"I like to see the ups and downs of my own journey": Returning to Past Content about

Weight Related Journeys on Social Media

by

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1. INTRODUCTION

In a society where diet culture sells a singular idea equating thinness with beauty and worth [20] and social media content stigmatizing weight is widespread [5], some social media users share content documenting their journeys with weight online and, as a result, develop personal digital archives filled with personal, potentially stigmatized and emotionally-sensitive content—while some users' journeys are weight-loss centric, others may aim to achieve other goals like weight acceptance, weight gain, etc. These individuals producing content about weight-related journeys do not exist in a vacuum, and instead exist in a world with billion dollar weight loss and management industries [37,38] profiting off of individuals' insecurities with their body weight and shape and deep-seeded fatphobia.

Children develop an awareness of weight and dieting at a young age [34], with body dissatisfaction, "*negative thoughts and feelings about one's body*"[46], emerging in girls as young as 5 years old [10]. Unfortunately, this dissatisfaction continues as these individuals become adults, with college-aged individuals experiencing high levels of body dissatisfaction [46] that puts them at increased risk of mental health challenges, including disordered eating [12]. In a society where weight stigma is widespread and pervasive on social media [5], these levels of body dissatisfaction can be exacerbated by consuming fitness and weight-centric content on social media. Prior research on weight and fitness content on social media has primarily focused on the impacts consuming this content has on young women's body image, and well-being. Little research has focused specifically on those who document weight-related journeys on social media; individuals who may be inadvertently contributing to or trying to overcome weight stigma and diet culture, while also being impacted by these same forces and

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experiencing body dissatisfaction. I define weight-related journeys as a progression of an individual's weight, and/or the progression of their relationship with their weight. This could include weight-loss, weight-gain, weight-maintenance, weight-acceptance, etc. People documenting weight-related journeys do so in online spaces where their journeys' content including photographs, text, etc. are stored and easily accessible to themselves and others.

While Hogan approached social media as an exhibit where users curate digital artifacts on display [21], scholars like Zhou et al. are exploring the ways data stored on social media functions as *"a personal archive and repository for meaningful memories"*[57]. This data and the memories or feelings they elicit when users return to them can have both positive and negative impacts on well-being [22,25,31], as the past is not always positive. Returning to the past on social media, both intentionally (i.e. manually returning to older posts) and unintentionally (embedded memory features that bring older posts to the forefront), has been explored in the context of relationship breakups [20,43,47] and gender transitions [18,19], highlighting the complicated nature of social media as a place where the past is easily accessible to users and their networks. In this thesis, I begin to explore these returns in the context of weight-related journeys in a world where weight stigma is rampant and at an age where body dissatisfaction is heigh.

In this thesis, I explain the ways social media users engage with the past and a 'personal archive' that documents their personal weight-related journeys. I explore the motivations behind their returns to the past and the impacts this had on their perceived well-being. I ask the following research questions:

1. What motivates social media users between the ages of 18 and 24 to return to past content about their weight-related journeys on social media?

2. What are the impacts of returning to past content on the individuals posting their weight-related journeys?

I conducted 17 semi-structured interviews with social media users (U.S. based, between the ages of 18 and 24) that reported documenting their personal weight-related journeys on any social media platform. I found that participants' motivations to return to past content were 1) to see and reflect on their journey, 2) to monitor, engage and reminisce on past audience engagements, 3) to delete past content, and 4) unintentional returns as a result of the social media platform's built-in memory features. I identified several impacts of this return, including participants 1) feeling inspired by their past selves, 2) comparing their past selves with their current selves in terms of physical, emotional and lifestyle status, 3) celebrating and regretting perceived success and losses of progress, 4) triggering past harmful thought loops, and 5) shaping decisions for their current self relevant to their weight-related journey.

I explore the ways returning to the past caused participants to re-visit their former selves and argue that documentation on social media, and the personal archives that result, creates a complicated relationship between one's past self and current self in the context of weight-related journeys. Delving into this complex relationship, I show how motivations of return to the past result in dynamic interpretations of the self and argue the impacts of interpretation cannot be mitigated without acknowledging and addressing the societal context in which they exist, one that is filled with weight stigma, fatphobia and narrow body ideals. I then discuss the ways social media may support users whose documentation build repositories of digital artifacts about

sensitive, stigmatized experiences and join other scholars in arguing social media's tendencies towards prioritizing remembrance—specifically with memory features that are not always optional—should be questioned as universally desirable and challenged by offering alternatives affordances not centered on remembrance.

This research shows weight-related journeys demonstrate a self-contained experience of return that puts the users' self-concept and well-being at stake. I end with a conversation about how documentation of weight-related journeys on social media and the resulting personal archive developed provides an opportunity to conduct a participant/individual/user centered investigation in understanding the motivations and impacts returning to the past has on an individual's self-concept.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Weight and Body Size Stigma on Social Media

Stigma refers to the discrimination or negative attitudes directed at someone based on some discernible characteristic or attribute, such as one's race, mental heath, disability, etc. [15]. Weight stigma is defined as "*the social rejection and devaluation that accrues to those who do not comply with prevailing social norms of adequate body weight and shape*" [54]. Weight stigma can also be internalized [45], with individuals believing this devaluation on the basis of weight and applying it to themselves. Those who are subjected to this stigma, and its subsequent stereotypes and weight-based discrimination, experience physical and psychological stress that can lead to poor health outcomes [44]. Several studies have demonstrated that psychological

stress induced by weight stigma leads to many of the adverse health outcomes commonly associated with excess body weight, like poor mental health, hypertension, etc. [13,38,58,59]. Weight stigma and a fear of fatness have racialized and gendered origins. In *Fearing the Black Body: The Racial Origins of Fat Phobia*, Sabrina Strings maps the racial origins of society's deeply-rooted fat phobia, connecting the transatlantic slave trade and spread of Protestantism to fatness being associated with Blackness and immorality [52]. String demonstrates how anti-blackness and misogynoir are integral to present day societal body ideals, medicine's treatment of larger bodies, and many weight-based stereotypes. Weight stigma is not a new phenomena and its roots are deeply intertwined with other systemic problems like gender inequality and racism, and as a result, it is widespread within the online spaces users document weight-related journeys.

Misogynistic and disparaging conversations about weight are pervasive across various social media platforms, contributing to the normalization and regularity of content that stigmatizes weight online [5]. Studies have explored the expressions of weight stigma on social media platforms such as YouTube [27]**,** Instagram [5,35], Facebook [5], and more. Chou et al. highlight the prevalence of "*observations about overweight people [...] across authentic social media channels, marked with sentiments of anger, disgust, and alienation*" [5], alongside some areas of acceptance and social support where overweight individuals may find refuge from derogatory content [5]. In a content analysis of over 4,000 tweets containing the word "fat" to explore the nature of weight stigma on Twitter, Lydecker et al. found that 56.6% of the tweets had a negative tone (in which women were more likely to be mentioned than men) and 11.5% exhibited weight stigma around themes of unattractiveness, laziness, gluttony, etc. [36]. Jeon et

al. looked at YouTube comments on two viral videos related to overweight individuals and found that "*both overweight men and women were verbally attacked for deficits in reproductive power, primarily signaled by physical attractiveness*" [27]. These studies altogether demonstrate the wide presence of weight stigma on social media channels, and the association of higher weight with negative attributes like laziness or ugliness. This provides some insight of the kinds of narratives and beliefs that circulate where participants of this study chose to document their weight-related journeys.

