Revealing Tensions in Autobiographical Design in HCI

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Expanding HCI research methods
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First-person research perspectives
Autoethnography

Focus on the lived experience with a system and within a culture
Autoethnography

Focus on the lived experience with a system and within a culture

Autobiographical design

Equal emphasis on the design and making of the system and living with the system
Autobiographical design: 5 tenets

1. Genuine needs
2. Real systems
3. Fast tinkering
4. Record keeping
5. Long-term usage

(Neustaedter and Sengers, 2012)
Questions, uncertainties, dilemmas

We need more discussion around the *tensions* that arise when doing autobiographical design
Reflexive analysis of autobiographical design

Two first hand accounts

Four published accounts in HCI
Reflexive analysis of autobiographical design

Two first hand accounts
Data collected: Photos, notes, diary accounts, tutorials, timelapse videos

Four published accounts in HCI
Data collected: Annotation of published accounts & email questionnaire to the authors
Van conversion project
Desjardins, 2016

Ludic communication
Ball, 2018
Ludic communication  
Ball, 2018

Van conversion project  
Desjardins, 2016

Video Window  
Gaver, 2006

Ludic communication  
Ball, 2018

Moments  
Heshmat, Neustaedter and DeBrincat, 2017
Ludic communication
Ball, 2018

Van conversion project
Desjardins, 2016

Video Window
Gaver, 2006

Leaky Objects
Helms, 2017

Ludic communication
Ball, 2018

Moments
Heshmat, Neustaedter and DeBrincat, 2017

Long-distance relationship prototypes
Chien and Hassenzhal, 2017
5 tensions in autobiographical design

1. Questioning genuine needs
2. Probing design participation
3. Weighing intimacy, relationships and privacy
4. Contemplating the co-shaping of design and research
5. Examining the authorial voice
5 tensions in autobiographical design

1. Questioning genuine needs
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4. Contemplating the co-shaping of design and research
5. Examining the authorial voice
Questioning genuine needs
Questioning genuine needs
Questioning genuine needs

Not really a need

“mix of curiosity, technological possibility, and aesthetic imagination”

(Gaver, email)
Questioning genuine needs

Not really a need

Mixed interests
TENSION #1

Questioning genuine needs

Not really a need

Mixed interests
Questioning genuine needs

Not really a need

Mixed interests

Intentional sincerity

“this attainment of ‘sincere’ autobiographical design decisions is requiring more deliberate reflection and rigor.”

(Helms, email)
TENSION #3

Weighing intimacy, relationships, and privacy
Weighing intimacy, relationships, and privacy

"doubts crept in: Is it a risk? Is it appropriate to bring design and the academic into our personal relationship? What may happen? Could it ruin my relationship?"

(Chien and Hassenzhal, p.10)
TENSION #3

Weighing intimacy, relationships, and privacy

Relational ethics

Visual strategies

Ball, 2018

Ball, 2018

Helms, 2017
Contemplating the co-shaping of design and research
Contemplating the co-shaping of design and research

Reflexivity

Desjardins, 2016
Contemplating the co-shaping of design and research

Reflexivity

Research expertise

“the researcher is trained to observe, critique, and reflect on the family’s usage with extensive knowledge of the related literature and continuous access to observe.”

(Heshmat, Neustaedter, and DeBrincat, p.679)
5 tensions in autobiographical design

1. Questioning genuine needs
2. Probing design participation
3. Weighing intimacy, relationships and privacy
4. Contemplating the co-shaping of design and research
5. Examining the authorial voice
Moving forward

1.
Sincerity
Moving forward

1. Sincerity
2. Collaboration and authority
Moving forward

1. Sincerity
2. Collaboration and authority
3. Inventiveness
To conclude

Autobiographical design can be powerful, rich, and highly relevant.

Articulating the tensions with finesse and nuance will hopefully open dialogue to continue pushing the method forward.
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TENSION #2

Probing design participation
Probing design participation

Designing for & with
“Bias like politeness is surprisingly low in our case - Claire always reveals her thought and [critique] directly”

(Chien, email)
Examining the authorial voice
“I thought introducing his name would be an unnecessary and distracting detail.”

(Helms, email)
“I thought introducing his name would be an unnecessary and distracting detail.”
(Helms, email)

“it seemed to be easiest to read.”
(Neustaedter, email)
Examining the authorial voice

Simplicity

Commitments

“Wei-Chi (first author) will now tell his story of designing, establishing, and living with “things” [...]. To do so, we will change to a first-person narrative.”

(Chien and Hassenzhal, p.9)