

**Running head: GAMERS ATTITUDES TOWARDS VICTIMS OF CRIME**

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## Abstract

Research on video game playing has focused mainly on the effects of such games in relation to aggression and attitudes towards perpetrators and towards crime. The present research was designed to investigate gamers' attitudes towards victims of crimes and incidents that were designed to mirror those portrayed in violent video games. Vignettes were used during interviews to explore 50 participants' attitudes towards different types of victims. The results indicate that long-term playing of violent video games appears to be associated with more negative attitudes towards victims of crime. This is the first study to directly explore attitudes towards victims of crime, in relation to violent video game exposure. Compared to nonviolent video game players, the violent video game players in the study reported less positive attitudes towards the victims in the study and attributed more blame to the victims. The implications of this finding in the context of previous research on violent video games, and on attitudes are explored. Directions for future research in the area are also highlighted.

***Keywords: Video games, attitudes, victims, vignettes.***

## **Introduction**

The tripartite (three component) view of attitudes (Katz & Stotland, 1959; Rosenberg & Havland, 1960) argues that an attitude is an unobservable psychological construct which manifests itself in beliefs, feelings and attitudes. Recent research has suggested that an attitude may exist as a result of one of these three components (Fazio & Zanna, 1981; Tykler & Raszynski, 1984), and the three components of attitude formation through cognition, affective processes and behavioural processes, remain a key element of more recent theories. Horgan, Muhlau, McCormack and Reider (2008) in their research on attitudes towards domestic violence in Ireland, have argued that norms regarding tolerance for abuse can manifest themselves in attitudes related to victim empathy, victim blaming and willingness to help. The present research was designed to explore attitudes towards victims of crime and the possible impact of violent video game playing on the attitudes of young people and adults. Attitudes towards victims are explored through a consideration of the three elements of attitudes, the cognitive element which can be seen to be related to victim blaming, the affective element which is related to the variable victim liking, and the behavioural element which is seen to be related to victim helping.

The literature on attitudes to victims has focused mainly on attitudes to victims of rape (Whately & Rigio, 1993; Davies, Pollard & Archer, 2001; Wakelin & Long, 2003; Doherty & Anderson, 2004), domestic assault (Sugerman & Frankel, 1995;), and victims of bullying (Baldry & Farrington, 2004; Rigby, 2006; Gini et al, 2008). Similar research on attitudes in children can be seen in the work on attitudes towards bullying, although there is some research that has explored empathy as a measure of children's attitudes and feeling towards

other types of peer victims (Funk et al, 2003, 2004; Porter & Starcevic, 2007). The research indicates that in general, children do express positive, prosocial and supportive thoughts towards victims of bullying (Menesini et al., 1997; Pervin & Turner, 1998; Smith & Levan, 1995), while indicating that children are generally upset by (and dislike) bullying and fighting (Mooney, Creeser, & Blatchford, 1991; Rigby & Slee 1991,1993; Whitney & Smith, 1993).

*Victim Liking and Victim Helping:* There are various theories exploring the reasons for people helping victims and these are related to internal motivations, empathy and feelings of discomfort. External factors can also play a role, such as the bystander effect where the presence of other people is likely to reduce the likelihood of people helping victims (Darley & Latane, 1968), as well as other characteristics related to victim liking (Shaw, Borough & Fink, 1994), attribution of cause and exposure to prosocial models (Bryan & Test, 1967).

Laner, Benin and Ventrone (2001) conducted research with 700 college students to examine intention to intervene on the behalf of three different types of victims. The researchers reported that there was a significant interaction between the gender of bystanders and the type of victim described in the vignettes. In other research, Clements, et al. (2006) explored adults concern towards victim of crime and level of advocacy in the development of the Victim Concern Scale (VCS). The adult participants in the research were presented with three victim vignettes which were designed to represent a wide range of crime and victim characteristics and circumstances. Concern for violence and for the more vulnerable victims described in the research was found to correlate with victim empathy. Rigby (2006) argued that children are likely to be motivated to help individuals for whom they feel some compassion or sympathy. It has been consistently reported that intervening to support victims and the development of positive feeling towards victims decreases with age (Gini et al, 2008; Henderson & Hymel,

2002; Menesini et al., 2003; O'Connell et al., 1999; Salmivalli, 1999), and their negative attitude towards bullying also appears to decrease with age, with children developing more tolerant attitude towards bullying and less positive attitude towards victims of bullying (Gini et al, 2008).

*Victim Blame:* In exploring attitudes towards victims, one of the key areas of research is the attribution of blame towards victims, and the level of blame attributed to the victim for the incident that occurred. Weiner's attribution theory (1986) argues that people are constantly attempting to determine why people behave as they do and thus attribute cause to behaviour. Heider's theory of attribution (1958) and Kelley's attribution theory (1972) argue that people often assume that behaviour that is purposeful is the result of internal characteristics. Attribution is regarded as a three-step process through which people will often perceive others as causal agents of the action, and this can explain why they will often attribute an amount of blame to the victim. The displacement attribution theory argues that people will defend against a threat by distorting their perceptual judgments of the victim's causal role in their victimization (Thornton, 1984). In addition, the Fundamental Attribution Error (Ross, 1978) or Correspondence Bias (Jones, 1979) suggests that there is a tendency to attribute others actions to dispositional causes, and thus ignore possible external causes for people's behaviour. This tendency, it is argued, may explain why some categories of victims do elicit higher levels of victim blaming (Clements et al, 2006). The key element in these theories of attribution is that people are unaware of these unconscious attribution processes, and so it falls to the researcher to explore these attributions and subsequent attitudes without allowing participants to develop an awareness of the existence of these attitudes.

