**The Violent Side of Video Games**

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When I was a kid, I was obsessed with video games.

I saved my allowance to buy new games every month. I read Nintendo magazines for tips about solving the Super Mario Brothers adventures. I played so many hours of Tetris that I used to dream about little blocks falling perfectly into place.

There were physical effects, too. My thumbs turned into machines, quick and **precise**. During especially difficult levels of play, my palms would sweat. My heart would race. I'd have knots in my stomach from anxiety. It was the same feeling I'd sometimes get from watching scary movies or suspenseful TV shows.

After a while, I started to think that looking at screens and playing games all the time might be affecting me in ways I didn't even suspect. It turns out that I was probably right.

Scientists are discovering that playing video and computer games and watching TV and movies can change the way we act, think, and feel. Whether these changes are good or bad has become a subject of intense debate.

**Concerns about violence**

Violence is one of the biggest concerns, especially as computer graphics and special effects become more realistic. Some parents and teachers blame…aggressive behavior on media violence—as seen in TV programs, movies, and video games.

"If you've ever watched young children watching kickboxing," says child psychologist John Murray, "within a few minutes they start popping up and pushing and shoving and imitating the actions." Murray is at Kansas State University in Manhattan, Kansas.

There's also evidence that people become less sensitive to violence after a while, Murray says. In other words, you get so used to seeing it that you eventually think it's not such a big deal.

Then there's the "mean world syndrome." If you watch lots of violence, you may start to think the world is a bad place. I still sometimes have trouble falling asleep if I watch the news on TV or read the newspaper right before going to bed.

Still, it's hard to prove that violence on TV leads to violence in real life. It might be possible, for example, that people who are already aggressive for other reasons are more drawn to violent games and TV shows…

**Video power**

Most of the research has focused on TV and movie violence, mainly because TV and movies have been around much longer than video games, says psychologist Craig Anderson of Iowa State University in Ames, Iowa. Anderson has a Web site dedicated to looking at the link between video games and violence.

In his own research and in analyses of research by others, Anderson says that he has detected a connection between violent video games and violent behavior. He has found that people who repeatedly play violent games have aggressive thoughts and become less helpful and sociable. Physically, their heart rates accelerate.

Video games might have an even more powerful effect on the brain than TV does, Murray says. Players actively participate in the violence…

Next time you play a violent video game, Murray suggests, check your pulse just before and after each round as one way to see how the game affects you.

"Ninety-nine percent of the time, I'll bet your heart rate will have increased rather dramatically while playing one," Murray says. "This indicates that . . . you are being affected."

Three teenagers from Puerto Rico have data to back up that observation. With the help of a school nurse, the high school seniors found that people of all ages showed a rise in blood pressure and heart rate after playing the superviolent game.  Playing an active, nonviolent game, did not have the same effect.