

CrossFit responds aggressively to criticism

By Cliff Weathers, AlterNet

You'd be hard pressed to find an article – outside one written by a CrossFit enthusiast – that reviews this exercise phenomenon without asking some real tough questions about its safety, effectiveness, cost, and even the philosophy behind it. Shouldn't all products, whether good or bad, be held up to such scrutiny? Maybe General Motors, Comcast and Apple grudgingly accept this, but CrossFit – both the corporation and its acolytes – can't seem to take criticism in stride. And there's been a lot of it going around lately.

The *New York Times* magazine was the latest publication to take issue with CrossFit and other extreme fitness programs, likening them to nothing more than labor camps you pay a king's ransom to join. "Why not join a roofing crew for a few hours instead? Surely there's a tunnel somewhere that needs digging," sniffs *Times* columnist Heather Havrilesky.

In response, commenters, many of them CrossFitters, swarmed the online version of the article, posting more than 800 messages. Many were sharply critical of Havrilesky's assessment of the workout routines.

The *Times* magazine article is only one in a recent wave of brickbats hurled at the sports-fitness brand, which now boasts an estimated 10,000 affiliates. Its critics are as diverse as medical researchers, fitness organizations, sportswriters, and social commentators. They've all found a bone to pick with CrossFit, and no, they're not joining them for a Paleo diet dinner.

Critics and online commenters have likened CrossFit to a cult, insinuating that it's not much more than a paramilitary, post-

apocalyptic wet dream. They're fitness preppers ready to take on whatever catastrophe awaits mankind. CrossFit's own website hints at this on its "What is CrossFit?" page: "We have sought to build a program that will best prepare trainees for any physical contingency – not only for the unknown, but for the unknowable."

CrossFit's founder, Greg Glassman takes the rhetoric a step further in his CrossFit newsletter, stating "nature, combat and emergency can demand high volumes of work performed quickly for success or for survival."

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