

## LEAKS & WHISTLEBLOWERS

## THE CONFLICT PERSPECTIVE

The *Conflict Perspective* interprets society as a struggle for power between groups engaging in *conflict* for limited resources. Within that framework, one way that **conflict perspective** might interpret Leaks and Whistleblowers is that they are working against the systems of control in this conflict structure, serving as agents of deviance against an oppressive regime. In that scenario, **conflict perspective** would say:

1) *Deviance is seen by those in power as threatening to their positions.*

2) *Rich and powerful use their position to define deviant behavior and decide on punishment.*

***Therefore, the actions of leakers and whistleblowers serve to undermine this system of oppressive control and put power back in the hands of the less powerful.***

What follows are several document excerpts which explore that idea, with guided questions:

From ***“Ben Franklin to Bradley Manning: Famous leaks in American history”*** by the *Washington Post*.

**Ben Franklin:** In 1772, Benjamin Franklin received a packet of letters written by Thomas Hutchinson, the royal governor of Massachusetts, in which he said that restive colonists could be subdued by depriving them of their liberties. Franklin passed them along. They were published, stirring the colonists toward what would soon become a drive for independence.

**Deep Throat:** Mark Felt, a top FBI official, was a secret source of information to The Washington Post about the Watergate scandal, which eventually culminated in President Richard Nixon's resignation. Felt's identity, previously known only as Deep Throat, was revealed in 2005.

**About the American Taliban:** Jesselyn Radack, then an ethics adviser for the Justice Department, disclosed after Sept. 11, 2001, that the FBI had interrogated John Walker Lindh, known as the “American Taliban,” without an attorney present. Her supervisor told her to find another job. Today, she is an advocate and attorney for fellow whistleblowers, who come to her “bankrupt, blacklisted and broken.”

**Daniel Ellsberg:** Ellsberg, a former defense analyst, leaked the Pentagon Papers, the classified Defense Department documents that revealed an unflattering picture of U.S. military involvement in Vietnam. Ellsberg was the first person prosecuted under the Espionage Act for releasing classified information to the public. The judge threw out the case after agents of the White House broke into the office of Ellsberg's psychiatrist to steal records in hopes of discrediting him, and after it surfaced that Ellsberg's phone had been tapped illegally.

**Abu Ghraib:** Leaked reports and photographs were critical to journalist Seymour Hersh's 2004 series of articles in the *New Yorker* that detailed the U.S. mistreatment of detainees at Abu Ghraib, the military prison near Baghdad.

**Edward Snowden:** Snowden, an NSA contractor, was behind recent leaks of classified NSA documents that exposed the existence of Internet and phone surveillance programs codenamed PRISM. Snowden said, “My sole motive is to inform the public as to that which is done in their name and that which is done against them.”

**Bradley Manning:** On July 30, Army Pfc. Manning was acquitted of aiding the enemy but convicted of most of the more than 20 crimes he was charged with for passing more than 700,000 government and military files to the anti-secrecy Web site WikiLeaks. The material included sensitive diplomatic cables and videos of airstrikes that killed civilians.

Answer the following questions:

- 1) In each case, do the whistleblowers appear interested in maliciously harming the government? Or in working to protect the rights of average people? \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) What are two government violations of rights that the whistleblowers wanted to stop?

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From *“The Pentagon Papers (Daniel Ellsberg) Trial: An Account”* by Douglas O. Linder (2011).

In early 1969, the "Pentagon Papers" study was complete. Pentagon officials classified the study "Top Secret" and published only fifteen copies. Although a historical study, officials worried that information contained in the Pentagon Papers, if it became public, would make foreign governments hesitant to engage in secret negotiations or provide secret assistance to the United States government. Officials also expressed concern that some of the information contained in the report came from wiretaps and bugging devices, and should the information be released it would likely jeopardize electronic surveillance and sensitive sources of information.

Daniel Ellsberg grew increasingly pessimistic about a U.S. victory in Vietnam. Ellsberg was tapped to prepare a study of Vietnam "options" for Henry Kissinger, Nixon's newly-appointed national security adviser, and found that Kissinger shared his negative assessment of the odds of a military victory. After meeting with Kissinger, Ellsberg returned to his work reading the Pentagon Papers. As he read through the secret history of U.S. support for French efforts to crush independence movements in Indochina in the 1950s, Ellsberg came to see the continuation of the war in Vietnam as not just bad policy, but as immoral.

It became clear to Ellsberg that Nixon had no intention of simply declaring victory and pulling out of Vietnam. The president did not want to see the flag of the Vietcong fly over the city of Saigon. Faced with the prospect of a war without end, costing thousands of lives, Ellsberg pondered what he might do to bring about a change in U.S. policy.

Convinced that release of the Pentagon Papers would make an already skeptical public more likely to apply the pressure that might finally bring an end to our involvement in Vietnam, Ellsberg decided to try to make that happen. Ellsberg visited the apartment of an anti-war friend of his, Anthony Russo. Ellsberg told Russo, "You know the study I told you about a couple of weeks ago? I've got it at Rand, in my safe, and I'm going to put it out." Russo replied, "Great! Let's do it."

