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Discourse Analysis of the Media Reports on Edward Snowden's Disclosures

The aim of this paper is to analyze the media discourse in constructing the social knowledge about the leakage of classified information concerning government surveillance programs by Edward Snowden. The main focus of the paper is the relationship between media discourse and social knowledge in building attitudes on this topic. To put it differently, we will be observing certain parts of the media discourse on the topic by analyzing specific terms, phrases and other parts of discourse used by the two opposing sides that help build a certain positive or negative attitude and construct the desired social knowledge.

In any serious analysis of media discourse one must pay attention to possible media bias of certain news channels or newspapers or, rather, the discourse analysis should reveal this potential political bias. The aim of this paper is not such a large scale analysis of American papers and news channels nor is it an in-depth analysis of all the subtle differences between them, but the scope is to show that Edward Snowden's disclosures were approached very differently and that this is reflected in the argumentative discourse of the opposing sides. We are simply examining two different interpretations of the same event that occurred because of ideological biases (van Dijk, "Discourse, Cognition, Society" 396).

Teun van Dijk says about knowledge and truth that "only situated talk or text may be said to be true or false; for instance, when the beliefs expressed by them are asserted to correspond to the facts. Beliefs themselves may, or may not, correspond to 'reality', but have no truth values unless discursively asserted" ("Discourse-Knowledge Interface" 85). In the case of Snowden's disclosures, we will be looking at how the two opposing perspectives are represented in the media by taking the same facts and presenting them in completely different ways, i.e. the discoursive context that these facts are put in helps construct the reality around them and helps build two conflicted "truths."

The sources that we will be observing are few, due to the limitations of this paper. The sources chosen as supportive of Snowden's actions are the film *Citizenfour*, which is the most direct source possible as it mostly stars Snowden himself, and the *Guardian*, as the first source to report on the subject and the first to use Snowden as a source. In order to analyze what some of the conservative media were writing about the Snowden case we examined articles by the well know conservative papers and magazines like the *Weekly Standard*, *National Review* and the *American Spectator*. However, due to the restrictions of this paper, we will provide and analyze more closely only the examples from *The American Spectator* as representative of the conservative discourse. Furthermore, we chose to analyze *Fox News* as an additional representative of the conservative news media.

By observing the case of Snowden's disclosures, we will be dealing with the role of the media in shaping attitudes and ideologies of the public: "[a]ttitudes and ideologies . . . are only shared by the members of specific socio-political groups, and hence are in need of specific assertion to other group members" (*Discourse and Knowledge* 92). We are talking about two sides, with completely opposite

perspectives on the case, trying to "teach" the general public their own truth. Through the media, the aforementioned groups are constantly asserting their own attitudes and trying to pass them on to a wider audience.

To start with, it is perhaps best to observe the way social knowledge is usually acquired: "[k]nowledge flow and transfer through the mass media is largely top-down, from a media organization to a (specific) public at large" (*Discourse and Knowledge* 134). The public does not have at its disposal the necessary information about an event such as this one. We are not born with the necessary knowledge to assume a positive or negative attitude about a case like this. Rather, the information comes from the above and is incorporated into our already developed perspectives, knowledge and attitudes and helps further shape them.

Generally, it is the government that controls what we know and do not know about surveillance and similar matters concerning national security. What Snowden did, however, was to interrupt the hierarchy of the information flow by stepping out and giving to the public the information he thought they should have been aware of. But, he brought to the public yet another form of hierarchy of information, since rather than one top-down information system, he created two: the public is now fed the information, but it comes from both the government's side and his own (or rather his media supporters), and both sides are strongly supportive of their own attitude and nowhere near neutral. This paper mainly observes how these two perspectives are carried out by the media discourse.

