, and customs of a group of people or community (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011). The goal of participant observation is to learn what it is like to be a member of a particular community through living the experiences of the community under study. In the study of culture, explicit culture refers to what people are able to articulate about themselves and their community, while tacit culture is intangible and outside of our awareness (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011). It is this tacit culture that is accessed through deep participant observation and becoming a member of a community so that the intangibles of that community can be understood, even if not able to be articulated. The need to understand the tacit culture of the CrossFit community is why I committed to becoming a participant observer in this study. Although I may not be able to articulate tacit culture, it likely unwittingly informed my perspective as a community member. This approach allowed me to view community in CrossFit and the CrossFit Games Open from the perspective of active participants to come to an understanding of this reality, which coincides with my paradigmatic position of critical realism and contextualism (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

CrossFit classes are generally one hour in length, and I intended to participate in at least three classes per week over the course of six weeks from February 22, 2018 to April 4, 2018.

This length of study included the entirety of the CrossFit Games Open, which lasts five weeks. The ways in which the CrossFit Games Open workouts are completed during the Open vary depending on the scheduling methods of individual CrossFit gyms. They may be included in certain classes over the weekend that each Open workout is released, or be completed during open gym time at the CrossFit affiliate. I included competing in each week's Open workout as part of my CrossFit involvement. Immediately following each CrossFit participation session, I recorded detailed field notes that included elements of community and competition observed during the session, as detailed in Section 3.2.4.

In-depth interviews with members of the CrossFit gym supplement the data I collected through participant observation and field notes, and provided additional perspectives on community and the CrossFit Games Open. Including interviews as part of a study is well-suited to research questions concerning individual experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Interviews are helpful in exploring participant feelings, understandings, and perceptions. Since my research study was interested in understanding experiences of competition and community in the CrossFit Games Open, individual perspectives from participants in the CrossFit Games Open were essential. I chose to use an in-depth interview strategy so that each interview would follow a similar format while allowing flexibility in the flow of the interview to address unanticipated participant issues or topics (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

3.2.2 Participant Details and Recruitment Strategy

CrossFit's participant population is comprised of a range of ages and abilities. The 11 CrossFit gyms in Winnipeg are scattered throughout the city in diverse neighbourhoods. However, participant demographics are likely influenced by participation costs. Memberships generally cost over \$100 per month, branded fitness apparel items are popular buys, and

participants are encouraged to maintain a healthy lifestyle by eating clean, unprocessed foods, and these factors all contribute to costs of participation (Washington & Economides, 2016). Additionally, individual participation in the CrossFit Games Open costs \$20. Financial barriers could limit CrossFit participation to middle-to-upper socioeconomic classes.

For the participant observation and field notes components of this study, the research participants included all of the community members of the CrossFit gym that are involved in the specific class in which I engaged. Community members included the class participants at the gym and the coaches that lead the classes. At the CrossFit gym that was used as the setting for this research, there are usually 6-12 participants in each CrossFit class. One coach leads the participants through the class. As I engaged in a CrossFit class, my fellow participants in the class and the coach leading the workouts were the research participants. In order to recruit these members for participant observation, I needed to be transparent about my role as a researcher and gain permission from all participants to use their anonymized data for this study. This is detailed in my discussion of ethics approval below.

In-depth interviews included as part of the data collection in this research study involved members of the CrossFit gym. I recruited four individuals to participate in interviews. Participant demographics are detailed in Chapter IV. Participants had to be at least 18 years old due to the minimum age requirement of participation in the CrossFit Games Open (participation in the Open is a prerequisite for interview as detailed below). There was no maximum age for inclusion in this study.

In order to be eligible, potential participants had to meet specific requirements: they (1) must be active participants in CrossFit; (2) must have been involved with the CrossFit gym in question for at least three months; and (3) must be planning on competing in the 2018 CrossFit

Games Open. Since my study is interested in exploring the relationship between community and competition in the CrossFit Games Open, it is essential that the perspectives gained through in-depth interviews came from participants in the CrossFit Games Open. I included a minimum participation time of three months so that the recruited individuals had hopefully become accustomed to the community environment and had experienced some aspects of community through their active participation.

Since CrossFit class sizes are relatively small, it may have been difficult for me to recruit more than four individuals to interview. This target number of four interview participants was flexible, and I set out to recruit up to six participants if there were more interested community members that satisfy the inclusion criteria. In consideration of the scope and feasibility of a master's project and for timely completion of this thesis, I limited interview recruitment to six individuals.

Recruitment for this study commenced after I received research ethics approval from the University of Manitoba Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB), which was granted in February 2018. I contacted the CrossFit gym owner and asked permission to conduct participant observation research in a CrossFit class three times per week for the six-week study duration. Before engaging in the research, I gained informed consent from the class participants. It was highly likely that, over the course of the study, there would be different members attending the specific class in which I planned on regularly participating. This may be due to normal gym attrition or the addition of new gym members. Therefore, the process of gaining informed consent was ongoing throughout the study. If a new member joined the class, I explained the purposes of the research study and gained informed consent from the new member before recording any details involving the new member. I intended to be open and transparent

about my role as a participant observer, avoiding deception while becoming a member of the community. If any members did not wish to be involved in the research study, I carefully avoided recording field notes that involved those members.

As I approached the tasks of participant observation and recording field notes, I was aware that informed consent could be problematic as I interacted with CrossFit participants that were not part of this study. Therefore, if I was including specific remarks or actions of class participants in my field notes, I paid particular attention to restricting specific field note observations to only those members that gave informed consent to participate in this project. Anyone that did not give informed consent was not included in any degree of specificity within the field notes, but instead was sometimes included in broad terms (e.g., “there were 12 participants in today’s class”), as is authorized under research ethics approval.

To recruit members for interview and participation, I put up an approved poster in multiple locations in the gym that described the specifics of the study and asked interested people to contact me for further information. Interested CrossFit participants had to meet the inclusion and exclusion criteria described above. I provided all research participants with physical copies of informed consent forms prior to their participation, detailing the purposes of the study and how participant anonymity will be protected. Each participant had time to review the informed consent form and ask questions. Participants were able to withdraw from the study at any time. All data collected through field notes and interview transcripts were to be anonymized with pseudonyms.

3.2.3 Interview Guide

In-depth interviews were audio recorded and were expected to be 45-60 minutes in length. Further details on these interviews are explained in Chapter IV. Interviews were planned

to take place at a time and location that was convenient for the participant. Each participant was provided with a copy of the interview questions in advance, and were given the choice to not answer certain questions. These preselected questions served as a guide for the interview, but there was some flexibility in the direction the interview took based on emerging themes that warranted expansion. Additionally, some questions were omitted if the interviewee addressed the topic in the answer to a previous question. After introductory questions, the interview questions that were asked during these in-depth interviews are as follows, with probing questions/prompts in parentheses:

CrossFit

1. Why did you start CrossFit? (What are the factors that led you to join a CrossFit gym?)
2. What other sports do you engage in?
3. What led you to this CrossFit gym in particular? (Did you know someone in this gym before joining?)
4. How long have you been participating in CrossFit? (Has this participation been continuous/regular?)
5. Tell me about what keeps you involved in CrossFit. (What motivates you to keep participating in CrossFit?)
6. Have you influenced or motivated anyone else to start CrossFit? (Any friends or family members?)

Community

7. What does the word “community” mean to you? (Do you value teams, communities, or do you prefer to be on your own?)
8. What communities do you belong to?

9. What does community mean to you in the context of CrossFit? (Have you experienced feelings of community during your CrossFit participation? Do you feel that your gym has its own community of members?)
10. What are your thoughts on the community environment within CrossFit? (Does community contribute positively to your exercise experience?)
11. What do you think about your relationship to your fellow gym members? (Have you developed friendships during your CrossFit participation?)
12. Could you describe instances or examples of community within CrossFit? (How did these experiences affect you?)
13. Could you describe instances or examples of individualized experience within CrossFit?

Competition

14. What is your experience with competitive sports? (Did you compete in sports in high school or university?)
15. What are your thoughts on competition? (What do you like or dislike about competition?)
16. What do you think about the competitive environment within CrossFit? (Does this competitive environment positively or negatively impact your experience? Why?)
17. Tell me about some examples of competition or competitiveness within CrossFit. (Can you share any personal experiences of competition within your own gym?)
18. Do you have any examples of cooperation?
19. Tell me about your experiences with CrossFit competitions. (Have you watched any local competitions?)

CrossFit Games Open

20. As part of inclusion for this interview, I know that you are competing in the CrossFit Games Open. Why did you choose to participate in this competition?
21. Have you participated in the CrossFit Games Open in the past? (What was your experience like?)
22. What are your goals for this year's CrossFit Games Open? (Do you hope to do better than last year? Do you hope to have a certain ranking in your region?)
23. Have you changed your training in anticipation of the CrossFit Games Open? (Have you sought more coaching or focused on any areas of weakness?)
24. What role does the CrossFit community play in your participation in the CrossFit Games Open? (Were you motivated or inspired by anyone to compete in the CrossFit Games Open?)
25. Do you complete the Open workouts at the same time as other members? (If yes, how do you feel about competing alongside others?)
26. Have you or do you plan on redoing any Open workouts if you feel your performance was not as good as it could be? (Why do you want to try for a better result?)
27. Do you watch others compete in the Open? (Do you try to motivate them while they are competing? Why or why not?)

I then gave the participant an opportunity to add other information they felt is important or pertinent, and closed the interview by thanking the participant for their time. The participant also had another opportunity to ask questions about my research.

3.2.4 Data Analysis

Each interview was recorded on an audio-recording device. After each interview, the audio recordings were transferred to a password-protected computer and stored securely. Prior to

the analysis of the data obtained in the interviews, the data needed to be prepared for analysis through transcription (Braun & Clarke, 2013). I carefully transcribed each interview verbatim, paying close attention to “all verbal utterances” (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 163) of the participant and of myself, the interviewer. This included pauses in speech and correct assignment of punctuation within the transcript, such as question marks or commas. I anonymized the transcript by changing the participant’s name and removing any identifying information. I then used the anonymized transcript for analysis and coding.

Both the interview transcripts and the field notes gathered from participant observation were coded by hand and analyzed using thematic analysis. I chose to utilize thematic analysis because it is “an excellent method for those new to qualitative research, and particularly suitable for student projects” (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 178). Using thematic analysis allowed me to focus on the themes that I identified from the data in a descriptive process that explored patterns of community and competition within the CrossFit Games Open. This method of analysis provided a fruitful and rich description of the data that was collected in this research project, leading to novel understandings of the subject matter.

