

Documenting a Life Well-Tracked: A Blueprint for the Quantified-Self Archive

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Abstract: One of the founders of the quantified-self movement, Kevin Kelly, logged the devices and tracking systems that surveil people living in the United States, including systems that are initiated by the individual and external entities. Driving habits, physical location, communication patterns, work activities, utility usage, screen activity, consumer purchases, entertainment consumption, financial progress, sleep patterns, health status, and physical activity are but some of the facets of a life well-tracked.

Historical examples of self-tracking records have found a home within institutional archival repositories including at the Louise M. Darling Biomedical Library, home to a collection of over 1300 nineteenth and twentieth century baby books containing parental records monitoring the mental and behavioral development of their infant children. While the idea of the long-term value of digital self-tracking data has been articulated in the HCI literature, the lag between the creation and the archiving of societal data means that the archival profession has only begun to look at preserving the new regimes of recordkeeping characteristic of an individual's mobile life from the 1990s to today.

The poster reports on findings from a qualitative study on the long-term value of personalized collections of quantified-self records. The study examined three main research questions.

- How is the conduct of everyday life mediated by self-tracking data, tools, and methods?
- What meaning do individuals assign to self-tracking data across their lifetime?
- How should we design to support the long-term personal use of self-tracking data, as well as the subsequent archiving of self-tracking data for societal purposes?

About the authors:

Ciaran Trace studies what constitutes a literate society and the role that people play in creating and sustaining literate environments. Using a variety of methods (historical, qualitative, quantitative, and experimental) she studies the nature of information objects, the history of information institutions and information work, the use and deployment of information in everyday and in professional settings, and the impact of information on the daily lives of individuals and of members of social groups. Spanning the period from the Progressive Era to modern times, her research has illuminated the information worlds of disparate communities, including Southern state archival agencies, 4-H clubs, self-trackers, and humanities scholars.

Yan Zhang's research centers on consumer health information needs and information search behavior, with a focus on the evaluation of the quality and credibility of online health information

and the impact of contextual factors (e.g., tasks) on search behaviors. She is also interested in designing user-centered information interventions to help users more effectively access high-quality online health information.