

Autoethnography of a Hard of Hearing Traveler

Dhruv Jain, Audrey Desjardins, Leah Findlater, Jon Froehlich
University of Washington, Seattle



Hard of hearing

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Before starting my PhD, I backpacked 21 countries.

This talk is about my experiences during the backpack tour
and also occasional travel as a PhD student.

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Hard of hearing

A person wearing a white cap and a dark shirt is riding a camel across a sand dune. The camel is carrying a large red and white bag. The background shows a clear blue sky and some green bushes in the distance. A white arrow points from the text 'Hard of hearing' to the person on the camel.

But why are we examining my travel?

During travel, an individual interacts with different people, culture and environment.




A silhouette of a person with a backpack walking on a ridge at sunset. The sky is a gradient of orange, yellow, and teal. Several birds are flying in the sky. The person is walking from left to right.

For people with disabilities, examining travel experiences could reveal how **disability** affects **communication** and **navigation** in diverse contexts.

A man with dark hair and a beard is shown in profile, looking towards the right. He is wearing a dark t-shirt and a red wristband. In the foreground, a lizard is resting on the sand. The background features a sandy beach with scattered rocks and a large piece of driftwood. The scene is dimly lit, suggesting dusk or dawn.

We critically examined my travel to investigate **how deafness shapes my experience** in diverse contexts.

RELATED WORK

A person wearing a hat and sitting in a wheelchair is on a beach, with their arms raised in the air. The background shows the ocean and a clear sky. The image is dimmed to serve as a background for the text.

Prior accessible tourism studies have largely **investigated experiences of people with visible disabilities** (e.g., vision or physical impairment).

RELATED WORK

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Interviews about DHH people's experiences in international conference (Friedner, 2014)

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Interviews about DHH people's experiences in international conference (Friedner, 2014)



Online survey of Deaf backpackers (Zajadacz, 2013)



We offer a longitudinal exploration of a hard of hearing traveler's experiences from a **highly personal view** using

A person with dark hair is sitting on a sandy beach, looking out towards the ocean. The background shows a rocky shoreline with driftwood and waves breaking. The scene is dimly lit, suggesting dusk or dawn.

We offer a longitudinal exploration of a hard of hearing traveler's experiences from a **highly personal view** using

autoethnography

AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHY

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A qualitative research method where **researcher adopts the role of participant** and uses *"self-reflection to explore their personal experience and connect their story to wider **cultural, political, and social** meanings."* (Ellis, 2010)

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A qualitative research method where **researcher adopts the role of participant** and uses *"self-reflection to explore their personal experience and connect their story to wider **cultural, political, and social** meanings."* (Ellis, 2010)

This method examines the **lived experience from within**, generating **rich personal insights** rarely available through other research methods.

AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

A qualitative research method where **researcher adopts the role of participant** and uses "self-reflective **ethnography** to interpret their story to wider **cultural, political, and social** meanings." (Ellis, 2010)

But why did we choose to use **autoethnography?**

AUTOETHNOGRAPHY FOR ACCESSIBILITY

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- Disability is **highly personal**; every person with disability is different.

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- We wanted to **amplify my first-person voice** as a hard of hearing researcher in various contexts.

AUTOETHNOGRAPHY FOR ACCESSIBILITY

- Disability is **highly personal**; every person with disability is different.
- We wanted to **amplify my first-person voice** as a hard of hearing researcher in various contexts.
- Our hope is to **diversify the array of methods** used in the ASSETS community.



THE AUTOETHNOGRAPHER



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- Severe to profound hearing loss



THE AUTOETHNOGRAPHER

- Severe to profound hearing loss
- Wears **hearing aids** in both ears



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- Wears **hearing aids** in both ears
- Relies on **facial cues to communicate**, thus communication is difficult if speaker's face is not visible



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- Severe to profound hearing loss
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- Beginner level signer
- Uses real-time **captioning** in lectures and group meetings