By attributing the cause of perpetrators' actions to internal characteristics of the victim, the observer can be seen to distance themselves from such occurrences happening to them, as they believe that the incident occurred because of the internal characteristics of the victim. This can have the added benefit of allowing the person to distance themselves from discomfort and the suffering of others. The 'just world theory' (Lerner, 1970; 1980) is based on the belief that most people tend to believe that peoples' fates and fortunes are contingent on their actions and their character. In this sense, bad things are seen to happen to bad people. This allows people to consider themselves safe from negative occurrences as they believe themselves to be a positive person. Research with children has shown links between these beliefs and bullying behaviour towards others, Children with a high belief in just world (BJW) are less likely to act aggressively or to break rules or bully other children (Otto & Dalbert, 2005; Sutton & Winnard, 2007; Correia & Dalbert, 2008; Fox, Elder, Gater & Johnson, 2010). Fox, et al. (2010) found that young people (11- to 16-years of age) with a high BJW showed more sympathy and exhibited greater support for victims of bullying which has also been found in previous research (Bierhoff et al, 1991). Correia and Dalbert (2008) failed to find a correlation between BJW and advocacy for victims of bullying in an Italian sample of 12- to 18-year olds. The authors argued that adolescents' views of a just world may motivate them to avoid any involvement in anti-social behaviour or difficulties.

Ireland (1999) has reported that prisoners who had engaged in bullying would often describe attitudes rejecting victims and attributing blame to the victim for the bullying that had occurred, while similar research has been found with bullying in children (Eslea & Smith, 2000; Menesini, Codecasa, Benelli, & Cowie 2003). The research on young people and bullying also suggests that students tend to attribute higher levels of blame to the victims in the case of direct bullying (Gini, et al, 2008), rather than in situations of indirect bullying.

This may be of importance when interpreting the results of the present study, as the vignettes are comprised of cases of direct crimes, with a clear offence committed against the victim.

### ***Research on Video Game Playing and Attitudes***

*Attitudes towards Perpetrators and Crime:* In relation to aggression, researchers have argued that an association exists between attitudes towards violence and an increased risk of aggression (Anderson & Bushman, 2002; Anderson, Benjamin, Wood & Bonacci, 2006). Ireland, Power, Bramhall and Flowers (2009) argue that the ability to understand attitudes towards violence (and presumably crime and criminals) can allow for a greater understanding of aggressive behaviour and its causes. Relevant research on the impact of violent video games suggests that playing violent video games can encourage fantasizing about aggression and cognitive rehearsal of aggressive acts and may also serve to strengthen pro-violence attitudes (Guerra et al, 1994; Funk, 2005). In one survey of 8- to 20-year olds, long-term exposure to video game violence predicted stronger pro-violence attitudes on the Attitudes towards Violence Scale, Child Version (ATVC; Funk, et al., 2006). Anderson, Gentile and Buckley's (2007) study on 14- to 19-year old adolescents found greater violent video game play correlated with more positive attitudes towards violence in wars, intimate partner violence, and general normative aggressive beliefs. Krahe and Moller (2004) found that German children's violent video game exposure correlated significantly with an acceptance amongst the children of physical aggression.

There have also been studies reported where the researchers have found no such effects from violent media. Sigurdsson, et al (2006) found no significant correlation between empathy and exposure to violent media, such as violent films and video games, while Bosche (2009) claim that their research found no evidence of short-term video game play. Lee, Pen and Klein

(2010) have argued that due to the nature of violent video game activity (i.e., where players are required to perform violent behaviour continuously in order to gain rewards and finish the game), that playing of these games can lead to greater tolerance towards violent crimes and criminals. The researchers employed the use of four comparable real life crime scenes after playing a violent video game. The results indicated that the participants who had played violent video game and role-played a violent police officer were more likely to indicate less punitive attitude towards criminals and crime. As the participants in this study were novice or only occasional video game players, the researchers suggested that this effect of violent video game play on players is evident even after a short time of playing such games. Other relevant research with children suggests that when considering victims of bullying, children generally say they do not like peers who bully. However, there appears to be a small number of children who do hold positive attitudes towards these bullies and research suggests these children might be positively impressed by them because they are perceived as brave, strong and self-confident (Olewus, 1979; Baldry, 2004).

*Violent Video Games and Attitudes towards Victims:* Desensitisation refers to a decrease in negative emotional responses which has been argued can be due to the increased exposure to violent media, and in particular can be due to the playing of violent video games. Funk (2004) argues that desensitisation relates to “changes in emotional responsivity are seen in the blunting or absence of emotional reactions to violent events, which would commonly elicit a strong response” (p.25). Desensitisation has been measured in video game research by conducting research on gamer’s levels of empathy, attitudes towards violence, and by measuring cardiovascular responding to aversive stimuli (Engelhart, Bartholow, Kerr & Bushman, 2011; Carnegey, Anderson & Bushman, 2006; 2007).

Funk et al (2003; 2004) conducted research with children between ages of seven and ten years and found that violent video game play was associated with lower empathy scores and more acceptance of violence. Sakamoto (1994) also identified a negative relationship between frequency of violent video game use and empathy with children, while Barnett et al (1997) found that adolescents (15- to 19-years of age) who played violent video games had lower empathy scores. Staude, et al (2008) have argued for a downward spiral hypothesis similar to that put forward by Slater, Henry, Swain and Anderson (2003) where increased exposure to violent content led to weaker reactions to aversive stimuli, and thus can be seen as desensitization of cardiovascular responding after playing violent video games. Bartholow, Bushman and Sestir (2006) and Carnegiey, Bushman and Anderson (2005) have explored desensitisation in terms of physiological and behavioural effects in relation to violent video game play. More recently, Engelhart et al (2011) have claimed that their research was the first to link violence desensitisation with increased aggression and to argue for a specific neural connection that can explain the impact of violent video game playing on aggression.

