
CLOSED LOOP VIRTUAL REALITY FOR THE TREATMENT OF PHOBIAS

Bachelor Thesis

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Saarbrücken, February 17, 2018

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Abstract

we want to find out if it is possible to design a fully automatic therapy system using vr and psycho physiological measurement. therefor we will test our virtual environment with a random group of subjects and measure ecg and gsr the goal of the conducted experiment is to show that our virtual reality is capable ob causing fear this will be done by evaluating the measured bio data

furthermore our virtual can be controlled by a therapist the therapist will be able to exercise control through a matlab program provided with real time visual data the therapist will be a substitute for the AI which will later be controlling the vr respectively to the measured data

the vr and the related pc will feed visual input to the subject this input is processed by the subject and he gives output information in the form of gsr and heart rate serving as input for our third system, the therapist (visual presentation of processed data) therapist can control vr —loop closed

Zusammenfassung

translation of abstract

Acknowledgments

Contents

Declaration	3
Abstract	1
Zusammenfassung	2
Acknowledgments	3
1 Introduction	5
2 Materials and Methods	7
2.1 Materials	7
2.1.1 Setup	7
2.1.2 Procedure(Paradigm)	7
2.2 Methods	7
3 Results	9
4 Discussion	10
5 Conclusions and Future Work	11
A Tables and Measurement Results	12
List of Figures	13
List of Tables	14
List of Abbreviations	14
Bibliography	15

1 Introduction

Virtual reality combines real-time computer graphics, body-tracking devices and high-resolution visual displays to create a computer-generated virtual environment. With their ability to immerse the user into a virtual mirror of the real world virtual environments are a powerful tool in clinical application, especially in the treatment of phobias (source). Studies have shown anxiety disorders to be the most prevalent mental disorders (Kessler et al., 2005). Many consider exposure therapy the most effective form of treatment for specific phobias (DeRubeis and Crits-Cristoph,1998)(source). However that may be, considering the nature of certain phobias such as fear of heights, exposure therapy involves a genuine risk of injury. Performing therapy in a virtual environment can therefore be a promising alternative to in vivo exposure.

The efficacy of virtual reality exposure therapy (VRET) has already been demonstrated in the past. A study conducted on acrophobia, comparing two groups of student subjects, showed that VRET is more effective than no treatment (Rothbaum et al.,1995). VRET was also found to be as effective as exposure in vivo in a more recent work by Emmelkamp et al. (2002). In addition to this using a virtual reality system can have a number of advantages. First and foremost being the ability to conduct therapy inside a controlled and secure environment like a therapist's office. This also implies therapy being less time consuming and provides financial benefits (Cavanagh and Shapiro, 2004). The possibility of having therapy in a more private scenario also could mean it becoming a more attractive choice for patients that are too anxious or fear public embarrassment.

A recent study explored the acceptability of virtual reality exposure and in vivo exposure in subjects suffering from specific phobias supports this hypothesis. Seventy-six percent chose virtual reality over in vivo exposure. In addition to this the refusal rate of 3% for virtual reality exposure was substantially lower than 27% for in vivo exposure (Garcia-Palacios et al., 2007). These results suggest that virtual reality exposure could help increase the number of people who seek therapy for phobias. Although epidemiological studies show a lifetime prevalence of 28.5% for vHI and 6.4% for acrophobia alone, only 11% of susceptible people consult a doctor (Huppert et al., 2013; Kapfhammer et al.,2015).

With so many people going untreated there is a distinct need to establish virtual reality in everyday clinical work.

In recent years there has been a lot of research on virtual reality treatment for different phobias trying just that.

-list studies for agora, aero phobia etc.

There also have been studies on ways to control the virtual reality. In a pilot study Levy et al. (2015) explored the possibility of a remote controlled virtual reality. After a trial session in a neutral virtual environment the patients received a total of six therapy sessions. The first three sessions were remote virtual reality exposure therapy (e-VRET) followed by three sessions in the presence of a therapist (p-VRET). The study showed that e-VRET not only is possible but produces results equal to p-VRET. This inevitably leads to the idea of an independent VRET. To our knowledge there has not yet been a form of VRET that does not depend on external control. A system that can adapt to the mental state of the patient throughout the entirety of therapy and therefore qualify for private use could help expanding the reach of exposure therapy even further. Assessing the mental state of a patient is essential for the success of therapy. A task which usually falls to the hands of the therapist and in most cases relies on a verbal communication between both parties. To ensure the quality of our therapy system we clearly have to provide some sort of substitute for this.

- stimulation triggers fear and this is shown through psychophysiological biosignals
- list studies that state gsr and hrv as valid indicators for emotions stress and fear
- hypothesis: independent system is possible if vr can trigger fear -goal of this thesis is to design a virtual environment for this purpose and proving it is capable of

we want to create a closed loop virtual reality, which is adaptive and can function without external control based on input from realtime measurement of psychophysiological data.

- establish that an adaptive VE would greatly benefit therapy - past studies VR paradigms where none adaptive - state goal as an automated

Research Question - is the designed VE able to elicit fear (subjective) - can the fear be related to changes in measured biosignals

2 Materials and Methods

2.1 Materials

mention the SNNU and the lab where the study takes place

2.1.1 Setup

- description of the therapy setup
- graphic 1, shows a patient inside the defined treatment area, wearing VR-Headset, the lighthouse system, eeg and gsr sensors, connection to the pc controlled by the physician

2.1.2 Procedure(Paradigm)

- how many subjects did participate?
- which tasks did the patients fulfill? (cross the bridge etc.)
- duration of the experiment

- description of the virtual environment, the procedure (baseline measurement, VRET in detail)
- pictures that show the VE in it's starting state as well as it's therapy state (descended floor)
- description of how the VR is controlled by the user(which parameters can be influenced)

2.2 Methods

- main objective is the measurement of gsr during the therapy and the evaluation of the gsr data concerning the stress of the patient during the therapy
- how is the gsr information processed and evaluated?

how is it presented to the user?

- description of how the VR is controlled by the user (which parameters can be influenced)
- graphic of control chain

3 Results

4 Discussion

5 Conclusions and Future Work

A Tables and Measurement Results

List of Figures

List of Tables

Bibliography