Becoming a Gamer: Cognitive Effects of Real-Time Strategy Gaming

Brian D. Glass  
Department of Psychology, University of Texas at Austin

Marc T. Tomlinson  
Department of Psychology, University of Texas at Austin

W. Todd Maddox  
Department of Psychology, University of Texas at Austin Institute for Neuroscience, University of Texas at Austin

Bradley C. Love  
Department of Psychology, University of Texas at Austin

Abstract: Video games are rich, dynamic, and fast-paced virtual environments that tap a number of cognitive processes. Prior work reveals that experienced video game players (and novices who become experienced) demonstrate enhanced cognitive and perceptual performance in a range of tasks. It is not clear why video gaming leads to these enhancements. To address this, we use real-time strategy games which require dynamic attention and multitasking skills. We employ a variety of novel methods to capture which game features are associated with various cognitive enhancements. Specifically, we use model-based analysis of empirical feature selection priorities, tests of generation via multiple game maps, and a map manipulation of centered versus bimodal attentional load. Novice participants engaged in 40 hours of game-training, with cognitive testing occurring before, during, and after training. We consider the plasticity of cognitive abilities over training in light of these well controlled factors.