

## **UC Irvine**

### **2022 Games + Learning + Society Conference Proceedings**

#### **Title**

It Comes In Waves

#### **Permalink**

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/40q2v0d2>

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#### **Publication Date**

2022-09-18

Peer reviewed

## **Title: *It Comes In Waves***

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### **Main Description**

*It Comes In Waves* is a narrative-based Twine game prototype about being an essential worker during the ongoing pandemic. It takes as its focus the role social class plays in relation to COVID-19 protocols surrounding workplaces and the subsequent effects these have on everyday life. Many employees in the health care sector are deemed "essential workers" despite continuing to have their well-being and labour devalued and living in precarity. You play as Beattie, a caregiver at two different long-term care facilities during the first few months of the pandemic, navigating the challenges of trying to stay safe while doing her two jobs and maintaining social contact with her friends and family. Central questions the game asks include: What does it mean to fear for your health and safety when going to work? Especially when without it, you cannot earn a living?

There were two central design goals for the game: first to show how social class inflects our daily experiences, including our employment prospects, opportunities in life, living experiences, and hopes for the future; and second to avoid the trap of becoming either an "empathy machine" or a misery simulator. Robert Yang has critiqued efforts to create VR experiences of disadvantaged groups as "appropriation machines" rather than empathy machines, because "I don't want your empathy, I want justice! (Yang, 2017). Additionally, this game design sought to avoid making a game that only modeled the problems that someone might encounter in a working-class job, implying that employment in the service sector only brings unhappiness and instability. Balancing these demands, along with ensuring the game featured a diverse cast and was reasonably faithful to the experiences of healthcare workers were additional considerations. This project only covers the first few months of the pandemic and is of smaller scope than its initial design, and thus we consider it a "prototype" rather than a fully fleshed out game.

### **References**

Yang, Robert. (2017, April 5). "'If you walk in someone else's shoes, you've taken their shoes': empathy machines as appropriation machines" available at <https://www.blog.radiator.debacl.us/2017/04/if-you-walk-in-someone-elses-shoes-then.html>

### **Game Link:**

<https://miaconsalvo.itch.io/waves>



Sarah stands up straight, hand on hip, as her question cuts across the room.

SARAH: "I'm sorry, but someone needs to ask. Louise, you've looked out for us, and I know this isn't on you but, we're putting ourselves at risk coming and going to work every day when the government is telling everyone else to stay home!"

Louise nods and adjusts her mask.

**Figure 1**

Beattie's co-worker Sarah and supervisor Louise discuss the risks involved in their work.



*Maybe Cecilia is down here for a good reason? It's hard to keep track of what people are up to nowadays — I don't get to see them very often.*

"Hello there Cecilia. Are you looking for someone?"

Cecilia glances out the window once more and a pained expression briefly flits across her face. She turns back to you quickly, her body relaxing, and lets out a resigned chuckle.

CECILIA: "No, I suppose not dear. I've just felt a little cooped up over the last week. I'd usually be visiting with friends on a gloomy day like this."

*You sigh. It must be tough for the residents to be **cooped up in their rooms all day.***

**Figure 2**

Beattie must confront a resident about staying in her room to comply with facility rules