

EMDR GAMING RECOVERY AND INSIGHT PROTOCOL (E-GRIP): AN APPROACH FOR  
TREATING VIDEO GAME ADDICTION

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PREVIEW

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **EMDR GAMING RECOVERY AND INSIGHT PROTOCOL (E-GRIP): AN APPROACH FOR TREATING VIDEO GAME ADDICTION**

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The prevalence of video game addiction has escalated with the advancement of digital technologies, posing significant psychological and social challenges. This dissertation introduces the eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR) Gaming Recovery and Insight Protocol (E-GRIP), a novel therapeutic approach designed to address the complexities of video game addiction. Grounded in the principles of EMDR therapy and incorporating insights into video game culture, E-GRIP aims to treat individuals struggling with problematic gaming behaviors by integrating their gaming experiences and preferences into the therapeutic process. The E-GRIP methodology extends the conventional EMDR framework by including an in-depth exploration of the client's gaming behavior, character identification, and the utilization of gaming jargon to enhance the relevance and efficacy of the therapy. Through the lens of video game character archetypes and gaming scenarios, the protocol addresses the emotional, cognitive, and somatic components of addiction, facilitating a comprehensive treatment strategy that resonates with the gaming community.

*Keywords:* EMDR, video games, addiction

## **Dedication**

This dissertation is lovingly dedicated to my beautiful wife, Amy, whose unwavering support has been the bedrock of my academic journey, from the earliest days of my college career to the challenges and achievements of this doctoral program. Amy has been a pillar of strength and motivation, her belief in my goals and dreams propelling me forward, even during moments of doubt and significant personal challenges.

Her support was especially crucial during my medical leave of absence and the subsequent intensive radiation treatment for my arteriovenous malformation (AVM) in my left occipital lobe. Amy's profound strength and resilience uplifted me, and her encouragement reinforced my determination to persevere through the most challenging times. Her ability to maintain grace under pressure and persevere through the adversity of her health struggles is inspiring, and she has been a guiding light in my life. We came out stronger at the end than ever before.

Moreover, Amy's wisdom and insight have often been my compass, guiding my decisions and smoothing the path through the rigors of academic life. It is with deep gratitude that I acknowledge her sacrifices, which, though they may not always be visible, have been fundamental to my success.

This dedication is more than a token of acknowledgment; it is a testament to the transformative power of support, love, and partnership in fostering personal and professional growth. Amy's role in my life vividly illustrates that behind every achievement lies a network of quiet, steadfast support from our loved ones. Thus, this dissertation celebrates my academic accomplishments and the enduring love and support that made it all possible.

Thank you, Amy, for everything. I love you with all my heart. Your love, patience, and unwavering strength have illuminated my path and profoundly enriched my work.

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of my work. Your collective wisdom and encouragement have been pivotal in reaching this milestone. Thank you for being integral parts of my journey toward becoming a psychologist.

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PREVIEW

## Statement of Position

As a Registered Clinical Counsellor (RCC) in private practice, an EMDRIA Certified EMDR Therapist, and EMDRIA Approved Consultant, my journey as a recovering gamer, mainly from my intensive involvement with *World of Warcraft* (WoW), one of the world's most renowned massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs), has deeply informed my therapeutic approach. Excessive gaming significantly impacted my daily functioning, prompting a transition towards more casual gaming habits.

In my practice, I encountered a challenging case involving a young male who had ceased attending school to play *Rainbow Six: Siege* incessantly. His mother, distressed by his refusal to attend school and his violent reactions to attempts at removing his gaming console, sought my assistance. Her son's behavior not only disrupted her work but threatened their family's stability, compelling her to allow him to stay home while she worked to support them. She hoped I could facilitate a reduction in his gaming and encourage his return to school.

Over twelve sessions, I applied EMDR therapy to address his compulsive gaming behaviors, starting with an intake assessment that explored his engagement with *Rainbow Six: Siege*, particularly his role as a medic and his self-perception as a proficient player. This exploration led to a deeper understanding of his connection to the medic role, revealing a significant childhood trauma: witnessing his father's heart attack left him feeling powerless and afraid. By integrating his medic role from the game into our sessions, we processed this traumatic event, enabling him to manage his anxiety more effectively.

