

2020 Miles in 2020

A Pilot Study of Whether Social Media Group Promotes Mutual Aid, Instillation of Hope, Universality Among Its Participants

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Abstract

The 2020 miles in 2020 challenge was created by two authors: an Olympian and his University of Colorado track and cross-country teammate. They based their challenge on the philosophy they established as they wrote *Run The Edge* (Catalano & Goucher, 2012). They created an exclusive Facebook (FB) group for those who are completing the virtual run challenged. The FB group was developed in order to encourage members to form social bonds and do their best to complete 2020 miles in 2020.

Thus far, the group seems to be succeeding. Members post their personal stories and interact with one another while motivating each other to succeed. The learning objective of the proposed poster is to gain a better understanding of how virtual groups in social media can incorporate and reflect the goals of in-person group work. Through interviews conducted with the organizers and selected participants, the investigator will be able to assess the presence of some of Yalom's (2005) therapeutic factors including: mutual aid, instillation of hope, and promotion of universality. Interviews will be conducted virtually using phone or Skype and in-person where possible.

IRB approval has been received to ensure the proper consideration of social work and research ethics. At this time, there are no foreseen risks to the participants of this study. The poster will reflect the learning objective and explore the method behind virtual running, its creation, philosophy and how the virtual exercise group motivates those involved to go on the journey of self-improvement and self-discovery. As authors of *Running the Edge* state "there's a huge community of people who want to be involved who don't want to travel to be part of a race." Participants can participate in the race remotely (run virtually) and receive awards and set their own records without the anxiety of travelling.

The poster will show how the virtual exercise FB group was developed and how it impacts its members. Quotes from the *Run The Edge* book as well as interviews from both the organizers and participants will be incorporated.

Background

In 2011, Olympian Adam Goucher and his University of Colorado teammate and long-time friend, educator Tim Catalano collaborated on writing the *Run The Edge* book.

“The book’s mix of personal stories, practical running advice, and motivation to push your own potential made it a bestseller — and pretty soon, Tim and Adam found themselves speaking to audiences all over the country to share the transformational power of running.”

By 2013, less than three years later, they started creating virtual weekly challenges. The challenges were a huge hit, but because they only lasted a week, there wasn’t enough time for participants to feel fully satisfied with them. That’s why they reached out to Adam and Tim asking to extend the virtual challenge deadlines, and soon enough Adam, Tim and his team

decided to try a challenge that would last a whole year and the miles would reflect the year. That's how Run The Year Virtual Challenge was born. This year is dedicated to 2020 miles in 2020.

Method

Sample:

Interviews were conducted with the creator, Tim Catalano and the Virtual Facebook Group developer, Mimi Otto to gain a better understanding of the interactions among its members as well as conflict resolution on a virtual platform. Simultaneously, interviews were conducted with ten individual members of the virtual Facebook group who varied in age, gender, race, sexual orientation and ethnicity. In order to further enforce the power of virtual interactions, interviews were conducted via virtual platform such as phone and zoom.

Goal:

The goal was to gain an understanding of if and how the virtual Facebook group has impacted its members on the road to success for completing the 2020 miles in 2020 challenge. Since none of the participants used exact Yalom's terms such as "mutual aid", "instillation of hope and "universality a coding system was created.

Findings

Out of the ten individuals four reported experiencing mutual aid, three instillation of hope and 3 universality. All ten individuals reported that being a part of the virtual Facebook group has been beneficial.

Coding:

Mutual Aid – any time an interviewee talked about feeling supportive and supporting others during the Facebook Challenge, such as posting encouraging saying on the group wall as well as

responding to posts of others. Individually reaching out to those who are struggling and collaborating times they can run together even in different states and time zones,

Instillation of Hope – Anytime the member shared how reading others posts on overcoming obstacles inspired them. Anytime the member him/herself posted about their hardship and received numerous positive and encouraging feedback.

Universality – Anytime the member talked about how it's helpful to see others participating in the same challenge. Reading posts and comparing how far they have come to how far you have come so far. Members reflecting how it put them at ease to know that there are others who have doubts and are worried and struggling to reach the goal of 2020 miles in 2020.

Interviews:

In order to keep the interviewees confidentiality, each of them was assigned a number from one to ten.

