Gamers’ Attitudes towards Victims of Crime: An Interview Study Using Vignettes

Lavinia McLean, International Gaming Research Unit, Psychology Division, Nottingham Trent University, Nottingham, UK

Mark D. Griffiths, International Gaming Research Unit, Psychology Division, Nottingham Trent University, Nottingham, UK

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: Attitudes, Victims, Video Game Players, Video Games, Vignettes, Violent Video Games

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 & Rasinzki, 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 peoples and adults. Attitudes towards victims are explored thorough 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 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
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