According to van Dijk, powerful groups and institutions, among which the media and their journalists, should manage their specialized knowledge in a way "that they do not use [it] in order to harm, exclude or marginalize citizens, but on the

contrary that they only use such knowledge in order for citizens (clients) to benefit from such knowledge" ("Discourse-Knowledge Interface" 88). He claims that:

> the critical approach to knowledge is also a study of the relations between knowledge and social groups and institutions: which groups or institutions have preferential access to various kinds of knowledge, which groups or institutions set the criteria for the very definition or legitimization of knowledge, and which are especially involved in the distribution of knowledge - or precisely in the limitation of knowledge in society. (88)

As the government abused their position of "knowledge manager" Snowden challenged it. However, his rebellion was against the exclusion of citizens from the knowledge about surveillance programs, but he did not want to be the one to decide how to release the information he had. Therefore, what the *Guardian* or, rather, the reporter Glenn Greenwald did was precisely what van Dijk is talking about—using the specialized knowledge of a journalist, a professional, to give the public information to their benefit, rather than uncovering all the information Snowden was able to provide. Snowden insisted continuously that he was not be the one to choose what goes public and what would be a danger to national security if revealed. He wanted the job to be done by professionals with a specialized knowledge so that the release of information would be for the public's benefit rather than harm.

The research on Edward Snowden's case, based on newspaper reports, news channels and a movie, led us to learn that the issues discussed follow certain discourse patterns that help create a context to the stories. Even at first glance, one can easily notice that, depending on the side that addresses the issue, different discourses are introduced into the discussion. Some of the most important concepts that construct the discourse around the case are the following: surveillance, terrorism

and national security, the Patriot Act, whistleblowers, metadata and linkability, privacy and liberty, treason.

Many of the supporters of Snowden's actions, as well as Snowden himself, bring out the argument that the lack of privacy is equivalent to the lack of liberty. In fact, the idea that the ubiquitous surveillance invading everyone's privacy goes against the basic principles of American democratic liberties is one of the strongest arguments that appear in this discussion.

In the movie, Snowden himself opens the dialogue on the importance of privacy as a crucial feature of democracy. The new knowledge that is introduced is the political side to the story. He builds awareness of the issue in American society around his disclosures by stating to the public: these are not just documents that do not concern you, this endangers our freedom and democracy; as Poitras puts it—"[w]e're building the greatest weapon for oppression in the history of man, yet its directors exempt themselves from accountability" (*Citizenfour*). The discourse switches from security systems, to invasion of privacy and finally to discussing the political system. In addition to saying that they endanger the whole idea of democracy, Snowden comments on the government's actions by comparing them to a practically totalitarian system of power: "[t]he balance of power between the citizenry and the government is becoming that of the ruler and the ruled, as opposed to . . . the elected and the electorate" (*Citizenfour*).

Snowden touches upon the right issue here: the notion of power is crucial to this discussion. The situation discussed is really a power game: "knowledge may be a power resource, that is, the 'symbolic capital' of specific groups . . . Knowledge may

be dominant, and may (have to) be ratified and legitimated, or may be challenged as such by alternative forms of beliefs" (van Dijk, "Discourse-Knowledge Interface" 86). This is precisely the case of what happened here. The government and its agencies had a knowledge of the surveillance systems and used it as a power resource to control the public, which had no idea about what was going on. Moreover, if knowledge is power, the situation really was that of a ruler and the ruled, as the government had all the information about its citizenry, and the citizenry no idea of what the government was doing. Snowden's role in it was precisely that of a challenger—he gave that knowledge to the public, as he presented it, as the main means to defend people's basic civil rights for privacy and, consequently, freedom of speech. Van Dijk continues: "[i]n order to study power and its abuse, it is therefore crucial to understand how exactly powerful groups and institutions (such as media, universities, and so on) manage and express their knowledge in public discourse" ("Discourse-Knowledge Interface" 87-88). According to him, discourse can is, too, a source of political and social power: "CDS scholars are typically interested in the way discourse (re) produces social *domination*, that is, the *power abuse* of one group over the others, and how dominated groups may discursively *resist* such abuse" ("Discourse, Cognition, Society" 389). What Snowden did was to challenge the power of the government by giving the knowledge of its actions to the public. And the defense of both Snowden and the government agencies are based on the managing of public knowledge. Consequently, the media and the institutions divided on the subject and both the defense and the attack were based on managing what the public knows: what it is being told and what is being withheld from it.

