



Japan: Rape simulator games and the normalization of sexual violence



Photo by Everjean Flickr

A schoolgirl around 12 years old travels on a commuter train. A man who has been following her gropes and sexually molests her. Eventually the train stops and she runs frightened into a public toilet, followed by her assailant who handcuffs and rapes her. The assailant takes her prisoner and repeatedly rapes her in various locations. Her mother and teenaged sister suffer the same fate. This family is targeted for rape as punishment because the older sister had previously reported to the police the attempted sexual assault of another woman by the rapist. This is the storyline of RapeLay, a rape simulator computer game produced by Illusion Software and sold in Japan. Prior to issuing this Action Equality Now brought RapeLay to the attention of Amazon Japan which also sold the game. Since then it has removed the game from sale, however it continues to sell similar titles based on stalking and sexually molesting women and girls.

Extreme pornography in the form of cartoons known as *hentai*, in various media such as comic books, animation, computer games and online entertainment, is easily accessible in Japan and its use is widely accepted. Common themes of *hentai* include rape, gang rape, incest and the sexual abuse of schoolgirls. This latter form of *hentai*, known as *Loli-Con*, often portrays girls being sexually abused by adults in familiar positions of power such as teachers. A number of computer games involving rape, sexual harassment and stalking of women and girls has been produced in Japan. These go one step further than other forms of *hentai* by enabling the player to control what happens through manipulation, for example as in RapeLay, of an onscreen penis and hands to simulate rape and sexual assault.

The aim of the RapeLay game is for the player to repeatedly rape the mother and her daughters until they begin to “enjoy” the experience. First, the player manipulates the onscreen hand to sexually assault each woman or girl on a train. This assault disturbingly mirrors the real-life situation in Tokyo where, in 2005, the local government was forced to introduce women-only carriages after a survey found that 64% of women in their 20s and 30s had been molested on public transport. Most respondents said they had been groped several times over the previous 12-month period. The sexual assault in RapeLay continues as the woman or girl becomes increasingly distressed and eventually runs away terrified to a secluded spot where the player can then simulate raping her. Both the young girls are virgins and their first rapes are represented by the breaking of their hymens with blood on the penis.

After on-screen raping of the mother and her two daughters, the player has more control over rape scenarios and must “rape-train” the woman and girls by subjecting them to multiple and varied sexual assaults, including gang rapes, until they succumb to each assault and even beg their rapist to indulge them. As the rapes continue the chances of the woman and girls becoming pregnant increases. The player must, however, force the woman and girls to get abortions otherwise one of the girls will stab him to death, again in a manner that sexualizes violence. Illusion Software has also issued a free download that includes depiction of the woman and girls in a cell being subjected to sexual torture, as well as a scene of a particularly brutal rape of the elder daughter with the mother and younger daughter being forcibly restrained and made to watch.

The Anti Pornography and Prostitution Research Group, an organization based in Japan which has been working to stop the objectification of women, says it has difficulty in trying to educate a government that even allows real gang rape videos to be sold in the open market. It was not until 1999 that Japan outlawed child pornography. However, pornographic computer games remain unregulated as they fall outside the legal definition of child pornography in the Law for Punishing Acts Related to Child Prostitution and Child Pornography of 1999.

Japan ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1985 and was last examined on its report in 2003 by the CEDAW Committee, which reviews government compliance with CEDAW. While in its report the Japanese government recognized that “violence from husbands or partners, sexual crimes, prostitution, sexual harassment and stalking behaviour are grave violations of women’s human rights” the CEDAW Committee expressed concern that Japanese law characterized stalking as “acts to ‘satisfy love or other favourable feelings towards the person,’ or to ‘work off grudges resulting from the failure to satisfy these feelings.’” Such characterizations are rampant in *hentai*, which include a successful Japanese comic book series called *Rape Man*, portraying a male teacher who transforms into “superhero” *Rape Man* by night, raping women in order to settle grudges or “teach them a lesson” for jilting their lovers.

