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"I like to See the Ups and Downs of My Own Journey": Motivations for and Impacts of Returning to Past Content About Weight Related Journeys on Social Media

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Documenting weight-related journeys (e.g., weight loss, weight gain) is prevalent on social media, as is weight stigma, resulting in easily accessible personal archives filled with emotional, and potentially stigmatizing content. Through semi-structured interviews with 17 U.S.-based social media users sharing weight-related journeys, we investigate the motivations for and impacts of returning to previously posted weight-related social media content. We show how these personal archives foster a contested relationship between one's past and current self, where returning to past content facilitates dynamic interpretations of the self. We argue these interpretations' impacts cannot be understood without acknowledging and addressing the socio-technical context in which they exist: one filled with weight stigma, fatphobia, and narrow body ideals. We introduce the novel concepts of *Transtemporal Support* and *Transtemporal Harm* to describe the support and harms that one experiences in the present from returning to their past social media content. We posit that designs accounting for transtemporal support 1) can facilitate reflective sense-making for users who create repositories of digital artifacts about sensitive, potentially stigmatizing experiences on social media, and 2) should not perpetuate transtemporal harm.

CCS Concepts: • **Human-centered computing** → **Empirical studies in collaborative and social computing**; *Social media*; *Social content sharing*; *Social networks*.

Additional Key Words and Phrases: social media, weight-related journeys, archives, life transitions, transtemporal support, transtemporal harm, weight stigma, fatphobia, reflection, persistence, reminiscence, emerging adulthood

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1 INTRODUCTION

Data stored on social media can function as "a personal archive and repository for meaningful memories"[121]. These data and the memories or feelings they elicit when people return to them can have positive or negative impacts on well-being [53, 56, 63], as the past does not always evoke positive affect. Social media platforms' affordances can facilitate memory processes (e.g. remembrance and forgetting) such as via built-in features presenting past content to a person (e.g. Instagram's "On This Day") or the ability to delete content as a form of memory management. Prior Computer-Supported Cooperative Work (CSCW) and social computing scholarship explores

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returning to the past as mediated by social media in contexts such as relationship breakups [51, 93, 102] and gender transitions [44, 45]. This past work highlights the complicated nature of social media as places where the past—with its good *and* its unpleasant—is accessible to users and their networks. What are social media users' *motivations* behind and perceived *impacts* of returning to past content, especially those related to their sensitive and potentially stigmatized experiences? In this paper, we address this overarching question by taking the documentation of weight-related journeys¹ on social media as our point of inquiry in order to inform designing social media that accounts for digital pasts acting as repositories for sensitive, potentially stigmatized content. Prior research [20, 33, 113] on weight and fitness content on social media provides valuable insights on the impacts consuming this content has on viewers' body image and well-being, such as exacerbating body dissatisfaction. As weight-related journeys can be a sensitive, emotionally-charged experience [24, 41, 60, 73], their documentation on social media and the resulting personal archives centered on weight can illuminate how returns to the past can impact a person's perceived well-being.

Why is it important to center the experiences of individuals who post about weight-related journeys on social media in particular? On the public and our bodies, Roxanne Gay once wrote:

“Regardless of what you do, your body is the subject of public discourse..Your body is subject to commentary when you gain weight, lose weight, or maintain your unacceptable weight. People are quick to offer you statistics and information about the dangers of obesity, as if you are not only fat but also incredibly stupid, unaware, delusional about the realities of your body and a world that is vigorously inhospitable to that body...They forget that you are a person. You are your body, nothing more, and your body should damn well become less.” [37, pp.120–121]

She spoke to the normalization of scrutinizing a body that does not comply with societal definitions of an acceptable body. Indeed, children develop an awareness of weight and dieting at a young age [68], with body dissatisfaction, “*negative thoughts and feelings about one's body*” [97], emerging in girls as young as 5 years old [29]. This dissatisfaction continues as individuals become adults [97] with increased risk of mental health conditions, including disordered eating as a result [34].

In a society where diet culture equates thinness with beauty and worth [48] and social media content stigmatizing weight is widespread [18], some people share content documenting their journeys with weight on social platforms. This production develops digital archives filled with personal, potentially stigmatized (and stigmatizing) content (e.g., sharing a 'before' and 'after' photo to highlight some form of transformation). While some users' journeys are weight loss-centric, others' goals include weight acceptance, weight gain, etc. It would be simplistic to view these individuals' content production in a vacuum, ignoring that they do so within the context of billion dollar weight loss and management industries [75, 98] profiting off of body and weight-insecurities, and deep-seated fatphobia. In this study, we are intentional about situating our work within this broader context to not dismiss the societal forces that hold power over people's experiences with weight and bodies. In centering weight-related journeys on social media, we acknowledge their existence in a social context where fat² bodies are devalued [114] for an in-depth understanding of people's experiences with documenting weight-related journeys. Our study focuses on individuals

¹We 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.

²We have chosen to use the word 'fat' in place of terms such as overweight or obese for multiple reasons. Firstly, the term overweight and obese stem from Body Mass Index (BMI), a metric commonly encountered in Medical settings. This now ubiquitous "medical" measurement originates from a weight-to-height index that only accounted for white European men in the 1830s, but has since been used in ways that have harmful ramifications for people of color, leading to medical bias and discrimination [1, 2]. Secondly, we choose to use this word to stand in solidarity with those working for fat liberation that want to reclaim the word 'fat' from its derogatory and stigmatized associations, and instead neutralize the word as

who document weight-related journeys on social media; those who may be inadvertently contributing to or trying to overcome weight stigma and diet culture, while also being impacted by these *same* forces and experiencing body dissatisfaction.

We conducted 17 semi-structured interviews with U.S.-based social media users between the ages of 18 and 24 that reported documenting their personal weight-related journeys on any social media platform. During these years as part of emerging adulthood [5], people experience high levels of body dissatisfaction [97] and social media usage [91] alongside identity exploration [6] that may impact one's relationship with their body [82]. Our analysis identified several motivations and perceived impacts of returning to past content, such as participants wanting to reflect on their journey and, subsequently, comparing their past selves with their current selves in terms of physical, emotional, and lifestyle status. Participants' perceived impacts of return were both positively and negatively valenced. Based on these findings, we introduce the novel concept of *transtemporal support* to describe the support and validation one receives from their own past social media content by returning to it in the present time, made possible by social media's archiving affordances. On the flip side, we introduce the concept of *transtemporal harm* as the psychological harm one can experience by engaging with their past content. We argue that designs facilitating transtemporal support while mitigating transtemporal harm can support those whose social media usage creates personal digital archives of sensitive content, where such content may have well-being implications. We suggest that by furthering design for reflection [35, 47, 66, 101], social media designers can support reflective sense-making of one's past. We briefly reflect on how these designs would operate within existing systems of surveillance capitalism [122] and imagine futures where sociotechnical systems reject capitalist notions of profiting from people's sensitive pasts. We argue concepts of transtemporal support and transtemporal harm are relevant to consider in these futures.

Our findings show that returning to the past, both intentionally (i.e. manually returning to older posts) and unintentionally (i.e. embedded memory features that bring older posts to the forefront), caused participants to re-visit their former selves. We contribute knowledge about how sharing weight-related journeys on social media fosters a self-contained experience of return putting social media users' self-concept and perceived well-being at stake. We argue that documentation on social media fosters a contested relationship between one's past and current selves in the context of weight-related journeys, demonstrating how returning to the past results in dynamic interpretations of the self. We note that these interpretations' impacts are best understood by acknowledging the socio-technical context in which they exist. We join other scholars [10, 45, 102, 103, 120, 121] arguing social media's tendencies towards prioritizing remembrance should be questioned as universally desirable and challenged by offering alternative affordances not centered on remembrance, such as reflective sense-making and forgetting.

2 RELEVANT WORK

2.1 Weight and Body Size Stigma on Social Media

Stigma refers to the discrimination or negative attitudes directed at someone (by themselves or others) based on some discernible attribute, such as one's race, mental health, disability, etc [39, 67]. Weight stigma refers to "*the social rejection and devaluation that accrues to those who do not comply with prevailing social norms of adequate body weight and shape*" [114]. Weight stigma, like other stigmas, can be internalized [96], with individuals projecting this devaluation on the basis of weight onto themselves. Weight stigma and increased body dissatisfaction may contribute to many people trying to lose weight. A National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey found that

both a descriptor and an identity [62, 106]. In this paper, we use the word 'fat' as a neutral descriptive word that is not inherently good or bad.

59.3% of women and 40.5% of men between the ages of 20 and 39 in the U.S. tried to lose weight within the last 12 months [77]. Experiencing stigma leads to physical and psychological stress and poor health outcomes [95]. Specifically, psychological stress induced by weight stigma explains adverse health outcomes commonly associated with excess body weight such as poor mental health and hypertension [36, 50, 81, 99]. Weight stigma also contributes to body dissatisfaction [95]. For example, college-aged individuals experience body dissatisfaction at high rates [25, 97]; this is important because low body image increases the likelihood of developing mental illnesses such as depression and disordered eating [34].