TIMELINE



TIMELINE



Autoethnography research begins

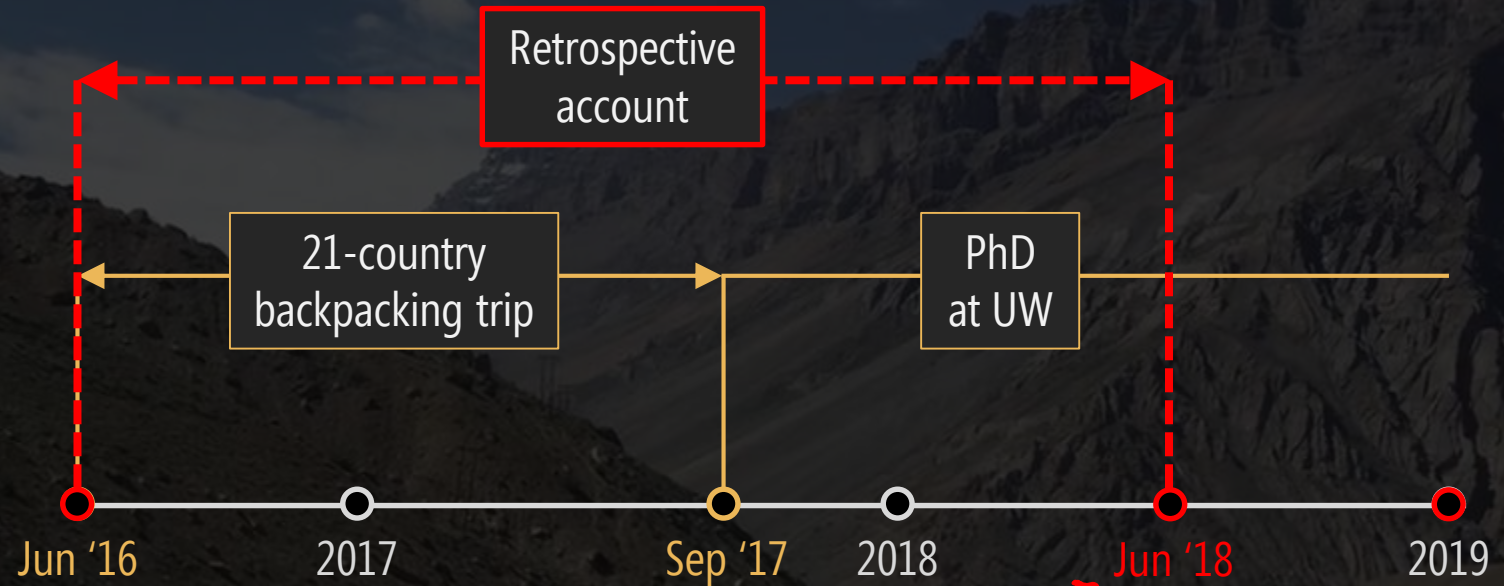
TIMELINE



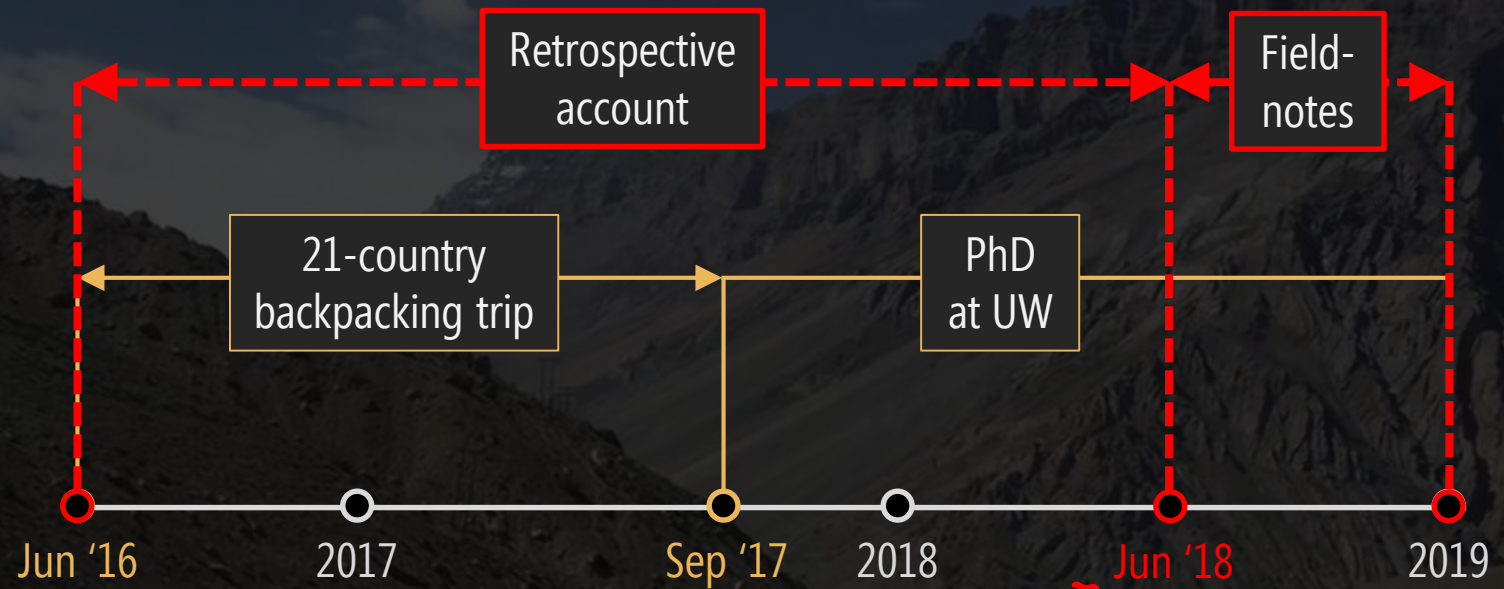
Autoethnography research begins



*Autoethnography
research begins*



Autoethnography research begins




Autoethnography research begins



Retrospective
account

Field-
notes

A dark, wide-angle photograph of a mountain valley. The foreground shows a rocky, sloping bank on the left and a wide, flat riverbed in the center. In the distance, a small vehicle is visible on the right side of the riverbed. The background features rugged, rocky mountains under a dark sky with some clouds. The overall scene is dimly lit, suggesting dusk or dawn.

(22 events, 7312 words)

Retrospective
account

(25 events, 7876 words)

Field-
notes

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Field-
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Thematic analysis