Recent research exploring cognitive processes (perspective taking) and affective responses (sympathy) towards individuals has suggested that these factors can be affected by violent video game play through modelling of violent behaviour (Viera & Krcmar, 2011). Similar to the research related to desensitisation of violent video game players, the researchers argued that the playing of violent video games does not allow gamers to develop affective sympathy for the victim in the game, and “pain to others is largely minimized or ignored” (Viera & Krcmar, 2011; p.126). Greitemeyer, et al (2011) have recently explored the concept of dehumanity as an effect of violent video game playing, with the research suggesting that those in the violent game condition associated less positive human-uniqueness and human-nature traits to others. Bastian, Jetten and Radke (2011) have demonstrated that engaging in

violent video game play may diminish players' perceptions of their own human qualities. Taken together, this research suggests that violent video game playing may have a significant effect on players' views of others, and this may be related to their attitudes towards others.

### *Use of Vignettes*

*Rationale for using Vignettes:* The use of vignettes in the current research study allows for a consideration of attitudes towards victim and perpetrator simultaneously, which has not been utilized in previous research studies. The vignettes used are directly related to video games scenes and in this respect they allow for particular conclusions to be drawn with regards to gamers' attitudes. The use of open-ended questions allows for further consideration of topics presented in the vignettes which would not be possible using scales alone.

Vignettes have been used in key research with young people to explore bullying (Nesdale & Scarlett 2004; Gini et al, 2006; Maunder, et al, 2010). Harrop and Tattersall (2010) used written responses to vignette-based questionnaires, while other researchers have presented vignettes to participants through headphones (Hirsch, Hayes & Mathews, 2009) or stories read out (Batson et al, 1997). Vignettes have been used with adults to explore attitudes towards victims of rape (Sleuth & Bull, 2011; Jimenz & Abreu, 2003), to measure self-efficacy and risky driving behaviour (Morisset, Terrade & Somat, 2010), and attitudes towards other health and social related aspects of care (Hazel, 1995; Hughes, 1998; Poulou, 2001; Rahman, 1996).

Vignettes have also been used to explore the effects of violent video games in children (Funk et al, 2003), with findings indicating lower levels of empathy with children who played violent video games but did not find a significant effect of violent game playing on attitudes

towards crime. The present research aims to address some of the limitations noted in this research by using video game content specific vignettes. The vignettes used in this research were chosen to mirror scenes of similar victim scenes as those found in common video games. Previous research using story stems (similar to vignettes) have explored gamers' hypothetical responses to different general situations in life to explore the influence of gaming on aggression (Greitemyer & Oswald, 2009; Guimetti & Markey, 2007; Bushman & Anderson, 2002). It was hypothesized that the violent gamers would differ significantly from the nonviolent gamers in their attitudes towards perpetrators of crime and to the victims of crime, with violent video gamers having more negative attitudes towards victims. The research also aimed to explore gamer's attitudes towards victims in terms of their attitudes towards victim blaming, victim helping, and general victim liking.

## **Method**

### ***Participants***

A total of 54 participants from youth service, recreational clubs (summer projects, dance clubs, and sports clubs), and from an educational institution were recruited for the research. The students from the educational institution were enrolled on a variety of first year Business and Humanities courses. All participants were resident in Ireland at the time of participation. The age range for the participation was 12 to 35 years of age with a mean age of 19.18 years (SD=0.49). The participants were categorised as violent gamers if they played violent video games for more than three hours per week. Consequently, there were 27 violent gamers and 23 nonviolent gamers who participated. There were 19 female gamers (4 violent and 15 nonviolent), and 31 male gamers (23 violent and 8 were nonviolent). Four participants started the interview but decided midway through the process that they did not wish to continue,

their data was not included in the final analysis. The final number of people included in the research was therefore 50 participants.

### ***Measures***

As previously discussed, there is a limited amount research in the area of attitudes towards victims, and this is particularly the case with published scales used to explore children's attitudes towards victims. Within the research on video game effects, there is a small amount of research on attitudes towards criminals (e.g., Lee et al, 2010) and on attitudes towards crime and on levels of empathy (e.g., Bartholow, Sestir and Davis, 2005; Anderson et al, 2004; Bosche, 2009; Funk et al, 2004; 2003; Krahe & Moller, 2004). As a consequence, this study aimed to explore attitudes with young people and adults using a semi-structured interview format, with a combination of structured questions answered on a Likert-style scale, and open-ended questions to allow participants to reflect on the victim and provide an overall impression of the victim in their own words.

***Vignette Design:*** There were three sets of vignettes describing different types of victims. Vignettes were constructed around a set of vignettes using common types of victim crime. This was broken down into three types of victims, as outlined in Table 1. The vignettes used were adapted from newspaper articles of crimes committed in UK and US during May 2010 and May 2011. In order to ensure that the material would not hold any specific relevance to any of the participants, newspaper articles were chosen from outside of Ireland where the study took place, and the identifying information (names of victims and places) were changed in each of the vignettes. Ten adolescent and adult gamers rated the vignettes according to their similarities to scenes in video games they have played. The participants rated these on a

Likert scale with a score of '5' indicating 'very similar' and a score of '1' indicating 'not at all similar'. Table 2 shows the ratings given to the 12 different vignettes used in the research.