Weight stigma contributes to body dissatisfaction [44]. Past studies have reported high rates of college aged men and women experiencing body dissatisfaction: "*negative thoughts and feelings about one's body*"[9,46]. Poorer body image has been shown to increase the likelihood of developing mental health challenges, such as depression and disordered eating [12]. When looking at women and men in the US, the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) 2013–2016 found 59.3% of women and 40.5% of men between the ages of 20 and 39 tried to lose weight within the last 12 months [37]. Weight stigma and the increased levels of body dissatisfaction among this age group may contribute to the large numbers of men and women trying to lose weight. Body image research about men has not been very expansive, feeding into stereotypes that men having poor body image is atypical, which isn't true [2]. Research, such as by Pater et al., has begun to explore this gap by looking at eating disorder content by men and finding similarities and distinct differences in the eating disorder expressions on social media across genders [41]. When it comes to weight-related journeys, to my knowledge, I have not come across research that looks into journeys beyond those that are weight-loss centric. This thesis begins to expand scholarship into journeys such as weight

acceptance, weight maintenance, weight gain, and others defined by participants. It is important to begin to address this gap in scholarship to make space to account for the experiences of those whose goals and journeys might intentionally or inadvertently challenge presumptions of weight loss as desirable and the ultimate goal as a result of weight stigma normalization.

2.3 Weight-Related Journeys on Social Media

Society and its values are reflected in the online spaces social media users exist in and inhabit. For social media users documenting their weight journeys, the atmosphere of these platforms is one where weight-based discrimination, stereotypes, and weight stigma are widespread and normalized [5], complicating the production and consumption of weight-related of content. Little research has been dedicated to understanding the impact of producing content on those who use social media to document weight-related journeys, including those not related to weight-loss; this thesis focuses on one aspect of this production—the future encounters with a digital past documenting one's personal weight-related journey. This thesis specifically looks at young adult social media users between the ages of 18 and 24 who are producing content about a weight-related journey at an age when body dissatisfaction is high [46].

Expanding on the applications of Goffman's theory of self-presentation on social media as a site of performance with a front and back-stage [16], Hogan argues that social media can be thought of as a collection of exhibits where a user (also referred to as 'the curator') can curate content for a private or public, known or unknown audience [21]. On social media platforms, such as Instagram, the curator engages in self-presentation and impression management with "*the capacity to filter, order, and search content*" [21]. Social media usage among 18 to 24 year

olds in the United States is high. A recent 2021 report by Pew Research Center found 76% of this age group uses Instagram, 75% use Snapchat and 55% use TikTok [42]. These users may engage in the production and consumption of curated exhibits found on social media, some of which document weight-related journeys. At an age when body dissatisfaction *and* social media usage is high*,* the consumption of weight and fitness centric content has been shown to have adverse impacts on well-being.

Social media research on weight-related journeys has primarily focused on the impact consuming weight-loss or fitness centric content on Instagram has on women, presumably because of the platform's large user base and dominance of weight and fitness content. Since Instagram's creation in 2010, users have been engaging with and posting content that documents fitness and weight-related journeys. Hashtags like #WeightLossJourney and #FitnessJourney have been used in over 36 million and 23 million posts respectively.[1] With a global health and weight management industry worth nearly $200 billion in 2018 and mass media's obsession with health and fitness, the sheer number of posts claiming to reflect some journey involving weight and/or fitness may be expected. Weight-related journeys exist alongside other content that mirror a certain understanding of a 'fit' body type and experience, subtly repeating society's body values. Nearly 20 million posts are tagged with #Fitspiration, a hashtag for posts claiming to inspire others to achieve their fitness goals. Research on this specific hashtag describes the tagged images as typically displaying "*scantily-clad women with ultra-thin or thin-athletic bodies in sexually objectifying poses*" [7]. Fardouly et al. found, among women between the ages of 18 and 25 in the U.S. and Australia, that internalizing beauty ideals and comparing one's

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[1] Numbers pulled from a search of each hashtag on June 19, 2020, #weightlossjourney; #fitnessjourney

appearance to these fitspiration images may adversely impact women's body image [11]. These studies show the repetitive and narrow body ideals in weight-loss and fitness related content on social media, and demonstrate users viewing this content can embody these ideals and be at-risk for increased body dissatisfaction.

Alongside these weight-related journeys and #fitspiration images on Instagram one can see the growing presence of body positivity. Body positivity is a movement rejecting the prevalence of images (such as the previously described "typical" #fitspiration images) and encouraging individuals to "*challenge current societal messages regarding beauty and to accept more diverse body sizes and appearances as attractive*" [11]. Body positivity content is defined as content that "*challenges the unrealistic standards of beauty present in both traditional and social media by the promotion and acceptance of diverse body sizes and appearances*"[33]. For young women between the ages of 18 and 30, Cohen et al. found that consuming body positive content on Instagram positively impacts mood and levels of body satisfaction and appreciation [6]. However, despite body positive content showing more diverse bodies, research of body positive content on Instagram has found it may still promote weight loss and the achievement of thinness as the ultimate goal, as well as continue to exclude the very types of larger bodies it claims to celebrate [6]. These findings echo critiques of the body positivity movement and have spurred alternative movements such as 'body neutrality' and 'fat acceptance'[29]. These alternative movements challenge the co-opting of body positivity from its Black Femenist roots, such as campaigns like #BodyPositivityInColor that hope *"to reclaim [Body Positivity] from white, cisgender, heterosexual, thin women who dominate the discussions around body positivity"*[28]. Body Positivity content on social media serves as an example of an online

movement initially started to challenge fatphobia and weight stigma has been touched by these same forces, showing just how tangled social media can be even for those who may wish to challenge body ideals and weight stigma.

2.4 Social Media, Memory, and Digital Archive

Recent work in Human-Computer Interaction and ubiquitous computing has begun to explore the ways in which social media emulates a digital archive. Expanding upon Hogan's exhibition curation view of social media [21], Zhao et al. argue that, as time passes, social media takes on another more intimate role as a personal archive and storage for memories [57]. Zhao and Lindley explored the ways in which social media users engaged with social media as an archive, suggesting that while social media is not an all-inclusive storage of digital artifacts, it does create an assortment that is more particular, easily navigable and more frequently encountered [56]. They found that photos on display on social media, pulling from Kirk and Sellen's objects on display archival storage method [30], supported users in reminiscence.

Viewing digital artifacts, like photos, can cue memories for users [23], as well as prompt reminiscence [14], altogether impacting user well-being in positive and negative ways [22,25,31]. Schoenebeck et al. found that young adult Facebook users returning to past content experienced mixtures of nostalgia as well as embarrassment [49]. Hollis et al. discovered that technology-mediated reflection on highly negative experiences may have an adverse impact on well-being, whereas highly positive experiences had a positive impact [22]. Social media can also work to bolster attachment to certain memories for users. Jacobsen and Beer found that social media metrics like the number of likes on a post can *draw attention to past content and*

change how individuals feel about those moments" [26]. They argue that memory features on social media foster attachment to past content and that this is emblematic of quantified nostalgia, "*the metrification and quantification of engagements with the past as well as their everyday implications and reception*" [26]. These engagements with past content on social media raise the stakes for social media platforms as mediators of memory.