As I coded and analyzed the transcripts and field notes, I paid close attention to salient instances of SOC and competition. Community elements included coaching, peer encouragement, motivational factors, social space, flow of the workout, interactions, and any other observed or experienced instances of camaraderie and community. In the context of McMillan and Chavis’ (1986) SOC theoretical framework, elements of SOC are related to factors of membership, influence, integration and need satisfaction, and shared emotional connection. Some of these elements were qualified in field notes and interview transcripts by coded key words, phrases, and descriptions that fit within each SOC subtheme. Competition

factors included, but were not limited to, scorekeeping, judging, coaching, score comparisons, retesting for a better score, and discussion of rankings and fitness levels.

The purpose of this analysis was to bring the data to order and attempt to discover patterns and themes across the data set (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011). Braun and Clarke (2013) identify seven stages of coding and analysis as a “practical ‘how-to’ guidance” (p. 201) when using thematic analysis: (1) Transcription, which involves transforming audio recordings to written form as described above. This is a meticulous process that requires a significant amount of time to perform well. (2) Reading and familiarization, which is an initial review of transcripts and field notes to become familiarized with the data and identify some salient information. (3) Coding, which will be complete (i.e., across entire data set). This involves assigning key words and phrases to pieces of text that encompass ideas and meanings. (4) Searching for themes, which is connecting codes with similar meanings to arrive at broader patterns that are common across the data set. (5) Reviewing themes, including conceptualizing connections between themes and producing a map of the provisional themes and subthemes. (6) Defining and naming themes, which is attaching labels that can accurately describe the broad themes. (7) Writing, which finalizes analysis and introduces the discussion of results. These seven stages of thematic analysis detailed by Braun and Clarke (2013) can be applied to interview transcripts and field notes. I analyzed the interview transcripts and field notes through the use of these seven stages, revealing themes and patterns across both sources of data. Comparing the emerging themes from interviews and field notes allowed me to arrive at a richer understanding of multiple perspectives and individual experiences of community and competition in the CrossFit Games Open.

3.3 Limitations

There are certain limitations to this research study that must be addressed. One limitation is the fact that in participant observation, “the observer is the research tool” (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011, p. 111). When the researcher is embedded within the research as a method of data collection, obtaining research objectivity presents itself as a challenge. In order to understand the results of the research, an understanding of the position of the researcher is necessary (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011). My position in my research had an influence on the data that was collected through my participant observation. Therefore, it was necessary that I engaged in self-reflexivity regarding my perspective within the study so that I could maintain a critical stance throughout data collection.

Another limitation to this study is my previous experience and interest in CrossFit. I had personally been using CrossFit training methods for approximately three years prior to commencing this research, and I support its exercise approach and efficacy. I am also a fan of the CrossFit Games, streaming live events online throughout the season and tracking individual athlete results. In studying the CrossFit Games Open through this research, I likely had some bias towards the competition and CrossFit as a whole, which may have influenced my field notes and reporting of the findings. However, this bias may have perhaps accelerated my transition into a member of the CrossFit community and helped position my research from the perspective of an active participant in the CrossFit Games Open. I needed to critically examine my position in the research and remain cognizant of the possibility of a propensity for bias, while valuing my role as one of the participants included in this study through my participant observation.

This research study is also limited by its relatively narrow scope. The CrossFit Games Open is a worldwide competition, but I was only analyzing a small sample size at a local

CrossFit gym in Winnipeg. The role of community within CrossFit and the CrossFit Games Open may present differently in other gyms, cities, countries, or cultures. Individual perspectives included in the data analysis may also be limited in scope due to participant demographics potentially restricted by financial barriers, as described above in participant details.

3.4 Delimitations

The delimitations of this project, which mark the boundaries and self-imposed limitations of my proposed research, involve the restricted focus on the experiences of select individuals in a CrossFit gym in Winnipeg. Because I am interested in understanding possible experiences of community within the CrossFit Games Open as a participant observer, I had to limit my research to one community of exercisers so that I could become a member of this community to study from the inside. Thus, I was restricted to a single CrossFit gym in Winnipeg for this study in order to become a member of this specific community. Delimiting my field work to the participants within a single CrossFit gym resulted in my exposure to an extremely small fraction of CrossFit Games Open competitors when compared to worldwide Open participation numbers. Additionally, the interview participants in this study had a similarly restricted perspective of their community only. Since I was only interviewing participants that were competing in the CrossFit Games Open, external perspectives of the Open from CrossFit participants not competing in the Open were not included in this research. Individual perspectives were limited to four interview participants, along with the general experience of a dozen more members that I interacted with during participant observation over a six-week period. However, these delimitations hopefully resulted in rich descriptions of individual CrossFit Games Open experiences and a deeper understanding of the dynamics of community within CrossFit and the CrossFit Games Open.

3.5 Summary

Understanding experiences of community and competition within the CrossFit Games Open required an ethnographic approach to synthesize multiple perspectives and meanings. This study combined participant observation and in-depth interviews in an attempt to arrive at a strong understanding of the role of community in CrossFit and the coexistence of community and competition in the CrossFit Games Open. It was anticipated that the data collected in this research would provide novel insights into the lived experiences of competitors in the CrossFit Games Open and explore the potentially innovative purpose and capacity of community in competition.

Chapter IV: Results

4.1 Data Collection

This project's data collection covered an eight week-span of CrossFit participation, beginning with the first week of the 2018 CrossFit Games Open immediately after research ethics approval was granted on February 26, 2018. My data collection proceeded through the week of April 16, 2018, as I completed the in-depth interviews with select participants in the weeks following the Open.

4.1.1 Participant Demographics

In the CrossFit gym where I conducted this research, Open participants convened every Saturday morning of the Open competition, completing each Open workout in heats to accommodate the number of participants. The gym owners organized the heats, running competitors through each week's event in a timely and orderly fashion. There were approximately 20 athletes competing in the Open each week, plus extra attendants who volunteered as judges/scorekeepers, and a few other members who came as spectators. Twelve gym members agreed to engage in my study as participants in my field observation, and four of these further volunteered to participate in the in-depth interviews. An even split of six males and six females comprised the 12 general participants, while three males and one female were interview participants. All four interview participants competed in the Open, which was a component of the interview inclusion criteria. Most of the other participants also competed in the Open, though a few did not. Interview participant ages ranged from 22-35 years old, while total participant age range was 22-50 years old.

4.1.2 Field Notes

I signed up for the 2018 CrossFit Games Open and completed all five Open workouts at the CrossFit gym study site over the course of the five-week competition. Following each Open workout event, I recorded field notes that captured my day's experience within the competition. Outside of the Open workouts, I attended three or four regular CrossFit classes each week, and recorded field notes following some of these group classes. Field notes were collected for 12 days and each day of field notes produced approximately one page of material.

4.1.3 In-Depth Interviews

I conducted four separate in-depth interviews with participants during the three weeks following the 2018 Open. The interviews took place at a time and location that was convenient for the participants. Interview lengths ranged from 33 to 71 minutes, with an average duration of 49 minutes. Each interview followed the structure laid out in Chapter III, with flexibility for certain topics upon which the participants expanded. I recorded each interview on a digital audio recorder and downloaded each audio file onto a password-protected computer for transcription. I transcribed the interviews in the weeks following each interview, conducting a complete transcription of all words uttered by both the participant and me, the interviewer. All participant names have been changed to protect the confidentiality of the participants.

Garrett, my first interview participant, is a recently-graduated mechanical engineer. He participated in competitive hockey throughout his teen years, and started participating in CrossFit shortly after finishing his junior hockey career at age 20. Garrett was drawn to CrossFit due to its competitive appeal, has been participating in CrossFit for three and a half years, and at this CrossFit gym in particular for almost 3 years. 2018 is Garrett's second year competing in the Open.

Jen is a full-time researcher at a post-secondary institution, and has a competitive background in dance. Jen began participating in CrossFit as a way to diversify her fitness training qualifications, and became a certified CrossFit Level 1 trainer. She has been participating in CrossFit for three years, all of them at this CrossFit gym, and 2018 is her second year competing in the Open.

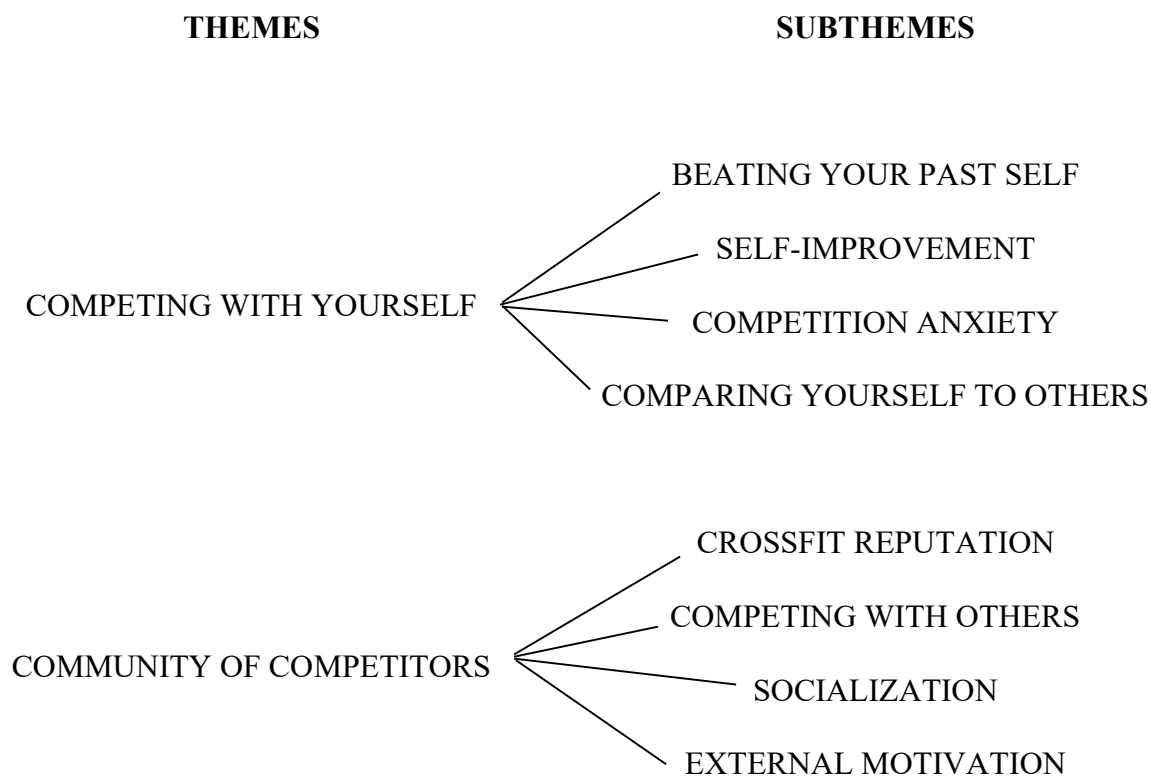
Trevor is a full-time tradesperson who played competitive football most of his life, culminating in two years of university-level football. He began CrossFit after his football career, looking for an avenue to continue fitness and competition. Trevor has been doing CrossFit for approximately 18 months, and 2018 is his second year competing in the Open.

