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Treasonous Patriot: A Comparative Content Analysis of the Media's Portrayals of Daniel Ellsberg and Edward Snowden

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Abstract

On June 9, 2013, the world was introduced to Edward Joseph Snowden, a 29-year-old NSA contractor and the man responsible for the biggest leak of classified government documents in American history. Almost immediately, comparisons were drawn between Snowden and another famous whistleblower—Daniel Ellsberg, the man behind the 1971 release of the Pentagon Papers. The overwhelming rhetoric surrounding the comparison was that Ellsberg was a true American patriot and that Snowden was nothing like him, that he was a traitor. Despite Ellsberg's own claims that he and Snowden are exactly alike, the media still finds Snowden lacking when comparing him with Ellsberg. This research examined a sample of new organizations' portrayals of Ellsberg and Snowden during their respective whistleblowing scandals to determine what similarities and differences exist in the coverage.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Consider, for a moment, a warm June day. America is at war. Protest is rampant. While the sun is coming up and businesses are opening their doors, millions of Americans are getting the news of the day in the morning headlines. Most days are indistinguishable from those that precede it; the news is filled with mundane reports of financial markets, political gridlock, or feature fluff. This, however, is not one of those days. This day is completely remarkable.

What is even more remarkable is this description could fit not one but two landmark news days in American history—days separated by nearly 42 years. The first was June 13, 1971, when *The New York Times* published the Pentagon Papers; the second was June 6, 2013, when *The Guardian* began publishing a series of articles by journalist Glenn Greenwald, detailing ongoing abuses by the National Security Agency (NSA). Both events sparked widespread debate, political scandal, and close examinations of the men who leaked the information that was published: Daniel Ellsberg and Edward Snowden, respectively.

It is widely held the Pentagon Papers, leaked by Ellsberg, shaved years off the Vietnam War and led to greater scrutiny of government officials. History has vindicated Daniel Ellsberg. America is still, however, in the throes of the Snowden scandal, the former NSA analyst viewed by some as a hero and others as Public Enemy Number One.

Description of the Study

This thesis will examine the media's portrayals of Ellsberg and of Snowden during the year immediately following the publication of information they supplied to journalists. Because the scope of media has grown immensely over the 42-year span between the two leaks, this research will be limited to newspaper coverage for an apples-to-apples comparison. Primarily, articles from *The Washington Post* will be used.

The following questions will guide this research:

1) What language is used to describe the whistleblower in coverage of the leak?
2) Does the article or journalist seem to be passing judgment on the individual being reported?

I will attempt to determine if Ellsberg's status as a hero and patriot was evident from the time he leaked the Pentagon Papers or if he was vilified in the media. If it is the latter, one may assume Snowden will enjoy, in time, the same exoneration.

Limitations of the Study

This study is limited to the media's portrayals of Daniel Ellsberg and Edward Snowden. It does not attempt to determine the public's reactions to those portrayals or whether the media outlets were successful in influencing public opinion.

This study is limited to newspaper portrayals of each whistleblower in the year following his respective scandal. It does not attempt to analyze portrayals by television or radio media outlets.

Definitions of Key Terms

The following operational definitions will be used in the course of this research:

- Whistleblower: one who speaks out against injustice in the name of the public good (Alford, 2001, p. 18). Whistleblowing "reveals government fraud and abuse and tends to strengthen the public's faith in government" (Norris, 2013, p. 695).
- Leaker: one who discloses classified information without permission. Leaks "actually harm the nation's defense capabilities or assist its enemies" (Norris, 2013, p. 695).

- Pentagon Papers: A 7,000-page study of the United States' involvement in the Vietnam War and in Asia from 1945 and 1967, classified as top secret. Ellsberg made copies of the document and gave them to *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* in 1971 (Ellsberg, 2002).
- NSA: Acronym for the National Security Agency of the United States.
- Espionage Act of 1917: A federal law established during World War I to "punish acts of interference with the foreign relations, and the foreign commerce of the United States, to punish espionage, and better enforce the criminal laws of the United States" (U.S. Code 18, Part 1, Chapter 37).
- The Fourth Amendment: An amendment to the United States Constitution intended to ensure the reasonable expectation of privacy of all American citizens. It states: "The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated, and no warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to searched, and the persons or things to be seized" (U.S. Const. amend. IV).
- Prior restraint: The restriction of the right of the press to publish what it chooses. The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution protects the press from prior restraint (Blanchard, 2013, p. 23).
- Communication Content: Referred to simply as "content," this refers to "actually listening in on people's phone calls or reading their emails or online chats, as well as reviewing Internet activity" (Greenwald, 2014, p. 132).
- Communication Metadata: In relation to communication content, metadata collection "involves amassing data *about* those communications," such as the time, length, and

location of a call; the number of emails sent and to whom; and the types of devises used for communicating.

