Two events happened this week that many politicians and members of the media will link together.

The first: A mass shooting in Washington, D.C. in which an angry, mentally-ill young man shot and killed a dozen of his fellow citizens.

Second: The release of Grand Theft Auto V, the perennially controversial sandbox game.

The shooting has already sparked calls for censorship of video games, with members of the media claiming both that there must be a causal connection and that not enough research has been done on the violent side-effects of video games. I would dispute both these claims.

Blame Game
According to Media Matters, MSNBC's Mika Brzezinski of the Morning Joe show said that "it's kind of hard not to make a connection [between games and the Navy Yard shooting] when you hear [the shooter's] friend saying that he would watch on a life size screen these violent video games for hours and hours and hours and hours and hours."

The Telegraph's Nick Allen described the shooter's "darker side" which "saw him playing violent "zombie" video games in his room, sometimes from 12.30pm until 4.30am." Is it odd to describe a mass murderer's "darker side" not as his killings or other unstable interactions with people, but as an activity he shares with millions of other people?

Quoth Fox & Friends' Steve Doocey: "unfortunately you know it seems every time something bad like this happens we look at "is there a connection between video games and the shooter?" Well, take a look at some people who were described as addicted, from Columbine High School, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, the Virginia Tech shooter, the Arizona shooter, Jared Lee Loughner, that Norway shooter who Anders Behring [sic], I think he shot 77 people. The Aurora shooter, James Holmes, the Sandy Hook shooter, Adam Lanza, they're all described as essentially being addicted to video games."

His co-host, Elisabeth Hasselback, asked: "Is there a link between a certain age group or demo in this – twenty to thirty-four year old men, perhaps, that are playing these video games and then their violent actions? We have yet to find out."

In fact, numerous studies have been conducted and the results are mixed. Some studies have shown that video games increase aggression; others show the opposite. No study has ever shown that violent video games result directly in actual violence, let alone mass shootings. That doesn't mean it isn't possible, though the numbers suggest it's very unlikely.

Analysts estimate 18 to 20 million copies of Rockstar's GTA V will be sold worldwide by the end of March, 2014.

It's possible that someone who buys and plays the game will later go on to carry out a horrible shooting. Should that happen, it will almost certainly occur in America, which boasts far and away the highest number of mass shootings (and shootings in general) while boasting no higher rate of video game consumption.

If and when this hypothetical shooting happens—and really, it's just a matter of when at this point—it will be terrifying and terribly sad, but it will pale in comparison to the reality of gun deaths in America.

Each day in this country, on average, 30 people are murdered with a gun, 162 more are injured, and 53 use a gun to commit suicide, according to the CDC.

In 2010 in the United States, firearms were used to carry out 11,422 homicides and 19,392 suicides.

But overall, violent crime is down in the US—indeed, as violent video games have become more popular, violent crime has fallen.

Each of the shooters Fox & Friends uses to bulwark their case for censorship played video games, but so do millions upon millions of other people every day. Games are a $70B industry, and violent games consistently top sales charts.

If there is truly a direct, causal link between games like Grand Theft Auto V and violent shootings, we will soon have 18 to 20 million killers on our hands, not to mention the countless millions more who have been playing violent video games for years.

Morality Play
In an article remarkable for its odd congruence of measured tone and hyperbole, The New Yorker's Simon Parkin argues that the "go-to argument that video games are analogous to innocuous playground games of cops-and-robbers grows weaker as verisimilitude increases." In other words, as games become more and more realistic, developers need to be more careful about their content.

Grand Theft Auto V can be viewed as a torture simulator (or strip club simulator) depending on which moments in the game you focus on. Parkin mentions a forum poster who hoped rape would be included in the game—it isn't—and imagines a future of games filled with such simulation.

"In a hypothetical motion-controlled video-game version of "Lolita," it would be possible to inhabit the body, as well as the mind, of Humbert Humbert," Parkin writes. "A virtual sex crime might elicit a very different response if, instead of pressing a button to instigate it, you were required to mimic its pelvic thrusts and parries—even if, as in Nabokov's work, it was included to illustrate or illuminate, not titillate."