Social media memory features involve algorithms that aim to promote reminiscence and have positive impacts on users' well-being [25,31], but they lack the nuance to handle emotionally sensitive situations such as relationship break-ups [20,43,47] or gender transitions [18,19]. Pinter et al. explored the way users experience reminders of their ex-partners from algorithmically curated content on Facebook and found Facebook's seemingly positive 'On This Day' memory feature led to upsetting experiences in the context of a breakup [43]. Haimson et al. studied the ways transgender people on Facebook, during and after identity transitions, navigated a digital past exhibiting artifacts of a past gender they may want to manage or forget [19]. They found these users engaged in emotionally taxing and time consuming behaviors (i.e. changing privacy settings, creating multiple accounts to separate social networks, etc.) to push against social media design's assumption that maintaining networks and facilitating an ongoing engagement with the past meets users' wants and needs.

Bannon demonstrates that ubiquitous computing and its tendencies towards archiving large amounts of data prioritizes only one side of the coin of memory (e.g. remembering) with less focus being paid to *forgetting* as a critical part of how humans process memories. He argues that the ability to record and remember are not inherently positive, and that forgetting or the impermanence of data is not inherently negative or a defect [3]. Schoenebeck and Conway use

archival appraisal theory to suggest "*preservation as a default affordance among technology companies is not a neutral decision*" [48] and that personal data demands a nuanced understanding that accounts for the potential benefits that come from not storing certain data. Sas and Whittaker discuss the salience of digital possessions and ways social networks can be designed to support users navigating digital possession disposal [47], beyond total deletion that may be a point of discomfort for some users [17]. They argue that more attention should be paid to support *intentional forgetting* in ways that are sensitive to the complex emotions surrounding negative (or positive) memories [47]. Altogether, this prior work highlights the importance of exploring "*[technical] augmentation means for all human activities, both remembering and forgetting*"[3] as a feature of design. Since social media's prioritization of remembrance lacks the nuance to handle emotionally-sensitive experiences, the documentation of weight-related journeys on social media and the development of personal archives centered on weight are particularly important to investigate as the reminisce or return to the past can impact a person's perceived well-being.

3. METHODS, DATA and ANALYSIS

3.1 Recruitment

I carried out semi-structured interviews (N=17) with individuals, between the ages of 18 and 24, who share(d) about a weight-related journey (including weight acceptance, weight maintenance, weight loss, weight gain and more) on social media using a research recruiting service. To be considered for our study, participants from the service's pool of potential

participants completed a screening survey. I received a total of 498 responses to our screening survey and 318 respondents met the eligibility criteria. I reached out to 33 respondents and conducted interviews with those who completed the informed consent process and scheduled an interview time. Participants received $20 in compensation for their time. Additionally, our university's IRB approved our study. I ceased recruitment when I achieved data saturation [51]: the moment when I started hearing repetitive stories and experiences from participants and no additional codes were being developed during analysis.

3.2 Screening Survey

The screening survey asked respondents if they used any type of social media, if they produced content on their social media about a weight-related journey, if they lived in the United States, and their age. If the respondents answered no to any of the questions, or were not between the ages of 18 and 24, they did not meet the eligibility criteria and the survey ended. Respondents were then asked about the social media they use, which platforms they primarily post(ed) about their weight-related journeys, and whether their social media feed is/was dedicated to documenting their weight-related journey. Additionally, there were questions asking participants to describe their weight-related journey (weight loss, weight gain, weight acceptance, etc.), as well as how they would describe their body size and how they think others would describe their body size. The survey ended with questions asking about respondents' demographics, specifically with text boxes so respondents could define these categories as they wished.

3.3 Interview Participants and Protocol

I reached out to respondents in waves to participate based on their responses to the screening survey. I considered themes and data emerging in our interviews when selecting and inviting new participants. To select participants with a diverse range of experiences whose survey responses implied I would gain in-depth data about the experience of documenting weight-related journeys on social media, I followed a 3-point system to flag interview participants as high priority. Participants received 1 point if they answered *Daily, Once a Week,* or *2 to 3 times a week* in response to 'How often do you post content directly or indirectly related to your weight-related journey on social media?'. Participants also received 1 point if they reported their social media feed was dedicated to documenting their weight-related journey, as well as 1 point if their weight-related journey was not weight-loss related, such as weight acceptance, weight maintenance, etc. Adding an additional point for not being weight-loss focused was part of a deliberate effort to develop a sample with a wide range of journeys beyond those solely weight-loss focused—our final sample included participants documenting 7 weight-loss journeys, 3 weight-acceptance journeys, 2 weight-gain journeys, 2 weight-maintenance journeys and 3 'other' weight-related journeys. Beyond looking at respondents' resulting flag score, I was attentive to overall respondent demographics and intentionally worked to assemble a diverse and varied range of perspectives along the axis of race, gender, and primary social media platform the participant posted their journeys on. This is motivated by a wish to amplify the experiences and voices of people of color in my research, and is informed by and in alignment with Ogbonnaya-Ogburu et al.'s call to have improved racial representation across participants in HCI studies [39]. In regards to gender, I hoped to ensure I

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heard the experiences of men who have not commonly been prioritized for weight-related

research, as discussed in Section 2.3. Table 1 provides some of our participants' information.

Participant	Age	Gender	Race	Sexual Orientation	Total Household Income	Weight-Related Journey	Documentation Platform
P1	21	Woman	White	Straight	$50,000 to $74,999	WA	R,S
P2	18	Man	White	Straight	$100,000 to $149,999	WG	I,S
P3	19	Woman	Filipino	Straight/Bi-Curious	$50,000 to $74,999	WA	I
P4	24	Woman	African American	Heterosexual	$35,000 to $49,999	WL	I
P5	24	Woman	White	Bisexual	Less than $25,000	WL	I
P6	24	Woman	Asian	Straight	Less than $25,000	Other	I,T
P7	23	Woman	Caucasian	Straight	Less than $25,000	WL	FG
P8	19	Man	Black	Bisexual	$50,000 to $74,999	WA	I
P9	24	Woman	Asian	Heterosexual	$35,000 to $49,999	WM	R
P10	22	Woman	Black/Filipino	Bisexual	$100,000 to $149,999	WL	R
P11	24	Man	Asian	Male	$75,000 to $99,999	WL	F,I
P12	21	Woman	South Asian	Straight	$100,000 to $149,999	WM	I
P13	20	Man	White	Straight	$25,000 to $34,999	WL	I
P14	23	Woman	White	Bisexual	$50,000 to $74,999	Other	F,I,PB
P15	23	Woman	Asian American	Bisexual	Less than $25,000	Other	F,I
P16	23	Man	Black	Straight	$150,000 to $199,999	WL	I,R
P17	21	Man	White	Heterosexual	$50,000 to $74,999	WG	I,T

Table 1. Participant Demographics were self-reported and documented above as such. Abbreviations for Weight Related Journey: Weight Acceptance: WA, Weight Gain: WG, Weight Loss: WL, Weight Maintenance: WM. Abbreviations for Documentation Platform: F: Facebook, FG:Facebook Groups, I: Instagram, PB: Personal Blog, R: Reddit, S: Snapchat, T: Twitter.

Our interview protocol directed participants through a set of questions related to their

general thoughts about and perceptions of weight-related journeys on social media, their

experiences producing content about their journeys on social media, as well as their perceptions

of audience and expectations surrounding weight-related journeys on social media. Throughout

these conversations, themes emerged regarding returning to past content and the impact this had

on participants, which I explore in this thesis.

I conducted interviews on Zoom, a video and audio calling service, and the author

recorded the interviews and actively took notes. These interviews lasted from 40 to 90 minutes

(average = 70 min).