David, my final interview participant, is the owner and head coach of the CrossFit gym under study. He also has a background in university football, and began CrossFit in 2008. He has competed in every year of the Open since its inception in 2011, making 2018 his eighth year of Open competition.

4.2 Coding and Themes

As described in Chapter III, I analyzed the field notes and interview transcripts through a complete coding process across the data set. I coded the data by hand, a process in which I went through the field notes and transcripts line by line, looking for sentences and phrases that related to CrossFit, competition, and community. I assigned code words and phrases to segments of the data to capture the essence of these sentences in a few key words. Many of these codes began to repeat throughout the data. I then went back through the data, grouping these codes into common themes. I did not have a specific number of themes in mind through my coding process, but rather allowed the codes to associate with each other and group into what I observed to be distinct yet related themes. Once the codes eventually merged into eight themes, I labelled the

themes with a phrase that summarized those related codes. Below is a description of the codes that I classified within the data, organized into the eight themes that captured the essence of these codes. I reassigned each of these themes as subthemes of two broader themes:



4.2.1 Competing with Yourself

This broad theme is primarily internally-driven, reflecting codes that relate to an individual's inward focus. The data that grouped into this theme contains a distinct concentration on competition and community factors that are somewhat within an athlete's locus of control or related to an internal conflict.

4.2.1.1 Beating your Past Self

The first subtheme that I organized in relation to an internal focus includes codes surrounding a fixation on beating your own past scores and performances, and this appeared to be quantitative in nature. The phrasing and context of these codes were primarily attached to a drive for specific improvement in quantifiable fitness metrics, such as better workout scores or heavier weights.

Codes

- Frustrated with performing poorly
- Everything is a competition
- Competing with yourself
- Proud of performance in competitive environment
- Competition pushes you harder
- The Open pushes you harder
- Proving to yourself that you can do it
- Pushing your limits
- Strategizing
- Competing hard all the time
- Working on weaknesses
- Competing with yourself keeps you coming back
- Embracing the challenge
- Internal motivation
- Comparing to yourself
- The Open is about competing with yourself
- Challenging yourself in the Open
- Giving full effort for each Open workout
- Mentally pushing yourself
- The Open shows you where you're at with your fitness

4.2.1.2 Self-Improvement

This subtheme is similar to the first, but involves a more holistic sense of self-improvement, related to more general feelings of improved health, fitness, lifestyle, and/or Open performance.

Codes

- Better lifestyle choices
- Prioritizing CrossFit Open over going out
- Not satisfied with success
- Always seeking improvement
- Working on weaknesses

- The Open motivates you to get better
- Self-improvement
- The Open allows you to see how you've improved
- Open goal of bettering yourself
- Improving from last year
- The Open forces you to get better
- The Open changes/influences your goals

4.2.1.3 Competition Anxiety

Throughout the areas of data that involved competition and the Open, there emerged certain levels of anxiety associated with competing. These codes primarily manifested as an internal struggle, fitting within the broader theme of competing with yourself.

Codes

- Pre-performance anxiety
- Competition anxiety
- Anticipation to exercise
- Competition is uncomfortable
- Learning to adapt to competitive environment
- Internal pressure in competition
- Hesitation to compete
- Strategizing workouts
- The Open is stressful, thinking about how you're going to perform
- No control over the competitions/workouts
- Strategies to reduce competition anxiety
- Shared experiences of competition anxiety
- Competition can be enjoyable
- Relying on yourself
- Getting out of your comfort zone
- Goal to complete the Open
- Prepping for competition
- Anticipation for the Open

4.2.1.4 Comparing Yourself to Others in the Open

Through analyzing your individual performance and scores in the Open, there appears to be a tendency to compare your performance to the performances of others. This subtheme and

associated codes are mainly internal in nature, as they involved a self-reflection on performance in comparison to others.

- Codes**
- The Open compares yourself to others
 - Humbling
 - The Open creates competition
 - Comparing your performance to others
 - Comparing yourself to elite athletes
 - Being realistic in the competition
 - Comparing yourself to others on the leaderboard
 - Setting realistic expectations
 - The Open is about competing with yourself and others, trying to improve your placing
 - Content with performance
 - You want to see where you stack up

4.2.2 Community of Competitors

This second broad theme that captures four of the subthemes involves more of an external outlook, highlighting extrinsic influences on individual Open participation. It is within this theme that codes related to community were developed.

4.2.2.1 CrossFit Reputation

As interview participants described the Open and CrossFit participation in general, the reputation of CrossFit and the Open appeared to have an influence on their participation.

- Codes**
- CrossFit has competitive reputation
 - CrossFit has sport elements
 - Quantifiable results, scored
 - Competition is the draw
 - Your CrossFit gym is different from other CrossFit gyms
 - CrossFit can diversify your qualifications
 - Community atmosphere, cooperation
 - Relaxed environment
 - CrossFit gyms have cooperation not found in other gyms
 - Cooperative element to CrossFit workouts
 - CrossFit is inclusive

- Appreciation for sport of CrossFit
- Welcoming atmosphere
- Community exercise is fun
- CrossFit looks a little crazy
- No previous athletic background necessary
- Promoting competition
- Competitive spirit

4.2.2.2 Competing with Others

Although the Open is an individual competition, completing the Open workouts alongside other competitors had an influence on individual Open experiences.

Codes

- Friendly competition with other gym members
- Competing with friends
- Don't want to be beat
- Individual exercise not as fun
- Pressure adds to the enjoyment
- Frustrated with performing poorly
- Everything is a competition
- Seeking competition with others
- Competition pushes you harder
- The Open pushes you harder
- Knowing your competition
- Motivating/cheering on others
- Knowing others' abilities
- Seeing others succeed
- Competing alongside others is the best part of the Open
- Competing with others improves your effort
- Seeing others compete
- Motivating others to compete in the Open
- CrossFit cultivates a supportive competitive environment
- Motivation to compete, getting comfortable with competitive atmosphere
- Feelings of community within competition settings
- CrossFit can be primary source of relationships for some
- Culture of inclusivity and welcoming
- More than just an individual workout experience
- Others cultivating competitive atmosphere

- Making teams for the individual competition, bringing more community into the Open

4.2.2.3 Socialization

Within CrossFit participation, a certain level of socialization emerged from the data, highlighting community aspects of CrossFit and the Open.

Codes

- Socialization, community
- Social group
- Making friends in CrossFit
- Social time in the gym
- Group feeling
- Group suffering
- Diverse community
- Gym members get to know you
- Coach responsibility to make others feel welcome
- Meeting other people through the Open
- Sharing your experience with a partner
- Friendly atmosphere
- Connections with other members
- Unique community groups within CrossFit
- Layers of community
- CrossFit creates a larger community based on shared experiences
- Community improves exercise experience
- Group setting more fun
- Relaxed competitive environment in own gym
- Community aspect of the Open
- CrossFit community is comfortable
- Wanting to spend free time here
- CrossFit is a shared experience
- Community = family
- Gym community becomes like a family
- CrossFit community is main focus
- Incorporating community into business, environment

4.2.2.4 External Motivation

While this subtheme is closely related to previous subthemes of socialization and competing with others, there was a strong recurrence of extrinsic motivation factors within the data, especially within my field notes.

Codes

- Needing others around you
- Others help motivate you to keep going
- Others cheering you on, especially during the Open
- External pressure to perform
- Pushed to success
- External pressure to compete
- Coach responsibility/pressure to compete in Open
- External pressure to compete in the Open
- Expectation to compete in the Open
- Community aspect influences Open participation
- External motivation to push harder

4.3 Summary

These codes have been gathered directly from the interview transcripts and field notes. The strategies I used in naming the codes include directly quoting the source, paraphrasing the lines, or reflecting on the context and meaning of the data lines and developing a phrase to capture that meaning. While the codes mostly separated into eight distinguishable subthemes, there is overlap between certain subthemes and some codes fit into multiple subthemes. A more detailed exploration of each subtheme is the basis of Chapter V, and includes quotes from the interview transcripts and field notes that give fuller meaning to the codes and allow for a greater connection to the prevailing literature in the discussion of these results.

Chapter V: Discussion

While Chapter IV details the specific results of this project and the codes and themes that I identified from the data, the purpose of Chapter V is to explore the themes and subthemes in detail. I will engage in an analysis and discussion of the results, presenting sections of interview transcripts and field notes that give greater context to the codes and subthemes and allow me to investigate this project's findings. Throughout this exploration of themes, I intend to ground my analysis and discussion in the literature base of sense of community, community and competition in sport, and community and competition in CrossFit as reviewed earlier, with a particular focus on how these elements manifest within the Open. After a thorough contextual analysis of these themes, I will return to my central research question of how community and competition coexist within the CrossFit Games Open.

5.1 Competing with Yourself

This theme developed early on in the analysis of the data as interview participants shared many examples of self-improvement, internal stressors and motivations, and a burning desire to best previous personal scores and achievements. Nuances in the specific ways in which this self-competition is expressed were identifiable in four different subthemes.

5.1.1 Beating your Past Self

For participants in the online CrossFit Games Open competition, your scores and ranking are recorded and displayed on the CrossFit Games website for every year in which you officially compete and submit results. This allows individuals to monitor their progress year-over-year, tracking improvements in fitness and ability. If your final Open ranking in your city, province, or region moves up each year, it can be surmised that your fitness has improved each year, relative to other competitors within the Open. For three of this project's interview participants, 2018

marked their second time competing in the CrossFit Games Open, with the previous year's results available to view online. For the fourth interview participant, the 2018 CrossFit Games Open was his eighth. All four interview participants referred to their previous results when discussing their performance in the 2018 CrossFit Games Open, indicating a focus on improving on past scores.

Garrett shared things he liked about competition in general, including how “if you do poor, you want to get better” and that, in a competitive environment, “[I’m] still going to push hard because [I’m] competing with myself.” In CrossFit, if Garrett re-tries a particular workout that he has done before, he says “I’ll put so much pressure on myself to beat my old score.” “If you see a number [from a previous workout] that you know you can beat, you’re going to try to beat it.” During Garrett’s first attempt at the CrossFit Games Open in 2017, he got injured after the second workout, at which point he was sitting at 10th in Manitoba. His goal for 2018 was to finish the five-week Open in the top-15 in the province: “I hope I haven’t gotten worse over the last year, so I hoped to finish top-15 and I got [top-15] so it was pretty good.” Garrett’s results from the Open influenced his training afterwards, as he considered that “sometimes you’re not motivated to train, then you’re like ‘well, I’ve got to get better for next year for the Open’.” “That’s what I hope next year... I hope I do better.”