Conclusion

When Edward Snowden revealed himself as the whistleblower responsible for the leak of thousands of NSA documents that detailed what he believed to be systematic abuses and intrusions into the privacy of the American public, the comparisons to Daniel Ellsberg began almost immediately. To some (including Ellsberg himself), Snowden was the next Ellsberg—a great American hero standing up to government overreach. To others, Snowden was the opposite of Ellsberg—a coward who threatened American lives and the foundations of democracy while refusing to face the consequences of what he had done. How does the public come to one conclusion or the other? What shapes or influences such judgments? The media are certainly complicit, whether in small or large part, in public perception of a scandal. When used effectively, the media can rain applause or scorn down upon any subject.

This research will attempt to determine whether the media portrayed Daniel Ellsberg and Edward Snowden similarly during their respective scandals. Chapter 2 will provide a review of literature relevant to this topic. Chapter 3 will present the methods used in this research, while Chapter 4 will discuss the answers gleaned using those methods. Chapter 5 will offer a conclusion and suggestions for further research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The current study aims to examine the similarities and differences between the media's portrayals of the respective whistleblowing scandals of Daniel Ellsberg in 1971 and Edward Snowden in 2013. This literature review is organized into three primary components: research on the Espionage Act of 1917 and its use to prosecute whistleblowers; research on Daniel Ellsberg and the release of the Pentagon Papers; and research on Edward Snowden and the release of thousands of classified NSA documents.

The Espionage Act of 1917

The Espionage Act was enacted under the presidency of Woodrow Wilson on June 15, 1917, just two months after the United States entered World War I. It is a criminal justice statute "historically 'reserved for the treasonous act of giving secret information to the enemy'" (Norris, 2013, p. 694). It addressed the issues of "the disclosure of classified information; gathering or delivering defense information to aid foreign governments; gathering, transmitting, or losing defense information; harboring or concealing persons; the use of aircraft for photographing defense installations; and the publication and sale of photographs of defense installations" (Espionage Act of 1917). Daniel Ellsberg was charged under the Espionage Act in 1971 for releasing the top secret Pentagon Papers to *The New York Times*; Ellsberg was freed of those charges due to a mistrial (Rudenstine, 1996). Edward Snowden has been charged with violating the Espionage Act for releasing classified NSA documents to reporters from *The Guardian* and *The Washington Post* (Greenwald, 2014). At the time of this study, his case is on-going, as Snowden has received temporary asylum in Russia.

In the nearly 100 years since its inception, the Espionage Act has been used relatively sparingly to prosecute whistleblowers. As Norris (2013) noted, this has had potentially negative implications for those whistleblowers who faced charges under the Espionage Act: "Because previous administrations rarely used the Espionage Act to prosecute individuals who leaked classified information to the media, the statute has faced only sparing judicial review and allows for strict prosecution of seemingly legitimate whistleblowers" (p. 695). Norris differentiated between "seemingly legitimate whistleblowers" and their opposite as "good whistleblowers" and "bad leakers." According to Norris, "Bad leaks actually harm the nation's defense capabilities or assist its enemies, while good whistleblowing reveals government fraud and abuse and tends to strengthen the public's faith in government" (p. 695).

As Greenwald (2014) noted, it is easy for the government to claim that any whistleblowing has harmed the nation's security. It is equally easy for the government to claim the types of surveillance Snowden revealed were necessary. According to Greenwald,

> A prime justification for surveillance—that it's for the benefit of the population—relies on projecting a view of the world that divides citizens into categories of good people and bad people. In that view, the authorities use their surveillance powers only against the bad people, those who are 'doing something wrong,' and only they have anything to fear from the invasion of their privacy…For many, the argument works. The perception that invasive surveillance is confined only to a marginalized and deserving group of those 'doing wrong'—the bad people—ensures that the majority acquiesces to the abuse of power or even cheers it on. (p. 182)

The specter of terrorism in a post-September 11 world has led to heightened rhetoric about national security. What began with the George W. Bush administration only expanded in the Barack Obama administration.

The Espionage Act and the Obama administration. According to Norris (2013), "the Obama administration has taken a severe stance toward leakers when the disclosed information involves national defense" (p. 695). "Under the Obama administration," noted Norris, "seven

other individuals [in addition to Chelsea Manning] have been similarly charged, more than all previous administrations combined" (p. 694). Private First Class Chelsea Manning (formerly known as Bradley Manning) was charged under and found guilty of violating the Espionage Act for providing classified materials to the website WikiLeaks. In August of 2013, she was sentenced to 35 years in prison. According to Norris (2013), "due to its active pursuit under whistleblowers, especially under the Espionage Act, the Obama administration has gained a reputation for severity that contradicts the President's campaign-trail dicta." As a presidential candidate, Obama was "a champion of whistleblower rights," but he "departed markedly from this reputation with his position on national security leaks" (698-699).