People's willingness to contribute (WTC) more resources to save the lives of identified victims than to save anonymous or statistical victims is known as the identifiable victim effect (IVE). Therefore, the vignettes used in the present research described each of the victims by name in each of the vignettes. Each of the vignettes also had a picture related to an aspect of the crime, which portrayed one key aspect of the crime committed, such as a picture of a car, a hospital department or a set of keys, depending on the vignette. The pictures were used to indicate that the vignette was similar to a newspaper article.

*Attitude Towards Perpetrator:*. In recent research, Lee, et al (2010) used a Likert scale to explore participants' evaluations of a perpetrator after playing violent video games. The adult participants were asked how well three different adjectives described their feelings towards a perpetrator in two criminal cases. The adjectives provided to the participants to describe the perpetrator were 'harmful', 'horrible' and 'intolerable'. The present study employed the 'person perception method' (PPM) for assessing participants' initial attitude towards the perpetrator of the crime in the vignette. Rayburn, Mendoza and Davidson (2003) used the PPM of measuring participant's attitudes towards a perpetrator following presentation of a crime vignette to adults. They argued that by having participants provide immediate perceptions of the perpetrator by rating the person on bipolar adjective scales, it could "reduce participant social desirability and therefore enhance uncensored responses to a sensitive and highly charged topic" (2003, p.1066). This method has also been used by others (e.g., Asch, 1946; Collins & Brief, 1995; Jones, 1979; McKinney, 1987). Participants in this study were asked to rate the perpetrators of the crime on a five-point Likert Scale, using six

adjectives, in order to explore attitudes towards the perpetrators of crimes described in the vignettes. The adjectives used are described in Table 3. Each participant's scores were summed to give an overall attitude towards perpetrator score with a higher score indicating more negative attitude towards perpetrators. The participants were also asked if they believed the behaviour was characteristic of the perpetrator on a five-point scale with '1' indicating 'no' and '5' indicating 'yes'.

**Victim Helping:** Laner and Benin (2001) conducted key research on helping behaviour, exploring different victims of crime to assess which types of victims that people were more likely to help. As the present study was interested in exploring young people's attitudes towards victims of crime, it was not possible to explore young people's willingness to help as their ability to help in these situations would be limited in real life situations. Therefore, the questions used to explore the variable of 'victim helping' related to participant's views of others helping the victim. Clements et al (2006) used three victim vignettes to represent a wide range of crime and victim characteristics and circumstances in their research with adults. The research aimed to investigate the level of advocacy for each type of victim by asking participants to rate statements on each vignette such as "*I would like to help the victim*" and "*The victim should have medical expenses paid for by the state*", on a Likert Scale. The present study used two questions, similar to those used by Clements et al to explore victim helping with participant's attitude towards helping victims. The participant's scores on these questions were given on a Likert scale and the scores combined to give an overall victim helping score for the participant, with a lower score indicating that participants believed the victim was deserving of and would receive help from others.

***Victim Blaming:*** Research on victim blaming with children has mostly focused on children who are the victims of bullying. Gini, et al (2008) used bullying vignettes with participants asked to answer the following questions, “*Do you think X was to blame for what happened?*”, “*Should X Blame themselves for what happened?*”, and “*Do you think X should be blamed for what happened?*”. In the present study, six different questions and statements were used to assess the level of blame participants attributed to the victim for the incident that occurred. Table 4 outlines the statements and questions used. These responses were given on a Likert scale with an overall victim blame score calculated for each participant in each of the victims described in the vignette, with a lower score indicating that participant had attributed higher portion of blame to the victim in the vignette. The participants were also asked to describe why this incident had happened to the victim. The data from these questions were analysed using thematic analysis.

***Victim Liking:*** Victim Liking was the third variable investigated in this research and relates to participants’ affective attitude towards victim of crime. Gini, et al (2006) measured victim liking for victims of bullying with young people, by asking participants to rate if they would like to spend time with the victim, do their homework with the victim, and would like to be the victim. The present study measured victim liking by asking participants about their feelings towards the victims, using four statements. These responses were given on a Likert scale with a lower score indicating higher levels of victim liking for the victim in the vignette. The participants were also asked to describe the victim in three words. These data were also analysed using thematic analysis.

***Video Game Questionnaire:*** Participants were asked their age and to name three of their interests and hobbies. If the participants mentioned gaming as one of their hobbies they were

asked to name three games that they played most frequently and asked on average how often they played these games. If participants did not mention gaming as a hobby the interviewer asked them if they played video games. The participants who played video games were categorised as violent gamers if they played violent games during the previous week, for three or more hours. This categorization method has been used in previous research to group participants as gamers or non-gamers (Wack & Tattleff-Duff, 2008).

### ***Procedure***

Participants were thanked for attending for the interview and the requirements for the interview were explained to the participants and they were asked if they wished to participate. The participants were then asked if they ever read newspapers and young people were reminded that they would have read newspaper articles in school (as it is part of the curriculum to study newspaper type articles at junior second level in Ireland). There were three groups of victim vignettes in this study; (i) the general victim group, (ii) the culpable victim group, and (iii) the soldier/police victim group. There were four different vignettes in each of the three groups of vignettes. All participants were given two vignettes (i.e., a general vignettes and a culpable or soldier/police vignette). The first vignette given to all participants outlined a general victim who had an offence committed against them or their property. The participants were given a second vignette which was about a culpable victim or a police/soldier victim.