Jen also indicated a desire to beat her past scores and results, as she sought out an individualized training program after her performance in the 2017 CrossFit Games Open. Jen examined her weaknesses in her performance and wanted to improve for the next Open. She noted that her individual training program has allowed her to work “on things that I need to work on to get better... it just forces me to really do it.” For Jen, the CrossFit Games Open “is very much competing against yourself and trying to improve each year,” because “the Open always

has a wonderful way of shining a light on [your weaknesses], so it just made me even more aware and I was like ‘oh man, I really want to get better.’” “Seeing how you can progress from year to year is probably the best way to look at the Open.” Jen’s goal for the 2018 CrossFit Games Open was simply to “do better than last year,” implying that beating her own past standings in the events would be a win.

Trevor views the Open as a yearly fitness report card “to see if you did anything worthwhile” over the past year of training, saying that “everyone should do it and sign up for it, put in some work for the year and see how you did.” Like Jen, Trevor stated multiple times that his only goal for the 2018 Open was to “do better than last year. I didn’t have any placing goals other than just improve from last year.”

These three interview participants display an element of virtuous competitiveness described by Gilbertson (2016). Rather than being consumed by a desire to win, the virtuous athlete is concerned with the challenge of competition, and how rising to this challenge is in the interest of developing their abilities. Since it is impossible to compete against your own past self in real time, this virtuous pursuit of self-competition may be a somewhat unique trait of the Open that is not easily found in other individual sports.

This allure of the challenge itself in the pursuit of competition was established as a theme in the study into social identity in the CrossFit Games Open by Woolf and Lawrence (2017). Similar to how this subtheme of beating your past self has been identified in my project, participants in Woolf and Lawrence’s (2017) study described the Open as an opportunity to measure their current fitness level, stack up their current performance to past years, and to be challenged by the events. The challenge was often “described in reference to oneself rather than competing against others” (Woolf & Lawrence, 2017, p. 173), further demonstrating the theme

of competing against yourself and beating your past scores. Several codes that I assigned in my project as outlined in Chapter IV that relate to beating your past self include “proving to yourself that you can do it,” “pushing your limits,” “comparing to yourself,” and “proud of performance in competitive environment.” Similarly, Woolf and Lawrence (2017) found that, after the Open, their participants reflected on “what they had achieved over the five-week period, the personal records they had broken, and the movements and weights, once thought previously unconquerable, they had overcome” (p. 173-174), emphasizing intrinsic motivation.

David, who has competed in seven CrossFit Games Open competitions, had a goal to simply complete the 2018 Open. “This year was just about trying to get it done.” Instead of talking about year-over-year improvement and beating last year’s standings, David discussed how he had sometimes redone an Open workout to try to get a better score. One year in particular after a certain Open workout, David felt he did not perform as well as he could have, and tried the workout again before scores had to be submitted. Although he does not normally redo workouts, he “got a better score a second time.” For David, he needed to be satisfied with each individual workout performance, and would redo an event if he felt he could beat his own score. “I’m pretty sure every workout I redid I got better. I don’t think there were any that I got worse.”

My own experience within the CrossFit Games Open included redoing one of the workouts in an attempt to beat my own score. Each week, the workout is released on a Thursday night. In the fourth week of the 2018 Open, I attempted the workout on Friday, and was disappointed with my performance. Leading up to this workout known as 18.4, I was feeling confident that I would be able to perform well on the specific movements in this workout. The first portion of 18.4 involved a high number of handstand pushups, which is a movement that I

had been practicing in the months preceding the 2018 Open. I approached 18.4 with a target number of repetitions as my goal, but became fatigued on the handstand pushups much swifter than anticipated. This left me feeling as though my score was not a true representation of my ability on this workout, as I was confident that I should have been able to do better. I then redid the workout on Monday prior to the cut-off time, in a desperate attempt to beat my score and submit a better one. My motivation through that second attempt was solely focused on surpassing my previous score, highlighting an internal drive to beat my past self - albeit only 3 days past. I wanted to prove to myself what I had initially thought immediately after completing 18.4 the first time: I was better at handstand pushups than my score suggested. I was unsuccessful in improving my score on the second attempt, and instead had to submit the results of my first attempt. Although initially disappointing, this unsuccessful attempt at improving my score forced me to accept that this is where I was at with my fitness and my handstand pushup ability in particular, and gave me motivation to improve in this area for next year.

For the vast majority of athletes competing in the Open, the end of this five-week online competition is as far as they will progress in the CrossFit Games season. Up until 2019 when the CrossFit Games altered the qualification format, only 0.2% of Open participants advanced to the next stage of competition that was Regionals (Box et al., 2018). Motivations for competing in the Open therefore have to be based on something besides progressing further in the CrossFit Games season for everyone that is not an elite competitor. Instead of competing for the chance to be the best in the world, participants need to focus on being the best version of themselves (Woolf & Lawrence, 2017). As this subtheme of beating your past self suggests, participation in the Open is likely motivated by factors referred to by Box et al. (2018) as “self-referenced performance criterion... or affective states” (p. 69). Beating your past scores and meeting your quantitative

fitness goals as described in this subtheme can be examples of performance criterion, while affective states like enjoyment may be connected to later subthemes.

5.1.2 Self-Improvement

This subtheme is similar to the previous one, but a distinction was revealed within the results of the interviews that featured a more holistic sense of self-improvement through CrossFit, competition, and the CrossFit Games Open that was different than beating your past self. Rather than easily-identifiable improvements derived from quantitative data from years past, the subtheme of self-improvement developed based on expressions of general improvement in wellbeing, ability, lifestyle choices, and the pursuit of goals.

The interview participants shared a drive for self-improvement through CrossFit, and this drive is intensified during the CrossFit Open. Jen identified her motivation for continued involvement in CrossFit as “the challenge, so you can always [lift] something heavier, you can always be more efficient at a skill, you can always improve, and as much as I find that frustrating, I find that motivating as well, so that’s a big part.” For Jen, the concept of competing with herself allows her to push past her perceived limits and improve in a variety of areas:

At the end of the day, you can only do what your body allows you to do, so you’re really just competing with yourself which for me is wonderful because I push myself really hard and I have high expectations for myself so to compete against me, I feel I can wrap my head around that... [and that is] a positive message in life, to do the best that you can do, see what happens, right?

Similarly, Trevor shared that “there’s always something to get better at... you’re never good enough... You just get better, you can just, like from day one, the first workout I did crushed me, but you can still get to that point now and you’re like, a lot better.” In this instance, Trevor

alluded to an interesting assessment of his fitness and abilities. By saying “you’re never good enough,” Trevor shared a perspective that appears to describe a never-ending quest for self-improvement. From his viewpoint, there are no personal metrics to meet to achieve satisfaction, and no performance markers that are simply “good enough.” Trevor’s quest for self-improvement does not have a finish line, accentuating a drive for holistic development and continuous progress in a pursuit of self-competition.

The pursuit of true competition – when the spotlight is fixed upon performing with the highest degree of effort and for the sake of self-improvement – is where the greatest defense of the concept of competition lies (Shields & Bredemeier, 2009). The purpose of engaging in competition should not be simply to win or earn glory, but to find meaning in the competition process itself (Shields & Bredemeier, 2009). Intense CrossFit training has already been shown to improve several general physical abilities (Gianzina & Kassotaki, 2019), but the analysis of my project results did not reveal a focus on achieving specific metrics of performance in particular physical abilities. The interview participants instead imply that the competition process is what leads to self-improvement, and the metrics by which self-improvement is determined is not limited to the final scores. The quest for self-improvement, vitalized by competing in the Open and in CrossFit in general, involves consistent constructive decisions that positively influence your performance. Sibley and Bergman (2017) encouraged this emphasis on self-improvement within a competitive CrossFit environment. Results of their study showed that “CrossFit participants primarily strive for goals related to health management and skill development” (Sibley & Bergman, 2017, p. 15). Both of these elements are intrinsic in nature, related to self-improvement in multiple areas of wellbeing. My interview participants shared a similar CrossFit perspective, and this focus appears to transfer to their participation in the Open.

During the CrossFit Games Open, Garrett chooses to make healthier lifestyle choices to improve his performance. “I never went out late or anything, if I had to do the Open the next day.” In choosing between leisure or performance, Garrett believes that “CrossFit is a higher priority... if I have to choose between getting a good sleep and feeling good working out, or staying up [late], I’ll choose CrossFit, I’ll choose going to bed early.” Garrett managed his schedule differently during the Open, so that “once the Open started it was basically working out three times a week, more rest, you just kind of get burnt out if you overdo it.”

5.1.3 Competition Anxiety

All four interview participants expressed experiencing feelings of competition anxiety surrounding their CrossFit Games Open participation. I experienced similar feelings at the start of my 2018 Open competition, as captured in my field notes at the time:

This was my first Open workout. Well, my first official one. I had done the Open workouts on my own in years past, at a non-CrossFit gym. This was my first time completing it with a judge, a clipboard, and a clock on the wall. My heartrate was elevated throughout the morning leading up to the workout... [My judge] checked with me that I know how to do the movements and know the standards, and I answered affirmatively. My heart was racing at this point.

Each Open workout felt different than a normal CrossFit workout. The movements were not new to me, but I felt a certain level of anxiety and trepidation all the same. I felt a pressure to perform, and push myself beyond my own perceived limits. Woolf and Lawrence (2017) reported similar emotions from Open participants, as competitors “expressed anxiety toward the unknown requirements first, and then their ability to complete the workouts” (p. 174). The

originality of each Open workout presents an unknowable challenge at the feet of competitors, so it is unsurprising that common and somewhat self-inflicted performance pressures arise.

Coming from a competitive gymnastics and dance background, Jen had faced competition before:

[I] always tried competition in every sport I did... I don't love it... but I feel it's good for me because it puts me out of my comfort zone. So growing up, I would always try competition and then I'd be like 'no no, I just don't like competing,' but what I figured out as I grew up and actually started listening to myself was I really do like competition, I don't like how I used to be when I was competing. So I used to put a lot of pressure on myself... so competition really stressed me out. And now... I'm trying to learn how to do competition in a more healthy way where I'm calmer about what the end result is.