In its general recommendation No. 19 on “violence against women”, the CEDAW Committee confirmed that “[g]ender-based violence is a form of discrimination that seriously inhibits women’s ability to enjoy rights and freedoms on a basis of equality with men.” Specifically, it commented that “traditional attitudes by which women are regarded as subordinate to men or as having stereotyped roles perpetuate widespread practices involving violence or coercion...Such prejudices and practice may justify gender-based violence as a form of protection or control of women...These attitudes also contribute to the propagation of pornography and the depiction and other commercial exploitation of women as sexual objects, rather than as individuals. This in turn contributes to gender-based violence.”

When reporting to the CEDAW Committee, the Japanese government admitted that “the image of women in the media, who were often portrayed as objects either of sex or violence, had a great impact” on gender stereotypes. The CEDAW Committee expressed concern about such stereotypes of women, “the prevalence of violence against women and girls and about women’s apparent reluctance to seek assistance from existing public institutions.” It also noted that “the penalty for rape is relatively lenient.” To prove rape in a court of law in Japan, judges often look at the level of violence perpetrated and/or the degree of resistance put up by the victim rather than whether the woman actually consented to intercourse.

Japan has an obligation under Article 5(a) of CEDAW “to modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women, with a view to achieving the elimination of prejudices and customary and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women.” In addition, Article 14 of the Japanese Constitution guarantees equality under the law and states that there shall be no “discrimination in political, economic or social relations because of race, creed, sex, social status or family origin.” Computer games such as RapeLay condone gender-based discriminatory attitudes and stereotypes, which perpetuate violence against women. Rather than allowing them to flourish, the Japanese government should be taking effective measures to overcome these attitudes and practices, which hinder women’s equality.

Recommended Actions

Please write to Illusion Software asking it to withdraw immediately from sale, whether online or any other outlets, all games, including RapeLay, which involve rape, stalking or other forms of sexual violence or which otherwise denigrate women. Suggest that corporations have a responsibility to consider, as good business practice, any negative impact their activities may have on society and the public interest. Please write a similar letter to Amazon Japan asking it to remove all games that simulate sexual and other forms of violence against women and girls. Write also to the Japanese government officials below, calling on them to comply with Japan’s obligations under CEDAW and the Japanese Constitution to eliminate discrimination against women and particularly to ban the sale of computer games such as RapeLay, which normalize and promote sexual violence against women and girls.

Mr. Tadashi Yoshimura
Managing Director, Illusion Software
1-10-1 Nishikanagawa Kanagawa-ku,
Yokohama-city, Kanagawa 221-0822, Japan
Tel: (+81) (0)4-5322-1551
Email: illusion@illusion.jp

Mr. Jasper Cheung
President of Amazon Japan K.K
2-15-1 Shibuya, Shibuya-ku, Tokyo 150-000-2, Japan
Email via website:
<https://www.amazon.co.jp/gp/help/contact-us/english-speaking-customer.html?ie=UTF8&nodeId=&type=email&skip=true#csTop>

Prime Minister Taro Aso
2-3-1 Nagata-Cho, Chiyoda-ku,
Tokyo 100-0014, Japan
Tel: (+81)(0)3-3581-0101
Fax: (+81)(0)3-3581-3883
Email via website:
<http://www.kantei.go.jp/foreign/forms/comment.html>

Mr. Eisuke Mori
Minster of Justice
1-1-1 Kasumigaseki,
Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo 100-8977,
Japan
Tel: (+81)(0)3-3580-4111
Fax: (+81)(0)3-3592-7393
Email:
webmaster@moj.go.jp

Ms. Yuko Obuchi
Minister of State for Social
Affairs and Gender Equality
1-6-1 Nagata-cho, Chiyoda-
ku, Tokyo 100-8914, Japan
Tel: (+81)(0)3-5253-2111
E-mail via website:
http://www.gender.go.jp/english_contents/index.html

With a copy to:
Ms. Seiko Noda
Minister of Consumer Affairs
1-6-1 Nagata-cho, Chiyoda-ku,
Tokyo 100-8914, Japan
Tel: (+81)(0)3-5253-2111

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Equality Now, P.O. Box 20646, Columbus Circle Station, New York, NY 10023 USA or
Equality Now, P.O. Box 2018-00202, Nairobi, KENYA or
Equality Now, P.O. Box 48822, London WC2N 6ZW, UK