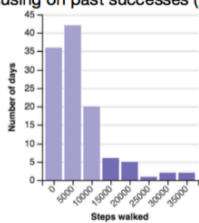


Life after Fitbit: Appealing to those who feel guilty vs. free

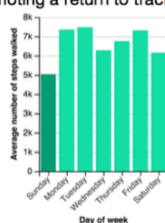
September 8 2016, by Jennifer Langston

(a) Histogram of steps walked per day (V1) focusing on past successes (F2)



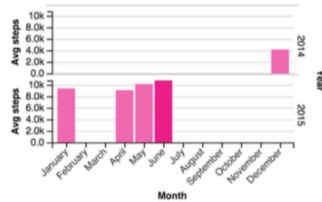
You walked over **15,000** steps **16** times. Great job!

(b) Average steps by day of week (V2) promoting a return to tracking (F4)



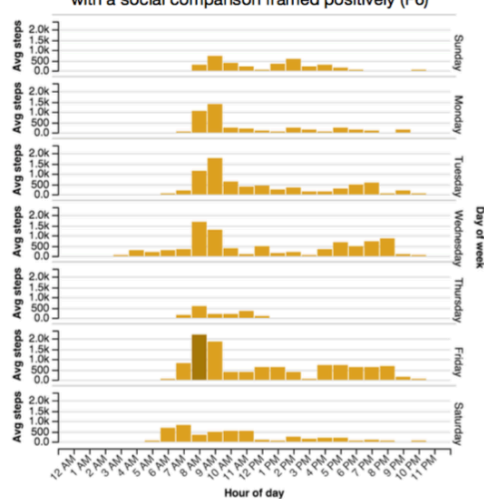
You walked an average of **5,055** steps on **Sundays**. Would you consider starting to use your Fitbit again?

(d) Average number of steps in month and year timeline (V5) with a social comparison framed negatively (F7)



June 2015 was your best walking month, you averaged **10,840** steps per day. **59%** of other Fitbit users had a better month.

(c) Average number of steps by hour and day of week (V7) with a social comparison framed positively (F6)



You walked the most between **8am** and **9am** on **Fridays**, averaging **2,231** steps. That's more than **52%** of other Fitbit users' best hour of a day.

The UW research team tested different types of data visualizations and social comparisons with lapsed Fitbit users. Credit: University of Washington

Personal tracking tools—technologies that meticulously count our daily steps, map our runs, account for each purchase - fall in and out of favor in users' lives.

People abandon self-tracking for different reasons, University of Washington researchers have found. Some don't like what their Fitbit or

financial tracking tools reveal, others find collecting data a hassle, don't quite know how to use the information or simply learn what they need to know about their habits and move on.

"We got curious about what it's like for people after they stop using self-tracking tools," said Sean Munson, a UW assistant professor of human centered design and engineering. "Do they feel great, do they feel guilty, do they feel like they've gotten everything they need?"

In [research presented earlier this year](#) that surveyed 193 people who had abandoned personal informatics tracking, the team found many people experienced no real difference in their lives. Other emotions, however, ranged from guilt over not being able to keep it up to relief from the tyranny of self-tracking.

Now, in a [paper](#) to be presented Sept. 15 at the Association for Computing Machinery's 2016 International Joint Conference on Pervasive and Ubiquitous Computing (UbiComp 2016), the researchers explore how different design approaches may better support people who have lapsed in their Fitbit use.

	N	Days Tracked	# Trials	Consistency
Short Use	49	avg 57	med 1	avg 77%
		min 4	min 1	min 17%
		max 128	max 2	max 100%
Long and Consistent Use	42	avg 316	med 1	avg 87%
		min 113	min 1	min 57%
		max 1053	max 2	max 100%
Intermittent Use	50	avg 216	med 3	avg 75%
		min 8	min 2	min 38%
		max 621	max 6	max 100%

	N	Would Return	Representative Perspectives
Learned Habits	5	Agree: 20% Neutral: 40% Disagree: 40%	<i>"I feel that I know my habits enough now"</i>
Useless or Negative	21	Agree: 24% Neutral: 0% Disagree: 76%	<i>"It didn't do anything useful for me" "Don't want to fall into obsessive habits again"</i>
Guilt or Frustration	70	Agree: 97% Neutral: 3% Disagree: 0%	<i>"Although I have gotten off track, I'd like to be more conscientious about using my Fitbit... it really did help me."</i>
Conflicting Feelings	45	Agree: 76% Neutral: 18% Disagree: 7%	<i>"I have one, I could be getting data, but I'm lazy and don't" "I liked using my Fitbit, but I don't have the money right now for a new one"</i>

Nearly half of participants felt guilt or frustration over abandoning tracking, while a few felt they had learned enough about their habits. Credit: University of Washington

"People feel more guilt when it comes to abandoning health tracking, as compared to something like location tracking, which is more of a fun thing that people do for a while and move on from," said lead author

Daniel Epstein, a UW doctoral student in computer science and engineering.

"We definitely don't think that everyone should be tracking forever, but we wanted to see if there are design opportunities to better support people who have had different experiences using Fitbit."

The research team surveyed 141 people who had lapsed in using Fitbit. They showed the subjects seven different visual representations and ways of framing previously collected data, to see if the data could offer additional support and encouragement to be healthy if portrayed in new and interesting ways.

Half of these Fitbit users described feeling guilty about their lapsed Fitbit use, and nearly all of those said they would like to return to activity tracking. Twenty-one said they got no value out of tracking, found it annoying, or struggled to connect the data to behavior change. Five participants felt they had learned enough about their habits, and 45 reported mixed feelings about abandoning their Fitbit.

The researchers found that lapsed users responded differently to seeing their old Fitbit data presented in new ways, depending on their personal tracking history.



In general, people preferred social comparisons that indicated they had performed better than their peers. Credit: University of Washington

Participants who had tracked their fitness levels for less than four months preferred visualizations that showed them which days of the week or time of day they were active, while those with a longer track record preferred visualizations that highlighted the length of their activity record.

Most people preferred social comparisons that made them look better than their peers, such as "you walked more than 70 percent of people," over those that were framed negatively, such as "30 percent of people walked more than you" - even if the comparisons represented the same information.

The team also found that people who felt guilty about abandoning their

Fitbit use were very receptive to recommendations that they return to tracking, while people who felt they had gotten what they had wanted out of self-tracking felt those same suggestions were judgmental and unhelpful.

The responses show, researchers say, that a one-size-fits-all design approach misses opportunities to support different types of users.

"Right now self-tracking apps tend to assume everyone will track forever, and that's clearly not the case," said co-author James Fogarty, a UW associate professor of computer science and engineering.

"Given that some people feel relief when they give it up, there may be better ways to help them get better value out of the data after they're done, or reconnect them to the app for weeklong check-ins or periodic tune-ups that don't presume they'll be doing this every day for the rest of their lives."

Provided by University of Washington

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