

Using Computing Technologies to Face the Challenges of Autism
HCI Seminar Series Spring 2007
Speaker: Gregory Abowd, Georgia Tech
Host: Rob Miller, MIT CSAIL

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Location: Patil/Kiva G449

Abstract:

In the Fall of 1999, my wife and I learned that our son, Aidan, age 2, had been diagnosed with autism. In the summer of 2003, our second son, Blaise, was also diagnosed with autism, at the age of 3. The CDC estimates that the incidence of autism in the U.S. is 1 in 166, so my wife and I are not alone in having to come to grips with the everyday struggles of this perplexing neurological developmental disability. Since I prescribe to the research philosophy of "scratching your own itch", it is no surprise that I have looked for ways to have my research in ubiquitous computing address the challenges of those impacted by autism. My goal is not to use technology to "cure" autism, but to have it play a vital role in increasing our understanding of that unique human condition and to have it ease the everyday struggles for those who deal with it. In this talk, I will give an overview of the research trajectory of a growing community of GVU researchers who are using this real-world health challenge to drive a human-centered research agenda. I will summarize four years of research and give a glimpse of what I think are the important challenges for the next four years, and why I think computer scientists are an important part of the solution.

Bio:

Gregory Abowd is an Associate Professor in the School of Interactive Computing and GVU Center at Georgia Tech, and co-Director of the Aware Home Research Initiative. His research explores applications of ubiquitous computing technologies, combining both human-centered and technology-driven research themes. Since 1995, Dr. Abowd has lead the development and evaluation of several influential ubiquitous computing projects: Cyberguide; eClass (nee Classroom 2000); the Aware Home; and most recently a suite of tools to support caregivers for children with autism and other developmental disabilities. Dr. Abowd is the co-author of a major textbook on Human-Computer Interaction and has published over 150 peer-reviewed scientific articles in the areas of Ubiquitous Computing, HCI and Software Engineering. He is a 1986 graduate of the University of Notre Dame, where he studied Mathematics and Physics. He has a M.Sc. (1987) and D.Phil. (1991) in Computation from the University of Oxford, where he studied as a Rhodes Scholar. Prior to joining the faculty at Georgia Tech in 1994, he was a postdoctoral researcher at the University of York in the U.K. and at Carnegie Mellon University. One of 12 children growing up in suburban Detroit, Dr. Abowd himself is the father of three children, two of whom have diagnoses on the autism spectrum. For the past four years, Dr. Abowd has been a strong advocate for technology research related to autism and serves on the Innovative Technologies for Autism Committee for the Cure Autism Now Foundation and as a member of the Board of Directors for the Autism Society of America Greater Georgia Chapter.

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