Participants were given a vignette to read alone initially and then it was read aloud to the participant and ensured that they had fully understood it. The participants were then informed that the questions they would be asked to consider related to the two people mentioned in the vignette, the victim (referred to by name) and the person who had shot, hurt, stolen something

from the participant (based on the particular vignette they had read). This was obviously different for each vignette and the researcher only referred to the victim by name and the perpetrator as the person who had committed the particular offence, thus avoiding the use of the word victim and perpetrator. The researcher then read each of the questions aloud to the participant and asked them which point on the Likert scale they felt represented their answer. Further probes were given on various questions by asking the participant why they felt this was true, why they had given this response. There were 17 questions with Likert scale responses.

The participants were asked to complete the vignette as they would expect to read it in a newspaper. Probes were given to the participants such as including items such as the witnesses to the incident, people who help, if arrests were made, and what had happened to the victim. To ensure participants wrote as much as they felt comfortable doing, the researcher offered to write for the participants and assured them that there were no right or wrong answers, and that there were no marks awarded for writing or spelling, etc. Once participants had finished this, they were asked to complete demographic questionnaire asking them about gender, age and activities they enjoyed doing. Participants were then given the second vignette to read and completed the questions as with the first vignette. The second set of vignettes was randomly chosen by the participant by asking them to choose from eight numbers, each of which represented a particular vignette. The procedure for the second vignette was identical to that in the first vignette, with participants answering the same 17 Likert scale questions and three open-ended questions. Participants were then given the video game questionnaire. This was given last to provide as little suspicion to the participants regarding the study and to ensure the researcher was unaware of the gaming habits of the

participants during the interview. Participants were then debriefed and given an information sheet, and thanked for their participation.

## **Results**

### ***Attitude Towards Perpetrator***

An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the attitudes of the violent gamers and non-gamers towards the perpetrator of the crimes. There was no significant difference ( $t(48)=1.2, p=.24$ ). in the scores for violent gamers ( $M=29.19, SD=3.81$ ) and non-gamers ( $M=30.52, SD=4.08$ ). Therefore, the nonviolent gamers were not significantly different to the violent gamers in terms of their attitudes towards perpetrators of the crimes.

### ***Victim Liking***

This variable was assessed using a scale and one open-ended statement (i.e., *Describe the Victim in three words*).

*Soldier/Police Vignettes:* Three main qualities emerged from the participants' descriptions of the soldier/police victim vignettes and these can be described as brave, loyal, and compassionate (e.g., kind, caring, helpful, and good to family and children). Both violent gamers and nonviolent gamers described these victims mainly in terms of positive attributes (kind, caring) and positive behaviours (good to family and children, and being helpful). For example, Participant 3 (nonviolent gamer) described the victim as “*good policeman, kind, loving to children*”.

All of the nonviolent gamers described the victim in a positive manner. The only negative descriptions of the soldiers and police victims were given by violent gamers in the sample ( $n=6$ ). One of the violent gamers described the victim as “*bossy and mean*” (Participant 1),

while Participant 36 suggested that the victim may “*have upset someone*”. A small number of the violent gamers’ sample (n=4) described the victims as lower in intelligence and lacking ability in relation to their role as a soldier/police officer. In relation to the soldiers’ level of intelligence, Participant 17 stated that the victim in the vignette “*follow(ed) commands, without question, therefore is not clever, should ask questions [and] not just do what he is told*”. Additionally, Participant 7 stated that the victim was a “*bit stupid as should have been looking around for this bomb/landmine*”, and Participant 37 stated that a police man “*should be able to do more with training they have*”. In contrast, none of the nonviolent gamers made reference to the victim’s level of intelligence or decision-making skills in relation to their role.

*Culpable Victims:* The main descriptions of the culpable victims were not positive, with participants describing the victims in terms of negative personality traits (e.g., greedy, dishonest, clumsy, devious, sly) and negative behaviours (e.g., not very nice to people, pleaser, reckless, harmful). There were four positive descriptions of the victims (i.e., clever, kind, harmless, nice) and two neutral comments (i.e., rich, lucky), and all of these comments were made by violent gamers. Nonviolent gamers were more likely (n=6), than the violent gamer sample, to describe the victim as “*foolish*”, “*stupid*” or “*naive*” than the violent gamers (n=4), with Participant 10 (nonviolent gamer) stating that the victim was “*stupid because he shouldn’t have robbed the car*” and Participant 7 (nonviolent gamer) stating the victim was “*a fool for owing so much money*”.

The nonviolent gamer sample were more likely to describe all three types of victims as “*unlucky*” (n=10) although both groups equally described the culpable victim as “*unlucky*” (n=8). The violent gamer sample mainly described the culpable victims in more negative

terms (e.g., dangerous, crazy, mad, violent and cruel; n=9) than the nonviolent sample (n=3). The nonviolent gamer sample were more likely to describe the victims as “*poor*”, “*unhappy*”, “*clumsy*” and “*not very nice*” or “*innocent*”, with Participant 33 (nonviolent gamer) stating that the victim was “*Innocent, misguided, [and] naive to be involved in drugs*”. The nonviolent gamer sample therefore gave more mixed and less negative descriptions of the culpable victims, while the violent gamers were more aggressive in their negative descriptions of the victims.

