“Panic Attackers!” A Digital Card Game to Educate College Freshmen about Anxiety Disorders

Ashley R. Simons and Robert O. Duncan, Department of Behavioral Sciences

INTRODUCTION

The American Psychological Association has identified anxiety as the leading mental health issue in the United States. Recent research has observed the correlation between the major anxieties and the appropriate therapies cards to treat these various anxieties especially on college campuses. Anxiety disorders are seen in approximately 40 million adults in the United States and, by the age of 22, 75 percent of these individuals will see a mental health professional (Bourne, 2010). Matriculating college freshmen are considered “at risk” for anxiety because they lack coping mechanisms to manage the various novel stressors that college brings. Consequently, we developed a game to inform institutional students about the types of anxiety and their respective therapies.

Games are effective because they encouraging practice, provide immediate feedback, and adjust challenges to meet the needs of the individual learner. A digital version of our board game “Panic Attackers!” was created to bring this lesson to a new educational level (Figure 1). All cards define an anxiety or therapy, and therapy cards possess information about which anxiety they relate to. Treasure Cards were used as resources in the game to be spent. (Figure 2) The data will be analyzed and compared to similar traditional teaching studies in order to observe the effectiveness of this game compared to traditional teaching methods. The results of this study are expected to determine whether there were higher scores on independent assessments of knowledge about anxiety compared to students who were given text-based assignments, and whether students would have lower scores on independent assessments of anxiety than students who did not play the game.

METHODS

Apparatus

Cards were used to represent 8 major types of anxiety and 11 therapies (Figure 1). All content was modeled from the Panic Anxiety Disorder Program, Jamaica, NY (Bourne, 2010). Subjects will complete a self-assessment of anxiety using a blank version of the chart in Figure 2.

Procedure

Players receive the following instructions to clarify the game objective: “You are facing 50 action cards!” The following procedures are implicit in the game.

**Action Phase**

- Each turn has an Action Phase, a Buy Phase, and a Clean-up Phase. Just remember:
  - Action Phase
    - 3 cards are drawn from your deck. This is your hand.
    - Players can play one Anxiety Card or Therapy Card. When a challenge prevents you with an Anxiety Card, you must choose the proper Therapy Card to protect yourself from anxiety. If you defend yourself, you will a Therapy Card. To win, you must draw 5 anxiety cards or draw 50 action cards! The following procedures are implicit in the game.
  - Buy Phase
    - Players can buy either 1 attack or 1 therapy card using the Treasure Cards in their hand.
    - Purchased cards are placed into the player’s discard pile.
  - Clean-up Phase
    - All cards in your hand and play area go into the discard pile.

**Buy Phase**

- Treasure Cards
  - 1 Treasure Card = 1 Action
  - 3 Treasure Cards = 1 Anxiety Card
  - 5 Treasure Cards = 1 Therapy Card

**Clean-Up Phase**

- All cards in your hand and play area go into the discard pile.

**REFERENCES**


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