In CrossFit, Jen has developed a healthier way to embrace competition anxiety, but still feels its effects during the Open:

I stressed myself out a lot about the Open... it's released on a Thursday, you can't sleep for two days and all you're thinking about is the movements that have been released, like how many times can I do a thruster in my head? So I mean there's still that level of stress and excitement, but that's part of it, but I think I was a little bit more prepared for it this year.

Garrett has also experienced competition anxiety, saying "I would have butterflies before every single CrossFit workout." Speaking about a multi-event competition, Garrett described the stress of the day as "the first one sucks, and the next one, you just want to get the rest over with... you enjoy it, but not till after." Trevor similarly described a competition setting as one in

which he is “uncomfortable, nervous,” and taken “out of [his] comfort zone,” but this atmosphere motivated him to push harder.

5.1.4 Comparing Yourself to Others

Due to the scoring system in the Open in which your results are ranked against the scores of other competitors, there appears to be an ingrained and pervasive, though not unexpected, subtheme of comparing your performance to others. The CrossFit Games Open online leaderboard is a public ranking of all Open results across the five weeks of competition, assigning points to your workout score each week based on your regional or worldwide position. The score submission deadline falls on the Monday afternoon of each week of the competition, resulting in a weekend of “leaderboarding,” a term CrossFitters use to describe constantly checking the leaderboard to see where their workout scores place them as other competitor’s results are submitted and filtered into the rankings. This leads to a tendency to compare yourself to others in the Open, which I identified as a dominant subtheme during the analysis phase of this project.

Based on Garrett’s ranking in the 2017 Open, he felt that he was “actually pretty good... relative to the average person.” This comparison helped motivate him to compete in the 2018 Open, where he could again “measure [himself] against others, see how good [he is], against the whole CrossFit... community.” When asked if he checks the leaderboard during the Open, Garrett replied “I check it all the time... it’s natural. I’m competitive and everything, so I figured what’s the harm in checking.” Trevor also admitted “I’m guilty for [checking the leaderboard]... it’s so hard not to.”

When I introduced the topic of competition within CrossFit during Jen’s interview, she referenced the Open leaderboard right away, saying “there is the leaderboard, and you can see

where you fall in a lot of different ways, so that's a huge piece of CrossFit and competition." Jen explored her strategy in the second 2018 Open workout, which had two separate components. "If I wanted to move myself up [the leaderboard] I should have gone faster on the first [part]... [going fast] on the first part would have been better, but for me I wanted to do well on both parts." She described checking the leaderboard as "addicting" because "you want to see what the top people are doing, but then you want to see the people around you and like 'how far off of that person am I?'"

David described the Open as an opportunity to "stack yourself up against the world." I found myself doing exactly that, checking the Open leaderboard every week to see where I rank in Manitoba, in Canada, and in the world. As the competition progressed, I could see where I performed relatively well, and which workouts were more of a weakness when compared to the performance of others. As I immersed myself as a CrossFit participant and Open competitor, I found myself comparing my results to others, and using those scores to illuminate weaknesses in my fitness in an effort to improve. Through the analysis of interviews and field notes, I found this subtheme of comparing yourself to others to be closely related to the subthemes of self-improvement and beating your past self, as these comparisons with other athletes drafted a mental or physical blueprint for training priorities to improve results in the next CrossFit Games Open.

The interview participants found comparisons with others to be mostly positive, as it encouraged them to examine their weaknesses and plan for improvement. My own experiences illustrated a desire to compare my performance to others so that I could truly assess my fitness in relation to other CrossFit competitors. By contrast, Sibley and Bergman (2017) suggested that "public comparison of workout scores could be discouraging for individuals with lower

performance levels” (p. 17). This could be combatted by fostering a strong sense of community within Open participation that supports building others up over performance comparisons.

Connecting self-comparison and comparison to others with sense of community may be achieved through the Open as this yearly event “may serve as an annual ‘check-in’ that brings like-minded people together to reenergize them and reminds them of what it means to be part of the CrossFit community” (Woolf & Lawrence, 2017, p. 177), which leads into the second theme that centres on community in CrossFit competition.

5.2 Community of Competitors

This second theme is classified as a collection of interactions with others within CrossFit and the CrossFit Games Open. While the first theme focused on individual experiences and internal influences, this second theme engaged the broader CrossFit community and revealed dynamics between aspects of community and competition.

5.2.1 CrossFit Reputation

Each interview participant’s foray into CrossFit involved prior knowledge of CrossFit’s reputation surrounding some level of community and competition. David began CrossFit in its earlier days in 2008, completing CrossFit workouts at a local college gym before any CrossFit gyms opened in Winnipeg. This relatively unknown exercise program looked strange to outsiders, as David recalls “some people thought I was crazy.” Trevor came from a football background, where “there was a negative... vibe about CrossFit.” Trevor shared that he did not know exactly where this negative vibe came from, but believed it may be due to the CrossFit Games being a relatively new sport, and other longstanding traditional sport areas do not view “working out” as sport, perhaps because the competition format and general CrossFit training methodology is misunderstood. After viewing CrossFit Games documentaries that detailed the

intense competition and showcased elite athletes, Trevor “eventually started to see it as a sport and see it for what it is,” where he realized how hard it is. Trevor has developed an appreciation for how much he has improved his fitness since starting CrossFit, despite already having what he thought was a high level of fitness from years of involvement in competitive sports.

Garrett started CrossFit because of the competitive appeal. He was “bored in the regular gym,” and “wanted something more competitive to push [himself]”:

I... get restless sitting around so I started doing it on my own before I came to a CrossFit gym and... I knew a little bit about it and I thought oh it'd be fun to do it with other people, be in a competitive environment, so that's kind of why I started.

As she was eyeing working in the fitness industry full-time, Jen saw CrossFit's rising popularity and viewed it as a way to diversify her professional career. The “class setting was... a little bit intimidating” for her at the start, but Jen soon became more comfortable and “started enjoying that kind of community and class setting.”

5.2.2 Competing with Others

This subtheme is similar to the subtheme of comparing yourself to others, but focuses on the interactions between competitors as a mutually-beneficial battle leading to improvement on all sides, rather than originating from and remaining primarily within the self. Competing with others reveals a prominent community involvement in the individual sport of CrossFit, as described by Jen:

...lots of people push super hard, but having people that, it's almost like that rabbit that you're chasing... they're better than me, and so working out beside them makes me better because I'm trying to catch them. And certain workouts they feel the same way, so having people that are forcing you to push harder than you would is fantastic.

Although the Open is an individual competition, Jen sees it as something that “everyone’s going through... together.”

As I was going through my first Open workout, I kept an eye on the athlete competing next to me. We were each completing the workout individually, but competing beside someone influenced how I attacked the workout:

[At the start of the workout] I came out fast, keeping ahead of a good athlete to my left.

As the workout went on, I began to slow down a bit, and the athlete beside me took the lead between the two of us. I tried to keep up, but had to take a slightly slower pace so I didn’t burn out.

As I kept an eye on the athlete competing beside me, I found myself trying to race him through the workout and hold on to a faster pace. It is possible that he also kept an eye on me, keeping his pace faster than mine. This micro-competition between the two of us improved my performance, and perhaps had an influence on his as well.

Garrett shared some of his reasons for participating in CrossFit that revealed an inclination towards the competitive side:

[I like] getting better, becoming more fit, trying to keep up with the other people in the gym so that you can have fun and workout with them and not get beat at every workout...

seeing [someone else] work hard makes you want to work hard and everyone else too....

That’s what keeps me coming back, mostly the competitive stuff.

When Garrett was preparing for the Open, he was focused on “trying to keep up with everyone else in the gym when they’re getting better and better.” Garrett relished the opportunity to complete his Open workouts alongside fellow competitors:

That's the best part... otherwise it's hard to tell where you are, hard to know if you're winning or losing, or if you're doing well, or pacing, or having a terrible pace, yeah I think that's the best part is doing it beside everyone else because you see where they are and you know 'okay, I can hang onto the bar, two more chest-to-bar pullups and then I can do one more extra thruster, reset, then I'll beat him.' That's the competitive part of me coming out... you wouldn't really get that anywhere else unless you're doing it alongside other people, especially in the Open because you see scores from other people in Winnipeg and Manitoba, and you know that they're really close to you in the previous workouts so... I was thinking 'okay I can... hang on for two more reps and I can beat them in this workout for sure'... So that's basically how I feel about working out with other people is it just pushes you a lot harder.

The climate within a CrossFit gym encourages competition between members (Partridge et al., 2014). Some members find that competition helps define them within their CrossFit community (Heinrich et al., 2017). Perhaps this engagement in competition is what leads some CrossFit participants to identify as athletes in the pursuit of sport within a physical activity program. Woolf and Lawrence (2017) found that some of their study participants, depending on Open goals and CrossFit tenure, "may identify as athletes, and others as not" (p. 175).

Competing alongside other Open participants may fuel this athlete identity, as this project found common codes of "pressure adds to the enjoyment," "competition pushes you harder," and being "frustrated with performing poorly" within this subtheme, which may be related to an athlete mindset. This athlete state of mind within the Open competition that pushes oneself and others to perform better is related to what Simon (2014) described as a "mutual quest for excellence" (p. 117). In pursuing excellence, athletes may strive for personal achievement over the concept of

winning, and when competitors each pursue this through competing against one another, this mutual quest can perhaps be realized.

5.2.3 Socialization

Beyond the competitive community atmosphere, interview participants shared many social aspects of CrossFit that positively contribute to their experiences. Garrett said that “it’s fun to come [to CrossFit] and socialize,” as he finds that he enjoys “coming [to CrossFit] and talking about things other than CrossFit with other people,” and that he made friends with “a lot of people [he] likes to hang out with outside of the gym.” Garrett also stated “I’m so busy I don’t even hang out with my old high school friends; I just hang out with my gym friends. I come here to socialize because this is my social time.” Garrett even views the Open as a social event, saying “if I didn’t come here to do CrossFit with other people, I probably wouldn’t do the Open.”

As a gym owner, David makes it a business practice to cultivate relationships and establish a community within his CrossFit gym:

I think about family... especially for someone like myself who moved here with no one else around in terms of actual family and I didn’t know anybody here... going to the gym was a big part of my life, especially when I got into it... seeing those people every day, basically they were my family.

David uses this mindset when promoting the community environment within his CrossFit gym, and it has an effect on other members:

[Community] is a huge part of what we’re trying to get across... part of it has to be the way you run it, right? If there’s somebody new in the class, I try and make a point of introducing names... [if] someone’s new, some people will go out of their way to say hi or if they see someone that looks lost... they’ll help out... Basically just treat them like

they're your family... I've noticed a lot of specific members going out of their way to help out new people, to make them feel welcome and a part of the community, and we get emails from people that are saying this is awesome, felt like I was a close part of the family from the get go... we can rely on our members to have these new people come in and feel welcome.