The former NSA veteran and a whistleblower himself, William Binney, continues in the same tone: "[a]ll these programs that Edward Snowden has exposed fundamentally are ways of acquiring information. Every dictatorship down through history has always done that. One of the first things they need to do is to try to acquire knowledge about their population, and that's exactly what these programs do;" "I see this as the most major threat to our democracies all around the world" (*Citizenfour*). Binney, too, recognizes the power of knowledge. Both so-called whistleblowers see the justification for their actions in the fact that they consider these surveillance systems as a weapon against democracy and therefore believe to have simply revealed to the public what the public should have known in the first place. The discourse is extremely political and centered around civil liberties. The words used by Snowden and Binney (such as "ruler" and "ruled," "dictatorship," "threat to democracies" etc.), are strongly negative words that aim to develop as strong an impression as possible on the audience, with the scope of developing a firm negative attitude towards the government's actions, due to feeling endangered by them.

The same kind of discourse is used by the investigative journalist Jacob Applebaum. His words summarize the way the minds of people fighting for civil liberties, such as the ones mentioned previously, work: "[w]hat people used to call liberty and freedom, we now call privacy . . . And we say in the same breath that privacy is dead . . . When we lose privacy, we lose agency, liberty itself . . . what is surveillance except control?" (*Citizenfour*). He uses logical deduction to support his arguments. His lecture is very didactic - he gradually leads the listeners to come to the same conclusion as his about the subject; he is really teaching them his own perspective on things.

In Edward Snowden's words—all these arguments prove that this is really a conflict between "state power [and] the people's ability to meaningfully oppose that power" (*Citizenfour*)—and both are based on the power of knowledge.

Another crucial concept for this discussion is terrorism, which is unequivocally connected to national security. What initially set the basis for the government's control over so much information about American (and other) citizens is the Patriot Act. The Patriot Act was set up immediately after September 11, 2001, and it allowed for a much wider and closer control on the side of the government over the data exchanged by the citizenry.

One thing has to be observed here, and it is the place that the 9/11 terrorist attacks have in the discourse about surveillance. 9/11 is set as a sort of a starting point; all subjects discussing the topic reflect on the issue of surveillance only reaching as far in the past as 2001. Therefore, the specificity of the discourse about the government's overly-invasive surveillance policies is that it does not predate 2001; it has a clear starting point—and it is not simply a date when it started, but it also provides a context for the whole issue. The date it can be traced to is the date when America was endangered. The mere mention of 9/11, as the most traumatic event in modern American history, invokes feelings of fear and vulnerability in the audience and is, therefore, a strong discursive weapon that helps build up the feeling of insecurity so that the readers (or listeners) could more easily approve of the government's actions as protective of the people.

Glenn Greenwald, the leading reporter on the Snowden case for the *Guardian*, was chosen wisely by Snowden as the first person to come to with this information. He, too, gives much attention to the role of terrorism in this discussion. A fighter for

civil rights, Greenwald expressed his view on terrorism as simply a "justification for everything" (*Citizenfour*). He strongly condemns the idea of the government invading people's privacy, without letting them know, in the name of national security. Greenwald's report for the CNN in *Citizenfour*, best explains the difference between what the Patriot Act should have represented and protected, and how the governmental agencies were actually taking advantage of it:

> The law that this was done under, which is the Patriot Act, enacted in the wake of 9/11, was a law that allowed the government very broad powers to get records about people with a lower level of suspicion than probable cause. . . Under the Patriot Act, if the government had even any suspicion that you were involved in a crime or terrorism, they could get a lot of information about you. What this court order does, that makes it so striking, is that it's not directed at any individuals who they believe, or have suspicion of committing crimes or [being] a part of a terrorist organization; it's collecting the phone records of every single customer . . . so it's indiscriminate and it's sweeping. It's a government program designed to collect information about all Americans, not just people where they believe there's reason to believe they've done anything wrong. (*Citizenfour*)