Weight stigma and fear of fatness also have racialized and gendered origins. Sabrina Strings maps the racial origins of society's deeply-rooted fatphobia, connecting the transatlantic slave trade and spread of Protestantism to fatness being associated with Blackness and immorality [110]. String demonstrates how anti-blackness and misogynoir, anti-black misogyny resulting in prejudice against Black women [9], are integral to today's societal body ideals, medicine's treatment of fat bodies, and many weight-based stereotypes. Misogynistic and disparaging conversations about weight are pervasive on social media, contributing to the normalization and regularity of content stigmatizing weight and fat people online [18]. These conversations' misogynistic tone reflects weight stigma's gendered roots [110]. Weight stigma is not a new phenomenon and its roots are deeply intertwined with other systemic injustices like gender inequality and racism; as such it is not surprising that weight stigma is widespread within the social media spaces people document weight-related journeys [17].

Studies have explored the expressions of weight stigma on social media platforms such as YouTube [58], Instagram [18, 70], Twitter [71] and Facebook [18]. Chou et al. highlight the prevalence of online spaces where fat people are spoken of with disgust and rage, alongside some areas of acceptance and social support where fat individuals may find refuge from derogatory content [18]. 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. [71]. Jeon et al. analyzed YouTube comments on two viral videos related to fat individuals and found fat people were insulted for having limited reproductive powers, often indicated by physical attractiveness [58]. These studies demonstrate the prevalence of weight stigma on social media, and its association of a higher weight with negatively perceived attributes. This literature also provides an understanding of the narratives circulating on platforms where people, including participants in this study, document weight-related journeys.

2.2 Weight-Related Journeys on Social Media

Society and its values are reflected in the online spaces social media users inhabit. For social media users documenting their weight-related journeys, these platforms' atmosphere is one where weight-based discrimination, stereotypes, and weight stigma are widespread and normalized [18], complicating weight-related content production and consumption. This raises questions about the impact of producing content on those who use social media to document weight-related journeys, including those not related to weight loss. Much prior work is centered on weight loss journeys and white cisgender straight women, as well as content challenging diet culture, such as body positivity content. This study expands scholarship into content production about journeys such as weight acceptance, weight maintenance, weight gain, and others as defined by participants; the present analysis focuses on one aspect of this production—present encounters with a digital past documenting one's personal weight-related journey. It is important to address this gap 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.

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 use Instagram, 75% use Snapchat and 55% use TikTok [91]. These users may engage in the production and consumption of content documenting 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 negatively impact well-being [33, 113]. This is partly why we chose to focus our inquiry to individuals in this age group.

Because weight stigma is gendered, it is perhaps unsurprising many studies on weight-related journeys feature women. Specifically, 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 44.7 and 30.4 million posts, respectively. 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 mirroring certain understandings of a 'fit' body type and experience, subtly or explicitly reinforcing 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*" [21]. Among women between the ages of 18 and 25 in the U.S. and Australia, internalizing beauty ideals and comparing one's appearance to fitspiration images may adversely impact their body image [33]. These studies show the repetitive and narrow body ideals in weight loss and fitness related content on social media and demonstrate that users viewing this content can embody these ideals and be at-risk for increased body dissatisfaction. With a growing understanding of these negative impacts, prior work has explored eating disorder content on social media [16, 88, 89]. For example, Pater et al. examined presentations of disordered eating on social media while remaining cognizant of limitations caused by a lack of gender diversity common in eating disorder-related research [88, 89]. Additionally, Chancellor et al. identified the challenges of content moderation as an effective intervention for pro-eating disorder online communities given the lexical variations used by these communities to evade moderation [16].

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 these images while encouraging individuals to "*challenge current societal messages regarding beauty and to accept more diverse body sizes and appearances as attractive*" [20]. Body positivity content "*challenges the unrealistic standards of beauty present in both traditional and social media by the promotion and acceptance of diverse body sizes and appearances*" [65]. For young women between the ages of 18 and 30, consuming body positive content on Instagram positively impacts mood and levels of body satisfaction and appreciation [20]. However, despite body positive content showing more diverse bodies, this content may still promote weight loss and the achievement of thinness as *the* desirable goal, and continue to exclude the very types of larger bodies it claims to celebrate [20]. These findings echo critiques of the body positivity movement and have spurred alternative movements such as 'body neutrality' and 'fat acceptance'[61], drawing attention to the co-opting of body positivity from its Black Feminist roots. Campaigns like #BodyPositivityInColor hope "*to reclaim [Body Positivity] from white, cisgender, heterosexual, thin women who dominate the discussions around body positivity*"[59]. Body Positivity content on social media serves as an

example of how an online movement initially started to challenge fatphobia and weight stigma has been touched by these same forces, showing how entangled social media experiences can be for those who may wish to challenge body ideals and weight stigma.

2.3 Social Media, Memory, and Digital Archives

Recent work in Human-Computer Interaction and ubiquitous computing has begun to explore the ways social media emulates a digital archive. For example, expanding upon Hogan's exhibition curation view of social media [52], Zhao et al. argue that, as time passes, social media takes on a more intimate role as a personal archive and storage for memories [120]. Zhao and Lindley explored the ways people engage 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 specific, easily navigable, and frequently encountered [120].

Viewing photos and other digital artifacts can cue memories for users [115] and prompt reminiscence [116, 120], potentially impacting viewers' well-being in positive and negative ways [53, 56, 63]. For example, young adult Facebook users returning to past content experienced mixtures of nostalgia as well as embarrassment [104]. Overall, technology-mediated reflection on experiences perceived as negative may have an adverse impact on well-being, whereas those perceived as positive may have a more positive impact [53].

Social media can facilitate attachment to memories for users. For example, metrics like the number of likes on a post can impact how they feel about past moments [57]. Social media's memory features foster attachment to past content and this is emblematic of *quantified nostalgia*, "the metrification and quantification of engagements with the past as well as their everyday implications and reception" [57]. 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 [56, 63], but lack the nuance to handle emotionally sensitive contexts such as relationship break-ups [51, 93, 102] or gender transitions [44, 45] to name a few. For instance, Facebook's seemingly positive 'On This Day' memory feature leads to upsetting experiences after a romantic relationship breakup [93]. As another example, transgender people on Facebook find it difficult to navigate digital pasts exhibiting artifacts of a past gender they may want to manage or forget [45]. These individuals engage in emotionally taxing and time consuming behaviors (i.e. changing privacy settings, creating multiple accounts to separate social networks, etc.) [45] to push against social media designs' assumption that maintaining networks and facilitating ongoing engagements with the past is always desired.

Promotion of remembrance in social media design occurs with the act of forgetting being devalued as a crucial part of individuals' wants or needs. Bannon demonstrates 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. Bannon 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 [10]. More recently, Schoenebeck and Conway use archival appraisal theory to suggest "preservation as a default affordance among technology companies is not a neutral decision" [103] and that personal data demands a nuanced understanding that accounts for the potential benefits that come from *not* storing certain data. Additionally, Sas and Whittaker discuss the salience of digital possessions and ways social networks can be designed to support users disposing digital possessions [102], beyond total deletion that may be uncomfortable for some users [42]. They argue for paying more attention to supporting intentional forgetting in ways sensitive to the complex emotions surrounding negative (or positive) memories [102].

Altogether, prior work highlights the importance of exploring “[technical] augmentation means for all human activities, both remembering and forgetting”[10] as a feature of design. Overall, social media’s prioritization of remembrance lacks the nuance to handle emotionally sensitive experiences. We take weight-related journeys as an important and socially relevant context to examine experiences of returning to the past as mediated by social media, with implications for how to better design social media experiences that account for past content becoming a repository of sensitive, stigmatized content. In being aware of weight stigma’s prevalence on social media (2.1) and the impacts of consuming weight-related content online (2.2), we can better understand how the documentation of weight-related journeys on social media and the development of personal archives centered on weight are important to investigate as their reminiscence can impact a person’s perceived well-being.

In this paper, we address the following research questions:

- **RQ1:** What motivates social media users to return to past content about their weight-related journeys on social media?
- **RQ2:** What are the perceived impacts of returning to past content on the individuals posting their weight-related journeys?

3 METHODS, DATA AND ANALYSIS

3.1 Recruitment

We conducted semi-structured interviews (N=17) with individuals, between the ages of 18 and 24, who reported sharing about a weight-related journey (including weight acceptance, weight maintenance, weight loss, weight gain and more) on social media using a research recruiting service. We scoped this study to this age group due to reported high levels of both body dissatisfaction [97] and social media usage [91]. Additionally, this age group falls into the period between adolescence and adulthood commonly referred to as ‘emerging adulthood’ [5], a self-focused time filled with identity exploration and transitions [6] that may shape or influence the way one relates to their body [82]. As emerging adults online “*portray themselves in ways that can be temporary, facilitating moment-to-moment alterations in one’s persona or shared self*” [15], their experiences are rich for a study focused on the motivations and impacts of returns to past content on social media. To be considered for our interview study, participants completed a screening survey. Interview participants received \$20 USD in compensation for their time. Our university’s IRB approved this study. We stopped recruiting potential participants when we achieved data saturation [22], that is, when we started hearing similar stories and experiences from participants and developed no additional codes 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 above questions or were not between the ages of 18 and 24, they did not meet the minimum 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, how they would describe their body size, and how they think others would describe their body size. The survey ended with questions asking respondents’ demographics with open-ended text boxes, so respondents could define these categories as they wished. We have included the screening survey in supplemental material. We received 498 responses

to the screening survey and 318 respondents met the basic eligibility criteria. We reached out to 33 respondents and conducted interviews with those who completed the informed consent process and scheduled an interview time. We did not reach out to more people to interview after achieving data saturation.