When David sees his gym members go out of their way to help, he says "that's family... that's community." David envisions his CrossFit gym as more than an individual workout experience: "It's not just supposed to be a place where you come in and just do your thing and leave." This family and community atmosphere is associated to higher levels of belongingness within the community, leading to relationship-building and social networking not found in traditional exercise settings (Whiteman-Sandland et al., 2016).

As a gym member and CrossFit coach, Jen appreciates that community atmosphere and views it as something special within CrossFit:

I think because of the community or that welcoming environment, and everybody knowing everybody, there's... always cooperation and it's like 'oh shoot, we don't have enough rowers,' people are like 'oh we'll just share,' you know, everybody is pretty easy going when it comes to their workouts, and so there's always I think cooperation, nobody's like 'no those are my dumbbells, don't touch them,' compared to regular gyms...

Garrett shares this view of CrossFit, saying "[other gym members] really get to know you... the more I'm here, the better I get to know them and then people open up to each other." Getting to know fellow competitors and building expectations to see each other at the gym increases exercise adherence by keeping members accountable in this social support system (Simpson et

al., 2017), highlighting the positive impacts CrossFit's sense of community and socialization aspects may have on performance and improvement.

Trevor feels that his CrossFit gym is his "home away from home," as he spends a significant portion of his free time at the gym:

It's a comfortable place, happy to be around, people are helpful... I think there's a nice community, family feel here, so it's good... most of my community is here... you just walk in the gym and it's like you already have something in common... it's nice to work out with friends...

This sense of community felt by the interview participants and the positive social environment it fosters has a considerable impact on continued participation in CrossFit (Heinrich et al., 2017), and may be an important factor in participation in the Open. Woolf and Lawrence (2017) reported that participation in the Open did not affect social identity, but explained that this may be due to the fact that "social identity [in CrossFit is] high to begin with" (p. 176), making significant increases during the Open somewhat difficult to measure.

5.2.4 External Motivation

As explored in other subthemes, there appears to be a strong community component to CrossFit competition, revealed in examples of external motivation that push the athletes to compete harder. Primary examples come from others motivating you to push harder, go faster, and do things you could not do before. This subtheme is closely linked to the subthemes of socialization and competing with others, as it is normally other members and fellow competitors that cheer you on during both regular workouts and the Open.

Leading up to the 2018 Open, there was an aura of anticipation within the gym. Before the first workout was announced, a gym member asked David "are you getting excited for the

Open?” David was more focused on the logistics of running the Open workouts in the gym, but as the first week of the Open drew near, most of the gym conversations turned to participation in the Open and trying to guess what the events might be.

I experienced multiple angles of external motivation firsthand during my Open workouts. As I stepped into the gym on the morning of 18.1, the first workout of the 2018 Open, “the gym was abuzz with excitement... heats of athletes were in the middle of the workout, with judges and spectators cheering them on.” This dynamic scene filled me with anticipation and energy as “there was an intensity in the air.” This energy was repeated the next week for 18.2:

I had such a great time last week in the gym, embracing the electric atmosphere and celebrating in the efforts and successes of all the athletes that were competing. I went earlier this time, so I could participate longer. As I walked in the door, heats of athletes were already engaging in the workout. Music was loud, and spectators cheered as athletes approached the end of the workout. This week was unique in that it involved a 1-rep max clean at the end. This part of the workout drew the loudest cheers as athletes attempted heavy weights and [personal records].

The raw energy in the gym was palpable every week of the Open, and I found myself spending more and more time at the gym for those Saturday morning competitions to immerse myself in the atmosphere. This dramatic environment in the gym during the competition serves as an additional motivating factor for Open participation (Woolf & Lawrence, 2017). Participant enthusiasm and excitability can contribute to positive affective states, improving the experience for all competitors (Box et al., 2018).

Garrett participated in the Open in a similar way to me, spending extra time at the gym during the Open workouts for the sake of others as he “came early to every workout... to watch a

couple of heats, just to cheer them on because I know what it's like when you're doing it, it's nice to have people watching and cheering you on, so I wanted to make sure I did that for others too." Garrett wants to see more people compete in the Open:

I hope next year we get even more people to do it from the gym... if we could get even five or 10 more people to come out, they'll realize that it is a lot of fun, and... you'll see people pushing themselves some more, it'll make them fitter or... [it will give] them more confidence, right? That's what I hope for next year, [I] hope more people do it and I hope I do better.

As a CrossFit coach, Jen makes a point of motivating others to participate in the Open and be a role model: "[As a coach] I thought I should for sure do [the Open] to be a good role model for other people and show that it doesn't matter if you can't do everything perfectly, just go and do your best and get a good workout."

During the 2018 Open workouts, I was cheered on by people I did not even know yet, and in turn cheered them on as well. In the final seconds of 18.1, "my judge and two other spectators cheered me on." I then watched the final heat of athletes complete the workout, and "all around, fellow members were cheering them on and congratulated them after they finished. [The final athletes] fist-bumped afterwards, congratulating each other on the impressive performances." This motivational cheer squad boosted my performance in 18.2:

[A member] and others were motivating me to continue... I had to break up the squats in those final rounds. [The member] was nearby, counting down for me to get back to the dumbbells and pick them up to my shoulders to keep going. If I set them down to rest, he would say 'okay, now pick them back up. Ready, 3, 2, 1...' and I would listen to his coaching and pick up the dumbbells again... [Later in the event] several fellow members

were cheering me on throughout my [weightlifting] attempts. After the unsuccessful 90-kilo attempt, [a member] enthusiastically said ‘you had that!’ Her faith in me helped motivate me to attempt 90 kilos again, and make a successful lift. After the time expired, the members gave me congratulatory fist bumps.

The external motivation provided by fellow competitors positively influenced my performances and scores, playing a significant role in my 2018 Open experience. Through a cultivated community environment, competitors are supported and support each other to perform to the best of their abilities. This mutual support is “an integral part of CrossFit” (Dawson, 2017, p. 375), because “by helping others along in their quest for improvement, [CrossFit participants] can better themselves” (Dawson, 2017, p. 375).

5.3 Reconciling Community and Competition

Now that I have conducted a thorough review of the results through a contextual analysis of the codes and themes, I will attempt to address the identification of these themes through a return to my central research question: how do community and competition coexist within the CrossFit Games Open? When I proposed this research project, I held the notion that community and competition were somewhat opposed, and wondered how these two concepts could coexist within the Open. The term “community” suggests a certain level of cooperation and group cohesiveness, as supported by McMillan and Chavis' (1986) functional theory of sense of community. Alternatively, “competition” elicits a sense of opposition, measured by an individual’s desire to win as two or more sides contend for superiority in a particular arena. More specifically within the Open, an athlete’s score is based on their performance relative to the performance of others, which I believed would intensify the feelings of competition between Open participants. CrossFit as an organization touts its high sense of community as an important

facet of the Open (CrossFit LLC., 2020a). In setting out to reconcile my perceived opposition of community and competition, I found the results told a different story. While the two broad themes primarily delineate into one theme of competition and another theme of community, there is less opposition between these themes than anticipated, and the themes instead point to internal versus external aspects of competition and community.

The first main theme that I identified from the data – competing with yourself – revealed a strong sense of individuality and intrinsic motivation for individuals participating in CrossFit and the Open. Feelings of competitiveness and competition were also prevalent throughout this theme, as expressed in the many codes that referenced competition. In the subtheme of beating your past self, the data captured an internal drive for participants to best their previous scores and meet their quantitative fitness goals. Certain codes that repeated throughout the interview transcripts and field notes were “the Open pushes you harder,” “working on weaknesses,” and “the Open is about competing with yourself.” These codes arose from lines of text that referenced comparing your results to your own previous scores, finding specific weaknesses in your fitness and addressing them, and using the Open as an opportunity to prove to yourself that you have gotten fitter over the past year. From this standpoint, Open participants use the Open as a yearly competition against themselves, seeking to best the past versions of themselves. Another code in this subtheme, “competing with yourself keeps you coming back,” suggests that this self-competition is a central tenet of the Open and is an internal driving force that motivates athletes to compete harder and register for the Open again next year. Beating your past self is thus not a competition with other Open participants, but a competition against your own previous Open performances. In relation to my central research question, this subtheme materializes on the

competition side, though it is internal in nature and does not seem to be related to the performance of others.

Self-improvement developed as another subtheme that is internally-driven. While the Open seems to elicit strong feelings of competing with yourself and beating your past scores, there is also a sense of more general self-improvement that comes with Open participation. Codes of this subtheme include “better lifestyle choices,” “the Open motivates you to get better,” and “the Open changes/influences your goals.” The first subtheme of beating your past self had a quantitative angle of improvement, while this subtheme is more qualitative in nature. It is distinguished by a more holistic and somewhat intangible sense of healthier lifestyle choices and general fitness improvements, achieved through participation in the Open competition.

In the Open and other CrossFit competition, a certain level of competition anxiety arose within participants. Codes of “anticipation for the Open,” “internal pressure in competition,” “relying on yourself,” and “the Open is stressful, thinking about how you’re going to perform” highlight a strong sentiment of competition anxiety that I identified as another subtheme within the main theme of competing with yourself. Open participants described pressure that they put on themselves when they compete, along with feelings of stress and anticipation prior to competing in Open workouts. Interview participants shared that they usually felt “butterflies” prior to competition, and I experienced these feelings through my own participation in the Open. These feelings of anxiety and anticipation were heightened prior to each Open workout and to a higher degree than “regular” CrossFit workouts. This aspect of competition was described by interview participants as an internal pressure that they put on themselves and not related to other competitors, further reinforcing this idea of the Open involving strong individual aspects of competition.

So far in this discussion of results, competition factors have been primarily internal and/or individual in nature. The final subtheme that I established in relation to competing with yourself involves comparing yourself to others in the Open. While this subtheme appears to surface from an internal source within an athlete, it does begin to relate to other competitors. As described earlier, the Open scoring system ranks athlete scores against the scores of others to determine final Open ranking. As I entered into this research project, I presumed that this scoring system would produce performance comparisons between athletes. These comparisons did not present themselves to the extent I had expected, but still developed into a subtheme of comparing yourself to others. Codes of “comparing your performance to others,” “comparing yourself to others on the leaderboard,” and “you want to see where you stack up” illuminate a tendency for athletes to measure their performance by their score relative to others. I found myself checking the Open leaderboard every week of the competition to see where I ranked, and I examined the scores of other participants that I knew so that I could see how they did in comparison to my own performance. The interview participants shared a similar weekly habit, concerning themselves with their overall placing in the Open. However, instead of this activity being based in a desire to beat others in the competition, it appeared to arise from a place of self-assessment. Participants viewed their own results as an example of performing well or performing poorly on a given workout, turning the scores into an internal examination of their performance. A code from this subtheme that reinforces this perspective is “the Open is about competing with yourself and others, trying to improve your placing.” Athletes are focused on improving their placing through the improvement of their own performance, not through a worse performance by others. The Open performances of other athletes have an undeniable effect on an individual athlete’s Open

ranking, but an athlete's comparison of scores remains an internal component of competing in the Open.

