

Online Support Groups: A Valuable Supplement to Conventional Mental
Healthcare

A Sociotechnical Research Paper
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by

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On my honor as a University student, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid on this assignment as defined by the Honor Guidelines for Thesis-Related Assignments.

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Preface

Research has found that about five percent of individuals are acrophobic. With such a large population suffering, how can this phobia best be alleviated? Prior research suggests that exposure therapy is effective in helping those with acrophobia. A variety of sources contribute to the phobia, such as a traumatic experience, witnessing parental figures express fear towards heights or natural conditioning to fear falling. Regardless, a VR experience that exposes acrophobes to virtual heights in a safe environment may help those suffering from the phobia. By creating a virtual environment where individuals can face their fears safely without consequence, users can gain control over their fears. This project was developed in Unity and C#. My faculty technical advisors are Madhur Behl, Aaron Bloomfield, and Seongkook Heo.

Since 2000, how has online mental-illness support supplemented or displaced in-person care? While licensed mental healthcare professionals have cautioned that online mental healthcare is no substitute for professional care, many depressed persons report that they find it indispensable as a supplement to professional care; to some depressed persons, it is an effective alternative to care they cannot afford or otherwise access.

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