

Video games don't  
murder, irresponsible  
parents do



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In a city where you murder or are murdered, and kill everyone you meet in a bloody and brutal way by using weapons like a gun or a power saw, it is the only thing you can do to survive and escape. You may wonder if there is such a horrifying city in this world. Actually, it can exist in everyone's home, in your own television, and the joypad you are holding becomes the deadly weapon.

"Impossible is nothing" (an Adidas' slogan) can also apply to the video games industry, as the above city is created in the world of "Manhunt" - one of the many highly controversial, but mega-selling and visually stunning, violent video games released in Western countries. The influence of video games on teenage violent behavior has long been called into question.

Some complain that video games are the main culprit as there are more and more video game-related crimes in U. S and U. K. For example, a 17-year-old game player who was addicted to playing "Manhunt" stabbed another boy to death with a knife and claw hammer last month in UK. But is it really true that the games industry should be held solely responsible? Actually, it is parents who should take the blame for such tragedies and violent acts instead of the video games industry in Western countries like U. S and U. K. Mostly, parents find it convincing that playing violent video games will inspire teenagers to have violent behaviors, and thus blaming the games industry.

They believe that teenagers will "assume the identity of the characters" and imitate their behaviors when they play video games (Kane). In the case of "Manhunt", the murder victim's mother said, "When one looks at what

Warren did to Stephan and looks at the brutality and viciousness of the game, one can see links" (Thorsen, "Manhunt"). Yet, this may not be the case.

Scientists nowadays are still doing research to find if there is any direct link between on-screen violence and the violent behaviors of teenagers, and the latest result is surprising for the parents. The Entertainment and Leisure Software Publishers' Association in England, in response to the "Manhunt Murder", stated that "despite many research projects into the effects of screen violence, some of which have been undertaken by eminent academics in their field, no link with violent behavior has been found" ("Police").

Therefore, parents should not use the violent games as an excuse to blame the industry and ignore their own responsibility. In addition, according to a comprehensive research conducted by the Surgeon General in 2001, it pointed out that "violent behavior seldom results from a single cause" and media violence "is best viewed as one of the many potential factors that help to shape behavior"(Walker). Besides, the effects of media violence "seem to be strongest on youths who are predisposed to be aggressive for some reason... (Walker). As children's characters and personalities depend largely on the home education and the ways they were brought up, it is the responsibility of parents to cultivate in their children a proper attitude since they were young, so as to eliminate the potential to develop aggressive characters, which in turn lower the possibility of teenage violent tragedy. Otherwise, parents should be the first to take the blame if they fail to do so.

Though the harmful effects of playing violent video games on the behavior of teenagers has yet to be proved by the professionals, it is still advisable to keep minors away from violent video games as prevention is better than cure. Since teenagers are not mature enough to resist the temptation and discipline themselves, this leads to their higher risk of developing an addiction, which is to play the games consistently and uncontrollably and even lose the ability to distinguish between the virtual world and the reality in some extreme cases.

Therefore, parental guidance is the most crucial factor, it is the main duty of parents to keep an eye open for what their children are playing and give proper instructions whenever necessary to keep them away from unsuitable games and media. If they had done so and spent more time with and taken care of their children, much of the tragedies happened could have been avoided. Why were they not aware of their children getting and playing violent video games? Even if their children did play the games consistently, they still had a lot of time to realize that and stop them from playing before they got addicted.

Moreover, if the teenagers are well cultivated by their parents, it can reduce greatly the chance of developing an addiction, and help them to resist the initiation of violent behavior by video game in case they are actually related. Therefore, the lack of care and home education by the parents was the main culprit of the violent tragedies of teenagers instead of the games. Yet, parents found it easier to blame the games industry solely rather than taking their own responsibility. Is it fair to the industry in which the associations between games and violent behavior are still uncertain?

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Even more unfair is that while parents are criticizing the games industry, very few notice its efforts in preventing violence among teenagers. Actually, organizations have been set up to categorize different games as the movies industry is doing. The Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) in USA and the British Board of Film Classification in U. K. are the cases in point. Take ESRB as an example, it provides " rating symbols that suggest age appropriateness for the game, and content descriptors that indicate elements in a game... (" CHECK THE RATING").

These indicators give parents " the information they need to evaluate a video game before making a purchasing decision" (" CHECK THE RATING"). The efforts were proved to be worthwhile as a report conducted by the U. S. Federal Trade Commission said that " there is much in the game industry's rating disclosure requirements that merits duplication by others" (" FTC 3rd Report"). Therefore, this kind of rating system can serve as the very first preventive measure to restrict minors from getting the inappropriate games.

However, there are also critics doubting the effectiveness of such rating system as it is not a crime for the retailers to sell or rent violent video games to minors. Therefore, parents play an important part acting as the largest barrier in the sense to close such loophole by staying alert and utilizing the rating symbols. For examples, purchasing the games with their children or checking the package (where the symbols are printed) of the games their children have brought.

Only by doing so should their children not getting violent video games easily. Isn't it ironic that some parents blamed the violent video game having bad

influence on their children but were unaware why they could get one and play it at home? In the prevention of teenage violent behavior and tragedy, parents should realize and promptly carry out their responsibility instead of blaming the violent video games, which are not the culprit of the tragic events happened.

As more video games containing violent scenes will be released because "video games have evolved as an adult medium" (Thorsen, "Take Two"), it is unavoidable that teenagers will be exposed to more of them. That is why the role of parents is so important and indispensable in protecting teenagers. Other than that, the games industry has been actively putting its efforts in tackling the problems by holding reviews and constant discussions such as at the Game Developers Conference in U. S. every year, game creators from all over the world gather to discuss the issue of minors and video games.

Besides, a bill suggesting the sales and rental of violent video games to minors as a crime was also introduced to the Congress in USA in 2002. What the society needs are responsible parents and the preventive measure provided by the games industry. Only by doing so should the "city of Manhunt" only appear on the TV screen, but not in reality anymore. So parents, please stay alert and be responsible!