Kai Lukoff
PhD Student
University of Washington
CSCW Workshop Position Paper: Social Issues in Personal Informatics

Tracking Together with Close Ties as an Act of Solidarity

Acts of solidarity are a feature of close relationships. When someone has cancer that requires chemotherapy, friends may shave their heads. When a woman is pregnant, her partner may forgo alcohol. When a person chooses to eat vegetarian, their family members may reduce the meat they eat at home. This position paper explores how tracking together with *close ties* can serve as an act of solidarity.

Solidarity can be defined as "shared practices reflecting a collective commitment to carry 'costs' (financial, social, emotional, or otherwise)" [10]. At the level of individuals, solidarity also entails a recognition of one's *similarity or sameness* to others in at least one relevant respect [10]. In this way, solidarity is distinguished from support, which--while valuable too--is often asymmetrical. A doctor supports her patients, but she does not practice solidarity. Acts of solidarity say, "We're in this together," or even, ""I know you would do the same for me, if our situations were reversed."

How can tracking together serve as an act of solidarity? Prior literature has explored solidaristic practices in communal tracking, when people track with *weak ties*. Lupton describes how people in the Quantified Self (QS) movement see themselves as part of a community of trackers, which motivates them to share their numbers [6]. Sharon chronicles how this data show-and-tell is driven by not just an individualistic quest for self-knowledge, but also a desire to connect with others [11]. However, Sharon also points out that the form of solidarity in such contexts is quite "narrow." As Ajana puts it, "solidarity becomes almost synonymous to data sharing and information giving" [1].

Here I propose tracking together with *close ties* as an opportunity for even *richer* enactments of solidarity. Prior research in family informatics, while not explicitly focused on solidarity, suggests numerous possibilities for support through collective commitment. Pina et al. found that current tracking tools often lack support for secondary caregivers, meaning that the burden of tracking falls solely upon a primary caregiver [9]. Munson and Consolvo found that [8]. In a paper that I will present at CSCW

2018, colleagues and I report that tracking eating together as a family facilitated new opportunities for social support, particularly tangible support [5].

Between close ties, tracking together in solidarity could offer a number of benefits over tracking alone. First, it could reduce the isolation of tracking alone. Our study on family tracking revealed that a key function of messaging within our journaling application was to "check-in" with other family members and ensure that everything was alright. Second, it could be a means for close ties to offer support without upsetting social dynamics. For example, if only one member of a family tracks a condition while the others provide support, it can foster an asymmetrical 'patient-caregiver' relationship. Saying "we should track" could offer a far more reciprocal relationship than "you should track," and may be a good choice for fostering equal standing in relationships. Third, tracking together could create opportunities for teaching that would not exist if an individual were journaling alone. By contributing their data to a shared tool, an individual could have more credibility and better illustrate practices that could help a close tie address their goals.

Benefits of Attendance
Attending this CSCW workshop will allow me to receive feedback on how to apply my ideas about solidarity in social tracking. My larger research agenda addresses how to support more *intentional and meaningful* use. One concern that many people have is how technology can adversely affect their social interactions. My current research project addresses how people can monitor and manage their smartphone use to bring it more in line with their enduring values (e.g., avoiding distractions when spending time with their loved ones).

As part of my upcoming work, I plan to explore is how families can track their technology use together, a practice that could foster a sense of solidarity and help children and parents alike act with greater intentionality. Many commercial tools enable parents to track or limit their children's technology use (imposed tracking [6]). However, recent work that finds it is not only parents who have concerns over the technology use of their children, but that children too have concerns about the actions of their parents [7]. Whether or not a child is able to follow a household technology rule is mediated by whether or not the child feels they had a voice in its creation [2]. Building on tools for tracking technology use that allowed groups to track together [3,4], I seek to explore how a family can track together.

Note: Yes, I wish to be considered for a provocative short presentation.

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