Further, we employed elements of the CravEx, DeTUR, and other protocols within the EMDR framework to challenge and diminish his positive associations with gaming, thereby reducing his urge to engage in excessive play. Behavioral interventions were also introduced to

diversify his activities and interests. This comprehensive approach yielded remarkable outcomes: decreased gaming hours, diminished irritability and aggression, and a triumphant return to school.

This case was instrumental in shaping my dissertation. It highlighted a significant gap in the research on using EMDR to treat problematic video gaming. It underscores the potential for innovative, game-informed therapeutic strategies to address the complex dynamics of video game addiction, advocating for further exploration and validation of such methods within the mental health field (Leeds, 2016; Shapiro, 2017).

## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Over the last few decades, the entertainment and leisure landscape has experienced a profound transformation, driven mainly by rapid technological advancements. Among these changes, the rise of video gaming has emerged as a significant cultural and societal phenomenon. Initially regarded as a niche hobby, video gaming has evolved into a dominant and influential medium, deeply ingrained in everyday life and entertainment across the globe. This shift necessitates thoroughly exploring video gaming's multifaceted impacts on society, from its psychological effects to its social implications.

The emergence of “gamers” as a distinct social category in the late 1970s, initially fostered within arcade venues, marked the beginning of a unique subculture centered around video gaming (Kowert, 2020). This community played a pivotal role in the industry's expansion from arcade machines to personal gaming consoles, solidifying gamers as a prominent subculture. According to recent statistics, the video gaming industry continues to proliferate, with significant engagement across various demographics. As of 2024, the Entertainment Software Association (ESA) reports that 190.6 million Americans, including people of all ages, engage in video gaming. This accounts for 61% of the U.S. population playing video games for at least one hour weekly (ESA, 2024). The data indicates that video gaming has become an integral part of entertainment in American households, fostering community and family bonds, with 70% of parents playing video games with their children at least weekly.

Globally, the gaming population is also expanding. Newzoo's Global Games Market Report for 2023 estimated that there were approximately 3.31 billion gamers worldwide, projected to grow to 3.45 billion by 2024 (Newzoo, 2024). This includes various players, from casual mobile gamers to dedicated users of high-end gaming consoles and PCs. The increasing



accessibility and variety of gaming platforms contribute significantly to this growth, making video gaming a ubiquitous part of global entertainment.

This expansive community contributes to an industry projected to generate \$278.4 billion in revenue in 2024 to \$321.1 billion in revenue in 2026 (Pricewaterhouse Coopers, 2023). This growth trajectory has prompted significant technology firms like Google and Apple to venture into gaming streaming services.

The rapid escalation of video gaming to a premier form of entertainment in the modern era has precipitated a surge in concerns related to video game addiction. This condition has attracted significant scholarly and clinical scrutiny. This underscores the urgency to address the psychological repercussions associated with excessive gaming. This increasing prevalence of video game addiction raises critical questions about its implications on mental health and societal well-being.

Amidst the growing concern over problematic video gaming, the lack of a tailored eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR) therapy protocol becomes evident. While EMDR has been successfully adapted for treating alcohol and substance use disorders, as well as behavioral addictions, video gaming addiction presents unique challenges that encompass psychological, social, and cultural dimensions (Fernández-Aranda et al., 2012). This highlights the need for a specialized EMDR approach that addresses the specific intricacies of the gaming world.

Video gaming addiction involves complex factors, including gamers' language, their emotional connection to virtual characters, and the immersive virtual environments they inhabit. Therefore, a new EMDR protocol must not only leverage the therapeutic essence of existing protocols but also be relevant to the gaming context. This involves understanding gamer culture

and how these elements interact with past traumas and current life stressors, which can exacerbate gaming behaviors (Snodgrass et al., 2018).

This dissertation proposes the development of a novel EMDR protocol specifically designed for individuals experiencing problematic video gaming. The protocol aims to integrate the core principles of the existing eight-phase EMDR standard while incorporating a comprehensive understanding of gamer language, culture, and virtual environments. This approach seeks to mitigate the negative consequences of excessive gaming and empower individuals to navigate the gaming world healthily. The proposed EMDR protocol will be examined in detail, outlining its potential effectiveness in addressing the emotional and behavioral aspects of video game addiction. By providing clinicians with new tools and insights, this research aims to contribute valuable resources for treating this growing concern.

## CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Historical Timeline of Video Games

#### 1970s

The origins of video games date back to the mid-20th century, a pivotal era that witnessed the birth of early gaming consoles and marked the beginning of an industry poised to revolutionize the entertainment landscape. This paved the way for the development of the video gaming sector, introducing the world to a new form of interactive entertainment (Kent, 2001). The Magnavox Odyssey, launched in 1972, stands as a landmark in video gaming history, representing the first step towards the complex and immersive gaming experiences familiar to contemporary gamers. As the progenitor of modern video games, the Odyssey offered a primitive gaming experience characterized by basic graphics and limited interactivity. However, it established a foundation for the burgeoning video game industry to expand and diversify rapidly (Kent, 2001).

In the years following the release of the Magnavox Odyssey, the video game industry witnessed exponential growth, spurred by technological advancements and an expanding consumer base eager for new forms of entertainment. This era saw the introduction of iconic games and gaming systems that would leave a lasting impact on popular culture and the entertainment industry. For instance, the release of Atari's *Pong* in 1972, a simple yet addictive table tennis simulation game, captured the imagination of the public and catalyzed the commercial success of video gaming (Wolf, 2008). These early innovations laid the groundwork for the dynamic and multifaceted video game industry known today, demonstrating the potential of video games as a significant cultural and economic force.

The historical trajectory of video games from their rudimentary origins to their current status as a dominant entertainment medium underscores the transformative impact of technological innovation and creative vision in shaping the industry. As video games evolve, they offer increasingly sophisticated narratives, graphics, and interactive experiences, reflecting and influencing cultural trends and preferences. The legacy of the Magnavox Odyssey and its successors highlights the enduring appeal of video gaming and its significance as a cultural phenomenon that transcends mere entertainment (Wolf, 2008).

### 1980s

The 1980s marked a golden era for arcade gaming, when titles like *Pac-Man* and *Space Invaders* became cultural phenomena, capturing the public's imagination and significantly shaping early video game culture (Kent, 2001). These games dominated the arcade scene and laid the groundwork for the social dynamics within the gaming community, as arcades emerged as communal spaces where gamers could gather, compete, and share their experiences. The allure of these games and the environment of the arcades played a pivotal role in cultivating a shared identity among gamers, fostering a sense of belonging and community (Kent, 2001).

Simultaneously, the 1980s also witnessed the advent of home gaming consoles, with the Atari 2600 leading the charge in transitioning video gaming from arcade halls to the domestic sphere (Kent, 2001). This transition was monumental, democratizing access to video games and expanding the gaming demographic beyond the typical arcade-goer. The introduction of home consoles like the Atari 2600 allowed gaming experiences to be personalized and shared within the family setting, thereby broadening the appeal and reach of video gaming (Wolf, 2008).

This shift from arcade to home gaming represented a significant evolution in the consumption of video games, making gaming more accessible and inclusive. As video games

became a staple of home entertainment, the industry saw rapid expansion and innovation, with developers pushing the boundaries of technology and storytelling to create more complex and engaging gaming experiences. The transition also heralded changes in the social dynamics of gaming. In contrast, arcades provided a public space for communal gaming, and home consoles introduced a more private and family-oriented gaming experience (Wolf, 2008).

### **1990s**

The 1990s marked a transformative period in the video game industry, characterized by significant technological advancements and the emergence of 16-bit consoles, which set new standards for gaming experiences. The introduction of platforms such as the Super Nintendo Entertainment System (SNES) and the Sega Genesis represented a leap forward in gaming technology, offering enhanced graphical capabilities that allowed for richer visuals and more complex game designs (Kent, 2001). This era witnessed the birth and proliferation of iconic franchises like Super Mario for the SNES and Sonic the Hedgehog for the Sega Genesis, games that not only captivated players with their engaging gameplay but also with their immersive storytelling, becoming cultural touchstones that transcended the gaming community (Herz, 1997).

Technological advancement during the 1990s facilitated deeper immersion in video games, enabling developers to craft intricate narratives and create expansive virtual worlds. This period also saw the introduction of narrative-driven games, which utilized improved hardware to deliver sophisticated storytelling experiences, thus broadening the scope of what video games could achieve as a form of narrative media (Poole, 2000). The success of these franchises and the widespread adoption of 16-bit consoles underscored the video game industry's growing influence in the entertainment landscape, establishing gaming as a mainstream form of

entertainment with the power to shape cultural narratives and trends (Kent, 2001). In 1994, Sony released the PlayStation, introducing the movement from video game cartridges to disc-based media and three-dimensional graphics (Kent, 2001).