3.3 Interview Participants and Protocol

The study focuses on young adult social media users between the ages of 18 and 24 who produce(d) content about a weight-related journey at an age when body dissatisfaction [97], social media usage [91], and identity exploration [6] is high. We reached out to eligible survey respondents in waves based on their responses to the screening survey. We 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 we would gain in-depth data about the experience of documenting weight-related journeys on social media, we followed a 3-point procedure to mark interview participants as high priority. Respondents 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?’. This criterion was motivated by our need to hear about a wide range of content and the assumption that an individual who has posted more frequently about their weight-related journey may have more content to discuss and reflect on in interviews. Participants also received 1 point if they reported that 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 accounts not focusing on weight loss was part of a purposeful effort to develop a sample with a wide range of journeys beyond those solely weight loss-focused (a topic in much prior work)—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 priority score, we were attentive to overall respondent demographics and intentionally worked to assemble a diverse and varied range of perspectives along the axes of race, gender, sexuality and primary social media platform the participant posted their journeys on. This was motivated by a wish to amplify the experiences and voices of people of color in our 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 [86]. With respect to gender, we hoped to ensure we included men and non-women overall who have not commonly been prioritized for weight-related research. The study was open to diverse genders, but all participants identified as a man or woman. Table 1 provides some of our participants’ demographic information.

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. We conducted interviews on Zoom, a video and audio calling service, and deferred to participants’ preferences for a video or audio-only call. We used the interviews’ audio for transcription and analysis. The first author conducted and recorded the interviews, actively taking notes and writing memos. These interviews lasted from 40 to 90 minutes (average = 70 min) depending on how much participants wanted to share.

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. We asked about and report on participant demographics in their own words. 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.

3.4 Data Analysis

The first author conducted interviews with participants between October 2020 and January 2021. The authors frequently met to discuss themes occurring in interviews and plan next steps for selecting participants. For example, when noticing interesting themes emerged in an interview with a participant who used the *Reddit* platform, we reached out to a few more participants who also used *Reddit* to gain more insight on experiences documenting weight-related journeys on *Reddit*. We coded interview transcripts using Dedoose, a qualitative data analysis software.

The first author conducted inductive, open coding [22] of all interviews, ultimately generating 108 total codes, and maintained detailed notes throughout this process to account for context and emerging connections across interviews. By the time the first author reached the 13th interview, no new codes surfaced in the data. The authors met to discuss codes during this process. Following open coding, we used axial coding [22] by grouping codes into broader categories and themes and assessing for connections between these groups. The authors met to discuss these themes and relationships between them.

3.5 Limitations and Opportunities

Aligned with interview method's expectations, this study's findings are not generalizable; rather they provide in-depth understanding of phenomena. Future work could use other methods like surveys with representative samples to draw generalizable conclusions and assess our findings' applicability to the wider population. This study's findings pertain to individuals that were part of the recruitment service's participant pool. This leaves out the experiences of those 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 the global COVID-19 pandemic when time is scarce, energy might be strained and access to technology is critical for participating in interview studies, we 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. We conducted the study in English. This may have excluded participants who did not know English or were not comfortable in their fluency to participate. We initially recruited participants between the age range of 18 and 24 due to the age group's high levels of body dissatisfaction [97] paired with high levels of social media usage [91] and identity exploration [6] during emerging adulthood [5]. While this

choice provides insights on emerging adults' experiences, it does not represent other age groups' experiences who also experience weight stigma and might have unique experiences producing content about weight-related journeys. For example, older adults have been shown to struggle with body dissatisfaction and be at-risk for developing eating disorders [40, 74], particularly as they experience physiological changes as part of the aging process that moves them further from society's body ideals [76]. We advocate for future work that includes other age groups' and older adults in order to investigate social media experiences at the intersection of age, body size/weight, and other attributes. Additionally, our study focused on the U.S. cultural context, and as such, might not reflect the experiences of those who document weight-related journeys in other nations. Future work could examine similar topics in other cultural contexts or systematically examine intra-cultural differences within the U.S.. It is important to note that there may be differences in the ways users access, experience and delete past content across social media sites with different affordances. Our inquiry focused on the motivations and impacts of returning to the past, highlighting relevant affordances as surfaced in our data. While our participants mentioned accessing the past more generally by ways such as scrolling to a post or a post being brought to the forefront by a platform's memory feature, future work should aim to systematically understand the experiences of return using an affordances lens [26] across platforms to draw comparative conclusions. Our study covered topics about weight-related journeys, and as weight is a sensitive topic for many, we may have missed out hearing from those who did not feel comfortable speaking with a researcher on this topic. Acknowledging these limitations, we note that they did not interfere with the main contributions we make in this work in addressing our research questions.

3.6 Researchers' Positionality

Looking at the research on weight stigma and psychological and physical health [36, 50, 81, 99], the authors reject notions of weight as reflective of whether a body is healthy or not, and instead look at weight-related journeys as they operate within a world that stigmatizes weight. The authors take 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*. The authors also take the stance that *all* people, regardless of their health, deserve respect, dignity and compassion. These beliefs derived our intention in centering weight-related journeys beyond solely weight loss, and shaped our efforts to avoid judgment when speaking with participants with a range of attitudes toward weight and body size. When analyzing and interpreting participants' experiences, we viewed participants' mentions of weight loss, 'good' or 'bad' bodies, experiences and awareness of weight stigma, as part of the society in which they exist (with weight stigma and fatphobia.) Additionally, we understand this work as a step towards shaping technologies that support people in more kindly engaging with and managing stigmatized pasts and presents. However, we acknowledge the systemic roots of many issues discussed in this study which are beyond the capacity of an individual to simply 'think' their way out of stigma and social rejection. While technology may sometimes facilitate processes of managing some immediate well-being or emotional impacts of stigma or weight and body-related discrimination, a society that is designed for *all* bodies so that body and weight hold no bearing over ones' quality of life is the ultimate aspiration.

4 FINDINGS

We first describe the motivations for participants returning to past content about their personal weight-related journeys (RQ1). We then report on the perceived impacts returning to this past content had on participants, both positive and negative, and how participants responded to them (RQ2). Before addressing our research questions, we first establish the context in which participants'

experiences occurred to demonstrate their awareness of and experiences with weight stigma and fatphobia.

5 AWARENESS OF AND EXPERIENCES WITH WEIGHT STIGMA

While participants shared experiences with an array of weight-related journey types beyond weight loss, *all* participants shared stories demonstrating either an awareness of or experiences with weight stigma. For example, P14, a woman who had documented a weight loss journey that transitioned over time into a weight gain and weight acceptance journey, shared how posting a before and after photo made it clear people cared less about her when she was larger: *"I think the hard part about before and after photos is knowing that's the same person and the world perceives those people so differently and this after part, they perceive as more worthy...it hits you in the face that inherently because you weigh less, you are more worthy ..."* P14 explains how people react to before and after photos on social media shows how they place less worth and less value on those who weigh more. This devaluation on the basis of weight as P14 describes is exemplar of weight stigma experienced by the participants.

Others noted the roles that societal values play in experiences with weight stigma. For example, P15 reflects on how she makes sense of weight loss posts: *"...I make sense of those posts, and I'm able to say like, 'Okay, I think weight loss correlates [and] the number going down correlates so directly with beauty because of the world we live in. And that's what we've been taught, and that's what we've been sold.'...what that means is we live in a system that really profits and benefits off of us feeling bad about ourselves...and I think that's kind of the way that I think about these weight loss journeys, right?"* P15 explains how she understands weight operates in societal evaluation of worth and beauty, and how rejecting these notions is going against systems that profit from those believing and or internalizing weight stigma.

Participants also shared concerns about discriminatory experiences by others. For instance, P13 was one participant who throughout our interview, reiterated many times his fear of gaining weight and its anticipated consequences: *"It really scares me because I don't want to be 200 pounds, and 170 ... Just really, I don't want to be ignored and not talked to. I think the friends influence too because some of them, they aren't a good weight...I feel like I will be ignored if I'm overweight... I don't want that to happen to me...where no one talks to me."* P13 anticipated experiencing various forms of rejection if he were to gain weight. Later, P13 continued: *"I don't want to have ugly looking clothes. You know the famous people, Justin Bieber and all those famous people that are not overweight...I won't be handsome like them. If I'm going to be overweight, then I'm not going to look like them."* It is clear P13 has both awareness of weight stigma, and experiences stress over the thought of being socially rejected and perceived as unattractive because of weight. It is worth noting how the wider societal discourse around weight and one's desirability and worth surfaced in these examples from celebrities and what they look like to one's own network to the society broadly.