In this report, Greenwald takes upon himself the task of explaining the law to the people. The understanding of such laws and governmental procedures is not a "commonsense belief" among the people—legal documents require a specialized knowledge in order to be comprehended, and the general public lacks such knowledge (*Discourse and Knowledge* 107). Therefore, Greenwald plays the role of an interpreter, which is his duty as a journalist, to convey the real meaning of such documents to the public, so they could understand on their own whether the

government has a right to do something like that to them or not. This is precisely the way media works to transform specialized knowledge and attitudes into a commonsense belief (*Discourse and Knowledge* 107). However, he does not do this without implicating his own perspective on things at the same time.

He continues in the same tone, explaining that some deeds just cannot be justified by such a weak excuse:

> The Americans' justification for everything since the September 11 attacks is terrorism. Everything is in the name of national security, to protect our population. In reality, it's the opposite. A lot of the documents have nothing to do with terrorism or national security, but with competition between countries and with companies' industrial, financial or economic issues. (*Citizenfour*)

Although it might have originated in the context of terrorism, Greenwald feels that the surveillance of today has nothing to do with terrorism anymore; he believes there to be other hidden motives behind these breaches of privacy. The government is simply retaining the discourse on terrorism and national security in the public to defend its actions.

The concepts of terrorism and national security extend even further—as a part of the personal attack on Snowden. While some look at him as a national hero who came out with the information that was in the public interest, others judge him as a national traitor, a person who betrayed his country's interests. The latter approach was also taken by the government itself, as Snowden was accused of espionage. In the movie, his lawyers comment on his charges, saying that the Espionage Act, under which he was charged, is a "World-War-One era criminal law" that was created "for spies cooperating with a foreign power, not whistleblowers" (*Citizenfour*). Therefore, his actions are being seen as those of a national enemy, without any regard for the

public interest of that same nation. The law "doesn't distinguish between leaks to the press in the public interest and selling secrets to foreign enemies for personal profit;" "it's no defense that the information shouldn't have been withheld in the first place" (*Citizenfour*). Once again, a different discourse than that which should dominate the discussion is taking the stage. A fictive discourse of World War One spies (cooperating with foreign enemies) has entered a completely different sphere—that of surveillance over all citizens and bringing to the press what is a breach of people's privacy. The government is using a different rhetoric than what is really the issue in both defending its own actions and accusing Snowden of a crime. This kind of playing with, or rather manipulating, the discourse is exemplary of the importance of the context, or rather, the setting. Knowledge can be manipulated by putting events or words into a chosen context, where the institution or the journalist has the chance to express their own situation model and their own interpretation of the event to evoke a desired reaction of the public (*Discourse and Knowledge* 134).

Yet another concept that keeps re-appearing in the discussion on Snowden is linkability, often connected to the notion of metadata. Jacob Applebaum explains linkability:

Take one piece of data and link it to another piece of data . . . if you have your metro card, and you have your debit card . . . you could draw a line between them. So that's like not a scary thing. Except your bank card is tied to all that you do during the day. So now they know where you're going, when you make purchases. So when they decide to target you, they can actually recreate your exact steps. With the metro card and with the credit card alone . . . by linking that data with other people on similar travel plans, they can figure out who you

talked to and who you met with. When you then take your cellphone data, which logs your location, and you link up purchasing data, metro card data and you debit card, you start to get what you could call metadata. (*Citizenfour*)

