Title: “She asked for it”: Can violence against women in video games cause increased rape myth acceptance?

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Introduction: Violent video games often aim brutality and aggression towards women, a phenomenon we labeled virtual violence against women (VVAW). The present study investigated the relationship between VVAW and rape myth acceptance among players. We hypothesized that those who played against female enemies would have higher rape myth acceptance than those who played against male enemies. Evaluating this link adds knowledge of how video game content impacts gamers’ gender norms and attitudes toward violence.

Method: In a controlled laboratory setting, participants played the video game Skyrim in one of two randomly assigned violent gaming conditions (female enemies or male enemies) for 30 minutes. Participants then completed a survey concerning their attitudes about women and violence. This survey included the Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance scale, a questionnaire in which participants indicate the extent to which they agree with many common myths related to the justification of rape. Of the 111 participants included, 27% were male and 72.1% were female, averaging 19.86 (3.62) years of age. An independent samples t-test compared levels of rape myth acceptance among gamers who played Skyrim against women to those who played against men.

Results: There was no significant difference in Rape Myth Acceptance between those who played against women (M=1.70, SD=.64) and those who played against men (M=1.69, SD=.56); t(109)=.059, p = ns. These results suggest that the gender of an opponent in a violent video game does not significantly impact explicit reports of rape myth acceptance.

Conclusion/Discussion: Although the present study found no relationship between the gender of enemies in violent games and rape myth acceptance, it only examined one piece of a larger puzzle. Additional research on the relationship between VVAW and attitudes about women and violence is still necessary. Future research should focus on examining relationships between the different types of violence against women and graphic or hyper-sexualized content in games and real world attitudes and behaviors. Such research could have vast implications for game rating and sales regulations and parent purchasing decisions.