Resonating with prior work discussed earlier, participants demonstrated awareness of and experiences with weight stigma. These encounters with weight stigma cannot be separated from the contexts in which participants produce and re-visit their weight-related journeys' content. Any attempts to study weight-related journeys on social media without acknowledging the societal contexts in which they occur would limit our ability to understand and address the challenges of participants' experiences. We share these experiences, out of many, to provide a lens through which to understand participants' experiences with their past content as we describe next.

6 MOTIVATIONS FOR RETURNING TO PAST CONTENT

We describe participants' motivations to return to content about their personal weight-related journeys to establish an understanding of how they came to be impacted by their digital pasts.

These motivations include both individual (intrapersonal) and social (interpersonal) dimensions: 1) to reflect on their journey (individual), 2) to monitor, engage and reminisce on past audience engagements (social), 3) to delete past content (individual), and 4) to inform future content (individual). We also describe unintentional returns as a result of social media platforms' embedded memory features.

6.1 To 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 intentionally viewing 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."* Digital artifacts have the ability to support memory recall [115]. 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 in the past. 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 past content to recall decisions about their journey, such as the workouts they did or food they ate. For example, 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 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."* In this instance, P12's return was driven by wanting to reflect on her fitness technique and achievements from the past. Revisiting past content to view past choices and 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 a wish to remember past choices and actions they had made during their weight-related journeys prompted returns to the past.

Participants' remarks show 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. Returning to the past here was motivated by wanting to *remember*. These returns were made possible by social media's archival, persistence affordances.

6.2 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, wanting to see how their audience reacted to their posts provoked returning to past content. P16, who posted about a weight loss journey, explained that he returned to content about his journey on Reddit *"just to see if people saw it, if people liked the post, that sort of stuff..."* 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 help to others, something very important to her as a member of 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 or respond to their audience’s past responses led them to return to past content about their weight-related journeys.

Taken together, one’s audience, whether it be their engagement or interactions with content about participants’ weight-related journeys, motivated many to return to the past. This motivation was one of the only times participants mentioned an audience when describing their returns to the past, and this distinction highlights the uniquely intrapersonal nature of return for weight-related journeys on social media as opposed to predominantly accounting for an interpersonal audience (key to extant social media scholarship’s understanding on online presentation), which we reflect on in the Discussion section (8.4). These returns were made possible by social media’s archival, persistence affordances as well as the ability to interact with posts such as via comments.

6.3 To Delete Past Content

Participants shared that they sometimes returned to past content 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 (i.e., flattening of one’s audience into one group) [78], 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’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.”* Even when posting about her journey to Reddit with a pseudonym rendering her account somewhat anonymous, the concern of being identified caused P9 to return to past content. She continued: *“it’s anonymous, but what if someone I know was also on that community?”* Separation from P9’s network of known ties was key for her to feel safe enough to keep her content; photos’ visual mode has the potential to render one identifiable despite using a pseudonym, as was P9’s concern here.

Some participants experienced discomfort or harm by the presence of content about their weight-related journey on their social media accounts, and this led participants to return to content to delete it. For example, 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—an ephemeral feature that Instagram users can share to a designated list of approved users (‘close friends’) on the platform [55]—as she describes: *“I had a before picture, and I was like, ‘Should I post those, or not?’ I was kind of like... I don’t like that picture...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’...”* People may be hesitant to share accomplishments on social media, wondering if their achievement is significant enough to warrant a share. However, ephemeral social media may alleviate these concerns by promoting norms of sharing more mundane and trivial life aspects [31]. While only a few participants shared weight-related content experiences on ephemeral social media (e.g. Snapchat and Instagram’s Story feature), ephemeral posts were still the subject of returns for them.

Returning to past content to delete posts because of its negative impacts was also shared by others. For example, P14, who documented a weight loss journey that overtime transitioned into a

weight gain and ultimately, a weight acceptance journey, explained she returned to past content to delete it after recognizing its harmful impacts: *"I think a lot of [posts] 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 or experiencing body dysphoria due to viewing prior content, these participants shared that these negative experiences led them to return to the past content in order to delete it, perhaps as a way to forget and remove opportunities to reminisce.

Sometimes, participants reported returning 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 indifference or a lack of utility (e.g., audience engagement) from the post as a reason to return and delete it from their platforms.

Whether it be because of privacy concerns, discomfort or experiencing harm due to the content and what it means to participants, or disliking or no longer finding a post useful, wanting to delete content was one motivator for intentionally returning to posts about weight-related journeys. This desire to delete content due to indifference or concerns around privacy and harm challenges remembrance as a collective ideal, showing how forgetting can be beneficial to those accumulating a digital past on social media platforms. Affordances related to returning to past content with these motivations included the extent to which participants felt in control of their privacy (e.g., via different degrees of anonymity, separation from known ties) and the ability to delete content – supported by archival, persistence affordances.

6.4 To Inform Future Content Shared

Participants shared how they returned to past content to inform future content they would share about their weight-related journeys. For some participants, returns were motivated by wanting to make sure they post a variety of content or share content authentically representing their lives. For example, P15, who described her weight-related journey as a broader wellness journey, explained she returned to past content as a way of evaluating whether the journey she is 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's wish to present authentically prompted her return to past content, P5 returned to ensure 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, fostered by archival, persistence affordances, assisted them in shaping their future content to reflect authentic or diverse content about their weight-related journeys.

6.5 Unintentional Returns

Not all participants returned to past content intentionally. Participants shared how certain social media features such as "Snapchat Memories" and Instagram's "On This Day" brought their past to them. For instance, 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.”* P6 shared a similar experience of unintentional returns: *“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.”* While many participants spoke generally about returns to the past made possible by social media’s archiving affordances of storage and easily accessible data, these participants’ experiences highlight how returning to content is not always by-choice, and at times, built-in affordances like memory features decide for them. These participants’ accounts highlight a tension between social media design that by default creates memory recollection and the possibility of unwanted forced remembrance by users.

In summary, participants shared numerous reasons they return to past content about their weight-related journeys on social media. Participants returned to view 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 for reasons such as privacy concerns and negative impacts due to the persistence of this content. Other times, participants returned to decide on future content to share about their weight-related journeys. 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.

7 PERCEIVED IMPACTS OF RETURNING TO PAST CONTENT

In this section, we describe the impact viewing past content had on participants from their own perspective, including: 1) finding inspiration in one’s past self and journey, 2) drawing comparisons between one’s past self and current self, 3) celebrating and regretting perceived success and failures of one’s journey, 4) triggering harmful thought loops, and 5) shaping future choices made about one’s weight-related journey. As we will see in this section, motivations (section 6) and impacts of return (this section) are closely intertwined and overlapping, akin to how other social media behaviors (e.g., social support exchange) can be both a motivator and outcome of social media use [4]. We will unpack these relationships in the Discussion.

7.1 Inspiration Derived from Past Self and Journey

Many participants described how they felt motivated and inspired when viewing past content about their weight-related journeys.

For example, P8 described how 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...”* Participants display how viewing content about weight-related journeys may cause them 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.”* These experiences demonstrate how returning to past content about weight-related journeys can cause

users to derive support and motivation from their past selves' ability to overcome similar challenges they face in the present.

For some participants who perceived themselves as having lost progress (whatever it meant to them) on their journey, revisiting past content acted as a source of motivation that they could return to when they were closer to their goals. As P6 explained her experiences on Snapchat: *"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.'"* 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 a similar point in the future.

Together, made possible by archival, persistence affordances, participants explained how 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 have experienced in the past, as well as to be able to 'return' to their past self's accomplishments.

7.2 Comparison between Past Self and Current Self

Participants spoke to how returning to past content prompted them to compare their past selves to their current selves' physical and emotional condition, their mindset towards their journey, and their lifestyles. Seeing previous content led participants to compare their current bodies to their bodies in the past. For instance, P6 reflected on changes in her lifestyle and demonstrated the ways returning to past content 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...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."* P6's return to past content prompted physical appearance and lifestyle comparisons—of her body's physique as well as the current feasibility of her past fitness schedule.

For some participants, returning to past content also led to comparisons on how they *felt* about their bodies. For example, P8 explained that going back to content helped him not only see physical differences, but also notice changes in how he felt about his body during 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...the comparisons are just very, very, clear."* P8's experiences demonstrate the ways returning to content about one's weight-related journey can prompt comparisons between both the physical and emotional status of their past and current selves.

Additionally, participants 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 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.'..."* It is clear from what participants shared that returning to past content led 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...I’m like, who is that person?”* P17 also showed how returning to past content led 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. Archival, persistence affordances of social media facilitated these outcomes.