*General Victims:* The descriptions of the general victims were mainly in terms of positive attributes by the nonviolent gamer sample (n=13), in comparison to the violent gamers (n=6). Violent gamers (n=13) were also more likely than nonviolent gamers (n=4) to refer to internal characteristics of the victims stating that the victims were foolish, silly and careless. Therefore violent gamers described victims in terms of negative personality characteristics to a greater extent, than the nonviolent gamers. Nonviolent gamers were more likely to describe these victims as unlucky and of being “*in the wrong place at the wrong time*” (Participant 28, nonviolent gamer) (n=11) than the violent gamers (n=7). Eight violent gamers also stated that the victim was cowardly, or was scared, while only two nonviolent gamers mentioned this in their description. While none of the violent gamers described the victim as courageous, three of the nonviolent sample described the victim as brave.

i) Victim Liking Scales:

An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare victim liking scores for violent gamers and non violent gamers. There was a significant difference ( $t(48) = 1.98, p = .053$ ) in scores for violent gamers ( $M = 11.37, SD = 4.72$ ) and nonviolent gamers ( $M = 8.91, SD = 3.91$ ).

Therefore, nonviolent video game players reported higher levels of victim liking, than the violent video game players

### ***Victim Blaming***

This variable was assessed using a scale of victim blaming and one open-ended statement (i.e., *Describe why this happened to the victim*).

*Soldier/Police:* All the participants from the nonviolent gamer sample (n=11) and the majority of the violent gamer sample (n=9) stated that the reason for the victim in these vignettes being hurt was related to their profession. For example, Participant 26 stated “*because he was policeman, goes with the job*”, while Participant 27 said “*he is a soldier at war, had a weapon and is part of the job of being a soldier, it is always a risk*”. Two of the violent gamers stated that the victim was in the wrong place at the wrong time, Participant 16 stated that the victim was “*not a nice guy, [but] in wrong place, wrong time*”.

*Culpable Victims:* All of the participants in both the violent gamer sample and nonviolent gamer sample referred directly to the previous negative behaviour of the victim when asked to provide reasons for the culpable victim being treated in this way. The participants referred to the victim owing money (n=7), breaking the law and having a criminal record (n=5), and of working with drugs and other criminals (n=3). The violent gamers consistently pointed to the fact that the victim had committed a crime, upset someone, or got involved with criminals as an explanation for why the victim had been treated in this way. Participant 29 (violent gamer) stated “*owing the men money, they had decided to punish him*”. Participant 18 (violent gamers) stated that the victim was “*involved with other criminals, what does he expect?*”.

Nonviolent gamers (n=8) were more likely than violent gamers (n=2) to attribute the cause of the incident to the motivation of the perpetrator, with participants noting that the “[offender] does not like authority, saw them as the enemy, [and] wants to avoid jail at any cost” (Participant 48, nonviolent gamer) while another stated that “the assailants were part of a gang and one of the gang got caught and this was a revenge act” (Participant 3, nonviolent gamer). One of the nonviolent gamers referred to an internal personality characteristic of the victim, stating that he may have been “rude” (Participant 5), while another nonviolent gamer stated that the “person who shot them was obviously just a very violent person” (Participant 33).

*General Victims:* Violent gamers (n=11) were more likely than nonviolent gamers (n=3) to attribute the reason for the victim being hurt in the general vignettes to individual victims behaviours. The violent gamers attributed the cause of the incident to victims being drunk (n=4), upsetting someone or owing money (n=3), and breaking the law and dropping their keys (n=4). Participant 35 (violent gamer) stated the victim had “dropped his keys, bit stupid, what does he expect”. Participant 18 stated the victim “was too drunk to react” and Participant 26 (violent gamer) stated the victim was “jaywalking, so kind of her own fault, what do you expect if you behave like this and break the law?”.

The nonviolent gamers were more likely to attribute the victim’s incident to them being unlucky (n=6), and to the actions of the perpetrator (n=8). Participant 5 stated that the victim was “unlucky (or) people were jealous of his car”, while Participant 33 stated “I don’t think it was Stephen’s fault, he was just getting into his car, it was the thief’s fault”. Overall, violent gamers (n=27) were more likely to attribute the cause of the incident to the victim’s

behaviour than the nonviolent gamers (n=16). The behaviours were directly related to something that the victim had done recently, in the three groups of vignettes. The reasons given by the violent gamers included arguments that the victim had “*done something on someone*” (Participant 2) or was “*out of control*” (Participant 21), or was “*involved with criminals*” (Participant 18).

ii) Victim Blaming Scale:

An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare victim blaming scores for violent gamers and nonviolent gamers. There was a significant difference ( $t(48) = 2.2, p=.028$ ) in scores for violent gamers ( $M=20.15, SD=7.6$ ) and nonviolent gamers ( $M=25, SD=7.51$ ). More specifically, violent video game players indicated higher levels of victim blaming than nonviolent video game players.

***Victim Helping***

An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare victim helping scores for violent gamers and nonviolent gamers. There was not a significant difference ( $t(48) = .087, p=.931$ ) in scores for violent gamers ( $M=6.29, SD=3.56$ ) and nonviolent gamers ( $M=6.22, SD = 2.73$ ) in terms of their scores on victim helping scale.

**Discussion**

Using vignettes as part of a semi-structured interview study, the present research demonstrates that long-term playing of violent video games by both adolescents and adults appears to be associated with more negative attitudes towards victims of crime. More specifically, the violent game players reported less positive attitudes towards the victims in

the vignettes, and attributed more blame to the victims, than the nonviolent video game players. Previous research has explored empathy towards victims (Funk et al 2003; 2004; Bartholow, Sestir & Davis, 2005) but no previous research has explored attitudes towards victims of crime.

In relation to liking of victim described in the vignettes, the analyses of the scale indicated while there was no significant difference in the scores given by the violent gamers and the nonviolent gamers, the violent gamer sample were more likely to describe the police/soldier victims and the general victims in more negative terms than the nonviolent gamers. While the entire nonviolent gamer sample described the culpable victims in a negative way, a number of the participants in the violent gamer sample described these victims in a positive or neutral way. In contrast, there were no positive descriptions of these victims given by the nonviolent sample.

