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## **Finding the Meaning in What is Missing: Ethnography, Absence, and Expertise**

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Whether it pertains to what is not considered, what cannot be determined, what is not allowed to be known, or what is deliberately concealed, absences figure as the constant shadows of what is made present by social research.

The presentation seeks to address a number of questions: How is disclosure dependent on the withholding of information? In what ways are absences bound up with the production of authority and expertise? How can overt incompleteness in accounts ensure definitiveness? It addresses these questions through an examination of the movements between the seen and the hidden in ethnographic studies. More specifically it examines the challenges associated with how we as ethnographers manage what is missing within our writing. The argument is based on an engagement with international diplomatic and security communities over several years. I want to consider the representational implications of the disclosure rules, confidentiality agreements, informal arrangements, etc. associated with contemporary research; in particular their implications for how knowledge claims are substantiated and reproduced.

This presentation explores the relation between what is presented and what is not by treating it first as a vexing conundrum for representation and then as a vehicle for understanding. The ‘-graphy’ under examination pertains to what is written about the social world as well as the methods of writing employed. One of the main goals is to identify novel types of intervention for ethnographic research and innovative writing formats for devising present absences, while also respecting the limitations on what can be communicated. In doing so, I want to ask how limits to what can be written can figure as a productive part of our research accounts.