

Commentator's On-Air Freudian Slip Reveals What the Media Wants

MSNBC's Mika Brzezinski appeared to have the rarest of moments Wednesday morning. She told viewers exactly what she thought her role was in regards to shaping public opinion.

Brzezinski, the liberal counterpart to conservative Joe Scarborough on the network's "Morning Joe," was discussing President Donald Trump's proclivity to do end-runs around the media, sharing (and sometimes fudging) "alternative facts."

Brzezinski worried aloud that Trump could "actually control exactly what people think." According to her, that's the job of the media.

SCARBOROUGH: "...I hear from all the Trump supporters that I talk to who were Trump voters and are still Trump supporters. They go, 'Yeah you guys are going crazy. He's doing – what are you so surprised about? He is doing exactly what he said he is going to do.'"

*BRZEZINSKI: "Well, I think that the dangerous, you know, edges here are that he is trying to undermine the media and trying to make up his own facts. And it could be that while unemployment and the economy worsens, **he could have undermined the messaging so much that he can actually control exactly what people think. And that, that is our job.**"*

When I first saw the headline, I assumed that Brzezinski was being droll. After watching the clip, I no longer believe that. She mutters the comment with an irritated seriousness.

Anyone who doubts that a lofty journalist could feel this way need only consider that a day earlier, on the very same program, a guest [appeared to admit](#) to engaging in political protests while working as a political correspondent.

This shouldn't be that surprising. In the lead-up to the November election, journalists began to publicly defend their efforts to "whittle down" Donald Trump. This led *Rolling Stone* journalist Matt Taibbi [to declare](#) that the 2016 summer "obliterated what was left of our news media."

It's time to admit that mass media in the 21st century is more about shaping thought than sharing news and ideas. Rachel Maddow and Rush Limbaugh are conspicuous examples, but the *Washington Post*, *New York Times*, and *NPR* are also attempting to shape what and how readers think.

The frightening part is that our culture, in its current state, would appear highly susceptible to propaganda for three reasons:

1. Modern education is [failing](#) and people are losing the ability to think for themselves.

2. Support for free speech [is waning](#), which will make it easier to drown out dissenting voices.
3. Social media is a perfect medium for propaganda. Social critic Neil Postman wrote [how technology changes culture](#). The narcotic-like effects of television are small potatoes compared to Twitter and Facebook, which would seem ideal for propaganda purposes. (These mediums rely heavily on imagery, large text, and few words, constantly updating us about what's important.)

What can be done?

Social media is not going away. But knowledge, Francis Bacon wrote, is power. And the best way to have a free-thinking citizenry is to ensure that it is well-educated and that ideas of all kinds are allowed to flow freely.

As Chesterton said, "Without education, we are in a horrible and deadly danger of taking educated people seriously."

Worse yet: Without education people are in danger of taking Mika Brzezinski seriously.