7.3 Celebrating and Regretting Perceived Success and Failure

Participants explained how returning to past content caused them to both celebrate perceived success and regret perceived failure 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 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 showing perceived 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’... Or I was like, ‘Oh, wow. I’ve come really far since then.’”* 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 experiencing negative feelings when returning to past content and believing they had lost progress toward their journey’s goals. P17 explained the shame he felt seeing photos he posted 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 progress (whatever progress meant to them).

7.4 Triggering Past Harmful Thought Loops

Some participants shared how when weight-related journeys included struggles with disordered eating, body dysphoria, and the like, returning to past content led them to develop harmful thought loops around these past behaviors and experiences. For example, 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 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 [we] 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, and the like. Even though P14 came to reject ideas of thinness and weighing less as desirable for her, she still found herself wrestling with viewing her past self through the lens of thinness as desirable and having harmful disordered eating thoughts triggered.

7.5 Shaping Decisions about Weight-Related Journeys

Some participants described how 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...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?’”* P2’s return to past content prompted a reflection of what future fitness decisions he should make on his weight gain journey after noticing his physical presentation didn’t presently meet his goals.

Overall, facilitated by archival and persistence affordances as well as the ability to post and delete diverse media, participants highlight how returning to past content about weight-related journeys impacted them, positively and negatively. Participants shared how 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 and current selves regarding their physical and emotional status, 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 they believed they had lost progress, revisiting content prompted negative feelings like embarrassment and shame. Sometimes, viewing previously posted content about weight loss journeys also triggered harmful thought loops. Lastly, participants shared how revisiting content shaped decisions about ongoing weight-related journeys.

8 DISCUSSION

In this section, we begin by reflecting on how returning to past content about weight-related journeys facilitates facing past selves and discuss how this brings to the forefront a complex relationship between one’s past and current self as mediated on and by social media. We argue that motivations of returning to the past result in dynamic interpretations of the past and current self. We cannot address these interpretations’ impacts *without* contextualizing them within a society where weight stigma, fatphobia, and specific body ideals are pervasive – as established in section 5. We then propose how social media designs may support users engaging with the past, particularly in sensitive and potentially stigmatized contexts, when the motivations and impacts of return are closely intertwined. Next, we highlight how people receive support *and* experience harm in the present time by returning to their own past social media content in what we conceptualize as *transtemporal support* and *transtemporal harm*, respectively. We suggest that designs facilitating

transtemporal support while mitigating transtemporal harm can promote reflective-sense making. Lastly, we discuss how documenting weight-related journeys on social media serve as examples of personal archives creating self-contained experiences of return, centering the individual, and putting users' self-concept and well-being at stake. We advocate social media platforms should better support users who may be storing potentially stigmatized, personal, and sensitive data on social media.

8.1 The Relationship between the Past and Current Self as Mediated on and by Social Media

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 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 [113], our findings show how consuming one's *own* past content exhibiting a weight-related journey can impact the current self.

Interactions with one's past serves as an opportunity to explore important non-traditional user relationships in HCI and CSCW research [12]—relationships that account for multiple subject positions one might have in relation to technology such as a person having multiple Twitter accounts to separate personal and professional networks, a mother using Facebook Groups on behalf of her daughter who wants to find a college roommate, or a person's Facebook profile turning into a memorial after they are no longer alive. Exploring returns to one's digital past allows us to consider interactions on social media between multiple versions of a *singular person* (e.g. their past and present self.) Our findings suggest that social media, when used in a way that documents weight-related journeys, facilitates the creation of 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 interpretation. 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 also reconstructions of experiences that are subject to dynamic interpretations*" [23] that can impact interpersonal relationships and one's sense of self. 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, their evaluation of the content in the present, as well as their journey's ultimate goals.

It may seem intuitive that someone would not feel positively if they are not making progress towards their stated goals or believe they are failing to achieve their goals. Prior research has established that when an individual fails to achieve their goals, they may experience a sense of failure and are prone to self-criticism [94]. Participants reported feelings of regret, shame, and embarrassment when they perceived themselves to not be achieving their weight-related journeys' goals. Alternatively, the achievement of one's goals positively impacts and sustains psychological well-being [118]. What makes weight-related journeys unique is the context in which these goals are set in—goals associated with an individual's weight—are *not neutral*. Participants, as described in Section 5, set their goals in a world and social media context where fatness is associated with laziness and undesirability, whereas thinness is associated with being desirable and worthy. Even for participants who strongly rejected weight loss as something to aspire to, interpretations of the past self and their weight-related journey sometimes reflected values of weight loss and thinness as desirable; evidence of how dynamic these interpretations can be when returning to past content about weight-related journeys.

Our study demonstrates how users' perceptions of their past and current selves is impacted by how they make sense of their journeys' goals *and* weight stigma. This sense-making is especially important as some social media users' goals—like those associated with weight—have pre-defined successful outcomes by society and industries (e.g., those using targeted ads on social media) that endlessly promote weight loss and thinness. One way social media platforms could support users in promoting less stigmatized meaning making of their past and present selves regarding their weight-related journeys' goals, is to change the environment in which these encounters with past content occur; one avenue is a collective ban on advertisements of products and services selling weight loss as the ultimate goal. Regardless of what participants' stated goals were on their journeys, it was clear, as demonstrated in Section 5, that they were impacted by and aware of weight stigma and the societal pressure to be thin. While Facebook and Instagram banned certain weight loss and diets ads from being shown to users under the age of 18 in 2019 [100], social media platforms that claim caring for their users' well-being should take stronger stances; for example, Pinterest banned *all* weight loss advertisements on their site for *all* users in 2021 [108] shortly after data analysis was completed for this study.

Future research may explore potential differences between how social media users make sense of their goals in relation to their sense of self (e.g. past self, current self) when returning to past content on social media that is sensitive and potentially stigmatized; this future work may provide insights into how social media platforms could support users making sense of their past in ways that helps them process their perceptions of achieving their goals without self-criticism and a sense of failure.

8.1.1 Context as integral to understanding and addressing impacts of returning to the past as mediated on and by social media. We discuss the contexts in which participants' motivations of return and the subsequent interpretations of their past and current self occur to better understand the impacts this return had on their perceived well-being; we highlight weight stigma, fatphobia, and body expectations as operational factors. Awareness of the context in which these motivations of return and associated impacts exist, identifies a target for where interventions, like education or social media campaigns countering the misconception of body size reflecting health or worth, may occur. By addressing weight stigma, fatphobia, and specific body ideals that surrounds the social media platforms in which these re-visits of the past happen, people may better be able to navigate the complex relationship between their past and current self as mediated on social media when documenting weight-related journeys; future work can look at what specific design affordances might assist in framing or recontextualizing weight-related content that leads to kinder interpretations of one's past or current self in ways that do not evaluate one's worth on the basis of weight. For example, future work might ask how social media may be designed to support a person experiencing harmful (to them) thought loops by seeing thinner or fatter past versions of themselves online so that they are able to work through those thoughts and reduce potential harms, such as P14 experiencing body dysphoria. This is a complicated inquiry because as our findings show, returning to the past can have both positive outcomes such as gaining support and encouragement and negative outcomes such as feelings of shame and failure.

We must not forget that individuals with weight-related goals are producing and returning to weight-related content in online spaces that are weight loss-centric and fatphobic [117]. It would be naive to assume they were able to do so without exposure to societal messages that propagate weight stigma, as we demonstrate in section 5. As Lydecker et al. 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” [71]

It is with this caveat on weight stigma that we look at the motivations and impacts of returning to past social media content about weight-related journeys. Solely addressing these impacts and 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.

8.2 Supporting Users in Engaging with Previously Posted Stigmatized Content

Participants shared the motivations behind their returns 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 (6.1) or to inform future content shared (6.4), some expressed discomfort around returning to past content (7.4) and desires to delete posts about their weight-related journeys (6.3). When managing 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 [120], particularly surrounding the limited affordances around deleting or ‘forgetting’ content that are reduced to either a permanent deletion or the ability to hide content from an audience but not one’s self [120]. They identify this tension as an opportunity for designers to support the safekeeping of digital possessions, including those that social media users may not wish to reminisce about.

Regarding supporting 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*” [120]. Haimson et al. propose various design opportunities to challenge the assumption that maintaining a connection to the past is ideal, such as social networking services requiring “*explicit work to maintain old photos and posts, rather than maintaining a personal archive by default*” [45]. When it comes to the documentation of weight-related journeys on social media, our findings show that supporting users through the development of additional features to help navigate sensitive, stigmatized past content is crucial.

On platforms such as Facebook and Snapchat, users now have the ability to turn off the platforms’ memory features that bring past content to the forefront [7, 107], a choice 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*” [64]. 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 [11]. 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. In these contexts, people may benefit from expanded design affordances that grant the ability to bulk delete or bulk archive content by attributes like date posted, hashtags, etc. Social media platforms should also consider making memory features opt-in as opposed to the default mandatory option to mitigate related harms *before* they occur.