3.4 Data Analysis

The author conducted interviews with participants between October 2020 and January 2021. As needed, the author met with her thesis advisor to discuss themes occurring in interviews and plan next steps for selecting participants. For example, when noticing interesting themes emerge in an interview with a participant who used the *Reddit* platform, the author worked to pull a few more participants who also used that platform to gain more insight on experiences documenting weight-related journeys on that platform. All interviews were recorded, transcribed using REV transcription software, and coded using Dedoose. The author conducted open coding [51] of all interviews, ultimately generating 108 total codes, and maintained detailed notes throughout this process to account for context and emerging connections between the interviews. By the time the author reached the 13th interview, no new codes were created. Following this process of open-coding, the author used axial coding [51] by grouping codes into broader categories and themes and assessed for connections between these groups. The author then met with her advisor to discuss these themes and relationships.

3.5 Limitations

The findings of this study are the result of interviews with individuals between the ages of 18 and 24 that were part of *User Interviews* potential pool of participants for our study. This leaves out the experiences of those that may be unaware of these services, as well as those who may not have the time or resources to get involved in interview studies. Similarly, as our study was conducted during a global pandemic when time is scarce, energy might be strained and

access to technology is critical for participating in interview studies, I might have missed out on those who did not have the bandwidth to find our study, complete its screening survey and commit to potentially 90 minutes of conversation. The study was conducted entirely in english (screening survey, interviews, etc.), and so this may have excluded participants who did not know English or were not comfortable enough in their fluency to participate. Additionally, as our sample only included those who lived in the United States, our study focused on the US cultural context, and as such, might not reflect the experiences of those who document weight-related journeys in other nations. Our study covered topics about weight-related journeys, and as weight is heavily stigmatized and a sensitive topic for many, I may have missed out hearing from those who did not feel comfortable speaking with a researcher on this highly-sensitive topic.

3.6 Research Positionality

Looking at the research on weight stigma and psychological and physical health [13,38,58,59], the author of this thesis rejects notions of weight being reflective of whether a body is healthy or not, and instead looks at weight-related journeys as they operate within a world that stigmatizes weight. The author takes the stance that a healthy body can exist at any size, and aims to prioritize and support an individual's sense of well-being and autonomy for defining what health and well-being means to them.

4. FINDINGS

I identified two primary themes through our analysis: the motivations of returning to past content about weight-related journeys and the impact doing so has on users. I begin by

discussing the motivations for participants returning to past content about their personal weight-related journeys. I then explain the impacts returning to this past content had on participants, both positive and negative, and the ways participants responded to them.

4.1 Motivations for Returning to Past Content

What motivates social media users who document weight-related journeys on social media to return to past content? I first describe what motivates users to return to content they have posted about their personal weight-related journeys to establish an understanding of *how* participants came to be impacted by encountering this past content.

4.1.1 To See and Reflect on their Journey

For many participants, returning to past content was motivated by a desire to see and reflect on their weight-related journeys. Participants described going to previous posts to remember their journey, as expressed by P3: *"I like to see where I've been, or I like to see the ups and downs of my own journey."* P1 shared why she went back to older posts on Reddit about her weight acceptance journey, saying, *"I'll also just return to remind myself [of] things. I think there's been a couple times where I've been struggling, so I go back to this post to hold me accountable and just keep me moving forward."* For P1, the act of returning was prompted by a wish to remind and motivate herself of her past experiences. Digital artifacts have the ability to support memory recall for users [23]. When struggling on their journeys, participants shared how they returned to past content to remind themselves of how they have made it through similar struggles. Similar to P1, P8 shared why he returned to past content, particularly during difficult

times on his own weight acceptance journey: *"If I wake up one day and I feel particularly insecure or I'm like, 'Oh, I don't really like the way this looks today, you know?' That's when I'll usually scroll back and then I'm just like, 'Oh, okay. Wow, look at that growth that I've made.' I may not feel great right now, but I can look at this and I know for a fact that it'll pass.'"* Participants returned to past content to reflect on their journey and remind themselves of their ability to overcome challenges.

Participants also returned to recall past decisions about their journey, such as the workouts they did or food they ate. P3 explained: *"Sometimes I'll get bored of my food, so I'll go back and then try to remember what I was eating."* More generally, participants returned to reflect on their past choices and journey's progress. P12 explained why she returned to fitness content she'd posted on Instagram: *"Sometimes I want to see if I have either improved, or if I was doing something wrong. And I did, I did see some flaws. Like for example, when I was looking at my January post, I was seeing that some of my workouts, it would pressure my hip. I would see that sometimes my hip would hurt."* In this instance, P12's return was driven by a want to reflect on her fitness technique and achievements from the past. This was similar to P2 who shared that he returns to past content to be able to see and evaluate his progress on his weight-gain journey: *"If I'm scrolling through my page, I could see I've put on 20 pounds of pure muscle basically, in the past few months. So, looking at that, it's like, "Oh, what I'm doing is actually working." Even though I don't really notice it every day. It actually is."* These participants returned to past content to reflect on their fitness experiences and judge their journey's progress. Revisiting past content to see past choices and view progress was further supported by P10, describing why she looks back: *"It's interesting to look at what I was doing years ago or something like that…if I*

have really old posts about struggling to do something, or even specific numbers of amount of weight or reps or something like that, to me, it's fun to look at the progress I've made." Participants demonstrate how returning to past content can be inspired by a wish to recollect the past choices and actions they had made about their weight-related journeys.

These experiences shared by participants demonstrate that users who post about weight-related journeys are driven to return to past content because they wish to see and reflect on their journey—whether that be to remember the specific choices they made, view their journey's progression, or remind themselves of their ability to make it through difficult times.

4.1.2 To Monitor, Engage and Reminisce on Past Audience Engagements

Participants also returned to past content to monitor audience engagement, as well as to revisit older interactions left by their audience. For some participants, returning to their past content was provoked by wanting to see how their audience reacted to their posts. P16, who posted about a weight loss journey, explained that he returned to past content about his journey on Reddit "*just to see if people saw it, if people liked the post, that sort of stuff...you're definitely in a zone where you feel like, hey, other people agree [with] me. All these people like what I have to say., this means I'm a really good person or something…It definitely inflates my ego a little bit, but I also have the feeling of hopefully it [the content] helps someone."* Similarly, P1 explained that she returned to past content on Reddit about her weight-acceptance journey to "*see if anyone else commented on it or needs help."* P1 demonstrates a motivation to not only see how viewers responded to her content, but she also expressed checking to see if she could provide social support to others, something very important to her as a community member of

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eating disorder recovery subreddits: *"...the reality of it is most people on medical or recovery Reddits, they're not doctors. They're not nutrition professionals, so there is a lot of false advice that goes around or even harmful advice...I'll give articles and I'll give information, just so someone doesn't end up doing something that's going to hurt their body even more. Or maybe they think they're doing something good and it's not."* Participants illustrated how wanting to check their audience's response or respond to their audience led them to return to past content about their weight-related journeys.

Beyond monitoring and engaging with their audience, some participants explained that returning to content was driven by a desire to revisit and reminisce on interactions left by viewers throughout their journey. As described by P15: *"I revisit old posts to also go read old comments. It's really nice to see what people I have helped along the way and it just reminds me sometimes that this is really worth it."* For P15, wanting to re-read comments left by her audience motivated her to revisit posts about her generally body positivity focused journey on her social media accounts.