#1 – An eighteen-year-old, African American, gay male reported that being the member of the virtual FB group helped him feel more confident in his abilities to take on 2020 miles in 2020 challenge. He remembered posting on the virtual FB group how nervous he was to do this challenge and not sure if he could make it. That same night he received over thirty comments encouraging him to do it. He experienced instillation of hope.

#2 – A twenty-seven-year-old, White straight woman reported that she felt enormous support from the members of the FB group. She noted that the members as well as organizers are very

positive, encouraging and motivating. Her favorite part of being part of the FB is the feedback everyone gets from one another through comments and posts. She experienced mutual aid.

#3 – A thirty-five-year-old, Hispanic single mother found the FB group most beneficial because posts from other members inspired her. She was mostly inspired by the post of the 70-year-old woman who has reached 700 miles in a few short months. This demonstrated instillation of hope.

#4 – A fifty-two-year-old, African American single father reported that he started the 2020 miles in 2020 challenge to help him distress and gain control of his life. He is inspired by the posts of those who have more miles than him and he is determined to catch up to them. His moto is “if they can do it, so can I”. He experienced universality.

\$5 – A thirty-three-year-old White woman who suffered postpartum depression expressed how seeing others participate in the 2020 miles in 2020 helped her keep going. The FB group got her out of her depression and the feeling of unity was most important for her as she continues conquering the challenge. She experienced universality.

#6 A twenty-nine-year-old, biracial male reported that being from a small town he always loved the connection to others. He experienced similar connection when he began to participate in 2020 miles in 2020 challenge and joined the FB group. He believes that because the FB group is exclusive, he feels an even greater connection to its members. He experienced mutual aid.

#7 – A forty-one-year-old, Hispanic woman who had to close her Beauty Salon due to the pandemic reported that participating in the challenge has helped her feel normal. She loves the FB group mostly because of other members sharing encouraging posts. When she posted about her hardship with her business closing, she received numerous encouraging comments. Furthermore she made a few friends, who try to virtually run together once or twice a month even though each of them is in a different time zone. She experienced mutual aid.

#8 – A seventy-year old, widow expressed how she is touched by so many members of the group being inspired by her. She is doing this challenge for her late husband and is now 900 miles in. She continues to receive praise from FB group members as she posts dedications to her late husband. This melts her heart. She experienced instillation of hope.

#9 – A thirty-five-year-old, African American woman reported that the members of the FB group continue to motivate him to keep going. He expressed that scrolling through and reading the members posts makes him feel connected to them. He experienced mutual aid.

#10- A twenty-five-year-old, Asian law student reported that the virtual FB group has given her a sense of community. She expressed how much she loves knowing that there are so many others participating in the same challenge as her. This was very important to her since she feels removed from her community due to the current health crisis. She experienced universality.

Member's Voices

Below are some of the most memorable moments from the members of 2020 miles in 2020.

“When I found myself in the ER last week, I posted that I was going to have to slow down until my Dr. cleared me for activity again and people offered so many good thoughts and words of kindness and encouragement. “

“There is a woman, I think in her 70's, who has 700 miles already!!! I'm inspired by her and hoping to get my 200-mile bib by the end of the month. “

“The FB group is absolutely wonderful! They are extremely supportive in the aspect of giving advice, help, ideas, encouragement, motivation. The more one participates the more one gets out of it.”

“This challenge has given me a sense of community which is so needed especially now when life has turned upside down.”

“I am dedicating this challenge to my late husband with whom we spend forty-five years together. I know he is touched by all the members who have found me inspirational. Little do they know that they are the ones who inspire me.”

“This FB group encourages members to get off the couch and move in order to complete the 2020 miles challenge. It unites us”

“Know where you at and give yourself grace and knowing it will take some time.”

“2020 Miles in 2020 helped me reclaim my sanity after going through postpartum depression.

The FB group helped me keep going”

“If they can do it, so can I”

“This FB group became my family. I am forever grateful to the creators of 2020 miles in 2020.”

Conclusion

At the conclusion of the interviews, it became clear that members of the virtual FB group do find benefit via “mutual aid”, “instillation of hope” and universality”. Ten members who I had a pleasure to interview also reported that my reaching out to them brought them an even greater feeling of unity. Social Media Groups do impact us and motivate us to keep going especially during the pandemic and difficult times we are currently in.

References

Catalano, T., & Goucher, A. (2012). *Running the edge: discovering the secrets to better running & a better life*. Austin, TX: Greenleaf.

Yalom, I. (2005). *The Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy*. Fifth Edition. Basic Books.