These expanded design affordances should also allow for flexibility beyond how people can ‘forget’ the past by expanding beyond the binary of remembrance or forgetting when engaging with past content that stirs up negative feelings initially. Herron et al. do not posit digital possessions that stir up negative attitudes are 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 elicit [51]. In the context of relationship breakups, they argue that designing to support those reflecting on the end of their relationship could assist them to grapple with their relationship's end in ways that lead towards acceptance [51]. Similarly, one may ask, how might we design social media to support users who may be documenting weight-related journeys online in contexts where societal beauty ideals, fatphobia and weight stigma [18, 117] might be particularly salient to them regardless of their journey's ultimate defined goal? We share ideas for designing to support reflection in the context of weight-related journeys in the next section.

By examining weight-related journeys on social media, we show 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, always desirable options.

8.3 Designing for Reflection to Facilitate Transtemporal Support While Mitigating Transtemporal Harm

While our work identifies some adverse impacts when returning to past content on social media, it also highlights benefits, specifically regarding users deriving confidence, support, and empowerment enabled by social media archiving affordances and content persistence, the "*continued availability of content over time*" [27]. We propose the novel concept of *Transtemporal Support* to describe the support and validation that one receives in the present from their own content from a past time via engaging with their own past, in this case as mediated through social media by content persistence affordances. We understand *transtemporal support* as operating in the spaces between social support and personal self-support. Specifically, social support entails provision and receipt of support between two or more individuals [111]; personal self-support [119] constitutes individuals' independent actions to support themselves. *Transtemporal support* incorporates features of both, involving a one-way receipt of support between one's past self and current self which are arguably different individuals. *Transtemporal support* also includes elements of social support because it can entail people looking back at others' supportive interactions with their own past content, without needing to engage with them or without those interactions re-occurring in the present moment. Our analysis suggests that participants hold complex thoughts about their past, and these thoughts often lead to reflection as they reflect on their past and current selves in relation to their weight-related journeys. We propose designing social media to facilitate transtemporal support; this approach can mediate support over time as an individual's personal digital archive accumulates, and provide infrastructure that supports reflective sense-making for those with a sensitive, potentially stigmatizing past captured in their digital histories.

Indeed, reflection as a component of design has been of growing interest to scholars in CSCW, social computing, personal informatics, and HCI (e.g., [8, 30, 35, 47, 56, 66, 84, 85, 101, 109, 112]), particularly with technological accumulation of personal data and its subsequent opportunities for reflection. Past research has explored reflection as part of design, including auto-generated postcards to support non-judgemental self-reflection of food intake as displayed on one's social media [112], a music player that facilitates memory-oriented music listening by allowing users to delve into their personal listening history with different temporal settings [85], and a blogging website designed deliberately to create a private time for self-reflection in the space between when one's post is written and shared [8]. Given the potential for technology to accumulate health- or weight-related data, social media and its potential self-tracking uses present an opportunity for design to consider self-reflection in the context of potentially sensitive data.

8.3.1 Reflection in Personal Informatics and Self-Tracking Technologies. Reflection has been a topic of interest in personal informatics and self-tracking scholarship, especially in relation to health-related data. Several models in personal informatics [14, 83] center reflection as a valuable component for setting goals and making sense of one's data. For example, considering fitness trackers, Niess and Wozniak argue within their Tracker Goal Evolution Model that reflection is a key process that must occur for a person's goals to evolve, allowing a person to adapt their goals in response to new developments in their life [83]. In the Technology-Mediated Reflection Model, Bentvelzen et al. envision tracking technology that facilitates reflection when it is aligned with the conceptual and temporal needs of an individual, such as by offering additional tracking metrics when viewing collected data [13]. While this prior work discusses reflection in contexts of quantitative data and formal tracking technologies (e.g. fitness trackers, food trackers), social media presents an opportunity to view reflection considering the varied presentations of quantitative and qualitative data weaved throughout one's digital archive, such as the case of stickers featuring quantitative data added to ephemeral social media posts on Snapchat [32]. Additionally, those with complex goals may benefit from technological support for selecting, simplifying and adjusting their goals over time in order to participate in transformative reflection [3]. Lu et al., exploring how tracking technologies and social media may work together, suggest that while reflection may occur as a person's self-knowledge increases when using tracking technologies, social media could directly prompt reflection on one's current behaviors to encourage "positive behavioral change" [69]. When thinking of how to prompt reflection and help people experience its potential benefits, Peesapati et al. found that people value and actively engage with technology-mediated reflection when it is woven into their existing practices [90]. While our study did not focus on formal tracking technologies, we show how participants utilized social media in a way that documents (or tracks) a weight-related journey filled with both qualitative and quantitative data embedded in their posts, captions and the memories past content elicited. Social media's archiving affordances present an opportunity for its digital archives to be used in reflexive processes similar to those that have been of interest in the field of personal informatics.

Our findings mirror previous work exploring reflection with food-tracking to support one's perception of "healthy eating" on Instagram [19]. Chung et al. found that people reflected on past food-related decisions by returning to their own *and other's* past content in order to stay accountable, gain motivation, receive and exchange emotional support and inform new actions towards their described goals of healthy eating [19]. We extend this work by showing how reflection on social media implicates the relationship between one's past self and current self, as well as identify possible harms inflicted by reflecting on sensitive, emotionally charged, pasts. By highlighting the varying benefits and harms of returns to digital pasts, we emphasize the need for designers and researchers to account for reflective processes within the personal digital archives found on social media. Weight-related journeys present an opportunity to think of how designing for reflection [35, 47, 66, 101] might support those with sensitive or stigmatized past experiences.

8.3.2 Social Media's Digital Archiving Affordances as Reflection Resources: A Place for Transtemporal Support and Mitigating Transtemporal Harm. Social media and the personal digital archives they create act as resources for people to reflect on their past experiences in order to learn from the past [28, 72] and experience emotional value [56, 90], such as participants who returned to past words and felt inspired. However, simply the existence of a personal digital archive does not posit the occurrence of reflection; people often need to have grounds for reflecting or be motivated to do so [43, 80], such as the case of participants specifically returning to past content to see and reflect on their journeys (6.2). Fleck and Fitzpatrick's synthesis of reflection literature and what it means for design articulates 5 levels of reflection (0: Description, 1: Reflective Description, 2:

Dialogic Reflection, 3: Transformative Reflection, and 4: Critical Reflection) each with their own behaviors and actions [35]. Social media can be designed to help encourage reflection and support people through its various levels to support emotional value, engagement in sense-making, and experiencing changes in perspective [35]. Lower levels of reflection are necessary in order for the higher levels of reflection (resulting in change in behavior or understanding) to occur [49]. Fleck and Fitzpatrick argue that technology has the potential to be designed to support all levels of reflection, but is particularly well suited for the lower, foundation levels [35].

We argue that designing for transtemporal support is one way designers can facilitate reflection on potentially sensitive personal data and associated personal experiences as mediated on social media, including but not limited to those pertaining to weight-related journeys. Consequently, when designing for transtemporal support, designers may also find they are combating the negative impacts of return by providing the scaffolding to facilitate reflective sense-making that can lead to more compassionate interpretations of individuals' past and current selves.

While transtemporal support is an outcome of returning to past content on social media, our findings show that these returns can also be harmful. Participants' accounts highlight how viewing past content can be triggering, leading to negative thought loops (e.g., experiencing unwanted thoughts around disordered eating when looking back at weight loss journey past content). We thus complicate the notion of transtemporal support by introducing the concept of *transtemporal harm*, describing the psychological harm one can experience by engaging with their past content in the present as made possible by social media's archiving affordances and content persistence [27]. Indeed, the occurrence of memories triggering emotions and thoughts can impact well-being [38, 54, 79, 92]. These impacts can be exacerbated on social media as shown in past work on romantic relationships [51, 93, 102], gender transitions [44, 45], and now, weight-related journeys. Building on these past works and our findings, we argue that social media-mediated returns to the past (e.g., relationship, gender, or weight journey), intentional or not, have the potential to pose what we term transtemporal harm. All in all, we posit that in designing for transtemporal support, designers should also ensure that they do not perpetuate *transtemporal harm*. For example, people like P14 might benefit from designs that lead to built-in features that support them in realizing triggers and providing ways to mitigate their impact. Future work may explore other instances where transtemporal harm exists to better understand its manifestations and how to prevent and/or not perpetuate it.

To support social media users in reflective processes, future work could use participatory methods to explore ways of supporting transtemporal support, preventing transtemporal harm, and designing for reflection using the case of weight-related journeys. This work could draw on frameworks such as Fleck and Fitzpatrick's framework for reflection as a guide [35]. Additional reflection-centered design affordances may allow users to annotate their past with the thoughts and reflections of their current selves and help them make sense of the past content, beyond solely deleting or 'forgetting' the past. The result of such a design may be creating a personal history annotated and intertwined with the present in ways that may allow a user to receive ongoing transtemporal support from their past self at a future time, as well as allow the past content to now also house evidence of growth or changes in perspectives. This study 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 in our study, is stigmatized and holds sway over their well-being.