One's audience, whether it be their engagement or interactions with content about participants' weight-related journeys, motivated many participants to return to the past.

4.1.3 To Delete Past Content

Participants also shared that they sometimes returned to past content about their weight-related journeys in order to delete posts due to concerns around privacy, experiencing negative impacts and discomfort around the content, as well as simply no longer liking the content or deeming it useful. While many participants shared their weight-related journeys on

public social media accounts, some expressed concerns around privacy, context collapse [60], and held a keen awareness of who might see their content. For some participants, like P9, this concern motivated her to go back to content about her weight-maintenance journey to delete posts: *"I rarely post photos for the sake of privacy concerns, but I will post photos sometimes and delete two days later, that kind of thing….I'll delete the photo so it's not visible anymore….I know it's just because after a few days I'll start to feel kind of anxious like, 'Oh my God, what if someone matches the shoes in that photo to the shoes that they saw me wearing in the gym?' That kind of thing. So it started from that."* Even when posting about her journey to Reddit with a pseudonym rendering her account anonymous, the concern of being recognized caused her to return to past content. She continued to explain: *"it's anonymous, but what if someone I know was also on that community?"*

Some participants experienced discomfort or perceived harm by the presence of content about their weight-related journey on their social media accounts; these experiences led some participants to return to their content in order to delete it. P6 described returning to a 'before and after' photo showing her weight-loss journey due to discomfort around her appearance and the fact that others could see the photo on her Instagram 'close friends' story—a ephemeral feature that Instagram users can share to a designated list of approved users ('close friends') on the platform [24]—as she describes: *"I had a before picture, and I was like, 'Should I post those, or not?' Because I was kind of like... I don't like that picture...I really just wound up posting it to my closest friends, and not to everyone who I knew...It was probably four to six hours after I posted it... I went back to check on social media, and I was like, 'Yeah, I'm really not comfortable with this,' just in general. I looked back at it, and I was like, 'I don't think so.'* Returning to past

content to delete posts because of its negative impacts was also shared by P14. P14, a participant who documented a weight-loss journey that overtime transitioned into a weight-gain and ultimately, weight-acceptance journey, explained that she had returned to past content about her weight-loss journey to delete it due to recognizing harmful impacts: *"I think a lot of them weren't healthy for me to see if I looked at my own feed, a lot of body dysmorphia from in four years a rapid weight increase and then decrease and then increase….I think I also deleted the ones that said things I didn't love and I left ones that had my cellulite in it. I do still have a before and after...I thought I deleted that."* Whether it be general discomfort around having certain content about their weight-related journeys posted or body dysphoria experienced due to viewing prior content, these participants shared how negative emotions and experiences due to content they'd shared lead them to return the content in order to delete it.

Sometimes, participants reported returning to past content to delete posts they no longer enjoyed, like P4 who described *"a feeling where I'm just like, "Oh, I don't want to put this on here anymore"* or because they were no longer receiving any additional information sought from their audience, as explained by P9, *"I've gotten all the help I need. So after a few days I can get rid of the photo, because I'm not going to get any more responses."* These participants' spoke of returning to past content to delete it due to indifference or a lack of utility around the post remaining on their platforms.

Whether it be because of privacy concerns, discomfort or experiencing harm due to the content, disliking or no longer finding a post useful, participants demonstrated that wanting to delete content was one motivator for intentionally returning to posts about their weight-related journeys.

4.1.4 Unintentional Returns

Not all participants returned to past content about their weight-related journeys intentionally. Participants shared how certain social media features such as "Snapchat Memories" and Instagram's "On This Day" brought their past to them. P11 described the ways these features unintentionally caused her to view past content about her weight loss journey, *"I don't do it intentionally, like I said, but I see these notifications from Google or Snapchat or Instagram, hey, take a look back at what you were posting about a month ago. I usually, yeah, look at it. And every single post that way, it's cool."* P6 shared a similar experience of unintentionally returning to past content about her weight journey: *"I would see, because now Instagram has a feature that says, 'Three years ago, this was you.' It helps sometimes, but it doesn't help at times as well just because sometimes you see it, you're motivated. Sometimes you're here, you're like, "Oh, my god, I was there before."* These participants' experiences highlight how returning to content is not always by-choice, and at times, built-in features decide for them.

Overall, participants shared numerous reasons they return to past content about their weight-related journeys on social media. Participants went back to see and reflect on their experiences during their journeys, and to monitor and re-engage with interactions from their audiences. Sometimes, participants returned to delete content due to a myriad of reasons, such as privacy concerns and negative impacts due to the presence of this content. Participants also revealed that these returns to their past experiences were not always intentional and features embedded on social media facilitated a reunion with their past.

4.2 Impacts and Consequences of Returning to Past Content

What are the possible impacts and consequences of users returning to past content about their weight-related journeys? In this section, I explain the impact viewing past content had on participants, and detail the negative and positive consequences and the ways in which participants reacted in turn.

4.2.1 Inspiration derived from Past Self and Journey

Many participants described the ways they felt motivated and inspired when viewing past content they'd posted about their weight-related journeys. P8 described the way returning to past content motivates him on his weight acceptance journey: *"I can sort of go back to a few years ago and be proud of myself and see how far I've come. And on the days where I am struggling, it definitely is a pick me up to go back and see how much worse I used to feel in comparison to right now and it kind of gives me motivation to know that I can keep moving forward, even if it feels difficult at the moment."* Being inspired by previously posted content was further supported by P11 who explained how he feels when returning to content about his weight loss journey: *"It motivates and inspires me a lot. It builds a lot of confidence in me. And this is something I never thought I could accomplish, but look how far I've come in the last month or two months. Sometimes it's always not rainbows or butterflies and you're always not making progress. But I like to look at the times I have actually made and tell myself, 'It's possible. You just need to put a little bit more hard work into it or you be committed to it or give it a little bit more time,' because it's not easy to do everything you want immediately."* P12 further explains the ways in which returning to past content and being able to see one's journey documented can motivate a user, she

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explains: *"I feel more motivated...When you see your own journey, you think you have come a long way, even if it's a week….You don't have to visualize it, you have a whole journey of it."* Participants display the ways viewing content about weight-related journeys may cause users to feel inspired when able to visually see their journey.

Returning to past content allowed participants to gain inspiration and support from their past selves. As explained by P1, *"It's really therapeutic as well to hear something in my own words and have it in writing, and to just reflect on that or just to be like, 'Wow, I need to really stay motivated for this past version of myself.' It's a really cool thing to look back on."* P15 also shared the ways returning to content about what she described as a holistic wellness and body positive journey provided her with support and motivation: *"I think it's really inspiring for me because I think when I'm in a bad mental health space, when I'm at my lowest, my mind [thinks] things are never going to get better, you're feeling the same way as you always do. Depression's voice can be really loud. And so I think it's really cool for me to go see all the things that I've done...it sounds silly, but I inspire myself because I'll post when I'm having a really bad day. And I'll like, 'You made it through that one. You can make it through this one.'"* These experiences demonstrate how returning to past content about weight-related journeys can cause users to derive support and motivation from their past selves able to overcome similar challenges they face in the present.