(22 events, 7312 words)

Retrospective
account

(25 events, 7876 words)

Field-
notes

Thematic analysis

Emergent Themes



EMERGENT THEMES

Our findings detail my experiences in varying **geographies, societies, cultures** and also presents my **relationship to technologies.**

A silhouette of a person walking away from the viewer on a beach at sunset. The person is carrying a bag over their shoulder. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a bright glow and reflecting on the water. The sky is a mix of orange, yellow, and dark blue.

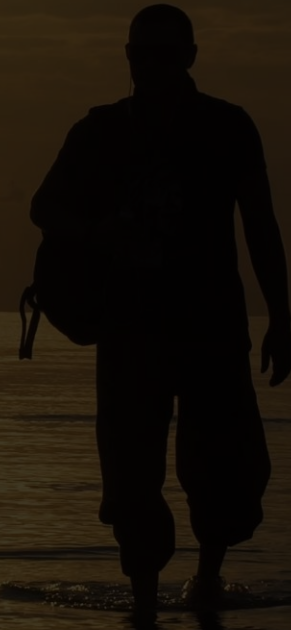
EMERGENT THEMES

In today's talk, I will discuss **three themes**.

A silhouette of a person walking away from the camera on a beach at sunset. The person is carrying a bag and is walking towards the ocean. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a bright reflection on the water. The sky is a mix of orange and dark blue.