We identify *transtemporal support* and *transtemporal harm* as two qualities for designs to account for to address issues with platforms' archival tendencies and promote reflective sense-making. We propose these concepts for researchers and designers to consider when people may depend on additional built-in features and/or algorithms to navigate a past that is emotional, and potentially stigmatizing. Designing for transtemporal support and against transtemporal harm can be applicable

to other journeys with repetitive or chronic stigmatized personal experiences such as substance use disorder recovery, grief, or mental and physical illnesses that tend to have ups and downs. In these contexts, people may stand to benefit from evidence of their own ability to overcome challenges, and to read words that encourage and motivate them in the present. For example, what would it look like for a person to draw transtemporal support from their own past social media posts about a past drinking relapse experience when they experience another relapse in the future? Imagine a person in recovery from an eating disorder. What would it be like to design technologies (including algorithms) that facilitate transtemporal support without perpetuating transtemporal harm that one might experience when looking back at eating disorder-related content? Future research would benefit from delving deeper into cases where transtemporal support may be present to better understand how to design for it and thus, reflection. In doing so, we can improve our understanding of how reflection as mediated by technology can serve individuals in light of sensitive and potentially stigmatizing experiences. Further explorations into designing for reflection with sensitive content may also be particularly relevant for social media platforms hoping to address sensitive content that persists despite the use of automatic content moderation, such as the case of pro-eating disorder communities on Instagram [16]. Additional affordances to support sense-making and reflection embedded in social media may provide an alternative (or supplement) to content moderation to mitigate associated harms and garner benefits. Researchers could also draw inspiration from recent work in CHI and CSCW that considers designing *for* discomfort [46, 105]; for example, Halbert and Nathan propose a series of affordances that support critical reflection to help individuals engage with negative emotions of "discomfort, stress, and uncertainty leading to significant change in perspective" [46]. By designing for discomfort, designers may better support those experiencing transtemporal harm to engage in reflective sense-making when negative, unwanted or harmful emotions occur.

8.3.3 Reflection on Design for Reflection. While we deem designing for reflection to be productive to supporting social media users in some sense, it is also important to note that social media companies profit from their users' engagement and content [122]. It is important to view technology design within these existing structures of surveillance capitalism. While designing for reflection and transtemporal support means potential for improved well-being, it also means being part of existing structures that govern our online lives. However, we also imagine alternative sociotechnical futures outside of capitalist notions of profiting from people's difficult pasts. In those futures, designing for transtemporal support and against transtemporal harm are still relevant guidelines.

8.4 Weight-Related Journeys and the Self-Contained Nature of Return: Archives for Whom?

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 [51, 93, 102] or gender transitions [44, 45], 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 6.2). As such, 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.

8.4.1 Who do social media's archiving tendencies value? As discussed in section 8.1, 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 7. 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 do social media platforms aim to serve with their archiving tendencies? Does social media design provide a return to a personal archive that supports a user revisiting the past in ways that promote their subjective well-being, or does it lead them to revisit a past that centers or predominantly accounts for other people or the company's profit?* Weight-related journeys on social media and the self-contained nature of return forces us to consider how and for whom these platforms and their personal archive values are designed. Our study points to instances of both beneficial and harmful perceived impacts of return. How might social media be designed in ways that are more beneficial to individuals sharing journeys such as weight-related ones?

When thinking of users who may intentionally use social media to document journeys related to personal or potentially stigmatized experiences, the personal archive aspects of social media take on a particularly consequential role that designers must attend to. Documentation on social media 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 [87]), 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. Expanding design to account for the complex relationship between one's past and current self might be further supported by adopting a post-userist approach [12], calling on designers to move beyond considering the human as a simplified 'user' by accounting for multiple subject positions they might hold within social media's ecosystems. For example, we argue designers could consider the relationships and interactions that occur between multiple versions of a singular person (e.g. past self, current self). By doing so, social media design may be better equipped to handle the fluidity of users whose relations with their content might shift and change, for better or for worse, with time [12]. Designing for *Transtemporal support* and against *Transtemporal Harm* is one opportunity for social media design to support users in experiencing the benefits of a platform's archival tendencies by offering new affordances to support users in sense-making and providing opportunities to reflect on past content and versions of self in a supportive, personal environment. In doing so, designing for transtemporal support and against transtemporal harm can begin to address some of the negative consequences of personal archives centered on sensitive, stigmatized content.

Returns to the past for those who document journeys related to personal experiences—like weight-related journeys—may differ depending on their sense of community around their journey and/or the characteristics of the platform used to document their journeys. While our findings identified some relevant affordances (e.g., anonymity, separation from known ties, (non)diverse media types, persistence) hindering or promoting beneficial returns to the past, future work could theorize what affordances shape what outcomes (and how) in engaging with past social media content. On the potential role of identifying with a community, 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 explore how identifying strongly as part of a community might change the self-contained nature of return identified in this research.

By illustrating how social media users documenting weight-related journeys create personal archives centered on these experiences, we contribute to our knowledge about the consequences of personal data storage on social media as well as memory and other content persistence 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.

9 CONCLUSION

We conducted interviews (N=17) with U.S.-based social media users between the ages of 18 and 24 who post about weight-related journeys on social media. We examined the motivations behind and impacts of returning to past social media content about weight-related journeys. We found that individuals returned because they wanted to reflect on their journey; to monitor, engage and reminisce on past audience engagements; to delete past content; to inform future content; or without any motivation and instead unintentionally returning via social media 'memory' features. We identified several impacts as a result of these returns including participants being inspired by their past selves and feeling validated; comparing their past and current self; making sense of their perceived progress; triggering harmful thought loops; and shaping future decisions about their journeys. Drawing from our analysis, we propose the novel concepts of *transtemporal support* and *transtemporal harm*, to respectively describe the support and validation, as well as psychological harm one can experience as a result of returning to their own past, in this case as mediated on and through social media.

We argue that returns to past content on social media fostered an engagement between users' past and current selves in ways that resulted in ever changing interpretations and led to both positive and negative perceived impacts on well-being. We propose ways social media platforms may reconcile and support people in engaging with a past that is sensitive or impacted by stigma. We suggest designing for transtemporal support and against transtemporal harm is one avenue for research and design, with applications beyond weight-related journeys, and demonstrate how designing for transtemporal support and against transtemporal harm can support reflective sense-making. We note that any design accounting for transtemporal support and transtemporal harm do so within existing systems of surveillance capitalism where social media companies profit from user content and engagement, and imagine a world where sociotechnical systems may design for transtemporal support and against transtemporal harm without profiting from people's sensitive pasts. Lastly, we identified weight-related journeys as a case where researchers can explore the implications of social media as a personal archive where 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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Screening Survey

Please read the following paragraphs:

Thank you for participating in this screening survey. This survey's goal is to help us find eligible participants for an interview study. The goal of our interview study is to understand the ways people produce and engage with weight-related journeys on social media. Weight-related journeys are defined 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.

Research Team:

Student researcher: [Name and Institution]

Faculty Advisor: [Name and Institution]

You are eligible to participate in this survey if you:

a) use any type of social media; b) have produced content on your social media about a weight-related journey; c) live in the United States; and d) are between the ages of 18 and 24.

This screening survey will take around 5 to 7 minutes to complete. If you are invited for the interview study, we would like to have a conversation with you about your social media use via your preferred communication tool. This interview will last about 60-90 minutes. We will offer a \$20 Amazon gift card for participating in the interview study and helping us.

1. **Do you use any type of social media?** Yes/No (stop the survey if no)
2. **Have you produced content on your social media about a *weight-related journey* (weight loss, weight gain, weight maintenance, weight acceptance, etc.)?** Yes/No (stop the survey if no)
3. **Do you live in the United States?** Yes/No (stop the survey if no)
4. **What is your age now?** _____ (stop the survey if response is < 18 or >24).

[When the survey exists in one of the above criteria, the exit message will be: "We appreciate your interest and willingness to participate in our study. Based on your responses so far, it seems like you do not meet the minimum eligibility criteria for participation."]

Responses to this survey are private and confidential. We ask for your email address only so that we can get in touch with you if you are invited for the interview study. If you are not selected to participate in the interview study, we will not keep your email address but we may use your de-identified responses to this survey in our analysis. We appreciate your input.