In relation to victim blaming, the analyses of the scale indicated that the violent gamer sample did differ significantly from the nonviolent group, in terms of their views of blaming the victim for the crime that had occurred. In exploring the descriptions given by the participants, it was found that the violent gamer sample was more likely to attribute the cause of the crime to the victim's behaviour than the nonviolent gamer sample. This finding was particularly relevant when people were asked to consider the general victim vignettes, and non-violent gamers more likely to attribute the cause of the crime to the victim being unlucky or to the fault of the perpetrator. Attribution research has found that people are actively making attributions about the role people have played in any misfortune that happens to them. In research with Australian children, Rigby (1996; 1997) reported that between 10% and 20% of all students interviewed reported that they felt negatively towards victims, with

the students reluctant to mix with the victims and referring to them in negative terms as a way of explaining why the person had become a victim.

The role of the defensive attribution (Shaver, 1970) may be considered salient in the attribution of blame in the culpable and police vignettes in the present study. This theory argues that people can be motivated to bias and distort causality and responsibility assignments in order to minimize their own responsibility for negative incidents. The victims past behaviour in these particular vignettes could be seen to play a role in the cause of the crime that was committed against them. Support for this argument can be seen in the fact that in the case of both of these victims, participants often made reference to their past (in culpable vignettes) and the profession of the police victims. In contrast to this, in the general victim vignettes there was no indication that participants believed that the victim was related to the act that occurred to them.

The use of vignettes in the present study describing cases of actual offences that caused harm to identified victims offers a new area of research to the impact of video games. Previous research has suggested that young people tend to blame victims in the case of direct bullying, rather than in situations of indirect bullying (Gini, et al, 2008). Therefore, in the present study it might be expected that both samples of participants would attribute more blame to the victims in the general victim vignettes. However, the violent gamers were more likely than the nonviolent gamers to attribute blame to these victims.

Exposure to violent video games has been found to be associated with more aggressive responses to ambiguous story stems (Gumetti & Markey, 2007) and it could be argued that in the current study, the descriptions of the victims given by the participants, were more

aggressive in their tone, particularly in the case of the culpable victim vignettes. The violent gamers used more aggressive terms to describe the victims than the nonviolent sample, who described the victims as “*innocent*”, “*naive*” and “*misguided*”. Additionally, the violent gamers were more likely to attribute the cause of the incident to the victim’s behaviour than the nonviolent gamers, while the nonviolent group were more likely to attribute the cause of the incident to the actions of the perpetrator. This may concur with recent research that found a higher level of positive attitudes towards criminals in those that played violent video games, than in other young adults (Lee, Pen & Klein, 2010).

Social learning theory points to the potential impact of media characters as role models triggering the processes of observational learning and imitation that can promote the acquisition and performance of aggressive behaviour (Bandura, 1973; Eron et al., 1972), and it can be argued this can be particularly when media characters are rewarded for their aggressive behaviour (Funk et al, 2004). Much of the previous research exploring the impact of violent video games on gamers has pointed to the role of these role models in the levels of aggression and attitudes identified in the players. In the current study, the gamers were less sympathetic towards the police and soldier victims and thought these people were more likely to be ineffective in their job, and some participants argued that the victims should not be in the situations that they were (being hurt) as they should know better with their training. This may be related to the fact that the violent gamers felt that they had some knowledge of the skills needed to be an effective soldier/policeman as they were playing these characters in the games that they were playing. It could be argued that self-efficacy levels could also play a role in this process, with gamers believing that they have a comprehensive understanding of the role of policemen/soldier and feeling that they could complete these tasks that these characters do, and then their levels of imitation of the characters behaviour could be higher.

It could be argued that children and young people between the ages of 12 years and 20 years of age are at a key developmental stage. Funk, Chan, Brouwer and Curtis (2006) have argued that the impact of violent models in video games may have a more significant impact on children when they are younger as they are developing a moral scaffolding. Funk (2003) has suggested that the social information processing theory may explain why children with greater exposure to video game violence may not attend to cues that trigger empathic responding, or may misinterpret such cues, suggesting desensitization. Virea and Kremer's (2011) research with children suggest that violent video game play is negatively related to perspective taking and ability to sympathise with people. Although the research did not explore the impact of violent video game play on victims of crime directly, the research suggests that these games may impact on the affective and cognitive elements of attitudes towards others. Therefore, the present study can be seen as an extension of this study with violent video game play associated with decreased affective and cognitive attitudes towards victims in young people.

The findings from the current study may have a wider societal impact and it can be argued could be considered in relation to key decision-making processes within the judicial system. The use of peers in a jury in the court system may be a key process affected by the results from the present research study. The research suggests that long-term players of violent video games have a more negative attitude towards victims and are more likely to blame victims, then this group may represent a particular group in society that are biased in their views of victims of crime than people who are not playing these violent games. Levels of violent video game play may therefore be a key factor to consider when people are chosen to be members of as jury.

*Limitations and Future Research:* The scales used in the present study, were those based on research on bullying and attitudes towards victims generally and may therefore not be suitable for the exploration of other attitudes with young people. This may have affected the quality of the results. This study introduced key strategies to try to control for some of these confounding variables, such as the use of interviewer reading the scales and vignettes to all young people, and the use of additional questions with the adult participants.