Daniel Ellsberg and the Pentagon Papers

Before he gained notoriety as the man responsible for the leak of the Pentagon Papers, Daniel Ellsberg was a well-respected "former Pentagon and State Department analyst who had spent two years in Vietnam and had advised Former Defense Secretary Robert McNamara and National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger" (Kitrosser, 2011, p. 90). His status gave him access to highly classified government documents, among them a Vietnam War study now known as the Pentagon Papers. As noted by Weiskopf and Willimot (2013):

> The *Papers*—official titled 'United States—Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967: A Study Prepared by the Department of Defense'—comprised a 47-volume politico-military history of the U.S.-Vietnam relationship from 1945 to 1967. It was prepared within and by the U.S. Department of Defense under the instruction of Robert McNamara, the Secretary for Defense, for reasons that remain obscure. The *Papers* were top secret, and were accessible to only a tiny elite of officials and advisers within the Pentagon, who included Ellsberg (the President had no knowledge of them). Their contents revealed how successive administrations—from Truman to Johnson—had grossly and repeatedly misled both the public and Congress about actions of the U.S. in Vietnam. (p. 476)

In the spring of 1971, Ellsberg smuggled the Papers out of his office and made copies of them to distribute to *The New York Times*. This was not Ellsberg's preferred way of confronting the

injustices he found in the Pentagon Papers. He had spent months taking the Papers and his concerns to various officials in the government—to no avail. If he had any hope of affecting change in the war, he had to take the Papers public. Ellsberg worked with reporter Neil Sheehan, and *The New York Times* began publishing the Papers on June 13, 1971 (Rudenstine, 1996).

The Pentagon Papers had dramatic effects on the political scene in the 1970s. According to Weiskopf and Willimot (2013), "Ellsberg's leak of the Papers contributed to the termination of the Vietnam War, the end of Nixon's presidency, and the growth of a healthier skepticism with regard to claims made by U.S. administrators" (p. 476). Kitrosser (2011) concurred:

> The Papers' revelations impacted Americans' willingness to take on faith the honesty and competence of their government…Closely related to wariness toward government claims of expertise based on secret knowledge is another type of skepticism fostered by the Papers' leak: Skepticism toward government claims that information must be kept secret in the name of national security in the first place. (p. 91)

The government's response was swift, and Ellsberg became the first American to be charged under the Espionage Act of 1917 "for giving information to the American public" (Ellsberg, 2014, para. 7). Kitrosser (2011) adeptly summarized the 23 months Ellsberg was under indictment:

> Ellsberg has said that he believed he was likely to be incarcerated for the rest of his life for leaking the Papers. He was indicted and tried, although the case was eventually dismissed due to a string of government misconduct. The government had suppressed evidence, burglarized the office of Ellsberg's psychiatrist, illegally wiretapped Ellsberg's conversations, and held secret discussions with the judge trying Ellsberg's case about the judge's possible appointment as FBI Director. (p. 89-90)

Ellsberg had a happy ending, and history has shined a heroic light upon his actions. As Kitrosser (2011) noted:

> The Pentagon Papers leak and its aftermath marked an important moment of social learning. To this day, they are invoked as evidence that leaking classified information is not always dangerous, that some leaks serve the public interest, and that

> government can just as easily use secrecy to shield wrongdoing as to protect national security. (p. 119)

In the 40 years since his indictment, Ellsberg has repeatedly called for reform to the Espionage Act, noting "in recent years, the silencing effect of the Espionage Act has only become worse…The current state of whistleblowing prosecutions under the Espionage Act makes a truly fair trial wholly unavailable to an American who has exposed classified wrongdoing" (Ellsberg, 2014, para. 6, 11).

Edward Snowden and the NSA

Edward Snowden went from an unknown NSA contractor to a household name and infamous fugitive in a matter of days. It all started on June 5, 2013, with a story in *The Guardian* by reporter and Pulitzer-winning journalist Glenn Greenwald: "NSA collecting phone records of millions of Verizon customers daily" (Gurnow, 2014, p. 43-44). It was merely the tip of the ice berg, as "the White House, intelligence community, Capitol Hill, multinational corporations, civil liberties groups, China, and the American population were about to be treated to a five-day production" of breaking stories and scandal (Gurnow, 2014, p. 43). Those stories would detail massive and far-reaching surveillance programs established by the U.S. government. On June 9, 2013, the source of that information was named in a 12-minute video posted on *The Guardian*'s website. Edward Joseph Snowden, 29 years old, was the man behind what was quickly noted in *The New York Times* as "the most significant security breach in American history" (as cited in Gurnow, 2014, p. vii).

Snowden had collected thousands of NSA documents during his years working as a contractor with the NSA. Those documents detailed how

> between them (and in close collaboration) the NSA and [British intelligence agency Government Communications Headquarters] now have access not just to 'metadata' (who and when) but to the content of a huge proportion of the phone calls, Internet

> searches, and online transactions made by ordinary citizens, in their own and in other countries. This 'suspicionless surveillance' occurs without specific authorization by any judicial or political authority, using technologies which break encryption codes, subvert security systems and tap fiber optic cables, and laws which force telephone and Internet companies to hand over their customers' apparently private data. (Making Sense of Snowden, 2013, p. 433)

According to Snowden, the NSA had access to, had gathered, and was hoarding multitudes of data and telephony metadata of the communications of millions of American citizens and internationals, all without warrant or suspicion of wrongdoing (Greenwald, 2014; Gurnow, 2014).