The second main theme that I identified from the data has a deeper focus on community within the Open. However, much of the content of this theme still involves competition and competing in the Open, so this theme has been identified as a hybrid of community and competition: a community of competitors. The first subtheme of this broader theme, and one in which the interview participants admit to being a factor in beginning their participation in CrossFit and competing in the Open, is the reputation of CrossFit. This subtheme serves as a partial explanation to my pursuit of my research question in the first place. There appears to exist a certain assumption/expectation that CrossFit contains elements of community and competition, illustrated by the following codes: "CrossFit has competitive reputation," "competition is the draw," "community atmosphere," "CrossFit gyms have cooperation not found in other gyms," "CrossFit is inclusive," and "community exercise is fun." I had heard of these kinds of sentiments prior to joining a CrossFit gym, and found that the interview participants held similar beliefs prior to and during their CrossFit participation. While this subtheme does little to reconcile the coexistence of community and competition in the Open, it helps serve as justification for an exploration into these seemingly powerful components of CrossFit that draw in participants and keep them engaged.

Competing with others materialized as a subtheme that integrates community and competition. Although the Open is an individual competition, the workouts are usually completed alongside other gym members. Codes that allude to the community aspect of competing with others include "competing alongside others is the best part of the Open," "seeing others succeed," "motivating others to compete in the Open," and "more than just an individual

workout experience.” Competing in the Open is often a group experience, highlighted by seeing others compete and encouraging each other throughout the competition. Interview participants experienced “feelings of community within competition settings,” and described the Open environment as a “culture of inclusivity and welcoming.” These codes suggest that the Open is a community event, and this community of competitors cultivate a competitive atmosphere. While most of the earlier examples of competition explored above are individual/internal in nature, this community environment constructed and described by the participants is more of an external aspect of the Open, influencing an individual’s Open experience. Additionally, codes of “competing with others improves your effort” and “don’t want to be beat” appear to reinforce the positive influence community can have on an individual’s competition results. Competition not only exists within this community but thrives within the Open community environment, with the community motivating athletes to jump into this individual competition as a fellow Open community member.

The Open also contains a high degree of social interaction as revealed in the subtheme of socialization. Interview participants shared that they experience a “group feeling” and “group suffering” in the Open, referring to the physical challenge of the Open workouts. “Sharing your experience with a partner” and making “connections with other members” reinforce the community aspects of CrossFit. Participants also describe “meeting other people through the Open.” I also made new acquaintances through participating in the Open because other competitors serve as workout judges that count your repetitions and record your score. I served as a judge for other competitors that I had not yet met, and new faces judged my competition as well, leading to “making friends in CrossFit.” Another code that fit into the subtheme of socialization is “gym family becomes like a family.” This sentiment was shared by multiple

interview participants as they explained that many of their current friendships and relationships were formed in the CrossFit gym. These many descriptions of community within CrossFit and the Open help inform some level of coexistence between community and competition, as feelings of community continue and perhaps even strengthen during the Open.

The final subtheme that I identified within this community of competitors theme involves the prevalence of external motivation during the Open. Codes like “others help motivate you to keep going,” “others cheering you on, especially in the Open,” and “expectation to compete in the Open” illustrate external sources of motivation to participate in the Open. Like some of the codes that formed into the subtheme of socialization, this subtheme of external motivation demonstrates a strong community element to Open competition. Examples of community support during Open workouts emerged frequently as revealed earlier, and help explain how sense of community can manifest and remain within competition and the competitive environment of the Open.

Through the analysis of this thesis project’s data, I found that community and competition coexist within the CrossFit Games Open because they are not in opposition. Instead, the results of this project suggest that community and competition coexist as internal and external components of the Open experience. The theme of competing with yourself demonstrates internal forces at play within competition, while the community of competitors brings external factors of community and group involvement into an individual’s Open venture. Even though the Open is an individual competition, CrossFit’s community environment persists through this competition and is perhaps amplified due to the shared physical and mental challenge. These findings have not yet been considered or explored in other studies on the Open, and can hopefully contribute to a greater understanding of Open participation and experience.

Chapter VI: Conclusion

In this project, I set out to explore how community and competition coexist within the CrossFit Games Open. The purpose of this chapter is to review the initial intent of my research, methods I used to conduct the research, results I gathered, the themes that were revealed through analysis of the results, and how these results answer my central research question. Finally, I will explore possible future directions for research on this topic and end with final remarks about my experience in this project.

6.1 Project Summary

CrossFit as an organization describes itself as a community-based lifestyle and exercise program (CrossFit LLC., 2020c) while simultaneously hosting the largest fitness competition in the world. At the outset, I presupposed that there may be a conflict between community and competition within the Open, as an athlete's score is determined based on the results of others. This relative scoring system inherently puts athletes in opposition because when one athlete earns a higher ranking, another athlete essentially draws a poor ranking, regardless of personal achievement. Therefore, I wished to explore how the individual competition of the Open can take place within a community environment.

In order to experience feelings of community and competition within the Open, I immersed myself in the culture of CrossFit by becoming a member of a CrossFit gym and competing in the 2018 Open. I recorded detailed field notes throughout my participation, and conducted in-depth interviews with four Open participants. Through the transcription, coding, and analyzing of the data, I identified several themes that allowed me to express the findings of this project and draw conclusions about the Open experience.

The first broad theme that is revealed in the analysis of the interviews and field notes – competing with yourself – has a primarily internal focus for an athlete. This theme divides into the following subthemes: beating your past self, which involves comparing your present performance with a past performance or score; self-improvement, which features more holistic expressions of improving your abilities; competition anxiety, which includes pre-performance jitters, competition anticipation, and the stress that accompanies moving beyond your comfort zone; and comparing yourself to others, often known in CrossFit as “leaderboarding,” to see how your performance stacks up against the competition.

The second theme involves an individual competitor’s interactions with the greater CrossFit community, summed up as a community of competitors. This features a more external outlook in which aspects of community are explored and its components are largely outside of an athlete’s locus of control. Subthemes include: CrossFit reputation, which influenced participants’ reasons for beginning CrossFit and includes competition and community; competing with others, which incorporates the performance of others and how that may influence your own performance; socialization, which is touted as a noteworthy component of CrossFit participation and enjoyment; and external motivation, which consists of the motivational factors that come directly from the environment and other competitors.

I expected themes of community and competition to reveal themselves somewhat distinctly, based on my presupposition of community and competition being primarily opposed. Instead, the two prominent themes can be categorized into internal versus external aspects of competition. The theme of competing with yourself was predominately internal, as the research informed a strong condition of self-reliance in competition. In concert with this first theme arose a second theme of community-based competition: an external perspective in which robust

aspects of community were intertwined with competition. This emboldened a community of competitors, revealing an integral group dynamic within the individual sport of CrossFit.

In answering my central research question of how community and competition coexist within the Open, I found that my results exposed a more intricate relationship between community and competition than I expected. There are several interesting facets of self-competition that emerged from the analysis of individual experiences in the Open, leading me to a more significant understanding of competition that included factors like self-improvement and competition anxiety. Most of the discussion on competition was internal to an athlete, but was simultaneously pervaded by an external influence of community that incorporated social interactions and external motivation. Thus, community and competition coexist within the Open because they do not seem to be opposed at all and instead bear significant influences for an individual's participation and overall experience in the Open.

6.2 Future Research Directions

This project occurred during the 2018 CrossFit Games Open, which, unknowingly at the time, was the final Open format that led to the intermediate CrossFit Games season stage of Regionals. In 2019, CrossFit overhauled the Games qualification format, removing Regionals and establishing Games qualification directly from the Open. Several CrossFit-sanctioned events supplemented the Open as opportunities to qualify for the Games, but the Open is now the primary path to the CrossFit Games. This potentially makes the Open even more crucial in an athlete's quest to reach the Games, as most athletes now qualify directly from the Open. Format changes could alter the experience of the Open, thus possibly altering future qualitative studies into athlete Open participation and understanding. Further research into the Open could focus on elite athletes' experiences in the Open and their quest to advance within the CrossFit Games

season, as this project was limited to competitors that were not at an elite CrossFit athlete level of fitness. Other alternative directions for future research on the Open could include how individual characteristics like ethnicity, gender, and social class play a role in Open participation as this project did not include such an analysis. One area in particular that warrants further exploration is the topic of transgender athletes competing in CrossFit. The rules of CrossFit competition had long held the requirement that athletes compete within the gender division that they were assigned at birth, but controversial statements by a CrossFit executive about the gender identity of CrossFit athletes and a lawsuit by a transgender athlete in response has influenced a policy change for the CrossFit Games (O'Hara, 2018). The impact of such attitudes and the perspectives of transgender participants as CrossFit athletes have yet to be fully explored.

Additionally, this project was limited to one CrossFit gym in Winnipeg, Manitoba, and the Open experiences of its members and coaches. Future research could broaden the scope of the exploration to a wider selection of participants, or replicate it in another setting. This project was also limited in its number of interview participants. Future research could expand its number of interview participants beyond the four that were included in this study.

6.3 Practical Applications

Building sense of community into exercise programs has already been shown to have a positive effect on exercise adherence and individual progress (Pickett et al., 2016), and competition can contribute to building sense of community within sport (Warner & Dixon, 2011). Incorporating competition into physical activity spaces can therefore possibly augment exercise program participation and membership retention. The Open, as an international fitness competition, represents an opportunity to build sense of community within CrossFit. As shared

by the interview participants and revealed in this project's themes, CrossFit competition and the community atmosphere it produces can have positive effects on individual performance and athlete improvement. For CrossFit gym owners and coaches, developing and fostering a strong sense of community leading up to and during the Open may positively influence their members' performance and experience in the Open. This project's findings can be applied to CrossFit gyms by implementing support for athletes through the five weeks of the Open. Internal aspects of competition are intricate and sometimes intense, so coaches can support their athletes by developing greater community involvement in the Open. Incorporating socialization, external motivation, and competition between members can possibly lead to individuals feeling like they have improved their fitness and performance, as these aspects of community are intimately connected to the competition experience as explored in the themes of this project.