The term metadata is actually one of the words that dominate the surveillance discourse and is presented here as an example of manipulation with specialized knowledge by a certain epistemic group - those who are familiar with the term and its meaning (*Discourse and Knowledge* 113). The discussion is often lead in a direction of whether or not the collection of metadata invades people's privacy. Businessdictionary.com defines metadata as "[d]ata that serves to provide context or additional information about other data." These type of data include information like phone call subjects and duration, e-mail subjects, sender and receiver of a message and similar fact-based data which could be considered less threatening to people's privacy since they miss the crucial factor - the content. And people are inclined to believe that it is the content that provides the story. However, people fighting the surveillance system, like Snowden or Applebaum, warn about the real meaning of metadata. Again, we are talking about a specialized knowledge that is not common-ground for the general public, and can therefore be used against it by withholding the real meaning and possibilities of using such information. Snowden and Applebaum explain the terms in a laic way, so that the public could comprehend what this really means and conclude for themselves if it really is a threat to their privacy.

Thanks to the notion of linkability and the fact that metadata is so widely recovered, the data that the governmental agencies collect really do help construct "a complete electronic narrative of an individual's life: their friends, lovers, joys, sorrows" (Snowden qouted in Harding n.p.). As harmless as metadata may seem at

first glance, it is necessary to acknowledge the fact that we live in a world where technology controls our communication—most of our contact with other people takes place through electronic devices. Therefore, Snowden has a point warning us about the "vast majority of . . . device-based communication, basically human communication, [being] automatically ingested without targeting" (*Citizenfour*), as he befittingly draws the parallel between device-based communication and human communication in general.

The discussion on metadata collection is also used by the government, as a way of defending their right to collect such "insignificant" factual information. Glenn Greenwald again warns about the erroneous government defense "that it was not invading the content of our communications, just taking the metadata" (*Citizenfour*). But the government does not explain how metadata can really be used and is, therefore, taking advantage of the fact that people do not know this - they are unfamiliar with the term and the purpose of collecting metadata. Applebaum explains that theirs is not a valid defense at all, for the collection of metadata is an equally significant invasion of privacy as is the collection of the actual content of conversations, messages etc.:"if I know all the people you are communicating with, and everyone they are communicating with, where you are when you are communicating, the call duration and the location, then I can learn a lot about your personality, you activity and your life. This is a major invasion of privacy" (*Citizenfour*).

Many reports also reflect on the possibility of debating and discussing the issue at hand on the part of the general public, rather than simply the media and the institutions. The key requirement for a fair debate is that the people have an established attitude based on their own knowledge about the topic. The idea of a

public debate is recurrent in the discussion on the Snowden case. It is really a question of whether or not the public has enough knowledge at its disposal to determine whose actions are right or wrong. Van Dijk says the following about attitudes:

> Attitudes are based on socially shared knowledge. Attitudes are not only based on the ideologies of a group but on the general knowledge of a community—allowing mutual communication and debate in the first place. In order to have a debate or opinions on gay marriages . . . one needs to know what gay marriages are in the first place. (*Discourse and Knowledge* 100)

 The two sides come out quite clearly in this case. Greenwald, in the movie, has quite a monologue on the subject. When he first sees the information that Snowden brings, his reaction is strongly supportive of making these documents public for he is shocked by the magnitude of the systems for data collection and believes it to be something every citizen should be aware of—"we should be having debates about this!" (*Citizenfour*). He blames the government for an abuse of power by keeping this information from the public. The government's reaction is a bit different: "the President is not happy about this: leak classified information about sensitive programs that are important in out fights against terrorists" (*Citizenfour*). The government tries to defend itself from keeping its action from its citizens by saying that it was for the sake of national security, but not denying that its actions were questionable in regard to people's privacy, by saying that: "the debate itself is legitimate and should be engaged" (*Citizenfour*). The question however remains: how could the issue be debated if the public did not know what was going on? Therefore, this is a breach of democratic principles through an abuse of power by withholding important information from the public.