For some participants who perceived themselves as having lost progress on their journey, revisiting past content acted as a source of motivation that they could return to a point in their journey where they were closer to their goals. As P6 explained her experiences when viewing past content on Snapchat and Instagram: *"It's just more of like, one day I can see this back on my*

Stories and be like, 'Yeah, I looked like that, that one day. I can get back to that.' It's more about recording stuff, when it comes to Instagram. It's more like, 'Oh, okay, now that's part of my life. I know that I can get back to that part of my life.'" P9 shared a similar reaction to returning to past content, specifically those that highlighted her fitness prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and spending more time at home: *"Having the numbers is quite helpful and having them logged down somewhere, so I don't forget...I haven't been able to lift as much because I'm at home. It can be nice to look back as a reminder, maybe I can't lift that much now, but I did at some point. So I can surely get back there."* Evidence of their past selves at a certain point of their journeys served as inspiration for their ability to return to that point in the future, particularly when participants believed they had lost progress towards their journey's goals.

Together, participants explained the ways returning to content about their weight-related journeys served as points of inspiration to continue on their journeys, to overcome challenges in the future similar to those they've experienced in the past, as well as to be able to 'return' to their past self's accomplishments.

4.2.2 Comparison between Past Self and Current Self

Participants spoke to how returning to past content prompted a comparison between their past and current self in regards to physical and emotional condition, their mindset towards their journey, and their lifestyles. Seeing previously posted content caused participants to compare their current bodies to their bodies in the past. P6 reflected on changes in her lifestyle and demonstrated the ways returning to past content about her journey caused her to compare the appearance of her body: *"My body was insane. Just insanely fit. But that was when I was at*

school... you get to your junior and your senior year, and things just get so, so busy. Exercise just kind of falls off your head. It's fine. I've made my acceptance with that. But sometimes I do go back to my posts when I was super fit, and I'm like, 'Oh, my god. You can get back to this point.'...sometimes you see it, you're motivated. Sometimes you're here, you're like, "Oh, my god, I was there before….Sometimes, it does make me feel terrible, but then at the same time, I have context that I cannot spend 40 minutes a day, seven times a week, doing that anymore." For some participants, returning to past content also led to comparisons on the way they felt about their bodies. P8 explained that going back to content helped him not only see physical differences in his body, but also changes in the ways he felt about his body on his weight acceptance journey: *"I'm able to scroll down and see where I was before, and how I was feeling about myself before, and I can visually see my progress in both my body and how I feel about it and the way that I express the way that I feel about it….I notice that I just was a lot more sad. And I can see it in the posts themselves and like just talking...And even if it's not as specific as the posts around it, I can tell like the way I'm venting and what I'm talking about...the comparisons are just very, very, clear."* For P8, re-consuming past content prompted comparisons in the ways he used to feel and talk about himself in addition to physical changes. These experiences demonstrate the ways returning to content one posted about their weight-related journey can prompt comparisons between the physical and emotional status of their past and current selves.

Participants also shared experiences of comparing their mindset and involvement with their weight-related journeys. P4 explained the ways returning to past content caused her to compare herself in the present with the ways she perceived herself to be more goal-oriented in

the past: *"Because I've gained weight back to whatever I was before, when I look back I'm just like, "Dang, I really was about to lose a lot of weight there." But I guess that's like nostalgia, I guess, because I'm like, "Okay, times were better back then," or whatever but yeah, I don't know….it's just me observing myself and being like, 'Oh, okay. Dang, you were really working towards a goal here and you let that go.'…I was consistent with it at one point and I think that just mirrors into real life in general, how I just let things go..."* P5 expressed a similar reaction to returning to past content and comparing her involvement in her weight-loss journey: *"If I'm not in quite the right mindset, I might feel slightly uneasy or I'm like, 'Why am I not in as good of a mood as I was here?' Kind of a thing, nothing super dark or dysphoric fortunately...I was super motivated to do this, this, this, and this on that day, or at this point in the day. And I look at whatever I'm doing that day or what I did the day before or what I'm about to do. It's like, 'Oh, I'm behind.'"* It is clear from what participants shared that returning to past content caused them to reflect on their levels of engagement with their weight-related journeys.

Participants also compared the lifestyles they used to live while on their weight-related journeys, as demonstrated by P14, *"I'm lucky if I do a YouTube video of yoga once a week now. And looking back at how much I was in the gym, even my few and far, not that many gym posts still up and how much I was there, I'm like, who is that person?"* P17 also showed how returning to past content caused him to compare his lifestyle when he was engaging in more fitness activities: *"The pictures are reminders of what I could be, I was, and what I still can…it's thinking back to that lifestyle, of the way I lived my life."* Participants demonstrate how returning to past content caused them to remember and compare the lifestyle choices they used to make and those they make now.

Returning to past content about one's weight-related journey and the subsequent comparisons around one's physical and emotional state, mindset and lifestyles in the past and present was a common impact shared by many participants, regardless of the type of weight-related journey they had shared on social media.

4.2.3 Celebrating and Regretting Perceived Success and Loss

Participants explained how returning to past content caused them to both celebrate perceived success and regret perceived loss toward their journeys. For some participants, when their weight-related journey was progressing towards their goals, viewing past content left them feeling positively. P2 shared how returning to content about his weight-gain journey caused him to feel validated about his journey by allowing him to see the physical progress he wanted: *"I want to say the posts definitely made me feel like my time was worth it, for sure. Definitely see muscle definition, I think definitely makes me more confident in what I'm seeing, like what I'm seeing is right...."* Similarly, P9 explained that when she viewed past content that showed progress, it left her feeling proud: *"It's kind of nice sometimes to look back and remind myself, when I look at my post about my personal bests and stuff, and it's kind of nice to remind myself, "Wow, last January, I was really proud of my gains and... Or I was like, "Oh, wow. I've come really far since then." Usually it's because it's like, "Wow, last year I was really proud of squatting 50 pounds, now I'm up to 70. Wow I've come really far."* The ability to see progression towards one's weight journey's goals when revisiting past content had a positive impact on participants and prompted feelings of validation and pride.

On the other hand, some participants shared how they experienced negative feelings when returning to past content and perceiving themselves as having lost progress toward their journey's ultimate defined goals. P17 explained the shame he felt when seeing photos he posted during a time when he believed he was in 'better' physical shape: *"I was in better shape before. Right now, currently, I'm in shape, but not great shape...There were things that I was able to do that, I know if I tried it right now, I couldn't do it. So, it was looking back for that picture also takes me back to that time period, if that makes sense...I feel like it's a mixture of regret and shame."* P10 shared a similar experience, describing how viewing content about her weight-loss journey didn't always have a positive impact: *"I would say positive sometimes and then sometimes I get down if for example I'm not in the gym for a while and then lose a lot of progress I've made...doesn't make me feel good."* These participants highlight the negative feelings and shame brought by returning to past content when they perceived themselves as having moved further away from their journey's goals and losing perceived progress.

Participants highlight a conundrum with returning to past content about one's weight-related journeys and judging perceived wins and losses: when it's 'good', it feels good. When it's 'bad', it feels bad.

4.2.4 Triggering Past Harmful Thought Loops

One participant shared how experiences during her weight-related journey included struggles with disordered eating, body dysphoria, etc. and that returning to past content caused her to have harmful thought loops around these past behaviors and experiences. For P14, what started as a weight-loss journey switched to a weight acceptance journey and awareness that past

actions she took were forms of disordered eating: *"So after I started gaining weight back, because first of all, I had an injury that I was not working out anymore, so I had gained weight...just realizing, oh, restrictive eating is disordered eating..."* P14, who deleted a lot of content about her weight-loss journey from her Instagram, went on to explain how returning to some of the remaining posts about her in the gym caused her to wrestle with disordered eating thoughts and experience dissonance between her past self and current self: *"It feels like a different person but I think I all go through that especially in our young 20s to a point of you look at yourself two years ago and you're like, who was that? But I think it [returning to past content] definitely makes that feeling exponentially larger...I think it's just the ongoing eating disorders or being addicted to something. It's always there a bit in the back of your head and then you have to sift through, was that a disorder thought or was that [a] 'me trying to grow' thought and looking back at them definitely brings those up a lot...I usually try to put it down pretty quickly."* P14's experiences demonstrate the potential magnitude returning to past content about weight-related journeys can have on social media users, especially for those who have particularly complex relationships with food, disordered eating, diet culture, etc.

