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Beyond the Body

CrossFit girls are beautiful—but it's more about attitude and determination than appearance.

By Louis Hayes

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Susannah Dy/CrossFit Journal



CrossFit chicks are hot.

Ever hear that saying? Well, it's true. And here's why:

Being "hot" has a lot more to it than physical appearance. Plenty of women and girls have all the physical components and gifts of the cover girl but simply "aren't hot." And then there are those magnetic ones who might never be a runway model but are irresistible.

Out With the Old Standards

Historically, women have been told about all the things in life they can do. They can cook, clean, put on makeup, be a mommy and a loving wife. The bold ones were once “allowed” to cut the grass, do yard work, move the furniture and paint the living room.

More importantly, women have been told all the things they cannot do. Women can't lift heavy boxes, enlist in the military, become police officers or firefighters, fight back or play men's sports. It's a mindset harvested after planting poisoned seeds, and it's a mindset that's instilled in young girls from the earliest ages.

In grade school, the Presidential Physical Fitness Test has boys doing pull-ups and girls doing the timed “dead hang.” And the name “girl push-ups” for those push-ups done on the knees is damaging. It says, “You as a female are incapable of doing full push-ups like men.” So in high school, when most sports trainers tell female athletes to lift light weights for lots of repetitions, they are only building on an already-behind-the-curve attitude that began when some elementary-school gym teacher said it was OK for women to do push-ups on their knees.

The mainstream fitness equipment industry capitalizes on this tainted image. They sell pink and purple rubber-coated dumbbells of 5 and 10 lb. Some women might be saying, “Hey, that's all I can lift!” And I say to them, “It's ‘all you can lift’ because it's exactly what everyone has told you that you can for your whole life.”

Popular cardio machines in gyms are yet another disservice. There is some mistruth about the efficiency of staying at some target heart rate for maximum fat loss. With such a low-intensity pace, it's no wonder women see low results. And to hold onto the participants' interest for these boring 45- or 60-minute workouts, the manufacturers incorporate nifty magazine holders into their designs.

Lastly, weight machines that use cables, pivot points or stacks of weights have been to the ruin of realistic fitness. This is the fitness industry's way of saying, “You are too stupid to learn free-weight exercises, and you definitely can't learn how to do them safely!” Manufacturers design and sell these machines for profit, exploiting the ignorance of both women and men.

Uneducated personal trainers fertilize this mutation. Trainers use fake terms like “toning” and “tightening” to describe their methods or programs. If you as a woman



Staff/CrossFit Journal

Fitness secret: Human bodies—male or female—respond to exercise and training with favorable adaptations.

**If you as a woman believe
in toning or tightening,
you have bought the lie!**

believe in toning or tightening, you have bought the lie! Women are scared away from strength training by looking at sick images of manly and chemically enhanced female bodybuilders. Many women equate weightlifting with fake-bake tans, oiled bodies, abnormal swells and bulging veins. So these trainers stick with the machines, which ensure the quickest and safest session, limit their liability and put a little sweat on the client's brow. The client leaves feeling good, and the trainer moves on to the next paying client.

And at the root of this epidemic is the press and media. As usual, I blame print and video media for putting out what is popular vs. what is right. Supermarket check-out magazines advertise this flawed image of 5-lb. dumbbells, low-intensity cardio machines like the elliptical trainer, and unrealistic photos of airbrushed abdominals and thighs.

Pissed off at me yet?

A New Mentality

It's not women's fault. Some women are unfortunately the product of a perpetually twisted mantra. Gym teachers, sports coaches, equipment manufacturers, marketing agents, personal trainers and the newsstand keep telling our girls that they cannot do it. It's no wonder some women believe it. This sinister mainstream message is disguised as something digestible: women are better off doing long, drawn-out sessions on cardio machines, they should use ridiculous ab machines sold on late-night television, and they need special equipment. Lies.

All these factors have grown into a culture filled with denial and want. It's no wonder many women desire more. They desire to lose more fat, get a firmer tummy or run faster. They want to lift heavier weights and be more independent. Women want to live healthier, more active lives. Some women are also left in a state of denial. They believe certain things are outside their grasp. They never imagine themselves doing pull-ups or deadlifts. They deny themselves the confidence to believe their goals are possible or attainable or winnable. Their whole lives, they have heard one thing: "You can only do as much as we tell you that you can."



