UNC health researchers explore how to take interactive video games to the next level

It's not just children! Many young adults also spend hours every day playing interactive video games. Is there a way, UNC researchers wondered, to make those games healthier for people to play?

Dr. Deborah Tate, assistant professor in the School's Departments of Health Behavior and Health Education and Nutrition, will lead UNC's efforts to explore how these games could be better designed to improve players' health. The project, supported by a grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation involves research teams at UNC and 11 other institutions.

"Research shows that young adults play video games as much as—or in some cases more than—children do," Tate says. "Since young adulthood is a time of decreasing physical activity and rapid weight gain, video games may provide a more active form of leisure than traditional TV for this age group."

Tate and doctoral student Elizabeth Lyons, an avid gamer, will investigate people's motivations to expend energy while playing video games. They will compare traditional video games played on home consoles with more active games requiring physical movement beyond pushing buttons or flicking the wrist. These active games require that players use a controller such as a dance pad, balance board or even a guitar.

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The researchers will look at effects of types of controllers that players use, the influence of players' perspectives in the game and their feelings of presence and intrinsic motivation. Fifty men and 50 women, ages 18 to 35, will participate in the study, which will examine 10 games.

"The findings may help us understand how to make traditional games more active and active games more compelling," Lyons says.

For more information, visit *www.sph.unc.edu/news/videogames.html.* ■