# **Against Surveillance: The Future of Accessibility Research is Resistance**

#### **Rahaf Alharbi, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor**

Disabled people are disproportionately surveilled by various forces, including assistive technologies. I believe that the future of accessibility research should counteract and subvert these harms by building a research agenda focused on *resistance*. In this short position paper, I reflect on my own attempts to design resistance technology. Specifically, I start by introducing my focus on visual assistance technologies, and how I attempted to incorporate resistance into my research.

## Visual Assistance Technologies for Blind and Low Vision People.

Blind people use visual assistance technology (VAT) like Microsoft Seeing AI and Google Lookout to access visual information (e.g., reading mail, or watching the sunset). Despite their benefits, they do have privacy and security risks that are often underexplored and unaddressed (Stangl et al., 2020).

Oftentimes, assistive technologies are designed with an assumption of “innocence” (Hamraie & Fritsch, 2019) with the end goal of resolving access barriers. But what if in the process of resolving access, we introduce additional harms?

I think VATs can be a great example to think about this tension. While they do mitigate access barriers that Blind people face, they also expose Blind people to ubiquitous surveillance and data regimes of Big Tech. This may cause various privacy harms in the event of a data breach. Most importantly, these pervasive data collection processes deny Blind people the agency to control what type of data is collected and how it is being used. It is especially egregious when VATs paint themselves as initiative for “social good,” yet coerce Blind people into providing data through opaque privacy policies.

## Co-designing privacy-enhancing technologies

I studied how future privacy-enhancing technologies can address this particular tension, and potentially provide Blind people with a way to control ubiquitous data collection within VAT (Alharbi et al., 2022). In doing so, my research moves away from resolving access barriers. Rather, I take a small step into critically investigating the types of risks that are introduced or increased by assistive technologies, and how can we design systems that resist, subvert, or prevent these harms.

However, my research is limited and confined in many ways. I conceptualize resistance in a rather techno-centric (or techno-solutionist) matter where I am primarily interested in designing technologies that address these harms. Additionally, through in-depth empirical research with Blind people, I identify a set of sociotechnical challenges that are introduced by privacy-enhancing technologies (e.g., accessible interpretability and cross-cultural privacy recognition).

In this workshop, I would like to further explore what it might mean to expand the definition of resistance technologies, and how to build a research agenda focused on resistance, control, and accessibility.

## Cited Works:

Alharbi, R., Brewer, R. N., & Schoenebeck, S. (2022). Understanding emerging obfuscation technologies in visual description services for blind and low vision people. Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction, 6(CSCW2), 1-33.

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Stangl, A., Shiroma, K., Xie, B., Fleischmann, K. R., & Gurari, D. (2020, October). Visual content considered private by people who are blind. In Proceedings of the 22nd International ACM SIGACCESS Conference on Computers and Accessibility (pp. 1-12).

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