Thomas Campitelli/CrossFit Journal

CrossFit women have a new fitness mentality that includes squats, deadlifts, thrusters, presses and Olympic lifts.



Thomas Campitelli/CrossFit Journal

CrossFit creates strong, confident women who aren't afraid to challenge themselves while challenging stale, outdated viewpoints.

But not CrossFit chicks. And not women who use kettlebells. Or those who do Olympic weightlifting. Or those who participate in other functional fitness models.

These women are different.

CrossFit chicks swim upstream. They battle against all the images of female physical fitness that have been implanted since birth.

They are defiant, but not the pierce-my-face-and-tattoo-my-forearms sort of defiant (well, sometimes they are). They defy this handicapped mantra with one of their own: "I can do it. They snub their noses at the magazine models who crash-diet and get airbrushed before the printing press. In the gym, they walk past the rows of treadmills and recumbent bikes on their way to the squat rack. They ignore paid advertisements for trendy fitness equipment. And they impress the hell out of muscle-bound men by ripping out deadlifts, burpees and rope climbs!

CrossFit chicks swim upstream. Through work capacity and high performance, they battle against all the images of female physical fitness that have been implanted since birth. They fight the self-limiting mentality put upon their gender community to deny women a way out or above. CrossFit chicks possess a confidence, commitment and sense of accomplishment that puts them at the forefront of their gender. They know the anxiety of stepping up to

competition. They savor the taste of victory. They sweat, suck wind, and give their all. They are part of a community that snuffs out the mantra of popular culture—the CrossFit community.

Somewhere, each female CrossFitter was introduced to a new, unorthodox philosophy of physical fitness. It's a model that allows women and girls to face their fears and weaknesses and learn how to win. They learn the movements and programming and attitude that put them on the pathway to a place the gym teachers and TV infomercials told them they could not go.

And once these ladies get on the path, there is no turning back. They quickly realize all the lies and deceptions that have flooded their existence. They set their sights on lofty goals and objectives that are now attainable. And they reach them. CrossFit chicks question authority and search for the truth. They rebuke folklore for something more substantive. They see a world filled with opportunity rather than obstacles. They search for answers rather than questions. They make plans instead of excuses.

The confidence seeps through their pores. The resolve shows on their faces. Resilience shines through. These traits are common to all CrossFit chicks. There is an added element of beauty and attraction given to these women.

Confidence Is Sexy

I'm married to a CrossFitter. She was bold and brimming with conviction and confidence before her introduction to functional fitness (which was why I married her). Goal-driven women don't have to be CrossFitters. Many women have broken the gender barriers to male-dominated careers and hobbies.

But what comes first: the attitude or the CrossFit? Which is the cause, and which is the effect? Does CrossFit turn shoulder-slumping, hesitant girls into driven women seeking excellence? Or do secure, positive-minded women simply find themselves at home in the spartan simplicity of a barbell-laden studio gym?

Maybe the answer is a little of both. Like my wife, I've seen previously poised women attracted to CrossFit and kettlebell work for another chance to get better at skills and abilities. They become even more goal-driven in search for personal excellence. But I've also seen pre-CrossFit women who lacked self-confidence and were disenchanted by the wheel-spinning of health clubs and magazine fitness. After functional fitness training, they were strong, able women

who now stand tall with pride and assertion. It has been a great reward to see these women dig for the courage to fight the screams of "You cannot!" and make the transition.

The rewards of CrossFit are found in more than physical ability and body composition. Women find a strange, comforting home in CrossFit. The community allows them to become whatever they want to become. Beauty is more than what is simply captured in a mirror or camera lens. Good looks, attractiveness and sex appeal are found in the souls of women and girls who believe in themselves.

And that is what makes them hot.



About the Author

Louis Hayes is a police officer for the Hinsdale (Illinois) Police Department, currently assigned as a supervisor and trainer for the FIAT SWAT Taskforce. He contributes to the not-for-profit Trinity Training Group blog, and he writes a quarterly police fitness column for the Illinois Tactical Officers Association. He'd rather watch his wife juggle kettlebells than see her get all dolled up for a night out.