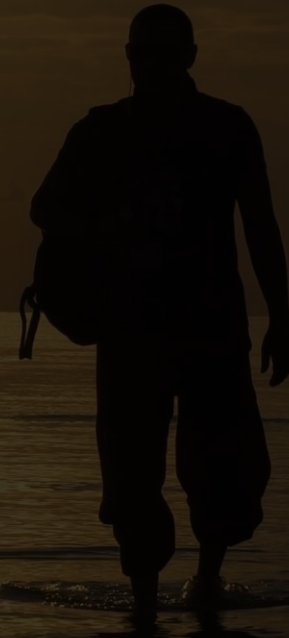
EMERGENT THEMES

1. **Environmental** complexities



EMERGENT THEMES

1. **Environmental** complexities
2. **Cultural** tensions

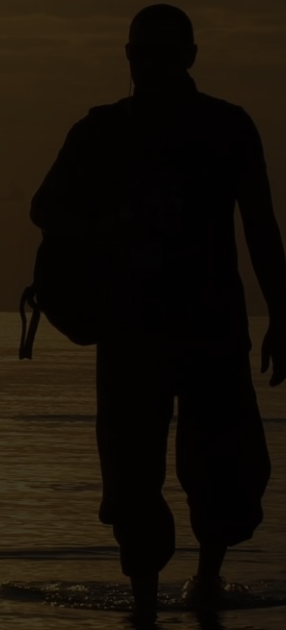


EMERGENT THEMES

1. **Environmental** complexities
 2. **Cultural** tensions
 3. **Relationship** to assistive **technologies**
- 
- A silhouette of a person walking away from the viewer on a beach at sunset. The person is carrying a bag and is walking through shallow water. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a bright reflection on the water and a warm, golden glow in the sky. The overall mood is contemplative and serene.

EMERGENT THEMES

1. **Environmental** complexities



EMERGENT THEMES

A person is walking away from the camera on a beach at sunset. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a bright reflection on the water. The sky is a mix of orange and blue. The person is silhouetted against the bright light of the sunset.

1. **Environmental** complexities

Environmental complexities included **no line of sight**, **background noise**, and **high frequency sounds**.

EMERGENT THEMES

A silhouette of a person walking on a beach at sunset. The person is walking away from the camera towards the ocean. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a bright reflection on the water. The sky is a mix of orange and blue. The overall mood is serene and contemplative.

1. **Environmental** complexities

- **No line of sight**
- **Background noise**

EMERGENT THEMES

1. **Environmental** complexities

- **No line of sight**

A major issue during travel was **no direct line of sight to the speaker's faces** which made communication difficult.



"I was **sitting at the back of a shared vehicle** during the journey in the deep mountains.

- Spiti Valley, India, Jun '16



"I was **sitting at the back of a shared vehicle** during the journey in the deep mountains. Since the journey was slow, people were chatting in the car and **I wasn't able to lipread**. It was frustrating... The journey was supposed to be around 6 hours but multiple road blockages, landslides and stoppages in the Himalayas increased the total time to more than 12 hrs.

- Spiti Valley, India, Jun '16



"I was **sitting at the back of a shared vehicle** during the journey in the deep mountains. Since the journey was slow, people were chatting in the car and **I wasn't able to lipread**. It was frustrating... The journey was supposed to be around 6 hours but multiple road blockages, landslides and stoppages in the Himalayas increased the total time to more than 12 hrs. **I felt spatially lost, like having no knowledge of where I am** and how much time it would take to arrive at the destination. **It felt disorientating and suffocating. I felt trapped.**"

- Spiti Valley, India, Jun '16



EMERGENT THEMES

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1. **Environmental** complexities

- No line of sight
- **Background noise**

EMERGENT THEMES

A silhouette of a person walking away from the camera on a beach at sunset. The person is carrying a bag and is walking through shallow water. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a bright reflection on the water and a warm, orange glow in the sky. The overall scene is dark and atmospheric.

1. **Environmental** complexities

- No line of sight
- **Background noise**

Areas with background noise (which are frequent during travel) were **very hard for me to communicate in.**

"[When I was on a plane] it was **terribly difficult to communicate drinks or food choice due to background noise.**

- Flight from Milan to Sharm el sheikh, Mar'17



"[When I was on a plane] it was **terribly difficult to communicate drinks or food choice due to background noise**. I couldn't **hear the attendant very well**. [...] And since I can't hear my own voice well, I did not know how loud I was speaking. Thus, the crew also had a hard time understanding me.

- Flight from Milan to Sharm el sheikh, Mar'17



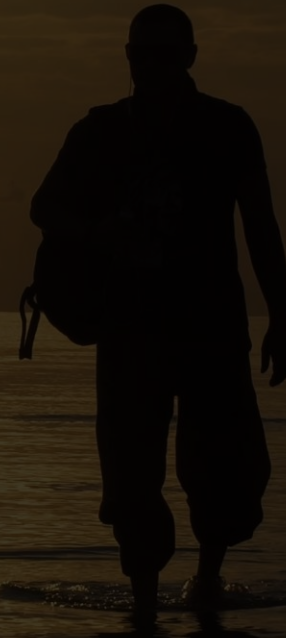
"[When I was on a plane] it was **terribly difficult to communicate drinks or food choice due to background noise**. I couldn't **hear the attendant very well**. [...] And since I can't hear my own voice well, I did not know how loud I was speaking. Thus, the crew also had a hard time understanding me. Somehow, **through gestures and repetitions, we made it work** but I **skipped one meal and compromised with cold water** instead of the hot water (which I wanted)."

