



Disability Rights and Robotics Co-Producing Futures

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Plain English Summary

1. Introduction

The Disability Rights and Robotics project had a team of young people and adults with lived experience of disability, family carers, students and academics in robotics and social sciences. Together we asked how can robotic technology support disability rights? We have used the term rights from the UN Convention on the Rights for Persons with Disabilities which states that disabled people have the same rights to a full life as everyone else. Our project was funded by our university (UWE Bristol). We talked about ethics throughout our project together as a team. Our project was led by people with lived experience of disability, and we worked together to create knowledge. This way of doing research and working together is called co-production. The co-produced themes from our project are 'opportunities', 'relationships' and 'ethics'. We discussed how we could use robots in daily life this is under the theme of opportunities and relationships. Our discussion of ethics is all about how we can understand robot design, how our data is used and how we can access robots. Our paper ends with a reflection on how I have understood the project from my perspective as a disabled person.

2. Summary of the research

We used a knowledge café which is a space where we work together to produce knowledge for action. We had planned to have three café days to meet robots and work together, however only one café took place as the COVID lockdown stopped the others. So, we kept working together online. Our co-production team also included a cartoonist. His job was to make sure the voices of the young students in our group were included in our key messages. Before we met for the first time each group (students, academics, and people with lived experience of disability) discussed how they understood 'rights' and what was important for them. The words that were used in that discussion formed our shared understanding of ethics.

At our knowledge café we met two robots Double a telepresence robot that you can control remotely and Pepper a companion robot that answers questions follows instructions and hangs out with you. Before meeting the robots, we talked about feeling unsure and nervous, however after we met the robots, we thought they were cool, and it felt like Christmas. We discussed how Double could be great for those who might be isolated, and that Pepper could be a non-judgemental buddy or helper, to be relied upon to remember important things. There were some things the robots could not do including going up stairs, understanding a student who used a phone to speak and when it was busy Pepper could not



understand instructions. This led to us asking lots of questions about what we want from robots, and how we can work together as co-designers.

3. Summary of the research findings

We all agreed that the big message from our knowledge café was that co-design is essential without it it's pointless. If you design robots for us but without us, you risk wasting time, effort and money. So, the people you are designing the robots with must be involved from the start.

The key messages from our project were about:

- Disability rights
- Driving robotics design
- Equal access
- Communication
- Privacy
- Feelings

4. Summary of outputs

We created a website to share our work, where you can find the report of our research, and our cartoon. We ran events to share our project that we presented to different audiences including a public event where we learned lots about making events accessible to as many people as possible.

My (Sophie's) reflection discussed ideas about being a 'cyborg'. A cyborg is a being with a body that includes technology just like the young student who used the smart phone to speak. The experience of driving Double the telepresence robot made me think about my sense of self, about how I use my body and a robot body, and how robots might support my right to live a full life.

Find out more

For more information about this work please visit

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