Stefanie Tellex

Week 4

Forlizzi, Jodi, Carl DiSalvo?, and Francine Gemperle. Assistive Robotics and an Ecology of Elders Living Independently in Their Homes

This paper makes me not want to grow old.

My grandmother just got a new stove. She couldn't figure out how to work it, and she blamed herself for her failure to understand it, rather than the technology for being difficult to use. Mrs. R also blamed the state of her kitchen on her laziness rather than on her. It's only anecdotal, but I suspect that this will also be a significant issue (and opportunity) with elder care technology. If it is too hard to use, it could not only not help matters, but actually make things worse because it would lead to lower self-esteem. On the other hand, it could help not just through its intended benefit by enabling the elder to feel a sense of accomplishment through their successful use of the technology.

I think it's especially important for my work with a voice controlled wheelchair to think about the stigma issues brought up in the paper. Speaking to a machine calls attention to the fact that you are using it, and might accentuate the feeling of weakness.

The anecdotes in this paper were especially interesting, but I thought they read too much into some of them. E.g., Mrs. L not driving because she wanted to assert her independence from her daughter. Having someone drive you everywhere is inconvenient and imposes a significant burden on the driver. It could just as easily be related to that as to wanting to assert her independence.

Some of the data they report could easily be quantified - it would be more concrete.

Peter H. Kahn Jr., Batya Friedman, Deanne R. Perez-Granados, and Nathan G. Freier. Robotic pets in the lives of preschool children

At least some of the startle effects probably would go away if the children were to spend more time with the Aibo. It would have been interesting to compare their reactions and responses to a real dog in addition to the Aibo and a stuffed dog. That would be an interesting baseline - especially if there were categories where the stuffed dog and the real dog were statistically indistinguishable. It would also be a way to get some insight into where an Aibo fails in imitating a real dog.

Sherry Turkle. Technology and Human Vulnerability.

"Machines can't be easily fooled by human dissembling." I think this is false. We don't yet have a reliable lie detector, or a spam filter. Machines now can often easily be fooled (in both directions). A machine would have to be better at reading emotions than a human

in order to not be fooled - even if it works once, a human could learn by trial and error to confuse it.

She makes an interesting point about confusing simulation with reality. Because we can control our machines we might make them better in every way than a real human relationship - they'll never get bored, never break up, and never die. People might come to prefer the machine relationship to a human one. But I think that concern is pretty far out.