- Flight from Milan to Sharm el sheikh, Mar'17



EMERGENT THEMES

1. **Environmental** complexities
2. **Cultural** tensions



EMERGENT THEMES



1. **Environmental** complexities

2. **Cultural** tensions

I faced tensions due to **varying cultural perceptions** of disability across regions.

A dark, grayscale photograph of an airport terminal. In the foreground, a man in a suit and glasses is talking to another man in a patterned hoodie. To the right, a man in a dark suit stands near a queue. In the background, a sign reads "Passengers" and another sign says "20 MINUTES".

In India, people were extremely sympathetic of my disability:

A dark, grayscale photograph of an airport check-in counter. In the foreground, a man in a suit is talking to a man in a dark jacket. To the right, a man in a dark uniform with a logo on the sleeve stands near a queue. In the background, a woman is walking. A sign above the counter says "Passengers".

In India, people were extremely sympathetic of my disability:

"[On finding that I am hard of hearing], the [gate agent at the airport] shook my hand and escorted me in person to the plane..."

- Leh, India, Aug '17

In India, people were extremely sympathetic of my disability:

*"[On finding that I am hard of hearing], the [gate agent at the airport] shook my hand and escorted me in person to the plane... **I was really embarrassed to be given special treatment** in front of other people who looked amused."*

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*"[After a long while of waiting], I heard what seemed like my name being called multiple times for boarding. **[Feeling very guilty,] I asked** the airport staff member **if they were really calling out my name.**"*

- Boston, Sep '17

A dark, grayscale photograph of an airport terminal. In the foreground, a man in a suit and glasses is talking to another man in a dark jacket and glasses. To the right, a woman in a dark uniform, likely an airport staff member, is standing. In the background, other people are visible in a queue, and a sign with the word "PASSENGERS" is partially visible. The overall atmosphere is busy but somewhat somber due to the dark lighting.

While in the US, the airport agent was overly polite, which was also an issue:

*"[After a long while of waiting], I heard what seemed like my name being called multiple times for boarding. **[Feeling very guilty,] I asked** the airport staff member **if they were really calling out my name**. She appeared unhappy (not knowing that I am Deaf) but said: **'yes sir, but it's okay!'**" I figured **social niceties conflict with accessibility** here. If she had asked the cause of the delay, I would have clarified—my deafness."*

- Boston, Sep '17

EMERGENT THEMES

A silhouette of a person walking away from the viewer on a beach at sunset. The person is carrying a bag and is walking towards the ocean. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a bright reflection on the water. The sky is a mix of orange and dark blue.

1. **Environmental** complexities
2. **Cultural** tensions
3. **Relationship** to assistive **technologies**

EMERGENT THEMES



1. **Environmental** complexities

2. **Cultural** tensions

3. **Relationship** to assistive **technologies**

I will detail two examples: **hearings aids**, and **a transcription service** (InnoCaption).



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During travel, I observed that my relationship to hearing aids changed because their **loss or damage would have caused increased discomfort.**



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*"I became obsessed with **cleaning my aids regularly, storing them safely, and keeping enough batteries.** As an example, while sleeping in shared dorms, I kept the aids under my pillow and woke up multiple times at night to check if they did not drop to the floor or got lost. Similarly, I **panicked when my aids became wet** with rain or sweat, and stayed up the night with a hair dryer to dry them."*

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For example, once I lost a credit card in Mexico.



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In summary, being away from **the support network at home** meant that I had to be more self-reliant, which **changed my relationship with the ATs.**

For example, once I lost a credit card in Mexico. Since I usually traveled alone, **it took me two weeks to find someone** who I can trust to make a phone call to my bank in the US for cancelling my card!



Reflection



Reflection

Reflections from our travel findings



Reflection

A person with dark hair and glasses, wearing a light-colored hoodie and blue jeans, is sitting on a grassy bank. They are looking down at the water, where the sun is reflecting brightly, creating a shimmering path of light. The background shows a large body of water under a bright sky.