The notion of whistleblowers also deserves some attention as part of the discussion on the surveillance state. The term is a crucial part of any such discussion, and while it retains a certain negative connotation (its meaning is often connected to, for example, that of a traitor), if we go back to its definition, it is a perfectly positive epithet; *Oxforddictionaries.com* defines is as "a person who informs on a person or organization regarded as engaging in an unlawful or immoral activity." This positive meaning, that of a person telling the necessary truth, is embraced by Greenwald, as well. In 2013, some months after he exposed Snowden's story, he wrote an article in defense of whistleblowers in which he describes whistleblowers as heroes, who "[undertake] great personal risk and sacrifice for one overarching reason: to make their fellow citizens aware of what their government is doing in the dark. Their objective is to educate, to democratize, to create accountability for those in power" (Greenwald n.p.).

While Greenwald sees it this way, there is another stand in the discourse on whistleblowers and it is that taken by the US government. As previously discussed, the government did approach Snowden's actions as acts of treason, as he has been accused of espionage and similar deeds. From their point of view, whistleblowers are indeed traitors. However, as Greenwald goes on to explain, "none of the whistleblowers persecuted by the Obama administration" have "[enriched] themselves by selling those documents for huge sums of money to foreign intelligence services," "[harmed] the US government by acting at the direction of a foreign adversary and covertly pass those secrets to them," nor "exposed the identity of covert agents" (n.p.). He believes that the reason behind the government

relentlessly attacking whistleblowers is that they are trying to take the attention away from their own wrongdoings. To put it differently: the best defense is a good offense.

The interesting thing is that the two actors on opposite sides, Obama as the representative of the US government and Snowden as a representative whistleblower, both found themselves on both sides of this discourse at one point. In 2008, as a presidential candidate, Obama stated that "often the best source of information about waste, fraud, and abuse in government is an existing government employee committed to public integrity and willing to speak out," defining whistleblowing as "acts of courage and patriotism, which can sometimes save lives and often save taxpayer dollars, [and they] should be encouraged rather than stifled" (quoted in Greenwald n.p.). Those same acts are now deemed by his own government as treason.

Snowden on the other side, used to be strongly opposed to government officials leaking classified information to the public, referring to it as "the worst crime conceivable" (quoted in Harding n.p.). In an anonymous Internet conversation about the New York Times's story on the Israeli attack plan on Iran, Snowden posted the following comments confirming his hostile attitude towards whistleblowing:

"moreover, who the fuck are the anonymous sources telling them this? those people should be shot in the balls"

"that shit is classified for a reason" (Harding n.p.)

But, as he started working in a governmental agency and realizing the harmful impact of his own work on people's privacy and anonymity, he, too, changed his mind and became a whistleblower himself. This change only goes to prove van Dijk's description of knowledge as a dynamic process—an "ongoing process of construction, as it is typically manifested in concrete conversation and interaction and

its processes of knowledge construction or interpretation" ("Discourse-Knowledge Interface" 92). In Snowden's case the change of attitude was based on his private life, as well, as he changed his opinion on whistleblowing when he started working for the NSA and getting a better insight into the government's actions. However, as van Dijk does not fail to stress (*Discourse and Knowledge* 94-5)—his change of attitude was a result of the social knowledge and ideological attitudes he already possessed, and it is that of a supporter and protector of civil liberties. Once he felt his own freedom and privacy endangered by his own work, he felt it was his duty to go public with the information.

The conservative media provide a different approach to whistleblowers. When covering Edward Snowden's disclosures, *Fox News* often interviewed people who saw Snowden in a more negative light than most of the mainstream media. In the article *Edward Snowden: Whistleblower or double agent? Fox News* quotes Richard Haass and presents the public with his accusation of Snowden's actions.

> Richard Haass, president of the Council on Foreign Relations recently tweeted, "Why is the media using the sympathetic word 'whistleblower' for Edward #Snowden, who leaked secret #NSA program? He broke the law & made us less safe."
>
> He added, "A 'whistleblower' is person who reveals wrongdoing, corruption, illegal activity. None of this applies here even if you oppose US (government) policy." (2013)

The key notions of this tweet include "whistleblowing," "breaking the law," "endangering safety," "revealing wrongdoings" etc. As for whistleblowing, the term has already been discussed in the first part of the paper, but rather differently. Here,

it is implicated as quite a positive term ("sympathetic"), too positive for Snowden in fact. But, the fact that the author said: "none of it applies here" is revealing to the accusative nature of the tweet. It is a strategy of attack in place of a defense. The question of whether or not opposing the government might be the same as helping the people is not addressed here. Rather than explaining if the government's actions really were a "wrongdoing" to the nation, the finger is pointed directly on Snowden. Avoidance of the issue whether the government did something wrong is characteristic of the conservative discourse on this subject in most of the media.