Gumetti and Markey (2007) argue that story stems can only assess how a person considers someone else will react to the current situation described, rather than assessing how a person will actually react and a similar argument can be made about the current research. The use of vignettes can only assess people's attitudes towards the victim described in this vignette and not towards all victims. As previous research has highlighted (e.g., Gentile et al, 2004; Ferguson, 2007; Porter & Starcevic, 2007), it was not possible to control for peoples' exposure to other violent and aggressive media and role models. This is a common argument against the use of correlation studies.

There was a difficulty obtaining participants to take part in the study, and a number of adolescent students were excluded from the final analysis as they decided to withdraw during the study. Several of the older people who played violent video games who were approached to take part were also reluctant and they appeared defensive about the study of violent video games and the violent content of the games. A similar finding of defensiveness when asked to discuss violent content in games has been found in other research with children (Funk et al, 2006). This could mean that some types of violent game players were not representative in the current study.

The present study was interested in exploring the concept of helping behaviour in relation to attitudes towards victims of crime. The use of open-ended questions was used with the participants asked to indicate if they believed the person would be helped by others and an open-ended question asking participants to complete the newspaper vignette, indicating the level of witnesses and help that the victims in the vignettes would have received. This was difficult for some of the young people to understand, and the varying levels of answers and willingness to answer this question meant that the overall results on this section of the study were extremely mixed. Therefore, it was felt by the research team that there was no benefit to include this aspect of the data in the overall analysis. It would be interesting for future research to explore the concept of helping behaviour in relation to victims of crime, in an age appropriate way. The difficulty with the concept of helping within the present research related to the lack of feasibility of the young person being able to help the victim in the vignettes and as such the exploring of participants' willingness to directly help the victim was not possible.

Kutner and Olsen (2008) argue that the difficulty of completing research with children can be related to the confidence researchers can have in children's abilities to answer honestly or accurately, as often they may get bored and make things up or misremember information. The present study employed an interview methodology in an attempt to address some of the comprehension difficulties children may have with the vignettes and questions used, although the authors' acknowledge there may still be difficulties with this methodology when completing studies with younger children. It could be argued that the use of questions related to the perpetrator of the crime and in relation to the victim could have caused comprehension difficulty for the participants. However, specific strategies were used by the researchers in an

attempt to overcome these possible difficulties, with the names of the victim made clear when discussing them and the interviewer making clear to the participant who the questions was making reference to at all times.

Future research in this area may consider exploring the area of attitudes with younger children and consider different elements of participants' attitudes towards victims, in both children and adult settings. It would be of use to have an instrument to allow the exploration of general attitudes and to explore the relationship between males and female gamers in relation to empathy and other general and specific elements of attitudes . The present research findings could be extended through further design of specific scales to assess participant's attitudes towards victims, particularly victims of crime. By extending the research in this area of attitude formation and violent video game play, researchers should consider female gamers and the possible impact of playing these violent games on this gamer sub-group. In the current study there was a gender imbalance. As with similar studies, it is difficult to address this as most males aged 12 to 20 years play violent video games. It could be argued that the present findings indicating a significant difference between the violent gamer and nonviolent gamer participant scores could be explained by the lack of females amongst violent gamers.

Overall the results of this study suggest a significant difference between violent gamers and nonviolent gamers in relation to attitudes towards victims of crime. The association between violent video game play and less positive attitudes can be related to both the cognitive and affective components of people's attitudes towards victims of crime, with violent gamers reporting lower levels of victim liking (affective) and higher levels of victim blaming (cognitive), than the nonviolent gamers. Further research is needed to explore this concept further and to consider the mechanisms through w

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**Table 1: Three types of victims described in vignettes**

Vignette Type	Victim Described
General Victims Vignettes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- business man who had his car stolen</li><li>- a woman held hostage</li><li>- a woman hit by a car</li><li>- a witness to an assault</li></ul>
Culpable Victims Vignettes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- drug addicts</li><li>- people with previous criminal history</li><li>- were known to police</li><li>- owed crime bosses money.</li></ul>
Specific Victims Vignettes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- victims who where police officers</li><li>- army personnel injured in the line of duty</li></ul>

**Table 2: Ratings for the Vignettes used**

<b>Vignette</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Mean Average Rating</b>
1. Man shot in drug row	Culpable	3
2. Hit and Run	General	3
3. Drug	Culpable	3.8
4. Soldier	Soldier	3.4
5. Restaurant Worker	General	2.9
6. Police	Soldier	3.1
7. Police	Soldier	3.5
8. Witness	General	2.9
9. Car stolen	General	3.8
10. Criminal	Culpable	3.4
11. Soldier	Soldier	3.6
12. Criminal (shooting)	Culpable	3.2

**Table 3: Attitude towards Perpetrator Bipolar Adjective Scale**

Nonviolent	Violent
Gentle	Forceful
Kind	Cruel
Blameless	Blameworthy
Dependable	Undependable
Harmless	Harmful

**Table 4: Questions used in Study**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Corresponding Questions &amp; Statements</i>
Victim Blame Scale	What percentage of blame would you attribute to X for what happened to him?
	Should X blame them for what happened?
	I believe X was responsible for what happened to him
	I believe the incident was X's fault
	I believe somebody else should be punished for what happened to X *
	Do you feel X was innocent? *
Victim Blame	Describe why this happened to X (victim)
Victim Liking Scale	I believe that X (victim's) family and friends would be upset by what has happened to them
	I believed X (the victim) was liked by many people
	I believed X (the victim) was unlucky
	I feel that what has happened to X (the victim) was sad
Victim Liking	Describe X (the victim) in three words
Victim Helping	I believe X deserves help from others
	I believe people would stop and help X if they observed this incident.

\* *These scale items were reverse scored*