

Exploring Design and User Experience of Game-Based Tools for Youth Social Anxiety

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Background & Motivation

Social anxiety disorder (SAD) is one of the most common anxiety disorders in youth, with a typical onset by adolescence. SAD is characterised by a persistent fear and avoidance of social situations such that it prohibits one from participating in regular social life and activities. Treatment for SAD can comprise different things such as talk therapies, exposure therapy and medications such as SSRIs. Despite SAD being widespread, access to supports for it are limited. Virtual reality exposure therapies (VRETS) are systems which combine virtual reality and exposure stimuli. VRETS have some evidence for success in terms of providing exposure to feared social scenarios, but studies have typically focused on adult participants and populations rather than adolescent groups. Games are played by the majority of adolescents and can help to facilitate social bonds and motivate learning. However, few examples exist of games specifically developed for social anxiety with the inclusion of perspectives of those who experience social anxiety themselves.

Therefore, there is an opportunity to explore how we can combine immersive features from virtual reality exposure therapies, with the motivating aspects of games.

Research Questions:

The guiding questions that structure the project are:

How can we determine the user experience requirements and design an engaging immersive game-based intervention for youth social anxiety?

What are the guidelines for effective and inclusive design that can be proposed for work with youth in a mental health context?

What can we learn from existing tech-based mental health interventions, and which design features may improve engagement and usability?



Methodology

Several design frameworks inform the project. These include:

- Design, play and experience framework (Winn, 2009)
- Participatory Serious Game Design (Khaled & Vasalou, 2014)
- Participatory game prototyping (Ampatzidou & Gugerell, 2018)

Given the multi-disciplinary nature of the topic, stakeholders are involved at different stages of the design process through a variety of methods. These include interviews, design workshops, prototyping activities, ideation exercises and validation and usability testing sessions.

Design Methods:

- Game building tools & prompts
- Design workshops
- Design iteration cycles with people with lived experience of anxiety
- Usability testing and talk-aloud exercises.

Qualitative Methods:

- Interviews (both in-person and online)
- Member validation through sharing summaries throughout the process.
- Pre and post session discussions.

Who is involved?

Involving participants with lived experience and subject matter expertise is important to explore questions of engagement and usability. Participant groups include:

- Technology founders and professionals working in health technology
- Clinician and support workers who supporting young people
- Adults with lived experience of social anxiety
- Whanau of people who have lived experience of social anxiety
- Game designers who have experience with games for applied
- Young people under age 18 with lived experience of social anxiety.



Current Work

I am currently interviewing participant groups as part of the discovery and design process. If you are interested in potentially being involved, please reach out through the contact email zoe.platt-young@pg.canterbury.ac.nz

Other current activities include:

Transforming findings from a systematic review into design and user experience features to explore in the prototyping and validation steps

Recruiting of participant groups for the current phase and future design phases

Building a design specification to support iterative design and future work, which merges insights from fieldwork with insights from existing tools and the systematic review.

Next Steps & Thanks

Next steps include continued interviews and workshops with people with lived experience, prototype iteration, validation workshops and usability testing

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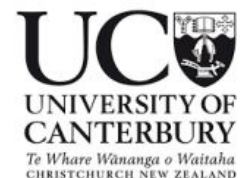
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References

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Contact zoe.platt-young@pg.canterbury.ac.nz to learn more about the project.