4.2.5 Informing Future Content and Decisions about Weight-Related Journeys

Lastly, participants shared how returning to past content about their weight-related journeys informed future content and decisions they would make about their weight-related journeys. For some participants, returning to past content shaped what future content they would post, citing wishes to make sure they're posting a variety of content or posting content that authentically represents their lives. P15, who described her weight-related journey as a broader

wellness journey, explained that she returned to past content as a way of evaluating whether the journey she's portraying is authentic: *"If I look at my feed, which I'll try to maybe do at least once every two weeks, I'll try to just go look at my feed. And I'll ask myself, "Does this represent the life I'm living right now? Or does it just represent the good parts?" And I think if my answer is, "It only represents the good parts," then I'll ask myself, "Okay, well, what's difficult? What's challenging about life right now?" And then I'll usually have a topic that just comes to surface. And then I'll just think on that topic, and over the next few days, write about it, and then try to challenge myself to post about it."* Whereas P15 returned to her past content to evaluate if she was presenting authentically, P5 had returned to past content to check that she was not posting content identical to previous content: *"I think I glanced back at a post. It was after I made another post, but looking at photos just to get an idea of what kind of picture I've already posted or have I already posted something similar? And that kind of a thing. I might tweak it to where it doesn't look like a mirror image kind of a thing, but nothing super extensive."* These participants expressed how returning to past content assisted them in shaping their future content to reflect authentic or diverse content on their weight-related journeys.

Beyond informing future content participants' posts about their journeys, some participants described the ways returning to past content shaped future actions as part of their weight-related journeys. P2 explained that he looks at content about his weight-gain journey to decide what parts of his body he wanted to target in his fitness routine: *"I'll notice in a video, because I never really just go and look at myself in a mirror that much, I really don't, but I will say in a video, I'll notice if my legs look a little disproportionate compared to my upper body. So then that's what I'll work out the next day….So, I'll notice as I'm working out and looking at*

these videos, what needs to be worked on….I'm not just posting videos, I'm looking at the videos. I'm looking, 'Oh, is this good form in this video? How much weight am I doing in this video?'"

Overall, participants highlight the ways returning to past content about weight-related journeys impacted them, sometimes positively and negatively. Participants shared the ways viewing their perceived progress, evidence of their ability to overcome challenges and seeing their visual journey served as points of inspiration to them in the present. Additionally, returning to past content prompted many comparisons between participants past selves and their current selves in regards to their physical and emotional condition, mindset towards their journeys and lifestyle choices. When participants felt they were still in alignment with their journey's goals, returning to past content prompted positive feelings of pride and validation. However, when participants believed they had lost progress, revisiting content prompted negative feelings like embarrassment and shame. One participant shared the ways seeing content she had posted about her weight-loss journey triggered harmful thought loops around disordered eating she wrestled with both during and after she'd documented her weight-related journeys on social media. Lastly, participants shared the ways revisiting content shaped future content, as well as decisions they'd make about their weight-related journeys.

5. DISCUSSION

In this discussion section, I begin by reflecting on the ways returning to past content about weight-related journeys causes users to face their past selves and discuss how this brings to the forefront a complex relationship between one's past and current self. I argue motivations of return to the past result in dynamic interpretations of the past and current self and that one cannot

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address the impacts of these interpretations *without* contextualizing them within a society where weight stigma, fatphobia and specific body ideals are pervasive. I then propose ways social media may support users engaging with the past, particularly in stigmatized contexts, when the motivations and impacts of return are so closely intertwined and overlapping. Lastly, I discuss how documenting weight-related journeys on social media serve as examples of personal archives creating a self-contained experience of return, centering the individual, and putting users' self-concept and well-being at stake; I argue this speaks to larger issues of responsibility for social media platforms better support users who may be storing potentially stigmatized, personal data on social media.

5.1 The Complex Relationship between the Past and Current Self

Our findings demonstrate that returning to past content about weight-related journeys compelled participants to engage with their past self and that these engagements induced self-reported positive and negative impacts on their well-being, such as receiving social support from their past self's words or feeling shame towards their current or past self's physical condition. While prior research has explored impacts of consuming content about other's fitspiration or weight loss journeys on social media, such as impacts on body image [53], our findings show how consuming one's own past content that exhibits a weight-related journey can impact the current self.

Crete-Nishihata et al. studied the effects personal memory technologies had on older adults with memory impairments and their families, arguing "*the narratives of the past captured by these technologies are not just collection of facts for users to record, store, and remember, but*

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also reconstructions of experiences that are subject to dynamic interpretations" [8] that can impact interpersonal relationships, one's sense of self, etc. Similarly, our findings suggest social media, when used in a way that documents journeys, creates constructions of the past that foster complicated and contested relationships between the past and current self when the subject matter is particularly vulnerable to ongoing, ever-changing interpretations. In the case of social media users documenting weight-related journeys, these interpretations of the past self and their broader journey are dependent on the current self's motivation for returning and their evaluation of the content in the present moment as well as their journey's ultimate goals.

Participants shared how their interpretations of their past selves from returning to content about their weight-related journeys led them to make sense of their physical appearance, emotional kindness towards themselves, lifestyle choices, etc in ways that either lent grace or directed frustration towards both their past and present selves. Awareness of the context in which these motivations of return and how the impacts of user interpretation play out identifies a specific target for interventions, like education or social media campaigns countering the misconception of body size reflecting health, can occur [Figure 1]. By addressing weight stigma, fatphobia, and specific body ideals that surrounds the social media platforms and society at large in which these re-visits with the past occur, users may better be able to navigate the complex relationship between a user's past and current self on social media when documenting weight-related journeys; future work might look at what specific design affordances might assist in framing or recontextualizing weight-related content that leads to positive, or more compassionate, interpretations of one's past or current self.

Figure 1. This figure shows the context in which a user's past and current self engage with each other when users return to past content about their weight-related journeys on social media. Users return to past content for a variety of motivations and this facilitates an encounter where users oscillate between their past and current selves and engage in interpretations leading to positive and negative impacts in the present. Users do so in a context where weight stigma, fat phobia and specific body ideals are pervasive.

One must always consider that these individuals are producing and returning to this content in online spaces that are weight-loss centric and fatphobic [55], and it would be naive to assume that they were able to do so without exposure to societal messages that propagate weight stigma. As Lydecker et al. so aptly put it:

> *"it is important to remember that targeting pervasive attitudes such as weight stigma*
>
> *requires prevention work at multiple levels, which could include social media, mass*
>
> *media, and everyday interactions. Messages promoting acceptance of a variety of body*

sizes, and the separation of health from body weight, is needed at each of these levels"

[36]

It is with this caveat on weight stigma that I look at the motivations and impacts participants shared when returning to past content about their weight-related journeys. Addressing these impacts and exploring these motivations on social media are not enough to 'solve' society's deep rooted fatphobia and widespread weight-based discrimination that mandate societal shifts in how we understand our bodies in relation to ourselves and each other.

