

Wearable Technology
Dr. Lucy Dunne , University of Minnesota
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Summary by Rayna Perry

When asked about wearable technology, many people think about Nike commercials featuring glistening athletes with chips built into their sneakers or an electronic band around their wrist. Dr. Lucy Dunne made it clear in her presentation that there is much more to wearable technology than we tend to think. The field covers a great deal of topics and different areas of study that are often the background noise in a world of fashion news and innovation.

The first distinction that Dr. Dunne made was between wearable technology and smart clothing. In her definition, Dr. Dunne states that wearable technology is an “artifact worn on the body for a functional purpose” (Dunne, 2013). The function can be to protect, heat, cool, or signal others, and is often electronic. Smart clothing is the “intersection of technology and clothing or textiles [such as] a garment capable of dynamic response to a stimulus” (Dunne, 2013). This could be a jacket that reacts to body temperature or another catalyst.

A devastating problem in the field of textiles is overabundance and a great deal of waste. One reason for this may be the quick pace in which fashions and trends evolve. Clothing and other textiles are bought in order to stay up to speed with what is in style, but is only leading to a dire situation, as we learned in Dr. Aspelund’s lecture. The data that Dr. Dunne presented to support her argument was substantial. When asked what percentage of their wardrobe they actually wear, women responded with an average of 45%. After the experiment they found that the true percentage was right around 5%. Researchers such as Dr. Dunne are trying to discover how technology can improve this situation, and that is why this information is pertinent to wearable technology. Dr. Dunne showed a piece of technology in her own clothing that tracks how often she is wearing the clothing in her closet, which is extremely helpful to the study. But how do we wear technology in an every day setting?

The problem with electronics in terms of clothing and textiles is that they are stiff, bulky, and heavy. The clothing becomes more scientific and less aesthetically pleasing. Regarding the lag in wearable technology in the mass markets the disconnect is between function and aesthetics. An extremely talented engineer could create a piece of wearable technology, but without being aesthetically pleasing, there is a very small consumer market. This is probably the reason why a good portion of wearable technology is geared toward health and fitness, where it is more socially acceptable to have a computer built into your clothing. For example, clothing that generates light and heat.

Dr. Lucy Dunne gave an abundance of information and insight into the field of wearable technology. An interesting point that she stressed is that over the years, wearable technology has not changed much, nor has it become more accessible in mass markets. The greatest challenge for those who are developing wearable technology is figuring out how to make it consumer friendly, and above all, wearable.