We always worry about the decadence of our children, the dilapidation of our future society, the immoral nature of people who engage in activities we don't quite understand.

There will always be people who see great, calamitous moral failures just around every corner. Sometimes they're right; more often, I suspect, they're simply uncomfortable with a changing world. After all, we have a desire to explain why bad things happen, and often we blame and evoke fear in order to do that.

When it comes to video games, the loudest voices are very rarely gamers. Like film censors who don't watch film, or book censors who don't read, this creates a hollow sort of analysis.

Grand Theft Auto V does have morally reprehensible characters, but the vast majority of people who play this sort of game—hopefully the adults who play it, and not impressionable children—see this experience as one of virtual, temporary, and entirely fantastical debauchery.

We can drive through stop lights, mow over civilians, crash and die and start over, get in ridiculous gunfights and still walk away on two feet. Or even just go shopping, or play golf, or hunt. We are given a vast canvas of possibilities, and the freedom to pretend to break bad in a cartoonish, outlandish, alternative reality.

Most people can see this for what it is: escapism.

Then again, gamers all too often do the heavy lifting when it comes to painting the demographic in broad, ugly strokes. Game critics and developers have received death threats in the past for changing a game or panning it in a review. There is a small, but vocal, minority of gamers who do their level best to undermine the rest.

The Line
Not everyone can draw lines between fiction and reality.

There are those who almost certainly are influenced by violent media to act out violently. The Aurora shooter had an obsession with The Joker from The Dark Knight film. Would he have carried out his crimes without that film? Who knows. Probably. (Even with tighter gun laws, it seems likely he would have attempted a mass killing. His apartment was rigged with explosives.)

But the horrible actions of the few is no cause for censorship, and all too often the censors really only want to clamp down on other peoples' entertainment, not their own. No, these shootings should point us to the elephant in the room, the other big common theme across all these mass murderers: untreated mental illness.

If there is a true culprit here, it is a society which allows so many of its mentally ill to fall between the cracks; it is the ease with which potentially violent, obviously disturbed young men gain access to firearms.

If it were as simple as saying "violent video games kill people!" then we'd really be in trouble. It's a silly fallacy, of course. (Homicidal maniacs kill people. Homicidal maniacs play video games. Therefore, video games cause homicidal maniacs to kill people.)

If it were true, millions of your neighbors, kids, and co-workers would be violent killers. So far as I can tell, this is not the case.

None of which is to say that violence in games doesn't matter, or that violence in games or any other media should be protected from analysis or critique. Gamers are rightfully fearful of censorship, but they too often mistake criticism for censorship, and that can make honest, amicable discourse on the topic difficult.

I believe strongly that the media we consume can and does impact our lives in other more subtle ways. "You are what you eat" is an adage that applies equally well to the images and experiences we code into our brains. It may not make us killers, but I find it hard to believe we are simply immune to the things we do on a daily basis.

Games like Spec Ops: The Line attempt to critique this violence and make us think about it critically, and even if we don't agree with the conclusion at least developers and writers are attempting to have the conversation on their own turf rather than on Fox & Friends.

Criticism and calls for censorship are two very different beasts. Video games are an easy scapegoat for a reactionary media and reactionary politicians, but that doesn't mean we should sit back and take an equally partisan, biased view of the ways our media might affect us.

Parents have a huge responsibility to understand and yes, censor, the media their children consume. Adult gamers have a similar responsibility toward their own cultivation of ideas and influences.

Thankfully, the US Supreme Court has made it very clear that the government has no such responsibility in limiting the speech of American citizens.

Answer the questions below on a separate sheet of paper

Using the article, answer the questions below. In your responses, make sure you include evidence from the article to support your answers.

For questions one and two, please write in complete sentences using proper spelling and grammar.

1. What are the author's main points?

2. Do you believe there is a correlation between playing violent video games and people who play the games committing violent crimes? Explain

3. Write three open-ended questions you would like to ask about the relationship between playing violent video games and people who play the games committing actual violence. (Open-ended questions are questions that CANNOT be answered with a "yes" or "no."