5.2 Supporting Users Engaging with the Past and Stigmatized Content

Participants shared the motivations behind their return to past content, including those that were unintentional and a result of memory features embedded in social media. While many participants reported intentional returns to reminisce and reflect on their journeys (4.1.1), some participants expressed discomfort around returning to past content (4.2.4) and desires to delete posts about their weight-related journeys (4.1.4). When dealing with the mass amount of personal data stored on social media platforms, Zhao and Lindley describe the limitations of using social media as deep storage in contexts such as Facebook [56], particularly surrounding the limited affordances around deleting or 'forgetting' content: "*If one wishes to forget, there is only one option on a social media site, and that is to delete. The feature 'to hide' on Facebook means hiding from others, not hiding from oneself*" [56]. They identify this point of tension as an opportunity for design to support the safekeeping of digital possessions, including those that social media users may not wish to reminisce about. When it comes to providing more support for users in producing narratives, Zhao and Lindley argue for features such as allowing a user to

favorite content on social media to support "*sense-making and the creation of a framework for browsing when revisiting past content*" [56]. Haimson et al. propose various design opportunities to challenge the assumption that maintaining a connection to the past is ideal, such as "*if an SNS required explicit work to maintain old photos and posts, rather than maintaining a personal archive by default*" [19]. When it comes to the documentation of weight-related journeys on social media, supporting users through the development of additional affordances to help navigate sensitive, stigmatized past content is crucial.

On platforms such as Facebook and Snapchat, users have the ability to turn off the platforms' memory features that bring past content to the forefront [1,50], an affordance that may mitigate unintentional reminiscence for users. This ability to turn off automatic reminders from the past are not always available to users. For example, Instagram users are unable to turn off the platform's 'On This Day' feature, and as Kraus explains, while users' technical devices afford the ability to turn off push notifications, "*a memory isn't something Instagram lets you turn off*"[32]. While users on Instagram can archive past content on their feeds, this process is often time consuming and requires users to archive one post at a time, as the platform does not allow users to hide multiple posts simultaneously by attributes like the date posted [4]. This is concerning when users' past content might trigger past harmful behaviors or prompt comparisons with the past that elicit feelings of shame and embarrassment, particularly in contexts where weight stigma might be of consequence. These users may benefit from expanded design affordances that grant the ability to bulk delete or archive content by attributes like data posted, hashtags, etc, as well as if social media platforms made memory features opt-in as opposed to the default.

Herron et al. do not posit digital possessions that stir up negative attitudes as inherently bad and identify an opportunity for design to support the re-contextualization of and reflection on these possessions and the histories tied to them to change the attitudes they illicit [20]. In the context of relationship breakups, they argue that "by designing for reflection in a post-break up context, we could provide ex partners with opportunities to come to terms with their relationship ending [20]." Similarly, one may ask what ways can social media platforms be designed to provide support for users who may be documenting weight-related journeys online in contexts where societal beauty ideals, fatphobia and weight stigma [5,55] might be particularly salient to them regardless of their journey's ultimate defined goal. This serves as a point for future work that can explore how social media design can assist users in navigating content that due to its central focus, such as weight in the case of participants, is stigmatized and holds sway over user well-being.

By looking at weight-related journeys on social media, we see how closely intertwined the motivations and impacts of returning to past content are. As a result, social media platforms must reconcile their current affordances that presuppose storing the past and returns to the past are default, desirable options.

5.3 Weight-Related Journeys and the Self-Contained Nature of Return: Archives for Who?

Returning to weight-related journeys on social media serves as a good model for understanding social media as a personal archive and the consequences of social media's prioritization of remembrance and return for users. Past work delving into how users encounter the past, such as in contexts of relationship break-ups [20,43,47] or gender transitions [18,19],

predominantly speak of engagements with the past that involves others or accounts for the *perceptions* of others —whether that be an audience, an ex-partner, a past network being contested or 'controlled' in the present, etc. The participants' experiences of return with weight-related journeys are unique in the ways they predominantly spoke of themselves, and not an audience (beyond experiences shared in 4.1.2). As a result, weight-related journeys can serve as a case in which researchers investigate how individuals' engagements with social media as personal archives affect the individual and their conceptions of self, given the self-contained nature of their motivations and impacts of return.

As discussed in section 5.1, returning to past content about weight-related journeys often caused participants to make interpretations of their past and current selves that led to the impacts detailed in section 4.2. In this instance, the salience of the self when returning, combined with the ease at which social media design affords this return, begs the question of who social media platforms aim to serve in their personal archive tendencies. Does social media design provide a return to a personal archive that supports a user revisiting the past in ways that protect their perceived well-being, or does it lead them to revisit a past that centers or predominantly accounts for other people? Weight-related journeys on social media and the self-contained nature of return forces us to ask ourselves how and for whom these platforms and their personal archive values are designed.

When thinking of users who may intentionally use social media to document journeys related to extremely personal or potentially stigmatized experiences, the personal archive aspects of social media take on a particularly consequential role that must be attended to by designers, as it can build an archive centered around these sensitive or stigmatized experiences where return or

remembrance of the past has impacts on one's self-concept (i.e. how an individual understands and makes sense of themselves [40]), such as the participants' return prompting comparisons between a past and present self that lead to feeling inspired, but also feelings of shame, guilt or embarrassment.

These engagements of return for those who document journeys related to personal experiences—like weight-related journeys—may differ depending on their sense of community around their journey or the characteristics of the platform used to document their journeys (such as if it is more text-based like Reddit or visual like Instagram.) For example, one may find encounters with the past that both center the self *and others* if users strongly identified their journey as part of a community, such as those who's weight-related journeys may be shaped by a fitness influencer. Future research may wish to explore the differences between the motivations and impacts of returning to past content around personal journeys on social media, particularly looking at ways identifying strongly as part of a community might change the self-contained nature of return identified in this research.

By understanding that social media users documenting weight-related journeys create personal archives centered on these experiences, we understand some of the consequences of storage of personal data on social media and memory features that make remembrance inevitable. Future research should delve into the specific design and technical affordances of social media that lend themselves to supporting users whose platforms, by default, create archives filled with sensitive, stigmatized content that may impact their self-concept and well-being in the future.

6. CONCLUSION

I explored the ways in which social media users between the ages of 18 and 24, when body dissatisfaction is particularly high, engage with the past, specifically a past that documents a weight-related journey in a society filled with weight stigma. I examined the motivations behind and impacts of returning to past content about weight-related journeys, finding individuals returned because they wanted to see and reflect on their journey, to monitor, engage and reminisce on past audience engagements, to delete past content, or without any motivation and instead unintentionally returning due to memory features on their social media platforms. I explained several impacts as a result of this return to the past, including participants being inspired by their past selves, comparing their past and current self, making sense of their perceived progress, triggering harmful thought loops or informing future decisions they made about their journeys and its documentation. I argued that these returns to the past forced an engagement between users' past and current selves in ways that resulted in ever changing interpretations and led to positive and negative impacts on well-being. I proposed ways social media may start to reconcile and support its users engaging with a past that is sensitive or impacted by stigma. Lastly, I identified weight-related journeys as a case where researchers can explore the implications of social media as a personal archive when its digital artifacts create a repository of data that holds sway over one's self-concept and well-being, such as an archive prompting comparisons of the self that attribute one version, past or present, as more worthy.

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