Reflections from our travel findings

Methodological guidelines for performing autoethnography

Travel Reflections



Travel Reflections

A person is sitting on a grassy bank, looking out at a large body of water. The scene is dimly lit, suggesting dusk or dawn. The water is dark with some ripples, and the sky is a deep, dark blue. The person is wearing a light-colored jacket and is looking towards the water. The overall mood is contemplative and reflective.

Autoethnography revealed deep personal experiences

- My travel experiences highlighted **personal ways of interaction** with different cultures, environments and technology.

Travel Reflections

A person is sitting on a grassy bank, looking out at a large body of water. The scene is dimly lit, suggesting dusk or dawn. The water is dark with some ripples, and the grass is a muted green. The person is wearing a light-colored jacket and dark pants. The overall mood is contemplative and reflective.

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Autoethnography revealed deep personal experiences

- My travel experiences highlighted **personal ways of interaction** with different cultures, environments and technology.
- Given that disability is highly personal, these deeply situated insights are **difficult to obtain through other research methods**.
- Future work should **further investigate experiences of other disabled people** in diverse contexts.

Travel Reflections



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- The varied environmental conditions during travel affected my communication.

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Personalized assistive technologies

- The varied environmental conditions during travel affected my communication.
- Future designers should consider: How might we **design personalized assistive technologies** that adapt to different settings?
- To examine this question, we investigated two highly **personalized technology explorations** to aid communication during my travel *in-situ*: a **speech to text translating** app, and a **customized quote speaking** app.

Travel Reflections

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Personalized assistive technologies

- The varied environmental conditions during travel affected my communication.
- Future designers should consider: How might we **design personalized assistive technologies** that adapt to different settings?
- To examine this question, we investigated two highly **personalized technology explorations** to aid communication during my travel *in-situ*: a **speech to text translating** app, and a **customized quote speaking** app.
- Results are in the paper.

METHODOLOGICAL GUIDELINES FOR DISABLED RESEARCHERS TO PERFORM AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

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Privacy vs. Transparency:

METHODOLOGICAL GUIDELINES FOR DISABLED RESEARCHERS TO PERFORM AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

Privacy vs. Transparency:

- **Disabled researchers may feel compelled to hide facts** that could negatively affect them.

METHODOLOGICAL GUIDELINES FOR DISABLED RESEARCHERS TO PERFORM AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

Privacy vs. Transparency:

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- In fact, some of my negative experiences are during travel with my family members, which were very hard to talk about.

METHODOLOGICAL GUIDELINES FOR DISABLED RESEARCHERS TO PERFORM AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

Privacy vs. Transparency:

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- While hiding intimate facts may be necessary, deep and evocative insights only result when **intricacies are disclosed** and discussed.

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- While hiding intimate facts may be necessary, deep and evocative insights only result when **intricacies are disclosed** and discussed.
- So, take the time to assess what **balance between disclosure and privacy** makes you comfortable.

METHODOLOGICAL GUIDELINES FOR DISABLED RESEARCHERS TO PERFORM AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

Balancing Authority:

METHODOLOGICAL GUIDELINES FOR DISABLED RESEARCHERS TO PERFORM AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

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- Graduate students performing autoethnography may be **intimidated to share** their personal experiences with advisors.

METHODOLOGICAL GUIDELINES FOR DISABLED RESEARCHERS TO PERFORM AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

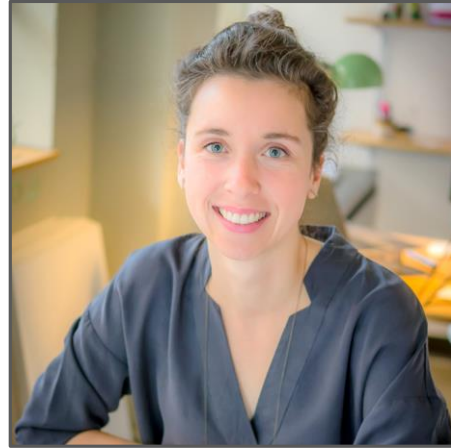
Balancing Authority:

- Graduate students performing autoethnography may be **intimidated to share** their personal experiences with advisors.
- Their advisers should **ensure a healthy, constructive environment** for personal expression.

DISCUSS YOUR IDEAS WITH US...



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Calling all researchers with disabilities!

Let's together contribute our rich personal accounts to reveal how diverse scenarios and contexts affect our disability.