Moreover, the very title of the article is an interrogative sentence expressing doubt whether Snowden is a whistleblower or maybe a double agent. This uncertainty, which is brought to public discourse with a sound title, is further reinforced towards the end of the article with apparent misuses of the term "whistleblower" when applied to Snowden. According to van Dijk, Haass' tweet is an example of "declarative knowledge" about whistleblowers—it teaches us what a whistleblower is and, together with its definition, there is also an explanation that Snowden is not that. However, it is missing a crucial part: what is a wrongdoing and why the government's actions were not wrong. Without this, Haas's definition of Snowden remains incomplete. The next conclusion this report tries to lead the readers to is that Snowden is a double agent. But, the only argument remains the fact that he is not a whistleblower. Theses deductions are not given full support in the article. This is indicative of a strongly assertive attitude of the report: it is trying to convey an opinion without providing all the necessary information.

In December 2013, *Fox News* analyst Ralph Peters argued that the death penalty should be brought back in order to punish Snowden. This is quite a strong move on Peters's side—he does not deal with the deed itself, but rather with the

punishment; the setting here is completely changed from what would normally be a serious political discussion and put into a sort of caricature-like context, in order to enhance the impact of his words against Snowden:

> Now you've got this 29-year-old high school dropout whistleblower making foreign policy for our country, our security policy . . . We've made treason cool. Betraying your country is a kind of a fashion statement. He wants to be the national security Kim Kardashian. He cites Bradley Manning as a hero." Peters continued, "I mean, we need to get very, very serious about treason. And oh by the way, for treason — as in the case of Bradley Manning or Edwards Snowden — you bring back the death penalty. ("Bring Back The Death Penalty")

Ralph Peters brought a couple of interesting terms into the Snowden discourse. "Treason" is perhaps the key term of the report. The idea of treason and betraying one's own country are used directed to a conservative audience that reads/listens to such reports. This kind of audience is better reached by using words that may not belong to this particular context (or may), but are connected to most horrible acts imaginable to such an audience and would evoke a strong negative reaction towards the subject. The same month, a quite harsh title appeared on *Fox News* webpage quoting the former CIA director James Woolsey: "[e]x-CIA director: Snowden should be 'hanged' if convicted for treason" (Tomlison n.p.). Although these statements were not a Fox News opinion nor were they especially promoted, they were nonetheless given space in media and this way brought into the public discourse about the case.

Another interesting things concerning Fox News coverage is the absence of terms like "surveillance state" which were typically used by other media and which

portray the state in the negative light. The whole idea of a wrongdoing on the part of the government is widely avoided in conservative media. While the media would have any right to stand in the government's defense when opposing Snowden, the complete absence of terms such as "surveillance state" and of the discussion on the things Snowden revealed, work against what van Dijk called journalistic duty ("Discourse-Knowledge Interface" 88) to not limit the knowledge of the public. Instead, there is a constant usage of word "treason" in *Fox News* coverage of the case and by merely "pumping" this word in the public discourse about Edward Snowden, he is presented merely as a doer of a historically grave crime. The issue of whether or not he did the right thing by the general public is not addressed.

Furthermore, the notion of security is always seen by the conservative media as an ideal which Snowden has heavily damaged: "[h]is leaks caused enormous damage to national security, unveiling in great detail some of the methods and means by which the National Security Agency gathers intelligence" (Babbin n.p.)

