

Does Glamorizing Violence in Films Inspire Copycat Crimes?

James Holmes, the man identified as the killer responsible for the massacre at the premiere of the latest Batman film, *The Dark Knight Rises*, dressed himself up as The Joker, the arch-villain in the previous Batman film, *The Dark Knight*.

Holmes, who announced himself to the police as “The Joker,” has clearly modeled himself and his actions on the extremely demented character played by Heath Ledger in the 2008 film. But this is not the first time we’ve seen movie characters inspire criminal copycats.

Blockbuster Copycats

Oliver Stone’s 1994 film *Natural Born Killers* was blamed for eight murders which the killers modeled on the film. As 18-year-old Christopher Smith was being led away by the police for murdering an 82-year-old man, he shouted to the media: “I am a natural born killer!” His statement echoed the words of actor Woody Harrelson in the movie.

Then, 15-year-old Jason Lewis murdered his parents. Police found that Lewis worshipped Satan, and along with three friends, had formulated a plan to kill all their parents and to copy the cross-country murder spree portrayed in *Natural Born Killers*.

The same week that *Silence of the Lambs* won an Academy Award for best picture, a young man decapitated his handicapped mother. “I’m Hannibal the cannibal!” he claimed, as he was led away by the police, Associated Press reported on March 26, 1993.

Scott Edward May, a 17-year-old obsessed with slasher movies, the occult and heavy metal music, attacked a girl during their first date. He stabbed her. They had just seen the movie *The*

Cutting Edge. May told the police that he had had an urge to kill since childhood: "I like to go to the movies a lot. A lot of people get stabbed in movies. I really like the *Texas Chain Saw Massacre*. A lot of people got stabbed in that."

The children convicted of the brutal murder of James Bulger in 1993 splashed their victim in blue paint, in imitation of the film *Child's Play 3*. After watching *Jungle Fever*, a 13-year-old boy raped his 8-year-old female cousin. The film *Scream* was identified as the inspiration for a murder in Belgium in 2001. And Cho Seung-Hui, the student who killed 32 people in Fairfax, Va., in 2007 had repeatedly watched the ultra-violent Korean movie *Old Boy*, and modeled poses from the film in his video diary.

Avoiding Exploitative Violence

In the golden age of Hollywood, effective action and suspense stories were shown where violence was sensitively portrayed, mostly being suggested, rather than actually seen. Most of the actual violence took place off camera and was without the blood, gore and extremely graphic, turbo-charged violence which is becoming a hallmark of many Hollywood action films today. As Alfred Hitchcock showed, you could create very effective films that had shock and suspense, without needing to portray any graphic violence at all.

Even when some films have a good message, the medium can overwhelm the message. Just because computer-generated images are now making possible more realistic sequences than ever before, does not mean that it is necessary, or helpful, to do so.

There are also an increasing number of video games which glamorize mass killing sprees. The potential impact of such desensitization on a psychopath or sociopath has been all too-well demonstrated time and again. Many of the mass murderers of tomorrow are being programmed by such massive overdoses of violence through Hollywood and violent video games today.

When you add to this toxic mix the extremely aggressive, angry rap, rock, hip-hop and other noise masquerading as music, it should not surprise us when such horrendous atrocities take place.

Ideas Have Consequences

Secular humanism is a worldview of destruction. Those who hate God love death. The massacre in Aurora, Colo., is just another demonstration of the truth of the depravity of man, the danger of glamourizing violence in the entertainment industry, violent video games, superficial materialism and self-centred existentialism.

We are involved in a spiritual world war of worldviews. We need to learn to discern, we need to redeem the media and we need to clean the screen.

To most young people, films are more real than reality. Movies show you what to do, how to do it, when to do it, why to do it and how to feel about it. Children learn by teachers presenting information and behavior, repeating the information and behavior, and by being rewarded for the accurate feedback of the information and/or behavior. Films and television present, repeat and reward behavior even more than parents and teachers do, because it occupies more time, delivers more information per minute, and is exciting, entertaining and captivating. So what films and programs are you watching?

1. It is important that we recognize that immoral, violent, occultic and pagan films, DVDs, TV programs and computer games present a serious threat to the development of our children. "Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them" (Ephesians 5:11).

2. Obtain documentaries that will help alert your family, friends, youth group and congregation to the deceptions and dangers in many films, such as *Death by Entertainment*, *Learn to Discern*, *Hollywood Vs. Religion*, *Hells Bells* and *The Final*

Frontier. “They are to teach my people the difference between the holy and the common and to show them how to distinguish between the unclean and the clean” (Ezekiel 44:23).

3. Be selective in your viewing choices. Take control over what is filling and forming your children’s minds. Rediscover the joy of reading great books. Set proper priorities. Relegate films and DVDs to a subordinate position, below exercise, worship, fellowship, evangelism and service. “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—”His good, pleasing and perfect will” (Romans 12:2)

4. Refuse to waste your time or money on immoral, anti-Christian films, but rather choose to support good, quality family films that honor God, such as *Fireproof*, *Courageous*, *Ben Hur* and *The Ten Commandments*, etc. “Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent, or praiseworthy—think about such things” (Philippians 4:8)

5. Pray for wisdom (James 1:5) and discernment (Proverbs 3:21). Learn to think critically. Discuss the film, its characters and its message in the light of the Bible. “So give your servant a discerning heart ... to distinguish between right and wrong” (1 Kings 3:9).

6. Speak up for moral, God-honoring entertainment and speak out against blasphemous, degrading and exploitative productions. Write to, or phone, producers of TV programs, scriptwriters, directors and producers of films. Be sure to praise the good as well as to protest against the bad. “Who will rise up for me against the wicked? Who will take a stand for me against evil doers?” (Psalm 94:16)

We need to help our children discern between the good, the bad

and the ugly. Refuse to waste your time and money on immoral, anti-Christian films, but rather choose to support good quality family films that honour God. Take control over what is filling and forming your mind. Be selective in your viewing choices. Get informed. Be discerning. Every time you purchase a cinema ticket, rent or buy a DVD, you are casting a vote. Be sure that you only invest in family-friendly and God-honoring films.

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