1. **What social media do you use?** [Select all that apply]
 - a. Facebook (not Facebook groups)
 - b. Facebook groups
 - c. Instagram
 - d. Twitter
 - e. TikTok
 - f. Snapchat
 - g. Pinterest
 - h. LinkedIn
 - i. Reddit
 - j. Tumblr
 - k. Discord
 - l. Other: [Please type in]
2. **Which social media platforms do you primarily post content about your *weight-related journey* on?** [Please type in]
3. **How often do you post content directly or indirectly related to your *weight-related journey* on social media?** For example, this could refer to a post where your photo and caption directly talks about your journey's progress, or a post that shares you doing an activity related to your journey.
 - a. Daily
 - b. Weekly
 - c. Monthly
 - d. Other: [Please Specify]
4. **Would you say that your social media feed is dedicated to documenting your *weight-related journey*?**
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. I Don't Know
 - d. Other: [Please Specify]
5. **Please select what best describes the *weight-related journey* you post/posted about on social media:**
 - a. Weight Loss
 - b. Weight Gain
 - c. Weight Maintenance
 - d. Weight Acceptance
 - e. Other: [Please Specify]
6. **How would you describe your body size?** [Please type in]
7. **How do you think others (for example, a person viewing your social media posts) would describe your body size?** [Please type in]
8. **What is your gender?** [please type in]

9. **What pronouns would you like us to use to refer to you?** [please type in]
10. **What is your race?** [please type in]
11. **What is your ethnicity?** [please type in]
12. **What is your sexual orientation?** [please type in]
13. **What is your highest education level?** (Some high school/High School/Some College/College/Some Graduate School/Graduate Degree)
14. **What best describes your current employment status?** (Employed full-time/Employed part-time/Out of work and looking for work/Out of work but not currently looking for work/Stay-at-home-parent/Student/Military/Retired/Unable to work)
15. **What was your total household income during the past 12 months?**
 - a. Less than \$25,000
 - b. \$25,000 to \$34,999
 - c. \$35,000 to \$49,999
 - d. \$50,000 to \$74,999
 - e. \$75,000 to \$99,999
 - f. \$100,000 to \$149,999
 - g. \$150,000 to \$199,999
 - h. \$200,000 or more
16. **What is the best email address to contact you if you are selected and invited to participate in the interview study?** [please type in]

If you have any questions please feel free to contact this study's researcher, [Name and Email]

The [Institution's Name] Institutional Review Board has determined that this research is exempt from IRB oversight.

Interview Protocol

“Hi, my name is [Name]— I’m a researcher at the [Institution’s Name]. I’m here to better understand how you produce and engage with content about weight-related journeys on social media. This interview will take about 60-90 minutes, during which time we’ll go through some questions. I might ask you to talk about some of the posts you’ve made about your journey on social media. Feel free to reference your phone and open up to your social media if that may be helpful.

A couple of things before we start. We will take your comments to be confidential and any quotes used from this interview will be anonymized. This interview is entirely voluntary on your part, and we appreciate your participation – if for any reason you want to pause or end our conversation or don’t feel comfortable answering certain questions, please let me know.

Do I have your permission to record this interview? [wait for them to consent]

Do you have any questions for me? All right, then, let’s proceed.”

[Warm-Up]

1. Before we begin, can you tell me about the social media that you use and what you typically use each for?
 - a. What kinds of content do you typically post on social media?
 - b. Who are you connected to on each social media?
2. Which social media platform do you primarily post content about your weight-related journey? Tell me more about that. What draws you to that social media platform?
 - a. Of the social media you use, on which platforms do you come across weight-related journeys most frequently?
 - i. Why do you think those platforms have more of these sorts of content on them?

[Weight-Related Journeys on Social Media]

3. What comes to mind when you think about weight-related journeys on social media?
 - a. (if needing a prompt) What sort of content do you usually see on social media that is about weight-related journeys?
4. Do you remember what age you started to come across this type of content on social media?
 - a. If yes, how did you engage with them primarily? Can you tell me more about that?
 - i. Has that changed since you've gotten older? If yes, in what ways?
5. How would you describe your primary reaction to seeing content about weight-related journeys shared on social media?
 - a. (if needing a prompt) What do you generally think about the act of sharing weight-related journeys on social media?

- b. Why do you think people share these journeys?
- 6. What do you typically look for when you come across these sorts of content?
 - a. (if needing a prompt) Do you check out their profile?
 - b. Can you tell me more about that? What draws you to this?

[Producing Content on Social Media]

- 7. You said in the screening survey that you personally produce content about a **{insert type of weight-related journey}** journey. When did you start producing that content? Tell me more about that.
 - a. Did you have any hesitation? If yes, why? If no, why not?
 - b. Do you use a pseudonym on your account? Why or why not?
- 8. How long have you been producing content about your journey on social media?
 - a. Do you have a 'schedule' for when you post? Daily? Weekly? Or is it unplanned?
 - b. How would you describe your process of making posts on social media?
 - i. How did you come up with this process?
 - c. What do you pay most attention to when posting content on social media? Why?
 - d. Do you have any concerns when you post content? If yes, what are they? Why?
 - i. Have you ever done anything to try and manage these concerns?
 - 1. If yes, what? How did you decide to do this?
 - 2. Have you ever posted something that you later regretted? Can you tell me more about that?
 - 3. Can you tell me about the kinds of posts you've made/make about your weight-related journey?
 - e. How did you come to decide what sorts of posts to make about your weight-related journey?
 - f. If you don't mind sharing, can you describe to me a few posts that you've made recently?
 - i. What do the photos look like? What were the captions?
 - ii. Can you tell me more about these posts? What drew you to make them?
 - g. Are there kinds of posts or content you see others post about their weight-related journey that you haven't made for your own?
 - i. What are they?
 - ii. Why have you not made those sorts of posts?
- 9. What motivates you to post about your weight-related journey?
 - a. Would you say you have a goal when you post? If yes, what is your goal?
 - i. Do you think you are accomplishing that goal?
 - 1. How does that [if yes or no] make you feel?
- 10. Do you feel that your identity, your gender/race/body size or other identity facets or attributes shape what you share about your weight-related journey at all?
 - a. If yes, in what ways? How has your content been shaped or influenced?
 - i. (if needing a prompt) Have you felt like you ever changed your content because of anything related to your identity?
- 11. What do you typically do right after you post about your weight-related journey? Why?

- a. Do you ever return to previous posts you've made? If yes, why? If no, why do you think you do not?
- 12. How do you usually feel after you post about your weight-related journey?
 - a. Have there been any posts of yours that stand out to you as having a strong impact on how you feel? Can you tell me a little bit more about that?
 - i. Why did it have a strong impact on you?
 - ii. How did you handle or respond to that?

[Audience and Expectations of Weight-Related Journeys on Social Media]

- 13. Who do you want your audience for your content about your weight-related journey to be?
 - a. What about this audience appeals to you?
- 14. Who do you not want your audience to be? Is there anyone or any kind of audience that you specifically do not want to see your content? Can you tell me more about that?
- 15. Have you had an engagement with anyone who's seen your posts that stood out to you? Perhaps it had a strong impact on you or impacted you emotionally?
 - a. Can you tell me more about it?
 - b. Why did it stand out to you (or have the impact on you that it did)?
- 16. When people come across your posts about your journey, how do you think they perceive you?
 - a. Why do you think this? How does this make you feel?
 - b. Does this impact how you choose to produce your content?
- 17. Do you feel that you are expected to portray your journey in a certain way? Can you tell me more about that?
 - a. (if needing a prompt) Do you feel that your audience expects you to feel or look a certain way as you document your journey?
 - b. How do you make sense of these expectations?
 - c. Have you ever directly or indirectly addressed these expectations?
 - i. (if needing a prompt) For example, have you ever made a post challenging these expectations or expressing your opinion regarding them?
 - ii. Do these expectations impact your experiencing documenting your weight-related journey in any way?
 - 1. Can you tell me more about that?

[Perception of Weight-Related Journeys]

- 18. How would you describe a person who has a "positive relationship" with their body?
 - a. (if needing a prompt) What does a positive relationship with one's own body mean?
 - b. What does this look like day to day?
 - c. What does this feel like?
 - d. What does someone who has a 'positive relationship' with their body do?
 - e. Do you think most people you see on your social media platforms would agree with you? Can you tell me more about that?

19. Can you tell me a little bit about the relationship you've had with your body throughout your life?
 - a. Has weight impacted this relationship? Can you tell me a bit more about that?
20. How do you make sense of the ways you use social media in regards to this relationship you have with your body?
 - a. {if needing a prompt} Have your posts and content you choose to share been impacted in any way by the relationships you have/had with your body? Can you tell me more about that?
21. Do you think your relationship with your body has changed since you've posted about your weight-related journey on social media?
 - a. If so, in what ways?
 - b. Can you tell me more about that?
22. Generally speaking, when you look at the content you've posted about your weight-related journey, how does it make you feel about your body?
 - a. Can you tell me more about that?
 - b. What about your social media posts leads you to feeling this way?
23. Do you think your weight-related journey on social media shows someone who has a positive relationship with their body?
 - a. Can you tell me more about that? What specifically shows this {positive or negative} relationship you have with your body?
24. If you'd change anything about your experience with {insert social media platform} and content about weight-related journeys, what would you change? Why?
 - a. What do you think the impact of this would be? On Yourself? On Others? Why?
 - b. {prompt} If you could change anything about the social media platform itself, what would you change? Why?

These were all the questions that I had. Thank you so much for sharing your experience with me. Is there anything else you'd like to add that we haven't talked about in regards to weight-related journeys on social media that you think is important?

On that note, we'll be in touch with your gift card over email in the next few weeks. Thank you again.

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