

Social Comparison Through Social Media Groups Tied to Sport: Communities of Support or Communities of Condemnation

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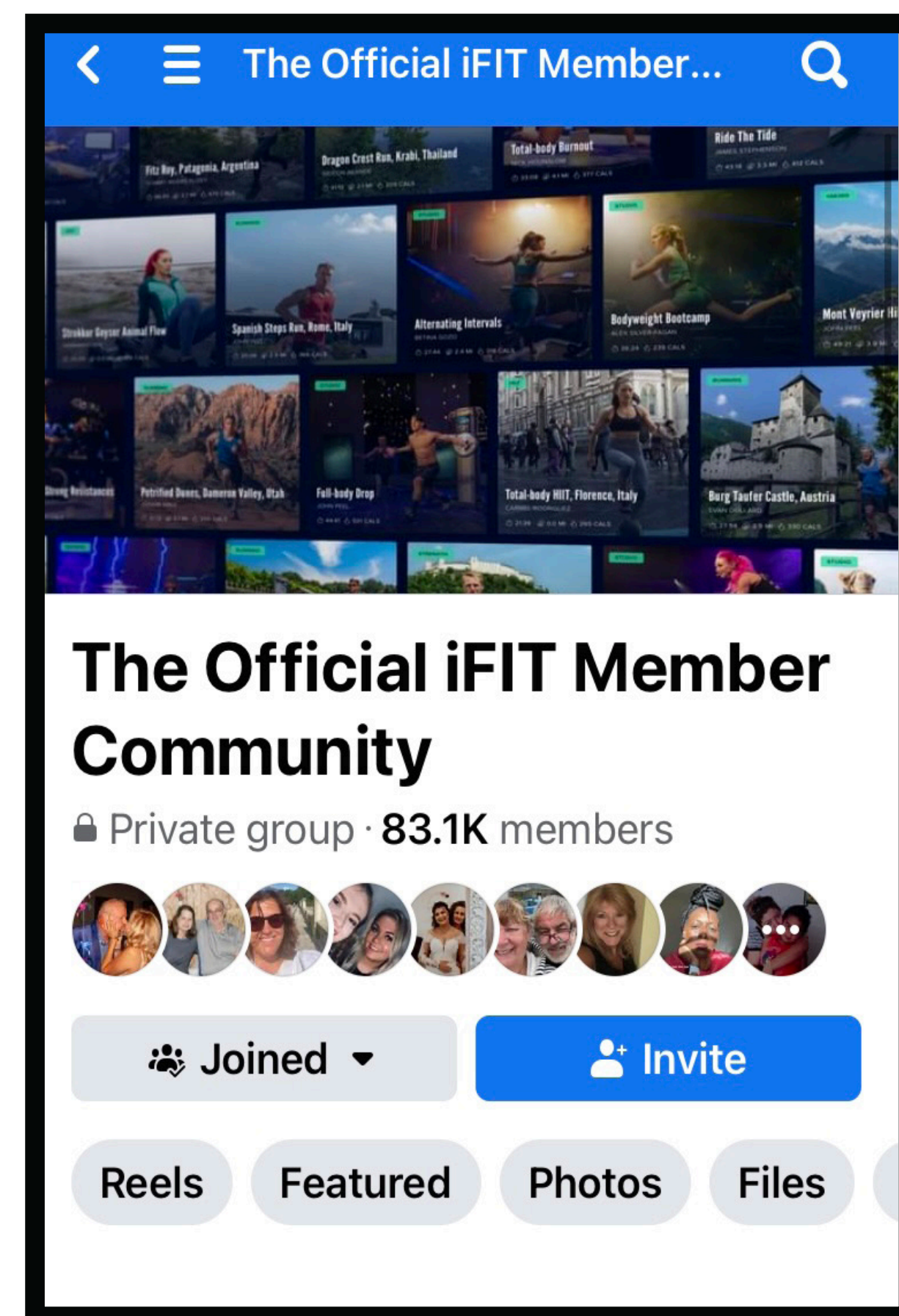
This pilot study surveyed members of Facebook pages tied to sport (e.g., Peloton, iFit, Girls that Run, etc.). The study examines if members of these pages engage in upward or downward social comparison.

Past research has examined social comparison and fitness apps, but this study examines social comparison and fitness Facebook pages.

Facebook use is positively correlated with subjective well-being, but using Facebook for social comparison is negatively associated with subjective well-being. Amateur athletes are goal driven, which Gerson et al. (2016) say moderates the relationship between Facebook and eudaimonic well-being. If one is a member of a social media group tied to sport, they should be motivated and goal driven. If one is actively posting/sharing/commenting, then they should indicate higher scores on well-being than those who are members of a Facebook group tied to sport but do not actively engage.

Gaining information and making comparisons with others are reasons why people use fitness apps and indicate exercise intentions (Lee & Cho, 2017; Zhu et al., 2017).

Individuals like to share information, indicate their exercise intent, and compare themselves to others while using fitness apps (Lee & Cho, 2017; Zhu et al., 2017), so the same pattern should be found when examining



individuals posting in Facebook communities tied to sport. The Facebook groups tied to sport allow for the proxy model of social comparison to play out because individuals can compare themselves to a proxy who already performed a certain behavior (Suls & Wheeler, 2011). The same pattern for upward and downward comparison that occurred in the fitness app research, should also be present when examining Facebook pages tied to sport.

Hypotheses/Research Questions:

H1: Individuals with greater Facebook intensity in Facebook groups tied to sport (e.g., Peloton, iFit, or others) will indicate higher levels of well-being compared to those with lower Facebook intensity scores.

H2: Those who are more engaged in the Facebook group tied to sport (liking/commenting/sharing), will engage in more upward comparison compared to those less engaged.

Method:

A survey link was posted in a social media post in Facebook groups tied to sport.

Participants: The mean age of participant ($N = 64$) taking part in the pilot study was 42.38 with a standard deviation of 10.39. Ninety-six (96.4%) of participants were female. Thirty percent (30.9%) of participants had earned a bachelor's degree, 27.3% had earned a master's degree; and 92% identified as Caucasian.

Measures:

Social Sharing was measured using a scale from Zhu et al. (2017): ($M = 2.70$, $SD = 1.01$; $\alpha = .82$).

Social Comparison was measured using a scale from Gibbons & Bunk (1999): ($M = 3.11$, $SD = .67$; $\alpha = .80$).

Facebook Social

Comparison in Sport was measured using two scales: Cramer et al. (2016) ($M = 3.68$, $SD = .76$; $\alpha = .75$); Feinstein et al. (2013) ($M = 3.12$, $SD = .56$; $\alpha = .90$).

Well-being was measured using the Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener et al., 1985): ($M = 3.81$, $SD = 1.01$; $\alpha = .92$).

Results:

H1: Individuals with greater Facebook intensity in Facebook groups tied to sport indicated lower levels of well-being compared to those with lower Facebook intensity scores. This is opposite of what was predicted.

H2: Those more engaged in the Facebook groups tied to sport scored higher on social comparison compared to those less engaged in the community.

The pattern of means partially support the hypotheses, but the sample size is not large enough for statistically significant differences.

Future Directions:

Additional recruitment measures have been approved by the IRB. More participants are being recruited from a variety of Facebook groups tied to sport. Some group admins will not support a post with survey link, so additional methods are needed to grow the sample size.

