Workshop Presentation of a Social Wearable That Affords Vulnerability

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ABSTRACT

We present 'True Colors,' a social wearable prototype designed to augment co-located social interaction among players in a LARP (live action role play). We designed it to enable the emergence of rich social dynamics between wearers and non-wearers. True Colors is Y-shaped, worn around the upper body, and has distinct front and back interfaces to afford actions taken by the wearer (front), and actions taken by others (back). To design True Colors [3], we followed a Research-through-Design approach, used experiential qualities and social affordances to guide our process, and co-designed with LARP designers. 13 True Colors wearables were deployed in a 3-day LARP event, attended by 109 people. Out of all the functionalities and interactivity the device afforded, players gravitated most towards those that emphasized the social value of experiencing vulnerability as a prompt to get together.

CCS CONCEPTS

• **Human-centered computing → HCI theory, concepts and models**.

KEYWORDS

1 TRUE COLORS

True Colors is a social wearable, i.e. a wearable that augments co-located social interaction [8]. The main goal in this project was to design a device that enhanced social interaction and enabled the emergence of rich social dynamics between wearers and non-wearers. To support these goals, the front interface was designed to empower the wearer to initiate action, while the back was designed for others to use. We were inspired by prior work on technology co-creation with expert design communities [6, 8]. LARP (live action role play) designers are experts in designing narrative and environments that support rich social experience for their players by utilizing technological and non-technological objects [9, 11]. We created True Colors by using a Research-through-Design (RtD) approach [4, 13, 14] and co-creation [10] with Event Horizon (EH)'s LARP designers of the New Gyr LARP [5]. We intend to bring one of the prototypes to the workshop to discuss its features in Beyond Individuals: Exploring Social Experience Around Wearables.

Traditionally, the focus in HCI tends to be more on reducing human vulnerabilities. We find "technological fixes" (Winberg cited by [7]) with the aim of resolving vulnerability issues, attempting to make us feel safe, strong and protected. The experience of vulnerability in everyday life
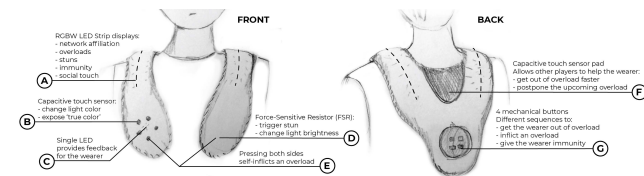
Figure 1: Illustration of functionalities.©Ella Dagan.

Figure 2: Left and Right: Non-wearer players interact with the back interface of wearers. Center: Device showing in-game immunity mode. ©Event Horizon.

may be perceived as unpleasant or unwanted, yet research suggests it serves an important function as "the core, the heart, the center, of meaningful human experiences"; a key for wholehearted living among others [1]. True Colors was tested primarily in the field, and provided very promising results regarding its potential to enhance co-located social interaction among players, in particular how players were embracing vulnerability through the use of the wearables [3]. This work extends previous work on wearable technology in LARPs [2, 8, 12], including supporting emotional resonance, social signaling, and spectator sensitivity (e.g. of moments of weakness) affordances [8]; supporting authentic self-presentation and choice; and supporting overcoming difficulties together (e.g. through social touch). See video demonstration here: https://tinyurl.com/y6xbw8l3.

2 LIVED EXPERIENCE OF TRUE COLORS

True Colors affords a variety of social interactions, ranging from friendly to more confrontational. During the LARP, participants could *choose* which features to use and how.

From a thematic analysis of the collected data, a few design themes other than vulnerability emerged: (i) players considered the wearable to be 'interactable'–it was easy for them to interact with, it felt like a 'real' interface to them, and it also supported their interaction with one another; (ii) the wearable supported role play of identity affiliation, it was easy to tell who was an 'Augment' because they all wore the devices, making them stand out as 'others' and telegraphing their group affiliation and social status; (iii) the wearable enhanced scene building by making scenes more interesting, and players used it to create scenes and improvise around its interactive features; and finally (v) uncontrollable timing, the wearable has a prominent feature triggered based on a timer which created a lot of interesting moments for players. Players referred to this as serendipitous timing that was perfect for the scene/players (but not necessarily for their characters). (For more detail about these findings, see [3].)

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