The growing ubiquity of the Internet and mobile telephones made the collection of such data possible for the NSA and agencies like it. According to Landau (2013), the statutes and laws in place to protect citizens' privacy, like the Electronic Communications Act of 1986, had not "kept pace with technology. People carry their mobile devices all day long, and the result is that cell phones disclose far more personal information than stationary ones did in 1986" (p. 67). The Electronic Communications Privacy Act was passed

> to govern the real-time capture of calling data—so-called pen register and trap and trace—as well as the collection of call data records (CDRs) and store content such as email. At the time of the ECPA's passage, telephones were essentially stationary, and such metadata wasn't deemed worthy of much legal protection….Consequently, metadata can be obtained by the government on the basis that it's relevant to an ongoing investigation; there's no requirement of probable cause. (p. 67-68)

Landau noted that "although the law provides less protection for metadata than content, metadata can be even more revelatory than content itself—for example, it can reveal who attended church versus an Alcoholic Anonymous meeting" (p. 69).

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 only exacerbated the government's seeming perception it needed to monitor the communications of any number of individuals in the name of national security. According to Landau (2013), after the attacks, "the criteria to conduct

surveillance, whether electronic or otherwise, loosened" (p. 68). The Bush administration argued that such surveillance was necessary to curtail terrorism and protect the lives of American citizens.

To Snowden, this kind of pervasive surveillance of the unknowing American public was a great abuse of power. According to Greenwald (2014), Snowden felt so strongly this was an abuse that he abandoned his well-paying government job, long-term girlfriend, and life of comfort in Hawaii to expose the truth. Snowden "was determined to expose the extremity of NSA spying revealed by the documents, so as to enable an enduring public debate with real consequences, rather than achieve a one-off scoop that would accomplish nothing beyond accolades for the reporters" (Greenwald, 2014, p. 56).

Snowden was calculated in his attempt to expose this perceived wrongdoing. He spent months, using his access as an NSA contractor, collecting and organizing the documents he needed to convey the severity of the issue, as he saw it. When he first began combing through the cache of leaked documents, Greenwald (2014) noted the following:

> As I continued reading, two things struck me about the archive. The first was how extraordinarily well organized it was. The source [Snowden] had created countless folders and then sub-folders and then sub-sub-folders. Every last document had been placed exactly where it belonged. I never found a misplaced or misfiled document…The other striking facet of the archive was the extent of government lying it revealed. (p. 29-30)

Snowden was nothing if not thoughtful and thorough as he ventured into the territory of whistleblowing.

Snowden relied on the judgment of the journalists he contacted—Glenn Greenwald and Laura Poitras—to decide what to release or withhold in regard to the information he provided. Greenwald (2014) recalled:

> [Snowden told us], 'I'm relying on you to use your journalistic judgment to only publish those documents that the public should see and that can be revealed without harm to innocent people.' If for no other reason, Snowden knew that our ability to generate a real public debate depended on not allowing the U.S. government any valid claims that we had endangered lives through publishing the documents. (p. 53)

According to Greenwald (2014), Snowden wanted to work with reporters who could interpret, analyze, and synthesize the massive amounts of content he provided so the public could consume the revelations, properly absorb the intended impact, and take action.

Snowden was also thoughtful about the likely consequences of his actions. When asked about the potential of prosecution and jail time, he told Greenwald (2014), "I'm going to try not to. But if that's the outcome from all of this, and I know there's a huge chance that it will be, I decided a while ago that I can live with whatever they do to me. The only thing I can't live with is knowing I did nothing" (p. 51). Snowden told *The Guardian*, "This country is worth dying for" (as cited in Ellsberg, 2013, para. 11).

Snowden's desire to avoid jail became a hot-button issue among those who disagreed with his actions. Secretary of State John Kerry called Snowden a "coward" and a "traitor" and told television reporters Snowden "should man up and come back to the United States" to face the consequences of his leaks (as cited in Ellsberg, 2014, para. 3). Many comparisons were made between Snowden and Daniel Ellsberg, who stood trial and faced charges under the Espionage Act in the 1970s. Ellsberg was used by many as the standard by which all whistleblowers should be held; in fact, Kerry claimed "there are many a patriot—you can go back to the Pentagon Papers with Dan Ellsberg and others who stood and went to the court system of America and made their case" (as cited in Ellsberg, 2014, para. 2).