Answer the following questions:

1) What did Ellsberg hope to accomplish by releasing the Pentagon Papers? \_\_\_\_\_

2) What are two things the Pentagon Papers contained which were being kept from the public? \_\_\_\_\_

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## PULLING IT ALL TOGETHER                      THE CONFLICT PERSPECTIVE

Answer the following question:

1) Bringing together the Conflict Perspective and the two readings above, what do you think would be the conflict view of the government's behavior in these cases, and how do you think advocates of the Conflict Perspective would perceive the actions of the whistleblowers? Would they be seen as traitors against the government? Or as heroes of the people?

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## LEAKS & WHISTLEBLOWERS THE FUNCTIONALIST PERSPECTIVE

The *Functionalist Perspective* interprets society as a system of interconnected parts that work together in harmony to maintain a state of balance and social equilibrium for the whole. Within that framework, one way that **functionalist perspective** might interpret Leaks and Whistleblowers is that they are working against the systems of balance and harmony in this functional structure, serving as agents of deviance that undermine the best interests of society. In that scenario, **functionalist perspective** would say:

- 1) *Rebellion is the rejection of both successes in a society and society's means of achieving them.*
- 2) *Substituting new sets of goals and means can reshape society and lead to breakdown of social order.*

**Therefore**, the actions of leakers and whistleblowers serve to weaken important norms and social structures which are in place for benign, functional reasons.

What follows are several document excerpts which explore that idea, with guided questions:

From "**Julian Assange Biography**"

at [biography.com](http://biography.com)

Journalist, computer programmer and activist Julian Assange was born on July 3, 1971, in Townsville, Queensland, Australia. Assange had an unusual childhood, as he spent some of his early years traveling around with his mother, Christine, and his stepfather, Brett Assange. The couple worked together to put on theatrical productions. Brett Assange later described Julian as a "sharp kid who always fought for the underdog."

Assange discovered his passion for computers as a teenager. At the age of 16, he got his first computer as a gift from his mother. Before long, he developed a talent for hacking into computer systems. His 1991 break-in to the master terminal for Nortel, a telecommunications company, got him in trouble. Assange was charged with more than 30 counts of hacking in Australia, but he got off the hook with only a fine for damages.

Assange continued to pursue a career as a computer programmer and software developer. An intelligent mind, he studied mathematics at the University of Melbourne. He dropped out without finishing his degree, later claiming that he left the university for moral reasons; Assange objected to other students working on computer projects for the military.

In 2006, Assange began work on Wikileaks, a Web site intended to collect and share confidential information on an international scale. The site officially launched in 2007 and it was run out of Sweden at the time because of the country's strong laws protecting a person's anonymity. Later that year, Wikileaks released a U.S. military manual that provided detailed information on the Guantanamo detention center. Wikileaks also shared emails from then-vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin that it received from an anonymous source in September 2008.

Answer the following questions:

- 3) Based on the reasons Assange gave for dropping out of the University of Melbourne, what can we assume he thinks of the government and military? \_\_\_\_\_

4) What are two types of confidential information Assange and Wikileaks have released?

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From ***“Understanding the Impact of the Deep Throat”***

by *PBS News Hour (2005)*.

GWEN IFILL: Now that we can put a name and face on "Deep Throat," what more is there to learn from that 30-year-old secret, and how did the Watergate scandal he helped unleash end up shaping our government, our politics and our journalism?

ELLEN FITZPATRICK: I think it created a much deeper skepticism in American life about American politics. It's hard to turn the hands of time back to remember that there was the day when the president was greatly revered, there was tremendous respect for the office. It was often the case that people believed that when the president spoke, he told the truth, and when he said something was so, it was so. Watergate changed all of that.

GWEN IFILL: Herb Klein, you were in the Nixon White House and you have spent the years since watching other presidencies. What's your sense on how much Watergate changed the whole face of the presidency?

HERBERT KLEIN: I think it changed it considerably, and the first thing it did was to weaken the power of the presidency. Congress moved against the White House, and so, for example, when the North Vietnamese moved to South Vietnam, President Ford was pretty much handicapped from doing so.

GWEN IFILL: I definitely want to go back to that, but Sanford Ungar, let me ask you. You knew Mark Felt [AKA Deep Throat], wrote a book about the FBI, and you've certainly been watching all of this, including the way journalism has changed since the 1970s. What's your answer to that question?

SANFORD UNGAR: Well, I think the first thing is the book to say, Gwen, is that it's fascinating to look back now and see that Mark Felt, when I knew him for a period of time, was a very opportunistic person who thought still he had a chance to become director of the FBI, and I think he may have done the right thing for the wrong motive or at least for partially the wrong motive at the time.

Answer the following questions:

3) What does Ungar think Felt's motive was for going public with Watergate? \_\_\_\_\_

4) What are 2 impacts the Watergate Scandal had on the presidency, according to the interview?

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## PULLING IT ALL TOGETHER      THE FUNCTIONALIST PERSPECTIVE

Answer the following question:

2) Bringing together the Functionalist Perspective and the two readings above, what do you think would be the functional view of the government's behavior in these cases, and how do you think advocates of the Functionalist Perspective would perceive the actions of the whistleblowers? Would they be seen as heroes of the people? Or as traitors against the government?

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