The conservative media try to distance us from questions like privacy and liberty and, by avoiding these, focus our attention on safety issues. Then, on top of all that there are people like Edward Snowden who leak those secrets to the public, terrorists and unfriendly nations. In this way the reader of such news can indirectly conclude that Snowden's actions harm the safety of US citizens.

The conservative media who repeatedly try to undermine the person of Edward Snowden continued after the movie about him as well. Debra J. Saunders analyzes in the *American Spectator* "Which Leaker is worse, Petraeus or Snowden:"

Last weekend, I watched *Citizenfour*, the Academy Award-winning Laura Poitras documentary on Snowden. Talk about self-aggrandizement. For almost

two hours, I was treated to one-shots of Snowden typing on his laptop on a hotel bed, playing with his hair in a hotel bathroom, and discussing how he didn't really want the NSA leak story to be all about him. But we never got answers to the questions that challenge the Snowden hagiography. How did Snowden *really* end up in Moscow? What does Snowden think of Russia's record on surveillance and treatment of "whistleblowers"? (n.p.)

In this attack on Snowden as a person using *ad hominem* arguments, the author tried to portray him contrary to the typical American hero. The attack on Snowden is personal, the other issue at hand are cleverly avoided and the target is pointed on one man's back only (just as he wanted). Furthermore, by juxtaposing the USA with Russia it is shown that he, although not saying it explicitly, changed his country and defected to much worse system. These words help portray Snowden as the national enemy, and further support the idea of treason.

We can conclude that there is an absence of terms like "privacy" and "liberty" in the conservative media, while at the same time, the term "treason" emerged as a dominant keyword in their discourse. It is also noticeable that the words like "security" and "safety" were used in a positive context. Through avoiding the usage of terms like "privacy," "anonymity," "liberty" etc. which might have been infringed by the government and their agencies and through positive usage of words like "safety" and "security" this type of discourse in a way manipulated the general public into believing that Snowden's actions are a threat to them.

In conclusion, we can observe that the media discourse on Snowden's disclosures brings to light certain characteristics of the construction of attitudes and knowledge through media discourse. Van Dijk stresses the role of public discourse in

shaping people's opinion:

> Ideologies—just like socially acquired knowledge—*are largely acquired and reproduced by public discourse*. Although personal experiences may be very relevant in choosing or developing an ideology, we generally become feminists or pacifists because of socially shared beliefs we learn about through communication, e.g., by the media or ideologues of an ideological group (*Discourse and Knowledge* 98, emphasis in the original).

What Van Dijk is trying to say here is that the media play a role of huge importance in shaping our attitudes and even ideologies. In this case, the fact of the matter is that the public had no idea what information the leaked documents contained and what was their meaning. Therefore, both sides (Snowden vs. the government, progressive vs. conservative) had to act through the media to shape the public's attitude the way they wanted to. The notion of dynamic knowledge is demonstrated by this case. The people were gradually acquiring knowledge about the governmental procedures, systems, laws, technical knowledge etc. through media discourse. The public was given the factual information that it had no knowledge to interpret. Therefore, the media served as an interpreter or, to put it differently, as a teacher to the public. The knowledge was constructed through and by the media in a process that lasted for months, even years (and still does). Snowden, through Poitras and the *Guardian* (Greenwald), approached his explanation of the events through notions such as privacy and freedom, by explaining the specialized terms that the government used to defend their actions ("metadata"). His reports where basically done through explanations of terms and actions and laicizing the specialized discourse that the public would otherwise not understand and could be easily deceived by. The conservative media, on the other side, assumed the approach in the form of a

personal attack on Snowden, rather than dealing with the explanations and justifications of the government's actions. Each side built their own truth and both found approval among their audiences. This is only demonstrative of our need to build our knowledge around the knowledge, attitudes and ideologies we already embraced and the fact that the media are here to help us shape our attitudes and ideologies in the direction that they themselves lead us. Cases like this teach us that there are hardly any information in the media that could be considered neutral—everything we read or hear contains a more or less successfully hidden bias that aims to teach us the "real truth."

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