## **2000s**

The emergence of consoles such as the Sony PlayStation and the Microsoft Xbox played pivotal roles in redefining gaming possibilities through their support for realistic graphics, expansive game worlds, and complex narratives (Kent, 2001). The Sony PlayStation 2 launched in 2000, and the Xbox, introduced in 2001, utilized their advanced hardware capabilities to offer gamers experiences unparalleled visual fidelity and narrative depth, setting new standards for the industry (Wolf, 2008). These were followed up by more advanced consoles, with the Sony PlayStation 3 in 2006 and the Xbox 360 in 2005.

Moreover, integrating online connectivity into these consoles represented a transformative shift in the gaming landscape, ushering in the era of multiplayer gaming and online communities. This connectivity allowed players from around the globe to connect, compete, and collaborate in virtual spaces, laying the groundwork for the massively multiplayer online games (MMOs) and expansive online gaming communities that are prevalent today (Kerr, 2006). The PlayStation Network (PSN) and Xbox Live services became central to this online revolution, offering platforms through which gamers could access multiplayer games, digital content, and social networking features, thus enhancing the social aspect of gaming (Taylor, 2021).

The transition to disc-based media and 3D graphics technology enhanced games' visual and narrative aspects. It facilitated the development of more complex and engaging gaming content. Game developers leveraged these technological advancements to create immersive

worlds and stories, contributing to the medium's growing recognition as a legitimate form of storytelling and artistic expression (Jenkins, 2004).

This era's technological advancements and innovations significantly impacted the video game industry's growth and evolution, influencing how games were made, played, and perceived. As a result, gaming became a more immersive, interactive, and socially connected form of entertainment, cementing its status as a significant cultural and economic force in the global entertainment landscape (Kent, 2001; Wolf, 2008).

## **2010s**

Over the past decade, the landscape of video gaming has undergone substantial changes. While there was the introduction of notable consoles, such as the Sony PlayStation 4 and the Xbox One introduced in 2013, allowed for the advancement of graphics and increased the capabilities of game design and performance, there was a significant advancement in the proliferation of mobile gaming and the advent of virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) technologies. The ubiquity of smartphones has transformed them into a prevalent platform for gaming, enabling individuals to access a wide array of games anywhere and at any time. This convenience has significantly contributed to the expansion of the gaming demographic, attracting a diverse audience that includes those who may not have previously engaged with traditional gaming platforms (Consalvo, 2009). Casual games, characterized by their simple rules and short playtimes, have been particularly influential in broadening the appeal of gaming, offering accessible and engaging entertainment options to a broad audience, thereby challenging traditional notions of who constitutes a gamer (Juul, 2010).

Simultaneously, developing and integrating VR and AR technologies have introduced groundbreaking opportunities for immersion within digital environments. VR technology, by

creating fully immersive virtual worlds for users to explore, and AR technology, by overlaying digital information onto the real world, has opened up new avenues for interactive experiences beyond the screen (Deterding et al., 2011). These technologies not only enhance the sensory and emotional engagement with games but also pave the way for innovative applications in education, training, and social interaction, thereby extending the influence of video gaming into new domains (Milgram & Kishino, 1994; M. L. Ryan, 2015).

The rise of mobile gaming and the integration of VR and AR technologies signifies a pivotal shift in the gaming industry, reflecting the evolving relationship between individuals and digital technology. As games become more integrated into daily life and accessible across various platforms, the cultural and social implications of gaming continue to grow in complexity and significance. These developments underscore the dynamic nature of the video game industry and its capacity to continually redefine entertainment, social interaction, and even educational methodologies through technological innovation (McGonigal, 2011; M. L. Ryan, 2015).

## **2020s**

The 2020s have been characterized by significant advancements in console technology, the proliferation of mobile gaming, and a deepening integration of gaming into popular culture. The release of next-generation consoles, such as the PlayStation 5 by Sony and the Xbox Series X by Microsoft in late 2020, marked a significant leap forward in gaming technology. These consoles offered unprecedented graphical fidelity, faster load times, and more immersive gaming experiences through innovations like ray tracing and haptic feedback (Martens, 2020). These consoles' increased processing power and enhanced capabilities have set new standards for game development and player expectations.