In response to these comparisons, Ellsberg wrote a number of op-eds in support of Snowden's action. According to Ellsberg (2014), "Edward Snowden is the greatest patriot of our

time, and he knows what I learned more than four decades ago: until the Espionage Act gets reformed he can never come home safe and receive justice" (para. 1). He noted that "many people compare Edward Snowden to me unfavorably for leaving the country and seeking asylum, rather than facing trial as I did. I don't agree. The country I stayed in was a different America, a long time ago" (Ellsberg, 2013, para. 1). Ellsberg (2014) offered a grim prediction for the treatment Snowden would receive as he awaited trial:

> Snowden would come back home to a jail cell—and not just an ordinary cell-block but isolation in solitary confinement, not just for months like Chelsea Manning but for the rest of his sentence, and probably the rest of his life….As I know from my own case, even Snowden's own testimony on the stand would be gagged by government objections and the (arguably unconstitutional) nature of his charges. That was my own experience in court, as the first American to be prosecuted under the Espionage Act—or any other statute—for giving information to the American people. (para. 5-7)

Unlike in the scenario he predicts for Snowden, Ellsberg was allowed out on bond during the extent of his trial. He was allowed to continue his work with the movement he supported by whistleblowing. As he noted, "for the whole two years I was under indictment, I was free to speak to the media and at rallies and public lectures" (Ellsberg, 2013, para. 3). The treatment of every whistleblower since Ellsberg has indicated Snowden would receive no such allowances. Smith (2014) supported this assertion, stating, "under the Espionage Act, there is no whistleblower loophole that would allow Snowden to argue that he should be forgiven for exposing government wrongdoing" (p. 11).

The response. The government's response to Snowden's action was rapid and sharp. According to Landau (2013), "NSA Director General Keith Alexander said that Snowden had caused 'irreversible damage' to the U.S., while Senate Intelligence Committee Chair Dianne Feinstein said Snowden's action was treasonous" (p. 66). However, as Norris (2013) noted:

> Opinions on Snowden's conduct are far from unanimous. While some would cite the government surveillance programs as prime examples of secret, illegal, and unethical government misconduct ripe for whistleblowing, others find the leak treasonous. Human Rights Watch 'urge[d] the Obama administration not to prosecute Edward Snowden…until it is prepared to explain to the public, in as much detail as possible, what…concrete and specific harms to national security his disclosures have caused, and why they outweigh the public's right to know.' Former President Jimmy Carter supports Snowden's revelations because, due to lack of transparency, 'America does not have a functioning democracy at this point in time.' Other high-ranking politicians, however, have accused Snowden of treason and Senator Lindsey Graham even said that he should be 'tracked to the ends of the earth.' Given its divisive nature, it's not surprising that courts also struggle with the issue. (p. 698)

Senator Rand Paul, a Republican from Kentucky, stated, "I think, really, in the end, history's going to judge that he revealed great abuses of our government and great abuses of our intelligence community" (as cited in Smith, 2014, p. 11). His Republican colleague, Representative Mike Rogers from Michigan, however, claimed "Snowden's actions are likely to have lethal consequences for our troops in the field" (as cited in Smith, 2014, p. 11). The divide among Snowden's supporters and dissenters did not fall along party lines.

David V. Gioe (2014), a former CIA operations officer, argued Snowden's leaks did far-reaching and long-lasting harm to America's intelligence gathering infrastructure. According to Gioe, "perception is the reality that matters in the world of intelligence" (p. 55). Gioe claimed Snowden's leaks jeopardized America's ability to gather foreign intelligence, as U.S. intelligence operatives may have difficulty convincing sources to trust that America is able to protect them. "In all cases," Gioe noted, "potential sources must be reassured that hushed words stated in confidence won't endanger them in the next tranche of leaked information" (p. 53). Gioe offered the following prediction for the state of American intelligence gathering after the Snowden scandal:

> The future damage of the Manning and Snowden disclosures will wane over time, but this does not make them any less dangerous, especially now. In the short term, America has lost valuable diplomatic leverage as well as counterterrorist capabilities.

> In the medium term, America will have lost [human intelligence] from potential future sources as well as [signals intelligence] from liaison partners that could provide an intelligence advantage over rival states, avert strategic surprise, and identify terrorists or proliferators of weapons of mass destruction. Only in the long term, once America has proven to both its allies and its adversaries that it can keep its secrets, will the country be able to benefit from [intelligence] sources that will not be obtained in the short and medium term thanks to Manning and Snowden. This damage could take a generation to repair. (p. 59)

As previously noted, at the time of this research, Snowden was living in Russia with temporary asylum; his scandal is on-going and without conclusion.

Conclusion

This literature review explored the existing research on the Espionage Act of 1917 and the respective whistleblowing scandals of Daniel Ellsberg and Edward Snowden. According to McGovern and Roche (1972):

> The publication of 'confidential' materials has inevitably given rise to a debate concerning a number of different but related problems: To what extent do the revelations contained in the documents throw light on events or policy decisions with which they deal? To what extent, if at all, does the publication of the information contained in the documents jeopardize the processes of executive decision-making? How can the conflict between the public's right to know and the executive's need for confidentiality be reconciled? (p. 173)

The next chapter details the research methods used in this study.

Chapter 3: Research Methods

Introduction

This chapter is organized around the methods that guided this research. The purpose of this study was to determine the differences and similarities between the media's portrayals of Daniel Ellsberg and Edward Snowden during their respective whistleblowing scandals. I did a content analysis, but I did not use traditional content analysis methods. Rather, I performed a thematic analysis on the texts that comprised my sample of media from news organizations to answer the research questions that guided this study. This chapter will provide a description of thematic analysis and will present the research questions explored in this study, as well as the sampling and research methods and the processes of data collection and interpretation used.

Thematic Analysis

This research employed thematic analysis as a tool for exploring the research questions and collecting data. According to Joffe and Yardley (2004), "Content analysis is the accepted method of investigating texts, particularly in mass communications research. Most content analysis results in a numerical description of features of a given text….Thematic analysis is similar to content analysis, but pays greater attention to the qualitative aspects of the material analyzed" (p. 56). Thematic analysis requires the researcher to establish categories, or themes, based upon the recurrent data and patterns found in the sample.

Research Questions

The research questions being explored by this study are:

1) What language is used to describe the whistleblower in coverage of the leak?

2) Does the article or journalist seem to be passing judgment on the individual being reported?

Sample

For this research, the sample consisted of newspaper articles published in the year following the release of documents by each of the subjects named in this study: Daniel Ellsberg and Edward Snowden. Many of the articles selected came from *The Washington Post*.

Research Design

I used thematic analysis to gather qualitative data on the media's portrayal of Daniel Ellsberg and Edward Snowden during their respective whistleblowing scandals. The following steps were followed:

1) I gathered samples for analysis. To do this, I pulled articles from online databases and archives that pertained to the topic and were published during the established time parameters of the study. Articles published during the 1970s Pentagon Papers scandal were purchased from *The Washington Post* archives.
2) I read each article for an initial introduction to its content without taking notes. Once I had done this for every article, I read each one for a second and third time, making notes on the articles themselves and in a notebook.
3) I examined my notes for common words, phrases, and tones that were prevalent across the sample for each whistleblower.
4) I categorized the commonalities I determined into themes.

5) I analyzed those themes to answer the research questions and reach a conclusion.

Data Collection

The data were collected through thematic analysis and used to determine the existence of concepts or themes that would portray each whistleblower in a particular light.

Interpretation

Once I had established the themes into which the data could fall, I interpreted the data using the paradigmatic conceptual device. According to Lindlof and Taylor (2011), the paradigmatic approach offers "a set of contrasting elements of a cultural domain" (p. 268). For this research, the two contrasting paradigms were "respected" versus "reviled."

Summary

This chapter outlined the methods that were used to conduct research on the topic of portrayals of Daniel Ellsberg and Edward Snowden in the media during their respective whistleblowing scandals. Thematic analysis was used to examine the texts gathered for interpretation. That analysis provided the results that will be discussed in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this research was to determine the similarities and differences between the media's portrayals of Daniel Ellsberg and of Edward Snowden during their respective whistleblowing scandals. This chapter presents an analysis of the results of the thematic analysis performed in this study.

The sample for this study was newspaper articles published in the year following the leaks of classified government documents by Ellsberg and by Snowden. Data were collected through thematic analysis of those articles; themes and concepts were coded for existence. The following research questions were examined:

1) What language is used to describe the whistleblower in coverage of the leak?
2) Does the article or journalist seem to be passing judgment on the individual being reported?

Audience

The intended audience of this research study is journalists, journalism scholars, communication scholars, and other media professionals. Such professionals may draw conclusions from this research that could impact the use of the media to shape public opinion. This study also has implications for government officials who participate in the classification of information the American public should know.

Newspaper Articles

Newspapers articles were used to collect data for this research study of the media's portrayals of two government whistleblowers. The articles pertaining to Ellsberg's release of the

Pentagon Papers had to be accessed through newspaper archives. Because there is a charge for each article accessed, the source of articles was limited to *The Washington Post*. I ran an advanced search on the archive's search engine for the most relevant articles under the keyword "Daniel Ellsberg" between June 1971 and June 1972. I used the first eight articles pulled by the search.

The articles pertaining to Snowden's released of the classified NSA documents were more readily available for no charge. For consistency, I pulled articles from *The Washington Post* for comparison. I also included articles from Politco.com and *The New Yorker*.

Portrayals of Daniel Ellsberg

Eight articles were used to explore the media's portrayal of Daniel Ellsberg after the publication of the Pentagon Papers, which he released to *The New York Times* in 1971. These articles were gathered from *The Washington Post*'s online archive through an advanced search. The following themes were determined through thematic analysis: Ellsberg was a reliable source and the newspaper was measured and unbiased in its reporting. Only one of the eight articles presented Ellsberg in a negative light. That article, "A Tet Memo from Ellsberg" repeatedly referred to Ellsberg as "mistaken," "wrong," and "flawed" in his interpretation of U.S. involvement in southeast Asia.

Ellsberg was a reliable source. What was overwhelmingly apparent in the articles published during the height of the Pentagon Papers scandal was the amount of respect afforded to Ellsberg. He was regarded as a thoughtful man, unafraid to admit when mistakes were made (Wills, 1971). In one article, multiple positive references were made to Ellsberg's education, qualifications, and history of government service; he was called the "MIT scholar," "the MIT professor," "the former defense analyst," and "the former Pentagon planner," (Greider, 1971).

Ellsberg held press conferences on his own, which the media attended and documented in the press. His statements were presented in the same tone as those of government officials.

Measured coverage by the media. Also overwhelmingly apparent was the matter-of-fact nature of reporting by *The Washington Post* during the Pentagon Papers era. Of the eight articles examined, seven were noted as straightforward and unbiased in their reportage. Ellsberg's perspective was offered, as was that of the government in prosecuting him, in equal measure.

Portrayals of Edward Snowden

Eight articles were used to explore the media's portrayal of Edward Snowden in the year following the June 2013 publication of classified NSA documents he collected and released to reporters from *The Guardian* and *The Washington Post*. These articles were originally posted in *The Washington Post* and *The New Yorker* and on Politico.com. The following themes were determined through thematic analysis: the revelations are insignificant; Snowden is an egomaniac; and the sources are faulty. Only one article made mention of a positive effect of the disclosures, noting they "shed useful light on some NSA programs and raised questions that deserve debate" (Editorial Board, 2013, para. 3).

The revelations are insignificant. The first theme to be determined during thematic analysis pertained to the idea that what Snowden revealed was not so surprising after all. In two of the articles examined, the writers went so far as to claim it is naïve of anyone to assume the government does not monitor, in some way, our electronic communications. In an opinion piece for *The Washington Post*, Richard Cohen (2013) claimed the government is merely doing what Internet companies like Google do daily while facing very little outrage. He opened the piece in a most flippant way:

> An old journalism saw goes like this: Dog bites man, no story. Man bites dog, story. Allow me to update it. Government monitors e-mail and telephone calls for national security, no story. Government doesn't do anything of the kind—now, that's a story. (para. 1)

Cohen calls Snowden "the self-proclaimed martyr for our civil liberties" and Greenwald the "vainglorious" reporter for *The Guardian* (para. 3). Cohen claimed "no one lied about the various programs disclosed [by Snowden]. They were secret, yes, but members of Congress were informed—and they approved" (para 5). Cohen also continued the Google analogy by stating:

> When I see "Hello, Richard" on my computer screen, I realize what's happened: *It* knows me. It knows what I bought and when I bought it and where I was at the time. It knows my sizes and my credit card number, and if it knows all that, it knows pretty much everything. I long ago sacrificed a measure of privacy for convenience. One click will do it.
> I also made the same sort of deal for security. I assumed the government was doing at least was Google was doing. (para. 6-7)

To Cohen, the idea of the NSA monitoring anyone's communication is no surprise at all.

In a piece for *The New Yorker*, Jeffrey Toobin (2013) argued "Edward Snowden is no hero." He questioned how naïve Snowden must have been to be shocked by the NSA's practices.

> He describes himself as appalled by the government he served…what, one wonders, did Snowden think the NSA did? Any marginally attentive citizen, much less NSA employee or contractor, knows that the entire mission of the agency is to intercept electronic communications. Perhaps he thought that the NSA operated only outside of the United States; in that case, he hadn't been paying very close attention. (para. 2)

Later in the article, Toobin claimed "these were legally authorized programs…[H]e wasn't blowing the whistle on anything illegal; he was exposing something that failed to meet his own standards of propriety" (para. 3). Toobin, like Cohen, found nothing surprising in Snowden's leaked documents.

Snowden is an egomaniac. The second prevalent theme to be determined through thematic analysis was the perception that Snowden was a narcissist looking for infamy and status as a hero. A number of the articles interpreted Snowden's statements as over-the-top and overly

sensational. Even Barton Gellman (2013), with whom Snowden initially worked, wrote Snowden "was capable of melodrama" (para. 16). In his opinion piece for *The Washington Post*, Cohen (2013) wrote that "everything about Edward Snowden is ridiculously cinematic. He is not patriotic; he is merely narcissistic" (para. 8). *The Washington Post* editorial board referred to him as a "naïve hacker" (para. 4), while Toobin (2013) called him "a grandiose narcissist who deserves to be in prison" (para. 1).

In a particularly blistering article for Politico.com, Roger Simon (2013) decried Snowden as a "slacker" with "hardly any qualifications" (para. 8) who stumbled into his position at the NSA. Simon pointed out that Snowden dropped out of high school and failed to complete his basic military training, referring to him as a "dud" and "loser" (para. 1-2). Simon ruthlessly attacked what he perceived was Snowden's lack of intelligence and judgment:

> Snowden flees the United States to a luxury hotel in—wait for it—China.
> True it is Hong Kong, a fabulous city brimming with soaring skyscrapers, marvelous restaurants, a glamorous nightlife and people of copious wealth. And true, Hong Kong operates as a 'semi-autonomous region' of China in which people have more rights.
> But as James Fallows of *The Atlantic* recently wrote: 'Hong Kong is not a sovereign country. Is it part of China—a country that by the libertarian standards Edward Snowden says he cares about it is worse, not better, than the United States. It has even more surveillance of its citizens….Its press is thoroughly government controlled; it has no legal theory of protection for free speech; and it doesn't even have national elections.'
> Oh well, small slip-up….But Snowden never claimed to be a genius. Maybe the history of modern China was not on his GED exam. (para. 15-21)

Many reporters found a lot to attack in the man who revealed the NSA's secrets.

The sources are faulty. Finally, thematic analysis revealed a proclivity toward covering the publication of the information rather than the content of the information. In a piece for *The Washington Post*, Paul Fehrl (2013) disparaged *The Guardian* as "small and underweight, even by British standards" (para. 1), calling it "a financially struggling, frankly liberal newspaper"

(para. 5). Ferhl's article posed the following question: "Why is a London-based news organization revealing so many secrets about the *American* government" (para. 7). Almost no specifics were offered in the article of the "many secrets" that organization exposed. Similarly, most of the space in every article was devoted to discussing Snowden himself rather than what Snowden revealed.

Findings

Based upon the 16 articles reviewed for this study, it can be noted the media's portrayal of Daniel Ellsberg in the 1970s was far more measured and far less heated than the contemporary media's portrayal of Edward Snowden. While Ellsberg was respected as a source of information, Snowden was widely panned as an unreliable egotist. During Ellsberg's scandal, the focus of the story was primarily on the value of what he revealed, while the focus of Snowden's scandal has been the whistleblower himself. Pickard (2013) claimed Snowden's treatment was calculated: "What seems like an obvious effort by the media to discredit Snowden could be viewed as a deliberate attempt by the media to divert attention from the substance of the disclosures to the *source* of the disclosures" (para. 16).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I presented the findings of my research into the media's portrayals of Daniel Ellsberg and Edward Snowden during their respective whistleblowing scandals. I determined there was a clear and marked difference in how each man was portrayed, with Ellsberg largely finding respect in the media and Snowden facing harsh and personal criticism. These results were garnered through thematic analysis of newspaper articles published in the year following each scandal.

The next chapter will offer a conclusion to this study and offer suggestions for further research into this fruitful topic.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

This study intended to determine what similarities and differences existed in the media's portrayals of the respective scandals of Daniel Ellsberg and Edward Snowden. Through thematic analysis, I determined there was a marked difference in how each of the men was portrayed by the press. While Ellsberg was widely respected and considered a reliable source of information, Snowden was vilified and attacked.

This is particularly interesting, as Ellsberg is now heralded as a patriot and hero for handing the Pentagon Papers over to *The New York Times*. The question is: will Snowden one day be proclaimed a hero, as well?

It is important to consider the kinds of information each man shared and the cultural climate of the time. This could reasonably influence the reception of certain revelations and of the revelators themselves. In Ellsberg's case, the Pentagon Papers revealed the sordid truth behind an already reviled war that had left many American soldiers dead or scarred by the battlefield. His actions contributed in large part to the end of the Vietnam War, preventing an unpredictable number of additional deaths. It was likely very easy for the American public to view his actions as heroic.

Snowden's disclosures were made in a post-September 11 world—a world that seemed possible of falling prey to terrorists at any moment. This kind of world was quite unknown to the United States, which had seen decades of nearly uninterrupted peace on its soil. In such a frightening world, many Americans felt comfortable sacrificing a certain amount of personal liberty in exchange for safety and security. Any threat to that security, real or perceived, could easily have been viewed as not only unpatriotic but a downright betrayal. It would be understandably difficult for Snowden or Snowden's supporters to break through such a fear-

based mindset and make the argument that his revelations were for the good of the American public.

We must also keep in mind how much the media changed between 1971 and 2013. If digital media existed in Ellsberg's day, what kind of reception would he have received? If reactionary pundits had an equal platform (i.e., the Internet) to post their extreme views, whether for or against his actions, how would that have influenced mainstream coverage of his scandal? If news organizations operated on a 24-hour news cycle, how would that have changed what I determined was the measured and unbiased the Pentagon Papers received in *The Washington Post*? Had journalists and bloggers dragged the minutia of Ellsberg's life through their respective media platforms, would the outcome of his story have changed? As much as anyone, myself included, wishes to compare Ellsberg and Snowden as equals, it may simply be impossible.

Only time will tell if Snowden will someday enjoy the same public exoneration as Ellsberg, but from my research I would venture to assume the path to glory will not come easily to Snowden. Ellsberg (2013, 2014) has gone on record stating he sees no difference in what he did and what Snowden did, but the wild beast of the collective digital, print, and broadcast media seems less convinced

Recommendations for Further Research

Research in this study was limited to the media's portrayals of two whistleblowers in the years following their scandals. It did not attempt to determine how the public's perception of those whistleblowers was affected by these portrayals. Further research could be done in this area. In a democracy, the public determines who has power. If whistleblowing (like that of Ellsberg, Snowden, and others) affects the public view of those with authority and inspires the

citizenry to question those in office, this could have great implication for the American political scene.

Further research could also be done to determine how reporting styles have changed in the 40 years between the scandals and how those changes affect coverage of political scandals. This could go far beyond examples of whistleblowing. Such research could affect how news organizations approach political stories.

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