6.4 Final Remarks

This ethnographic study utilizing participant observation gave me the opportunity to immerse myself in the CrossFit culture and explore personal experiences of the CrossFit Games Open. Reflections on my participation in the Open reveal the development of a greater appreciation for sense of community in sport and the power of competition in the pursuit of self-improvement and fitness goals. As touted by CrossFit, LLC. (2020a), the Open is a celebration of fitness and community, spurred on by the fierce competitors within the sport. From the amateurs to the elites, CrossFit Games Open participants share in an event that seemingly deconstructs adversarial contests and assembles a community of competitors. As I became a member of the CrossFit gym and moved through the 2018 Open, I experienced the strong feelings of community and competition described by my fellow competitors and interview participants. Many of the codes that I assigned to the interview transcripts were also present in

my field notes, reflecting a similar Open experience shared between myself and the interview participants.

I recognize that I approached this research with bias because, like my interview participants, I like CrossFit. I like CrossFit a lot. I am a fan of the CrossFit Games, and participating in the first stage of the CrossFit Games through the online Open competition alongside elite Games athletes is an exciting opportunity. To personally explore the Open through an academic lens was an intriguing concept for me, as this was my first time officially competing in the Open. I was excited to be able to combine my interest in CrossFit with my pursuit of graduate studies. As a researcher, I kept this bias in mind as I moved through the data analysis and tried to let the data speak for itself without too much influence from my own favourable perspective of CrossFit, but I realize this influence is difficult to measure or control. However, the perspective I had as a participant observer in this research project allowed for field notes that reflected the musings of a true CrossFit participant and Open competitor, hopefully contributing to the rich data found within the interview transcripts and to our academic understanding of CrossFit and the CrossFit Games Open.

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7

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00273

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Appendix A

Informed Consent Form for CrossFit Participants and Coaches

Research Project Title:

Friends and Foes: Exploring community and competition within the CrossFit Games Open

Principal Researcher:

Ben Peachment, Graduate Student, Faculty of Kinesiology and Recreation Management,
University of Manitoba: peachmeb@myumanitoba.ca; [REDACTED]

Research Supervisor:

Russell Field, PhD, Associate Professor, Faculty of Kinesiology and Recreation Management,
University of Manitoba: russell.field@umanitoba.ca; [REDACTED]

This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

Project Summary:

The purpose of this research is to explore sense of community and competition within the context of the CrossFit Games Open. The CrossFit Games Open, which is the first qualifying stage of the CrossFit Games, has experienced massive growth in participation since its inception in 2011. This project intends to explore community dynamics present within CrossFit competition to come to a better social understanding of the CrossFit Games Open. The principal researcher, Ben Peachment, will be a participant observer in CrossFit classes, taking field notes about his experience in the gym and in the CrossFit Games Open. Data will be collected through these field notes and through in-depth interviews. You are being asked to participate in this research as a fellow CrossFit participant and/or as an interviewee.

Eligibility, Participation, and Time Requirement:

You may participate in this study if you: (1) are 18 years or older, (2) have been participating in CrossFit for at least three months, and (3) intend to compete in the CrossFit Games Open (scaled or as prescribed).

Note: you do not have to finish the CrossFit Games Open to be eligible for participation in this study. You can still participate in this study if you do not intend to finish the Open, get injured, or do not complete the Open for any other reason.

Your participation in this project comes in two forms: observation and/or interview. You can choose to participate in one or both. For the observation portion of this project, the principal researcher (Ben Peachment) will be participating in regular CrossFit classes and in the CrossFit Games Open, and will take field notes about his experience during three sessions per week for six weeks (there may be additional times when the principal researcher attends a class but does not observe or take field notes). These field notes will be comprised of descriptions of the physical space, elements of CrossFit training, interactions between gym members/coaches, and other observable phenomena. Your participation in this portion of the research will allow the principal researcher to include elements of your actions and interactions in research field notes. These notes are not for the purpose of judgement of any kind, but rather for the exploration of community and competition in CrossFit. By describing what happens in the CrossFit gym environment and the CrossFit Games Open, we may be able to better understand the dynamic between community and competition within the CrossFit Games Open.

The second component of this research project is an interview about your experiences in CrossFit and the CrossFit Games Open. This interview will be with the principal researcher at a time and place convenient for you, and will take approximately an hour of your time. During the interview, a digital audio recorder will be used. Interviews will be recorded so that they may be transcribed for use in data analysis. This recording will be kept confidential and will be stored on a password-protected computer, accessible only by the principal researcher.

Potential Benefits/Risks:

By participating in this study, you will have the opportunity to share your experiences in CrossFit and the CrossFit Games Open, contributing to the advancement of academic knowledge on the subject. There is minimal risk to taking part in this study. Minimal risk is defined as those risks which might be encountered in everyday life.

Confidentiality:

Any information you provide will be kept confidential. You will be asked to identify yourself by name in the interview (if you choose to participate in an interview) so that data can be linked during the analysis phase of this research project. Your name will be dissociated from the data you provide and your data will be assigned a code number. If any of your responses are reported

in the final thesis, your name will be replaced with a pseudonym. No identifiable data will be shared. All names, code numbers, and any other confidential information will be securely stored on a password-protected computer, accessible only by the principal researcher. Your informed consent form will be stored in a locked filing cabinet, accessible only by the principal researcher and the research supervisor. Identifiable data and non-identifiable data will be stored separately.

Dissemination:

Results from this study will be disseminated to the research community via student thesis publication and defense, and may be submitted for publication in scientific journals and/or presentation at academic conferences. However, under no circumstances will your identity be revealed. Your name will not appear in any report or publication resulting from this study. Pseudonyms will be used when direct quotations from the interviews are used in the description of the subject matter.

If you are interested in receiving a summary of the results of this study, please provide your email address below. A 2-3 page summary of the results will be disseminated to interested participants by email after completion of data collection and analysis (approximately June 2018).

Confidential or personal data collected in this study will be kept for three years after thesis publication and defense, until approximately July 2021. After this date, all digital files containing confidential data will be permanently deleted, and any physical files containing confidential data will be shredded.

Voluntary Withdrawal:

Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may withdraw from this research at any time without consequence, up until the date of thesis publication and defense (approximately July 2018). Please inform the principal researcher of your intent to withdraw, and any information that may have been collected from you will be removed from the research results and will be destroyed.

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and /or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

The University of Manitoba may look at your research records to see that the research is being done in a safe and proper way.

This research has been approved by the Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB) of the University of Manitoba. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Coordinator at 204-474-7122 or humanethics@umanitoba.ca. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

Please check all that apply:

I consent to participate in the observation portion of this study.

I consent to participate in the interview portion of this study. I wish to be contacted for interview by (check preference or both): phone
 email

Phone number and/or email address: _____

Participant Name _____

Participant Signature _____ Date _____

Researcher Signature _____ Date _____

Do you wish to receive a summary of the research results? Yes No

If yes, please provide an email address to receive a summary of the results:



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Appendix B

Informed Consent Form for CrossFit Gym Owner

Research Project Title:

Friends and Foes: Exploring community and competition within the CrossFit Games Open

Principal Researcher:

Ben Peachment, Graduate Student, Faculty of Kinesiology and Recreation Management,
University of Manitoba: peachmeb@myumanitoba.ca; [REDACTED]

Research Supervisor:

Russell Field, PhD, Associate Professor, Faculty of Kinesiology and Recreation Management,
University of Manitoba: russell.field@umanitoba.ca; [REDACTED]

This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

Project Summary:

The purpose of this research is to explore sense of community and competition within the context of the CrossFit Games Open. The CrossFit Games Open, which is the first qualifying stage of the CrossFit Games, has experienced massive growth in participation since its inception in 2011. This project intends to explore community dynamics present within CrossFit competition to come to a better social understanding of the CrossFit Games Open. The principal researcher, Ben Peachment, will be a participant observer in CrossFit classes, taking field notes about his experience in the gym and in the CrossFit Games Open. Data will be collected through these field notes and through in-depth interviews. You are being asked to participate in this research as an interviewee.

Participation and Time Requirement:

Your participation in this project involves an interview about your experiences in CrossFit and the CrossFit Games Open, and as the owner of a CrossFit gym. The aim of this interview is to

explore elements of community and competition in the CrossFit Games Open, and your role/perspective. This interview will be with the principal researcher at a time and place convenient for you, and will take approximately an hour of your time. During the interview, a digital audio recorder will be used. Interviews will be recorded so that they may be transcribed for use in data analysis. This recording will be kept confidential and will be stored on a password-protected computer, accessible only by the principal researcher.

Potential Benefits/Risks:

By participating in this study, you will have the opportunity to share your experiences in CrossFit and the CrossFit Games Open, contributing to the advancement of academic knowledge on the subject. There is minimal risk to taking part in this study. Minimal risk is defined as those risks which might be encountered in everyday life.

Confidentiality:

Any information you provide will be kept confidential. You will be asked to identify yourself by name in the interview so that data can be linked during the analysis phase of this research project. Your name will be dissociated from the data you provide and your data will be assigned a code number. If any of your responses are reported in the final thesis, your name will be replaced with a pseudonym. No identifiable data will be shared. All names, code numbers, and any other confidential information will be securely stored on a password-protected computer, accessible only by the principal researcher. Your informed consent form will be stored in a locked filing cabinet, accessible only by the principal researcher and the research supervisor.

Dissemination:

Results from this study will be disseminated to the research community via student thesis publication and defense, and may be submitted for publication in scientific journals and/or presentation at academic conferences. However, under no circumstances will your identity be revealed. Your name will not appear in any report or publication resulting from this study. Pseudonyms will be used when direct quotations from the interviews are used in the description of the subject matter.

If you are interested in receiving a summary of the results of this study, please provide your email address below. A 2-3 page summary of the results will be disseminated to interested participants by email after completion of data collection and analysis (approximately June 2018).

Confidential or personal data collected in this study will be kept for three years after thesis publication and defense, until approximately July 2021. After this date, all digital files containing confidential data will be permanently deleted, and any physical files containing confidential data will be shredded.

Voluntary Withdrawal:

Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may withdraw from this research at any time without consequence, up until the date of thesis publication and defense (approximately July 2018). Please inform the principal researcher of your intent to withdraw, and any information that may have been collected from you will be removed from the research results and will be destroyed.

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and /or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

The University of Manitoba may look at your research records to see that the research is being done in a safe and proper way.

This research has been approved by the Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB) of the University of Manitoba. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Coordinator at 204-474-7122. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

I wish to be contacted for interview by (check preference or both): phone
 email

Phone number and/or email address: _____

Participant Name _____

Participant Signature _____ Date _____

Researcher Signature _____ Date _____

Do you wish to receive a summary of the research results? Yes No

If yes, please provide an email address to receive a summary of the results:
