

EXAMINING CAREER SUCCESS AMONG PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTITIONERS  
WITH ADVANCED DEGREES

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A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the

Jack J. Valenti School of Communication

University of Houston

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In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

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By

Kristen Leigh Boucher

December, 2012



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## **ABSTRACT**

This study examined how advanced degrees affect representation in management roles within public relations. In-depth interviews were used to explore the relationship between advanced degrees and career success in thirteen public relations practitioners. Roles theory as well as studies focused on gender and public relations, and educational advancement were used to guide this study. Advanced degrees were shown to be investments into the future. Additionally, practitioners felt that advanced degrees increase confidence and credibility within the field. The results suggest that advanced degrees in no way create a hindrance in practitioner's careers. These findings contribute to literatures regarding roles, education, mentorship, career success and gender in public relations.

*Keywords:* roles, gender, public relations, career success, mentorship

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## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction**

While over 85 percent of today's public relations industry consists of women, less than 20 percent of women comprise the upper management team (Aldoory, 2009). O'Neil's (2004) research suggests that public relations practitioners who function mainly as managers spend their time making more executive decisions including communication policy assessments and counseling the dominant coalition (upper management) in statistical communication objectives and initiatives. Those in management are more powerful than practitioners who focus on technical tasks. In addition to an increase of power, there is also an increase in salary, likelihood to be further promoted, and overall respect within the industry and beyond. Aldoory and Toth (2002) found that men are often favored for hiring, higher salaries, and promotions to management positions. While women do have career opportunities in public relations, they are not equivalent with men when it comes to management (Aldoory & Toth, 2002).

Toth, Serini, Wright, and Emig (1998) determined that women are more likely to fulfill the technician role than men. Toth et al.'s (1998) study concluded that women willingly take on additional work responsibilities outside their role's scope without getting the salary increase or professional promotion that is deserved. Furthermore, another industry trend that Toth et al. noted is that men seem to be receiving more job training for management positions than are women. In summary, men are favored and have more opportunities than women to excel in the public relations industry.

There are a number of reasons why women are overlooked for promotions in the workplace including balancing the responsibilities of raising children and handling typically considered female household duties including cooking and cleaning. There are only 24 hours in a



day and being able to balance work, family and household tasks is a complicated undertaking that often automatically is allocated to women. Aldoory, Jiang, Toth, and Sha (2008) explored perceptions of balancing work-family by conducting eight focus groups. Findings included that the work-life balance is a complex issue affected by factors such as societal norms, organizational contradictions, new technology, professional identity, and parenthood. Ultimately Aldoory et al. (2008) concluded that the concept of “work-family balance” is solely a woman’s issue (p. 13). In addition to balancing numerous personal and professional responsibilities, both women and men portray an identity that is shaped, in part, by personal roles and needs as well as gendered expectations that women, as well as men, need to live up to (Aldoory et al., 2008).

As a female public relations practitioner, I find these statistics disheartening. It is apparent that there is a gap in scholarship that explains why women are overlooked for promotions and monetary raises, and most importantly why women are not gaining the respect as thought leaders in our industry. Management executives have a certain level of respect by ascending the corporate ladder and leading teams by making strategic decisions. As previously discussed, having an identity that one can be proud of is essential to finding a comfortable balance between a successful career and a happy social life.

I propose that obtaining an advanced (master’s) degree in communications and/or public relations can improve a practitioner’s upward career movement into the management function of an organization. Through this study I aim to identify the extent to which advanced education helps female practitioners overcome gender barriers and achieve professional success in public relations. I am focusing on advanced degrees as a factor in career advancement because like a job title, an advanced degree is a way to separate oneself in a distinct manner. It shows a willingness to work toward a professional goal and an eagerness to put in extra time and effort

for future opportunities. While some women are content with working in a technical role, it is my opinion that women who pursue a master's degree are looking for a role that has more management responsibilities.

I will examine roles theory, gender, and educational advancement throughout the course of this study. Roles theory is important to public relations because it was the first time that specific roles, titles and responsibilities were defined in the public relations industry. It is appropriate to study roles theory as related to educational attainment and gender because even though roles within public relations are clearly outlined, it is not clear why women are not advancing up the ranks from a lower, technical position, to that of a manager. There are a number of factors that influence this issue, and I feel that educational advancement is one that is not only important, but it has been neglected from current scholarly research.

#### *Purpose of Study*

This study will focus on in what ways educational advancement and representation in the management function are related. By obtaining various perspectives through interviews with both male and female public relations practitioners who have pursued a master's degree in communications and/or public relations, I hope to gain insight as to why women are not advancing as quickly as their male counterparts.

#### *Significance of Study*

There is an apparent lack of scholarly work as related to the effects of educational advancement in public relations, and this study aims to advance that body of knowledge. The results of this study will contribute to a greater understanding of how female practitioners can increase their probabilities of moving up the career ladder and breaking through the glass ceiling, a term that depicts the barriers to advancement experienced by women who wish to join the

management team of an organization's public relations function (Grunig, Toth, & Hon, 2001). The significance of the glass ceiling in public relations demonstrates how women can dominate the field in numbers while also being discriminated against, limiting opportunities for future advancement.

Additionally, this study will contribute to the theoretical development of a greater understanding of gender issues and how an advanced degree can help separate female practitioners into those who are content with their technical role and those who want a management position. Finally, it is my hope that this study will contribute to a knowledge of the capabilities of female practitioners and their drive and determination to overcome barriers to achieve personal and professional successes.

#### *Plan of Study*

To begin, this study will examine the bodies of theoretical work that include the development and origination of roles theory and defining public relations roles. Gender will be examined in relation to gender norms, perceptions of gender by both male and female practitioners, and gender stereotypes. In addition, education will be examined in relation to gender and public relations roles.

The methods section will define the parameters of the study and the chosen qualitative method of using in-depth interviews for this study. Results from the interviews will be examined as related to my research questions:

RQ1: What factors contribute to practitioners wanting to pursue advanced degrees?

RQ2: What public relations roles do practitioners perform before and after obtaining their advanced degrees?

RQ3: What are the gender-related outcomes in the public relations workplace of practitioners obtaining an advanced degree?

Finally, the practical and theoretical implications of this study will be discussed as well as limitations and future research opportunities.

## Chapter Two

### Literature Review

It is apparent that the public relations industry is not as diverse as the publics it strives to communicate with. More than 85 percent of today's public relations industry is comprised of women. However, less than 20 percent of managers in public relations are women (Aldoory, 2009).

One factor in professional advancement may be obtaining advanced education. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2012-13 Edition) identified that public relations manager candidates typically hold bachelor's degrees in public relations, journalism, communications, English, or business. In order to obtain a position in management, real-world work experience is also needed to obtain this coveted position. In 2010, one-fourth of public relations managers held a master's degree (*Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2012-13 Edition*).<sup>1</sup> Further investigation examining the variables affecting the lack of female leadership in a female-dominated industry is necessary when having an education as well as work experience does not necessarily cultivate promotions to managerial positions.

It is important to note that the lack of female representation in management positions is not a problem unique to the public relations industry. In fact, only three percent of *Fortune 500* CEOs and less than 15 percent of corporate executives at top international companies are held by women (Carter & Silva, 2010). Women make up 40 percent of the global workforce and are making strides to make it to the top. Carter and Silva (2010) identify the fact that women are earning advanced degrees in record numbers and in some areas surpassing men. However, even with these promising statistics, there is still a large, obvious gap between the ratio of male to

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<sup>1</sup> The Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, *Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2012-13 Edition*, "Public Relations Managers and Specialists" did not break down this master's degree statistic by gender.

female industry leaders. And public relations is a growing field that is perceived to be particularly open to women Carter and Silva (2010). Thus, my study aims to explore how obtaining an advanced degree relates to this issue in the public relations industry.

The purpose of this literature review is to delve into the numerous factors affecting the reasons why men are dominating managerial roles. Additional issues such as salary inequality and unlikeliness to receive a promotion are also embedded in this management imbalance.

The literature review will begin by examining the originations of roles theory. It is important to have a thorough understanding of this substantial theory that has helped define the specific roles and responsibilities of the public relations industry. Following this, I will examine the concept of gender and how this element affects public relations roles. In addition, I will look at the concept of leadership – not only how women are struggling to earn leadership roles, but also how gender alters perceptions of good leadership qualities. Finally, the literature review will examine educational advancement in public relations. It is through this literature that I hope to gain insight into the issue of the lack of female practitioners in management positions, and whether obtaining an advance degree can help to lessen the gap between male and female managers.

### *Roles Theory*

*Origination of theory.* Broom and Smith (1979) contributed greatly to the field of public relations by providing a clear set of responsibilities and expectations for practitioners. Defining roles within the industry helped to define public relations as a management function in an organization. Edward Bernays, a pioneer in the field of public relations, believed that communication is the centerpiece of effective leadership. In order for an organization to be strategically effective and a leader in any industry, it is necessary for all management

departments to communicate and operate cohesively, with one uniform communications strategy (Curtin & Gaither, 2007). Thus, it is essential to embed public relations into the management function of an organization and Broom and Smith's ground breaking work greatly contributed to allowing public relations' roles to become better defined, helping to make the profession of public relations more legitimate in the eyes of other industries.

Within every professional organization there are established roles that are defined as "recurring actions of an individual, appropriately interrelated with the repetitive activities of others so as to yield a predictable outcome" (Katz & Kahn, 1978, p. 189). Grunig, Grunig and Dozier (2006) supplemented this definition by adding that roles are perceptions about patterned behavior of individuals in organizations. Roles allow for the classification of activities that a person might perform. Broom's research helped to examine and outline the numerous roles that public relations practitioners play within their organizations including the manager, senior advisor (also known as the communication liaison), technician, and media relations roles (Broom & Smith, 1979).

There has been extensive research conducted on the four major roles that public relations practitioners perform in organizations (Grunig et al., 2006). This paper will now examine the four roles found within the public relations industry. It is through this examination that a commonality becomes apparent - there is a lack of female practitioners in upper management positions.

Roles theory is an important body of work because having a clear definition of a role's responsibilities, expectations, and even limitations can create not only a stronger work environment, but it can also help to enhance the industry as a whole. When roles are clearly defined it allows for organizational expectations, future goals, and objectives to be fully realized.

It removes confusion over responsibilities between colleagues and departments. In addition, having clear roles definitions also contributes to the salaries of public relations practitioners and how much satisfaction practitioners derive from their work (Dozier & Broom, 1995).

It was not until the 1970s that Glen Broom sought to develop practitioner roles that would sufficiently describe the daily activities of public relations professionals (Broom & Smith, 1979). Broom's research has helped to validate the field of public relations. Ideally, for the public relations function to be effective it must be imbedded in the dominant coalition (upper management) of an organization to be involved in strategic management decision making (Sriramesh, J. Grunig, & Buffington, 1992). In the eyes of the dominant coalition, public relations must contribute to the "bottom line" and "connect communication objectives to broader organizational goals" (Grunig & Ehling, 1992, p. 65).

As previously discussed, being able to define public relations' roles helps to legitimize the profession and those practitioners working within it. While defining specific roles is tangible, the results that public relations offer often is intangible, thus making it difficult to prove the field's worth. It is challenging to prove public relations' as an essential function to an organization when the industry is based upon building mutually beneficial relationships with key publics. These results cannot always be measured in terms of contributing to an organization's profits (Weaver, 2011). However, having strong roles and being able to categorize practitioner's roles allows for a more legitimate profession, especially in the eyes of upper management (Wrigley, 2009). From Broom's research, he described four roles that encompass all of public relations' responsibilities – the expert prescriber, the communication facilitator, the problem-solving process facilitator as well as the communication technician.



Practitioners who play the dominant role of expert prescriber, communication facilitator, or problem-solving facilitator also tend to play the other two roles (Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 2009). Practitioners play these roles to varying degrees, even though a dominant role emerges. High connections among these three roles suggest that they go together to form a single, complex role that is distinct from the communication technician. Therefore, two major dominant roles occur in practice: public relations technician and public relations manager.

This brings about a new set of considerations because of the evidenced male domination in the managerial leadership positions. While public relations is referred to as a pink collar profession, as it is comprised of a majority of women, there is a lack of women who move up the corporate ladder to the higher-paying, more respected roles of management. Instead, they hold a technical position, taking on more work than is typically required for an individual by contributing to tasks outside of their job's scope.

For example, the opinions of female communication executives were documented in *Communication World*. These women argued that "there's plenty of room at the top" if female practitioners create their own opportunities (Post, 1987, p. 18). Another female practitioner suggested that women should take "on as much work" as they "can possibly handle" (p. 18) and *do it all*. It was Toth (1988) that took issue with women believing they needed to *do it all* in the workplace. Toth went on to criticize women practitioners who contributed to the myth of the "endlessly expandable woman who can do it all...the superwoman" (p. 42). Grunig et al. (2006) found that female public relations heads are more likely to play dual manager-technician roles as compared to male managers.

*Defining public relations roles.* First, the expert prescriber is an individual who makes recommendations that the dominant coalition complies with, as s/he is an organization's

acknowledged expert on all matters relating to communicating with key publics (Dozier & Broom, 2006). However, a criticism of this conceptualization is due to the fact that the public relations function is not always embedded in the management sector of an organization. Thus, having access to the dominant coalition- powerful leaders with the collective power to make strategic choices and change organizational structure- is not always an option (Robbins, 1990). This makes the role of expert prescriber less effective by not having easy access to the dominant coalition. Without this access, there is a breakdown in communication and future expectations between those making the decisions and those advising. Without an overall consensus that public relations is an essential management function, the industry might be misunderstood as a crafts-driven tactical endeavor rather than what it is - a strategically implemented communication function (Ledingham, 2006).

Second, the communication facilitator role serves as a go-between, facilitating and monitoring the quality and quantity of information flowing between the dominant coalition and key publics (Dozier & Broom, 2006). Communication between key publics is a central role to communication facilitators because it helps to establish mutually beneficial relationships between the organization and its key publics. Dozier and Broom (1995) concluded that “the public relations function is key to organizational feedback, acting as the eyes and ears of organizations as well as their mouthpieces” (p. 5).

A similar criticism to the communication facilitator role as compared to the expert prescriber role is that the role cannot be demonstrated properly if the public relations function has not been integrated into the management function. Thus, critics question if the communication facilitator can rightly be considered a managerial role. Without the link to the

dominant coalition, communication can weaken within the internal organization and lead to less effective communication between key publics (Dozier & Broom, 2006).

Third, the problem-solving process facilitator is a role that assists the dominant coalition in analyzing and solving public relations problems for the organization (Dozier & Broom, 2006). This member of the management team collaborates with others throughout the organization to not only define but also solve problems. Broom (1982) stated that the problem-solving process facilitator helps guide other managers in the organization through rational problem-solving processes.

It is important to note that not all organizations foster collaborative environments. This is a realistic criticism that could lessen the effectiveness of the problem-solving process facilitator role. Collaboration is an ideal workplace strategy that allows multiple perspectives that work toward an integrative solution. However, there are factors in the workplace including multiple projects and deadlines that can interfere with this role's responsibilities (Grunig et al., 2006).

The fourth and final role that Broom conceptualized was the communication technician. The technician role provides technical services, generating collateral materials needed to implement public relations campaigns formulated by others (Dozier & Broom, 2006). Responsibilities that fall under the technician's scope include executing general research, writing press releases, and creating printed materials to support a public relation's campaign. These tasks are more creative than the responsibilities that fall under management roles. Broom and Dozier's (1986) research shows that some practitioners build their careers and prefer performing these types of creative tasks. The creative artistic practitioner seems to gravitate toward the technician role, which in turn can create high levels of job satisfaction (Dozier & Broom, 1995).

Dozier (1992) concluded that the four roles described by public relations practitioners could be reduced to the manager and technician roles because three out of the four roles (the expert prescriber, communication facilitator, and the problem-solving process facilitator) are included in managerial roles. It is important to separate the roles of manager and technician in the field of public relations to allow a real separation of responsibilities. Toth et al. (1998) found that female managers oftentimes performed both technical and managerial functions for a lower salary, and women did mainly technician activities as compared to men who performed more managerial tasks even in the technician ranks. My study will continue to explore this issue in subsequent paragraphs because it is important to call attention to the fact that women feel the need to take on more responsibilities than men to prove to others that they are qualified to perform management tasks.

### *Gender*

Gender is not a physical trait that differentiates human beings but a set of cultural norms that prescribe human's behaviors. Gender is the combination of beliefs and assumptions about what is feminine and acceptable for women versus what is masculine and acceptable for men. This applies to different avenues of life including work, personal life, and society in general (Hon, 2009). Strong and established gender-role expectations have lessened women's opportunities for managerial success, including promotion to leadership roles, access to power resources such as coalitions and networks, and positive performance appraisals based on unbiased judgment criteria and clear detailed feedback (Hon, 2009).

According to Hon (2009), gender is considered a prominent characteristic that affects followers' perceptions of leadership as well as leaders' self-perceptions. Individual characteristics such as being able to negotiate, having a strong viewpoint, and being able to successfully

manage multiple persons are valued in leadership roles. These characteristics are typically thought of as more masculine, which creates a challenge for women to fulfill management expectations. Society generally accepts the concept of gender without question. The typically male or female characteristics are automatically assumed and accepted. However, Steinem (2008) argued that gender is a tool of oppression: “Gender is probably the most restricting force in American life, whether the question is who must be in the kitchen or who could be in the White House” (“Women Are Never Front-Runners,” para. 3). Her words resonate especially in the public relations field because she points out the realities faced in the professional world. Public relations creates gendered norms that in turn creates a substantial need to continue critiquing how communication encourages gendered norms and constrains the public relations profession (Aldoory, 2009).

*Gender norms.* Gendered norms are assumptions and expectations about how to behave and act and even how to believe based on whether a person is male or female (Aldoory, 2009). These gendered norms influence many factors including the way that organizations are structured, the manner that practitioners practice, and even the way that individuals think about themselves. Aldoory (2009) concluded that in order for men and women to expose and eliminate gender discrimination (in reference to the public relations industry), practitioners need to be aware of current injustices (i.e., the persistence of sexist themes underlying public relations campaigns). By thinking through the ways in which women and men are expected to act (i.e., women should be more passive and men are born leaders) as compared to the ways in which they should be able to act might help reduce gendered norms given by ourselves and society (Aldoory, 2009).

*Gender stereotypes.* Gender is a way of thinking that is taught at a very young age. Gender expectations (i.e., women are naturally more passive, and men are leaders) are instilled and reinforced throughout life by society with no exception to expectations in the public relations industry. Hon's (1995) study identified factors that have contributed to creating a discriminatory environment including a male-dominated work environment, gender stereotyping, and women's historical lack of self-esteem. Participants in Hon's (1995) focus group felt the need to prove themselves because others are too quick to judge that a woman is inferior or not as qualified in the industry. Other women felt the need to "try harder" and prove that women are just as bright as any man (Hon, 1995, p. 53). Grunig, Toth, and Hon (2001) found that the concept of gender stereotyping was and continues to be a major obstacle for women in the workforce.

A criticism of roles research is that a strategy for reducing gender discrimination against women practitioners in the workplace often includes treating organizational biases as a constant (Dozier, 1988). This means that rather than trying to change a system that operates with gender bias, accepting this inequity as 'just the way things are' is the appropriate response. These findings support Hon's (1995) conclusions that women *do it all* by doing more research, enacting the manager role, and taking on more responsibilities in general so that they can overcome gender discrimination. Women must "align themselves with the masculine stereotype (power and control)" (Hon, 1995, p.33).

In addition to taking on these typically masculine traits (i.e., being strong willed), another belief is that for women to succeed, women must move above and counter the gender stereotype by being "superwomen" and taking on additional work outside of a practitioner's scope (Hon, 1995, p. 53). A reminder of this mentality of being "superwomen" (Hon, 1995, p. 53) was reinforced in an article titled "Nine Rules Women Must Follow to Get Ahead" published in *The*

*Wall Street Journal*. Author Julie Steinburg spoke with women executives and leadership coaches to determine ways for women to position themselves to move up the corporate ladder into upper management. In addition to volunteering for projects that no one else wants to take on, suggestions include dressing well and playing golf (Steinberg, 2010). This suggestion to play golf and network with male colleagues in this traditionally male environment supports Choi and Hon's (2002) findings that little or no progress has been made in breaking down gender stereotypes. For instance, institutional barriers including being excluded from male networks (i.e., business dealings and networking on the golf course), which could potentially offer new opportunities, still exist. While Steinburg (2010) suggests that women cater to the gender biased system, ultimately this continues to reinforce gender inequalities. In addition to gender inequalities, individuals can face discrimination outside of identifying as male or female. Intersectionality looks at how these various identities are interrelated.

*Intersectionality*. According to Crenshaw (1991), the feminist theory of intersectionality looks at the interconnected relations between oppression. Intersectionality looks at power disparities in systems such as sexism, racism, ageism, heterosexism, economic oppression, etc. to exhibit the complexities of oppression and the many factors relating to it. As previously discussed, society dictates what gendered characteristics are typical of men versus women.

Society's expectations regarding the gender norms of men and women are a form of oppression.

Individuals' identities are made up of an unlimited number of life experiences including their family life, education, childhood, gender, race, ethnicity, age, class, religion, and sexuality. These life experiences all come into play when making up a person's identity and personality. Simply being the same race or gender as another individual does not automatically create a similar identity. Everyone experiences race, gender, sexuality differently depending on factors

such as their location and social class structure (Vardeman-Winter and Tindall, 2010). The study of intersectionality is complex, however it offers some clarity when looking at female public relations practitioners and their ongoing struggle to succeed in the workplace.

Intersectionality offers an analysis of “intersection forms of domination [that] produce *both oppression and opportunity*” (Zinn & Dill, 1996, p. 327). When looking at the public relations industry, it is clear that female practitioners are marginalized due to their gender and socially imposed female characteristics that limit a women’s mobility in the workplace. There is also a creation of opportunity for male practitioners who are able to move up the ranks to the top management positions with more ease than their female coworkers. They are able to take on leadership roles more readily because they are offered more professional opportunities.

*Leadership and gender.* Leadership can be defined as “a process of social influence in which one person is able to enlist the aid and support of others in the accomplishment of a common task” (p. 27). Meng, Berger, Gower, and Heyman (2012) defined excellent leadership as:

A dynamic process that encompasses a complex mix of individual skills and personal attributes, values, and behaviors that consistently produces ethical and effective communication practice. Such practice fuels and guides successful communication teams, helps organizations achieve their goals, and legitimizes organizations in society. (p. 24)

Having a clear definition of leadership is important to my study because researchers have argued that women are perceived as inappropriate for management roles because the common managerial image is based on a stereotype that traditionally favors male traits such as aggression, dominance, and competitiveness (Choi & Hon, 2009). However, on the other hand, Aldoory and Toth’s (2004) research found that women made better leaders due to their perceived empathy and



collaborative efforts. They also found that women had fewer opportunities for leadership positions in public relations.

So while we have a strong definition of excellent leadership, Butler and Geis (1990) argued that female leaders are devalued even if their performance is of the same quality as that of male leaders. Since society instills in us that women are not thought to be natural born leaders, possessing these leadership characteristics is not normal, and women are judged for possessing them.

In addition to being judged by stereotypical gender characteristics (i.e., women are more passive), women are also not receiving a fair shot at leadership positions because they rarely get the chance to prove their leadership skills. Research suggests that women are underrepresented in leadership positions due to lack of opportunities to exhibit leadership capabilities. According to Choi and Hon (1995), men can obtain and exercise power more easily than women because men have access to resources for power, are placed in jobs with power, and maintain their positions through support of male networks and a male-intensive dominant coalition. On the other hand, women have to overcome obstacles such as less authority, less access to information networks, and little support at each career transition. According to Aldoory and Toth (2002) and Hon (1995), theory building that focuses on gender discrepancies in public relations has been minimal.

*Socialization and gender.* Hon (1995) contended that women and men are taught at a young age to act a certain way. Women are conditioned to act like natural caretakers. They have historically run the household, balancing maternal tasks such as caring for children, cooking, and cleaning. On the other hand, men are expected to be the breadwinners. They are perceived to be leaders and innovators, successfully managing strategic issues in the workplace. Bem (1993) also

argued that the term gender has been built by “historically-constructed cultural lenses embedded in the social institutions and cultural discourses of society which...lead us to become unwitting collaborators in the social reproduction of the existing power structure” (Bem, 1993, p. 46) between women and men.

Male characteristics such as being aggressive or demanding are valued. On the other hand, women are seen as loudmouthed or pushy if they act in an equally strong manner. These skills are beneficial in managerial roles where managers need to lead groups of individuals and make strong decisions. Because leadership requires these strong characteristics, women are at a disadvantage because they have not necessarily acted in this way previously and have not refined these specific skills (Chemers, 2000).

#### *Feminization of the Field*

Ten years ago Aldoory and Toth (2002) pointed out that it is still a man’s world and clients want to see male representation. In a field dominated by women, my study will now look at how a field filled with “too many women” creates a demand for “more men” thus creating favoritism toward men due to their low numbers in public relations (Aldoory and Toth, 2002, p. 125).

Researchers have been studying the impact of the growing number of female practitioners in the public relations industry for more than 20 years. Feminization of the field became a concern in the 1980s when the number of women in the profession surpassed the number of men (Aldoory, 2009). This creates a concern by both male and female public relations professionals that this feminization will affect the overall respect and status of those working in the profession as well as declining salaries and gender discrimination (Aldoory, 2005). This has hurt the

profession in general by lowering salaries and credibility, which, in turn, has hurt all practitioners as well as students of public relations (Aldoory, 2005).

Toth (1989) contended that because “women face a continual devaluation in relation to men,” men worry when women appear to “take over” a particular profession (pp. 70–71). The feminization of public relations is often described by those in the field as a “self-fulfilling prophecy,” in that women self-select technician roles and, therefore, participate unwittingly in their own discrimination (Wrigley, 2009, p. 32).

It is important that our field not become marginalized due to gender stereotypes. Tsetsura’s (2010) research showed that society has notions of what constitutes a real job versus a woman’s job. Because public relations is often stereotyped by industry outsiders as “money-makers and manipulators” (p. 5), the field is often criticized. Thus, our work as practitioners is considered fluff and does not contribute to the strategic planning of the dominant coalition. According to Grunig et al. (2006), excellent public relations departments empower both men and women in addition to encouraging diversity of all racial, ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

Considering that public relations continues to be dominated by female practitioners working in the field and pursuing it as a course of study in college, it is important that gender research continues to be a major focus of the field. It is through my research that I hope to contribute to this body of knowledge.

*Women’s choice of the technician role.* Choi and Hon (2002) found that “women and men perform certain roles not necessarily because they prefer these roles, but rather to meet others’ expectations consistent with traditional gender stereotypes shared by a majority of a society” (p. 233). Many practitioners replicate and embrace stereotypical perceptions of female

practitioners as natural communicators who are creative and generally thought to be a “people’s person,” thus reinforcing women’s skills as that of a technician (Tsetsura, 2010).

Creedon (1991) suggested that the technician label is negative because women populate the technical ranks (Aldoory, 2009). Dozier and Broom (1995) countered that it is unproductive to tinker with labels. However, in a study that expanded Dozier and Broom’s (1995) study of the evolution of the manager role in public relations, Toth et al. (1998) determined that women are more likely to fulfill the technician role than men. In addition, Toth et al.’s (1998) study concluded that women are still “doing it all” (p. 161) without getting the salary increase or professional promotion that is deserved. Furthermore, the study’s results found that men seem to be receiving more job training for management positions than are women.

Supporting Toth et al.’s (1998) findings, Farmer and Waugh (1999) completed the first study to explore students’ perceptions of gender issues in public relations. In April/May of 1997 a two-page survey was completed by 430 students studying public relations at 17 different schools across the United States. The findings showed that there were no statistically significant differences in male and female students’ desires to perform managerial activities, but there were significant differences in areas outside of management preference. One was that female students expected to earn less money starting out and to be promoted more slowly than their male counterparts. Female students were also more likely to believe that they will need to postpone having a family in order to advance in their careers.

Additionally, female students reported they want to *do it all* — both managerial and technical activities. Grunig et al. (2006) found that female top communicators may be required to work harder to develop strategic expertise while they engage in technical activities that are not expected of men. Since technicians do not participate in strategic planning and women typically

work in a technician role, women are not given the experience of developing strategic experience necessary to successfully fulfill a managerial position. Female public relations heads are more likely to play dual manager-technician roles than are men. In addition to being required to do more work than men to prove themselves capable, Grunig et al. also found that women may have less opportunity than men to gain strategic expertise because their time is already committed to completing technical tasks.

So not only is more expected of women than men to obtain these coveted management positions, but in addition women have less professional exposure to the strategic management skills needed to effectively understand and execute a manager's responsibilities. Since female practitioners are typically in technician roles, they are not gaining the necessary experience to plan strategically and develop communication campaigns. Being separated from these management tasks is not exposing women to the knowledge needed to rise to a management position in the professional workforce. This brings about the question: are women seeking advanced degrees to obtain this knowledge in a different environment? This is a current gap in scholarship that my study hopes to shed light on.

#### *Educational Advancement of Public Relations Practitioners*

An essential element of my study is the examination of education in the field of public relations. A research gap exists around whether advanced degrees in public relations/communications prepares alumni with the necessary expertise needed for manager role enactment (Dozier & Broom, 2006). My study will strive to fill this theoretical gap.

My study will now look at what skills have typically been taught during the formal study of public relations in college. My research will examine the educational trend that teaches technical skills of public relations without addressing the need to develop leadership skills that

can help prepare practitioners to join the elite class of management. In addition my study will look at how obtaining education affects a practitioner's sense of empowerment.

*College curriculum.* According to Hon (1995) one of the major reasons that the field of public relations is marginalized is due to inadequate college curriculum. Hon (1995) voiced criticism that there is an emphasis on teaching the technical skills in college with little or no focus on business skills. Public relations programs at an undergraduate level teach future practitioners the profession's core skills including writing in the appropriate styles, pitching news releases to the media, and conducting research. These skills are primarily reserved for those in the technician level.

The 2006 Commission on Public Relations Education gathered input from educators and practitioners regarding public relations education and reported their results in *Public Relations Education for the 21st Century: The Professional Bond*. Findings suggested necessary skills public relations students should possess to be effective professionals. Emphasized skills included writing, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills. The commission cautioned that while hands-on skills, such as writing, are essential for students to learn, "too much focus on technical skills in a curriculum may actually disadvantage graduates who need greater research, problem-solving, strategic thinking, planning and management and counseling skills" (Turk, 2006, p. 14). Thus, college curricula could be contributing to women possessing technical skills to handle technician roles and lacking the skills to handle managerial roles because the focus of their courses was focused on technical skills (Hon, 1995).

This brings about the question as to why male students who are receiving the same education as female students are able to move up the career ladder from the technician role to that of manager. One explanation is that women are excluded from men's networks. Hon (1995)

determined that male domination in the professional workforce causes women's segregation from the inner circle where important business decisions are made. In addition to be excluded from formal circles, like in management meetings, women are also excluded from participating in informal networking, like on the golf course or at the basketball court. So while men and women receive the same public relations education, women must work harder to "earn her way into the male circuit" (Hon, 1995, p. 47).

In addition to primarily learning technical skills in school, research suggests that practitioners' business skills were insufficient and that practitioners would need to return to school to learn skills like salary negotiation, critical thinking, and strategic management (Hon, 1995). Business schools produce managers who are prepared for handling factors in everyday workplace management while it seems that students who graduate with a public relations degree are less than prepared for handling these management skills (Hon, 1995).

O'Neil's (2004) research suggests that public relations practitioners who function mainly as managers spend their time making more executive decisions including communication policy decisions and counseling the dominant coalition. They are more powerful than practitioners who focus on technical tasks. There is an obvious gap in scholarship if the skills necessary for advancing into management positions are not part of a basic public relations education.

*Education and empowerment.* Empowerment means that "individuals have a sense of ability and confidence within that might be used to change something in their lives" (Aldoory, 2009). Obtaining an advanced degree can help improve a woman's sense of empowerment through increased industry knowledge and help in "mediating social change, in reproducing assumptions about women's appropriate roles" (p. 115). According to Aldoory (2009) "female public relations students are less likely to accept oppressing job contexts if they are aware of the

symbolic and rhetorical expressions of gender discrimination” (p. 120) such as exclusion from male networking opportunities and the need to work harder than a man to prove oneself worthy to the organization.

New research shows that among graduates of elite MBA programs around the world, women continue to lag behind men at every single career stage beginning right after graduation with their first professional job (Carter & Silva, 2010). After starting out behind, women do not catch up. Men move further and faster up the career ladder. In Carter and Silva’s (2010) study, the only women who advanced at an equal pace were those who began their post-MBA careers at middle management or above. Unfortunately many women did not have this career advancement. In fact, only about 10 percent started at those levels, compared with 19 percent of men. A possible reason for this gap is that men are perceived to be more qualified and ready but women must first prove themselves capable for management positions.

Finally, Carter and Silva’s (2010) study showed that not only are women not advancing up the ranks as fast (or as often as men), but women are less satisfied with their jobs and make less money as well. On average, 37 percent of men indicated that they were happy with their overall advancement as compared to only 30 percent of women feeling this same satisfaction. In addition, women made on average \$4,600 less in their initial position. These facts are important to this study because gender discrepancies in hiring, salaries, and promotions are continuing to strengthen public relations’ “gendered field” distinction (Aldoory & Toth, 2002, p. 103).

An additional important trend to examine for this study is leadership skill development. Meng et al.’s (2010) study on leadership in public relations found that formal education programs at colleges and universities and professional development programs like those offered by the PRSA did not rank highly for leadership skill development. Instead senior public relations



executives perceived that working experiences, individual initiative and desire, as well as the examples set by role models are the three most valuable sources for leadership skill development. Even though Meng et al.'s (2010) study is recent, the findings do not reflect the current influx of public relations educational programs nationwide. The participants in Meng et al.'s (2010) study were seasoned public relations professionals who had been practicing in the industry for fifteen-plus years. Since this time, public relations education programs have expanded. A gap in research that my study aims to lessen is the need to examine practitioner's opinions who are currently enrolled or recently graduated from a college or university.

### *Research Question*

To date, there are not any specific studies exploring the specific link between gender, status in the profession, and advanced education. Will this increase in knowledge help women to obtain higher paying jobs and move up the career ladder? This study explores how obtaining an advanced degree affects female practitioner's upward career movement through increased promotions, salary, and respect. The ultimate purpose of this paper is to answer a research question of *To what extent does going back to school to obtain an advanced degree help or hurt career advancement in public relations?* To answer this, three specific research questions frame the study:

RQ1: What factors contribute to practitioners wanting to pursue advanced degrees?

RQ2: What public relations roles do practitioners perform before and after obtaining their advanced degrees?

RQ3: What are the gender-related outcomes in the public relations workplace of practitioners obtaining an advanced degree?

## Chapter Three

### Method

#### *Qualitative Inquiry*

This study examines how obtaining an advanced degree in communications and/or public relations affects female practitioners' career paths. Conducting this study utilizing a qualitative research method provides "multiple truths, alternative visions and critical perspectives" (L'Etang, 2008, p. 249). Qualitative inquiry is the most appropriate method for this study because information is gained not only by asking participants about their opinions, experiences, ideas, and thoughts, but also by observing what they do. Observation is an additional source of information that can be used to help analyze the content obtained by an interview (Berger, 2000).

#### *Interviews*

My objective was to gather and analyze multiple male and female public relations practitioners' perspectives regarding their career goals, day-to-day tasks and responsibilities, and an overall sense of gender barriers within the industry. Interviews are a way to gain an understanding of a person's experience, knowledge, and worldviews (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011).

An interview is a "conversation with a purpose" (Bingham & Moore, 1959). There are four types of research interviews including informal, unstructured, semistructured, and structured (Berger, 2000). My study utilized semistructured interviews as I (the interviewer) had a pre-determined list of questions to ask while I attempted to maintain a casual, conversational flow during the interview. It is through this conversation that the interviewer has the opportunity to build trust and a good rapport with the participant.

An ultimate goal was to establish a level of trust and rapport with each participant to ensure that answers were information rich. This means that open and honest responses allow

participants to speak freely without feeling any judgment or fear that their answers are incorrect or not what the interviewer is looking for. Without maintaining a level of respect from the beginning, participants might feel uncomfortable and not be inclined to answer questions cooperatively and openly. As Spradley (1979) notes, “Just as respect can develop between two people who do not particularly like one another, rapport can exist in the absence of fondness and affection” (p. 78).

One advantage of interviews is that the interviewer can record sessions and be able to analyze a written record of each conversation (Berger, 2000). Being able to use a recording device allows the interviewer to more actively listen to the participant and allow for a more natural, conversational exchange of communication.

Another advantage to interviews are that they allow for a deep and broad investigation into subjective realities. Qualitative interviewers strive to replicate the look and feel of a conversation between friends. It is meant to be relaxed, neutral, and free of judgment and bias. It is through qualitative methods like interviews that there develops a sense of connection, similar to that of an intimate conversation (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011).

Hon (1995) suggests that using long interviews gives women the opportunity to speak freely and for themselves about gender issues. To this end, using in-depth interviews is the best fit to explore issues of gender and roles in public relations for my study.

While qualitative research is richly beneficial, there are also downsides to this methodology. One of the biggest challenges for researchers is being able to make sense and cope with all of the data that must be interpreted into useful contributions to the study’s research questions (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). Additional challenges are that participants are not always a reliable source of information. Very often people unintentionally forget specific details or

important aspects of what they see and hear. Furthermore, people might exaggerate or not mention important details worth noting during an interview. Finally, people could lie about their answers (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011).

### *Interview Protocol*

My interview protocol is designed to explore my proposed research questions and to serve as a guide during the interview process (see Appendix B). The purpose of the interview is to explore if advanced degrees affect public relations practitioners careers. Initial interview questions were drafted to build rapport and ease any apprehension in the early stages of the interview. Additional questions explore some of the main theories that make up the backbone of my study including roles theory, gender, and educational advancement. Sample questions include: *What specific tasks do you perform in your job?* (roles theory), *How is gender considered in the work you do, like with your clients or the campaigns you work on?* (gender), and *If you could change how women/men experience advanced degrees, how would you?* (educational advancement).

Finally, questions were posed to learn more about each participant as a professional. I was interested in learning more about personal career goals, professional obstructions (if any), and to gain an overall sense of each individual.

### *Recruitment Procedure*

Most qualitative researchers choose to employ in purposeful (or purposive) sampling which is when a researcher makes an informed decision about what or whom to interview or observe (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). I used this method to recruit participants for my study. Solicitation of participants occurred through networking with individuals in the public relations industry and recommendations by professional colleagues in the field. I initially reached out to

potential participants via email and/or phone calls. It was through this dialogue that I was able to address any questions or concerns about my research and the interview process as well as secure agreement to participate. Also, members of the Public Relations Society of America (Houston Chapter) were solicited. I reached out via email to the Chapter Administrator. As a member of the PRSA Houston Chapter, I am familiar with this individual. Through this conversation I established the best way to reach out to the members of the local PRSA chapter which included emailing specific members individually. I also posted a recruitment message on the PRSA LinkedIn page, the U of H School of Communication Alumni LinkedIn page, and the International Association of Business Communicators of Houston LinkedIn page. These attempts to recruit through social media were not fruitful, and I received no responses from interested parties.

In addition to using purposive sampling, I also used snowball sampling. This is a method that “yields a study sample through referrals made among people who share or know of others who possess some characteristics that are of research interest” (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981, p. 141). Snowball sampling is an effective method when studying people who have certain attributes in common. In this case, my study’s participants were all public relations practitioners who have an advanced (master’s) degree in public relations and/or communications. A snowball starts when a researcher locates someone who is willing to volunteer for the study. At the end of the interview, the researcher asks the participant if they know of anyone else who would fulfill the requirements of participating in the study (a public relations practitioner with an advanced degree) and if they might be interested in also participating. This chain of referrals creates a bigger pool of respondents, eventually creating a “snowball” that grows larger over time (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p. 114).

All of the participants in my study were quite helpful in helping me recruit additional participants. I sensed that they knew what I was going through in my attempt to complete my thesis and obtain my advanced degree, and many were willing to take an extra step to reach out to additional contacts who could also participate in my study.

### *Data Collection Procedures*

Interviews were conducted via video conferencing and face-to-face meetings at local coffee shops. Participants selected convenient spots to conduct the interviews which created a comfortable and accommodating location. Participants were assigned pseudonyms to guarantee anonymity. Interviews were scheduled to last for approximately forty-five minutes to one hour. This allowed plenty of time for the interviewer and participant to comfortably discuss all scheduled questions, fill out the required forms for consent, and discuss any items of concern to the participant. If more time is needed and both parties agree, the interview can run over in time. There were no instances in which any interviews in my study ran over the one hour allotment.

Prior to the interview, participants were asked to sign an Institutional Review Board (IRB) informed consent form. This form ensures that participants are aware of all aspects of the interview and their rights as a participant. This study was approved to use human subjects by the Committee for Protection of Human Services (CPHS)/Institutional Review Board (IRB).

During the interview I asked for consent from each participant to audio record each session. Recording interviews allowed me to be more present and active during the conversation without stressing about taking detailed notes. One participant expressed concern over our interview being recorded so I refrain from doing so and took the additional time to document our

conversation with note taking. I stored and personally transcribed the data on a password protected computer and backed up the data on a secure cloud storage system.

The participants were asked to also fill out a short demographic questionnaire (see Appendix A). The purpose of the participant information sheet was to develop a background profile compiled of all participants' information. This information was useful when reporting the results of this study by providing a clear profile of participants that included items such as: job title, industry of employment, years of experience in the public relations/communications field, and level of education. Finally, I communicated that the information that they provided would not be matched to their name or identity in anyway. I reiterated the fact that this information will be kept strictly confidential.

I interviewed thirteen participants during the course of two consecutive weeks. I initially chose to interview fifteen participants because this was a realistic goal that would provide enough data to be able to thoroughly examine my research questions for this study. After interviewing thirteen participants, I reached a level of theoretical saturation. Snow (1980) described tests to determine "information sufficiency" by which researchers can determine that their data collection is nearing its end. The first test, *taken-for-grantedness*, means the researcher is no longer surprised by participants' answers. The second test, *theoretical saturation*, refers to continued observation by the researcher of what is already known as well as repetitive field notes. Finally, the third test, *heightened confidence*, is a time when the researcher feels that the findings are faithful to the empirical world. It is a time when the claims or concepts expelled during research is felt to be credible (Snow, 1980). After talking in-depth with thirteen participants, I felt that the data collected fulfilled Snow's (1980) theoretical saturation test for "information sufficiency."

Exploratory research generally utilizes small sample sizes allowing the researcher to be immersed in the research field and to establish rewarding relationships with all participants. Therefore a small number of interviewees (less than 20) allowed a close association between myself and the participants and enhanced the validity of this in-depth inquiry in such an intimate setting (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006).

### *Data Analysis*

It is important to reflect on fieldnotes during the data analysis process. Lindlof and Taylor (2011) suggest that researchers periodically reread fieldnotes and transcripts to help gain a better view of how the multiple research components are developing. I wrote observer's comments (O.C.), which are personal notes written for the researcher's benefit, during the research process to express personal concerns about my study, including emotions, thoughts, misunderstandings, and speculations about the motives of the participants I have met (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011).

All audio recordings were personally transcribed and O.C.'s were inserted into the transcriptions. The ability to write anything that struck me as important or intriguing helped to liberate my creativity at the early stage of analysis. I wrote about what my initial reactions were, how I thought I did as an interviewer, when I started to see themes in my research, in addition to my biases or feelings about a participant.

According to Lindlof and Taylor (2011), "the systematic start to a qualitative data analysis usually comes with the creation of categories and a coding scheme" (p. 246). I categorized and arranged apparent concepts and themes into these thought containers to help identify and organize my study's data.



I based my qualitative data analysis on the grounded theory approach first introduced more than four decades ago by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). The first stage of the grounded theory model involves coding for as many categories as possible from the data. Codes are the links between data and the categories that the research creates (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). I used codes to mark meaningful data from my transcriptions and fieldnotes including interpersonal patterns during the course of the interview. I used open coding to analyze transcriptions to “open up the inquiry” (Strauss, 1987, p. 29).

At this point of the process I developed a codebook which is “a tool for the development and evolution of a coding system and is an important means for documenting the codes and the procedures for applying them” (Weston et al., 2001, p. 395). The main purpose of a codebook is to catalogue the category definitions, the codes used for identifying each category, examples of text (from fieldnotes and/or interview transcripts) for each category, the number of incidents coded, and the location of incidents in the data (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011).

The next step of the grounded theory approach, integration, begins with axial coding – creating a new set of codes whose purpose is to make “connections between categories” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p. 252). Axial coding can help to connect previously separated categories together under an overarching umbrella of theory. I used Microsoft Excel and Word to create documents to arrange transcripts into various themes. The process defining categories is dimensionalization, one of the final steps in the process of coding, categorizing, and conceptual development (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011).

### *Sample*

I concentrated my study specifically targeting both male and female public relations practitioners who have obtained their master’s degree in a communications/public relations

course of study. Women and men of all ages and races qualified to participate in this study. I was interested in talking to practitioners who previously worked in public relations and decided to go back to school to pursue an advanced degree because these practitioners will have a unique perspective that differs than students who have yet to experience the professional workforce. Practitioners who have already worked in the field had a more realistic opinion about the dynamic of working in this industry. They also were able to speak to how their role changed or remained the same before and after receiving an advanced degree.

My study initially proposed only interviewing women practitioners since my study is examining career success among female public relations practitioners. However, after receiving additional feedback about my participants, it was decided by my thesis committee that including a male perspective would be helpful in evaluating my study's findings. With multiple perspectives my study was able to more thoroughly examine gender bias in the public relations industry.

*Participant demographics.* In-depth interviews were conducted with public relations professionals practicing in the Houston, Austin, and San Antonio areas. In total, 13 practitioners were interviewed for this study (see Table 1, for demographics of participants). Four interviews were conducted over the phone and the remaining nine interviews were conducted in-person. Ten participants were female, and three were male.

**Table 1**

<b>Name<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Job Title</b>	<b>Industry</b>	<b>Experience</b>
<b>Evan</b>	Male	Communications Specialist	Biotechnology	6 years
<b>Melinda</b>	Female	Communications Manager	Professional Services	13 years
<b>Sara</b>	Female	Internal Communications Advisor	Energy	16 years
<b>Janet</b>	Female	Principal	Agency	17-18 years
<b>Joy</b>	Female	Administrative Assistant <sup>3</sup>	Energy	25 years
<b>Aaron</b>	Male	Director of Communications	Multiple	10 years
<b>Jen</b>	Female	Director of Communications	Education	6 years
<b>Maureen</b>	Female	Communications Manager	Education	15 years
<b>Britney</b>	Female	Senior Account Executive	Agency	5 years
<b>Mary</b>	Female	Adjunct Faculty	Education	4 years
<b>Kara</b>	Female	Principal	Agency	30 years
<b>Dylan</b>	Male	Adjunct Faculty	Education	31 years
<b>Madelyn</b>	Female	Marketing Director	Healthcare	12 years

Years of experience ranged greatly from four years to thirty-plus years. Participants held a variety of titles including communications specialist, communications manager, internal communications advisor, principal, administrative assistant, director of communications, senior account executive, adjunct faculty, and marketing director. The participants industries spanned across multiple disciplines including biotechnology, professional services, energy, agency, education, and healthcare. Eleven participants had a master's degree in communications or public relations, and two participants had finished all of their graduate classwork and were completing their master's thesis. Since these individuals were so far along in the graduate

<sup>2</sup> Pseudonyms were assigned to each participant to maintain a level of confidentiality.

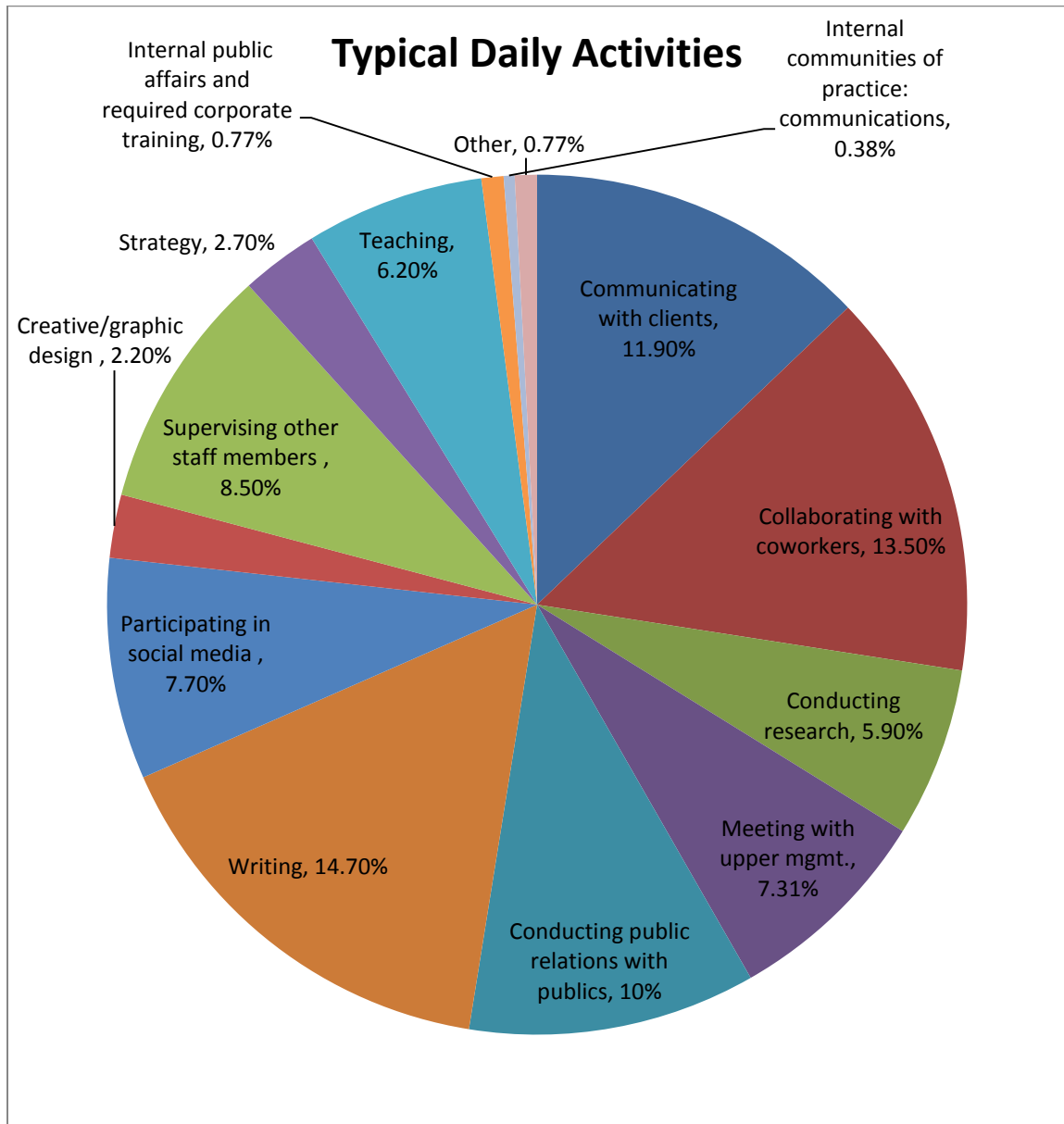
<sup>3</sup> Participant's official title was administrative assistant, however the majority of her roles fall within the scope of public relations.

process and fulfilled all other specifications of my study, I included their thoughtful data in my study.

Each participant identified their main role ranging from media relations, external relations, internal relations, community relations, or other. Cutlip, Center, and Broom (2009) break down the roles of public relations into these general categories in their comprehensive text, “Effective Public Relations.” This textbook is used by many universities as a mandatory read for students learning about the industry and these categories are typically broken down in this manner. Five participants identified just one role, while the remaining eight participants identified two or more roles.

Participants were also asked to break down the activities they perform during a typical day. Categories included communicating with clients, collaborating with coworkers, conducting research, meeting with upper management, conducting public relations with publics like media and customers, writing, participating in social media, creative/graphic design, and supervising other staff members. In addition, participants could choose “other” and fill in what other tasks they typically perform. The responses for each participant totaled 100 percent. The below chart (Figure 1) incorporates all participant’s responses and averages the data.

Figure 1



*Validity Issues*

Validity is the truth value of a theory. A study is considered valid if an observation measures what it is supposed to measure (Littlejohn & Foss, 2008). In order to reduce the issues of validity in my study I took care not to manipulate the information received from conducting interviews. Researchers could unintentionally or intentionally skew their study's data in favor of

their hypothesis. This could potentially occur by embellishing participant's answers or leading participants with loaded questions during an interview to steer them toward subjects that the researcher wants to highlight. Additionally, researchers could disregard data while examining their results to manipulate their study's findings.

After analyzing all interviews I realized that I tended to favor a few participants' interview answers over others. This can be attributed to the fact that a handful of participants were very articulate and communicated their responses clearly and expressively. I did not disregard any answers, however I did quote the responses that I felt most efficiently connected the participant's opinion with my study's themes.

Lindlof and Taylor (2011) suggest using the method of triangulation to achieve useful results in situations requiring a research's interpretation of an event. Triangulation involves the comparison of two or more forms of evidence with respect to an object of research interest. In my study, I compared my O.C.'s with transcribed interviews to improve my study's validity.

To further increase the validity of my study, I employed member checks, which involves taking findings back to the field and determining whether the participant identifies them as true or accurate (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). I randomly chose seven participants and asked them for assistance with this additional validity check. I summarized my findings so as to not impose too much reading or work for each participant. Lindlof and Taylor (2011) suggest including typical questions like "Is there anything you particularly like about this? What did I get wrong? Have I been fair?"

Participants responded to my study's summary with comments that included "I think your results seem reasonable and fair," "it looks good to me," and "Excellent, Kristen. Looks like you've built a solid thesis." One participant noted that her bachelor's and master's degrees were

not in separate fields. Since her master's degree was in mass communications, this included journalism (her bachelor's degree of concentration). However, this participant did add that everything else that I summarized in my study seemed fair and accurate.

A final member check included consulting someone who was not a participant in my study, but rather is a member of the field of public relations. This person provided an additional outside opinion while also being familiar with the field. As with most member validations, employed this tactic toward the end of the study, almost like an "exit interview" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011).

I found it interesting that this participant had read the Steinburg (2010) article, "Nine Rules Women Must Follow to Get Ahead" and felt offended by the advice it offered. She said:

I was honestly offended by parts of it that said that you should go play golf with the men and maybe not wear a cardigan and flats every day to work. It completely undermines a woman's intelligence and says that you can only get ahead by trying to play the favorite in the office among men.

She also voiced her agreement with Hon's (1995) findings that business schools produce managers who are prepared for handling factors in everyday workplace management while it seems that students who graduate with a public relations degree are less than prepared for handling these management skills.

The participant felt that the only thing lacking from my study was an interview question that broach the topic of whether or not female participants felt like they had ever had to take on typically male characteristics like acting more aggressively than normal, in the workplace. She pondered whether female participants had possibly done this to gain a promotion or communicate a thought more effectively to a superior.

I took these comments and additional feedback into consideration when drafting my final thesis. Comments were included where appropriate throughout the text.

### *Personal Interest in the Study*

I decided to supplement my career by pursuing a graduate degree in public relations. It is my opinion that this increase in knowledge will help to eventually boost my career and bring me away from a technician role and into an esteemed management position. Part of the problem with the feminization of the field is that since management positions are so highly regarded, technician roles are not. Women are primarily fulfilling the less desirable, feminized technical positions with little progress shown in being promoted to management positions. Creedon (1991) theorized that the hierarchical preference for the manager role may have the unintended effect of belittling the technician role. In turn, this may support a bias against the majority of work that women practitioners perform in public relations practice. My personal decision to go back to school made me think about other women who are obtaining advanced degrees in public relations.

Additional interests in this study grew from my curiosity about the benefits (or lack thereof) of pursuing a master's degree in public relations studies. I worked in communication roles in multiple industries including finance, nonprofit, and aerospace before deciding to go back to school to obtain a master's degree. My main motivation was to learn the basic theories of public relations since my bachelor's degree was in a different discipline. While studying public relations at the University of Houston, I began to learn about the industry in a more theoretical manner. I also began questioning the reason why women seem to be ascending the career ladder slower than men.



This curiosity lead me to pursue my research question: In what ways do advanced degrees affect career goals in female public relations practitioners? I hope to uncover new reasoning by speaking with both female and male peers in the industry. I hope to gain insight into this seemingly gender-biased issue. I hope that the results from this study will ultimately help female public relations practitioners take their careers to the levels that they deserve. I am a firm believer that knowledge is power and ultimately women practitioners will become more empowered by becoming more aware of gendered norms and stereotypes. Finally I hope to show that obtaining a master's degree will help improve their public relations professional skills and overall confidence, allowing for more women to occupy managerial roles.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Results**

The data collected provided insight into the issue of career progression of public relations practitioners. Common themes were found such as an awareness of public relations being a female-dominated field, obtaining a master's degree to increase industry knowledge and confidence, an overall thought that a master's degree does not hinder career progress, and a separation between theoretical and practical skillsets in graduate programs. In the following sections I will discuss the results of this study in greater detail. I will focus on each research question and break down the common themes and unique findings. The results are organized by theme that coincides with each of my research questions.

There were thirteen participants who participated in this study. Of the thirteen, ten individuals were female and three were male. The participants' industries spanned across multiple disciplines including biotechnology, professional services, energy, agency, education, and healthcare. Eleven participants had a master's degree in communications or public relations, and two participants had finished all of their graduate classwork and were completing their master's thesis. All participants had worked prior to returning to graduate school to pursue a master's degree.

I used Wordle, an online word cloud generator to create Figure 2. This graphic visually represents the major themes that emerged from my study's findings. Adjectives were included that were repeated by multiple participants and contribute to the overall impression that was communicated to me surrounding career progression among public relations practitioners with advanced degrees.

To summarize my word cloud, public relations is a *female-driven* industry. An advanced degree is an *investment* into a practitioner's future and might not necessarily yield immediate results (i.e., increased salary, promotion.) A master's degree helps a practitioner see the *big-picture* in an organization and act in a *strategic* manner. Having additional industry knowledge, as gained from an advanced degree, can aid individuals in feeling more *authoritative* and *confident*. It takes *motivation* and *dedication* to go back to school to pursue and ultimately complete an advanced degree.

**Figure 2**



*RQ1: What factors contribute to practitioners wanting to pursue advanced degrees?*

The following section will highlight the major themes discovered surrounding RQ1. The themes that emerged are that practitioners pursued advanced degrees as a necessity to *change careers*; practitioners felt the *timing* was right to advance their education; and they received *mentorship and support* from supervisors or peers to pursue an advanced degree.

*Changing careers.* While individuals found their way into the public relations profession for various reasons, a few commonalities as to why practitioners decided to go back to school to

pursue an advanced degree surfaced. A number of participants *initially pursued different careers* and decided to pursue public relations later on in their careers. Going back to get a master's degree was a necessity because their bachelor's degree was in a different discipline. Out of the thirteen participants, three started out in journalism and decided that career path was not right for them. Jen, who is a communication director for a university set her heart on being a journalist and completed her bachelor's in journalism.

I did journalism before this so I worked at a newspaper and that was kind of um, I was getting to write and do the things I liked to do, but it was less predictable. I was working sometimes 12 hours days, 14-hour days and it was a crazy schedule. So I like that it encompasses what I like to do, writing and talking to people and interviewing people and working and communicating, but it's not such a crazy, unexpected schedule.

Another participant, Maureen, also started out in the journalism field.

I started my career as a Journalist and I always assumed my career would be in journalism. And then I moved to Houston and I realized the Houston Chronicle wasn't going to hire me and so I looked for the next best opportunity. And PR fit and bill and I was really engaged and enthusiastic about entering this career field. But I wanted that education component [and] I hadn't taken any PR classes in undergrad.

Melinda explained her situation regarding how she found herself in the public relations field:

I sort of got into this purely by accident. I graduated from university and I was going to be a policy wonk and that's what I was going to do and so I ended up in communications strictly because my job evolved into that and I realized that I liked it because I thought it was a good fit for my particular skills.

Another participant who was unhappy with her previous career was Madelyn. Madelyn, a marketing director, was working in a marketing position that focused on graphic design. She expressed her unhappiness with the role and decided to go back to school to pursue a master's degree in communications because she enjoyed writing.

Public relations was an attractive career for participants to pursue for a few reasons. One reason was that participants felt like they had the skills that would transition well into a career in communications. Kara, who is a principal of her own agency, initially thought she wanted to be a psychologist. She quickly realized that the profession just "wasn't for her" and her boss at the time felt she would be a great fit for the public relations profession. Kara expressed her love for writing, creativity and being in a profession that allows her to "use [her] brain."

Jen also felt like the skills from her background in journalism would transition well into a degree in public relations.

Well I got my bachelor's degree and journalism was what I wanted to do. So I was out in the field working at a daily newspaper. And I did that for about a year and a half and I decided that just, it wasn't giving me the flexibility to give me a personal life. The schedule like I mentioned was running me into the ground. So I wanted to do something different where I was using the same skills and not doing it at a newspaper. So PR was kind of the place that I looked because I thought, yeah the skills that I have are applicable to PR.

Another reason why participants thought public relations would be an ideal profession was because they felt it provided a stable career. Sara, an internal communication advisor, went back to pursue a master's degree in public relations because her undergraduate degree was in business.

My undergraduate degree was in business. Marketing specifically and I always had a love to go into advertising so on all my marketing classes and electives I did advertising. And so I went into advertising first thing out of school in [19]91 and I loved it, but I quickly realized that it was a really tough business. The pay was low and I just broke my back being in that industry and it kind of a tough industry to be in. But I learned so much. But then I realized there was money in corporate communications and a lot more stability, frankly.

Dylan also expressed his appreciation for the stability of the profession: “There was a relationship built up over the years where people worked in like safety or financial, as projects came and went I would cross paths many times over the years and I liked that stability.”

*Timing.* Another apparent theme as to why participants decided to go back to school was this it was *the right time in their lives*. They felt that it was now or never and there were no big obligations holding them back. Britney said:

So there were some semesters where I was like, why am I doing this? Why am I putting myself through all of this extra stress? Like, what is the outcome going to be? But if I think long-term, like I said this is the time for me to get the master’s degree. I might not need it tomorrow but I need to get it tomorrow because five years down the road I’m going to have kids and I’m going to be doing a lot more.

Maureen felt like the decision to go back to school was a “no brainer.” She had no children at the time, and she wasn’t married. She discussed how it was a time when she was still “finding herself” and part of that discovery was going back to school to pursue an advanced degree. She added that she felt like it was “now or never.”

Britney, a recently married senior account executive, also felt like the *time was right* to dedicate to an advanced degree. She pursued a prestigious program at a school outside of the country where she was able to experience a different culture, learn alongside a diverse study population while also working in conjunction with going back to school. She was able to devote the energy at that time in her life before she took her vows with her now husband.

There were challenges faced by individuals when making the commitment to go back to school to pursue an advanced degree. These challenges included both monetary issues with paying for tuition and books, loss of salary for those who went back to school full time and did not work, and finally the challenge of balancing a career with school for those who were attending classes and also working at the same time.

Jen commented that “only on my personal level it’s gotten kind of tricky with balancing school work with you know every day at work verses I got married in 2009 so I was working, going to school, planning a wedding.”

*Mentorship and support.* A final noticeable theme was that participants had very *supportive bosses (both male and female) who motivated them to go back* and get an advanced degree. In addition, some organizations made it very appealing to go back for a master’s degree because they paid (or partially paid) for tuition and supported flexible schedules to accommodate for evening or afternoon classes.

Janet fondly recalled one of her first bosses and talked about how she had run into him at a recent conference. She thanked him for his support and credited his not so politically correct encouragement he gave her during one of her first professional jobs.

He said, why are you wasting time, why are you not getting that master’s degree done? Get the master’s degree done and you’ll get the promotion that you want. You want the

money, you want more accountability, and more autonomy in this job, go get your master's degree. Because you're younger than most of your peers and you need it. So go get it done. I was like, fine I'm going to finish this thing and then you better give me what I worked for.

Since gender is a major component of my thesis, it was essential for me to analyze it in regards to why participants decided to go back to school to pursue a master's degree. There was no discernable difference between genders when analyzing why participants decided to go back to pursue an advanced degree. No participants, male or female, discussed any gender discrimination in the workforce that motivated them to pursue a master's degree. The only time gender discrimination was mentioned was when participants were asked how they would change how men and women experience working in public relations. Many of my interview questions centered around gender. I explored gender discrimination (if any) in the workplace, gender biases, gender roles, etc. I was surprised that more participants did not know how to answer, or had no response, for these types of questions because they did not feel like they were relevant to their personal situation.

When analyzing my findings, I was surprised that more participants did not go back to school specifically because they wanted an increase in salary. It is possible that it was not clearly communicated by organizations how an advanced degree would affect an individual's pay grade. Maureen commented about her lack of knowledge regarding how her degree was taken into account with her current position as a communications manager for a university.

Well at my last place of employment I did receive a salary increase because of my degree. It wasn't substantial but it was in line with others who received a bump in salary from receiving this degree. I don't know that it figured into the salary I'm receiving right



now. I don't really know anything else about how it helped me except fortifying my knowledge and practicing my work every day.

Only one of the participants went back to school to earn a master's degree to get a better position at her organization. In every other instance, individuals did not expect to be compensated because of their degree; at least not in the near-future. All participants believed that their degree was without a doubt a great investment into the future. Not one person believed that their advanced degree would hinder their careers in any way. Janet, a principal at her own agency, believed, "You know its opened so many doors for me. I'm convinced it's one of the best investments; it was probably the best professional investment I made in myself. I have absolutely no regrets on getting my master's degree."

Sara also did not see any change to her salary after completing her master's degree:

Um, you know getting a degree isn't easy as you know and achieving it gave me the confidence in doing what I do and my daily work and being able to counsel people. Um, and I think there was recognition from my colleagues, so it might not have been monetary but it's um, it's recognized and appreciated to a certain extent.

Dylan also stated that his advanced degree did not necessarily equal a pay raise:

But as far as, 'now you have a master's degree, now you'll get promoted' that never happened. It was just a good thing to do. It was noted but it wasn't signaled out or anything. And I was fine with that. I wasn't looking for career advancement or anything. The fact that they paid for it was good enough for me.

Finally, I was surprised that no participants mentioned the challenging economy as a reason they pursued an advanced degree. Before gathering data, I hypothesized that some participants would have went back to school because they were laid off from a job or wanted to

give the economy some time to bounce back while being productive. While I did not specifically ask participants what year they graduated from their programs, I suspect that the majority of individuals were in school before the economic hit the challenges we are currently facing. The two participants who are currently finishing their thesis did not specifically mention the economy as a reason why they decided to go back to school to pursue an advanced degree.

*RQ2: What public relations roles do practitioners perform before and after obtaining their advanced degrees?*

The following section will highlight the major themes discovered surrounding RQ2. The themes that emerged are that practitioners' professional responsibilities shifted from *technical to managerial roles*; and they feel that being *strategic* is a learned skill honed from obtaining an advanced degree.

*Shift in tasks.* While it was apparent that each participant held different job titles and had unique responsibilities, there was a noticeable *shift from performing technical tasks* (writing, research, editing) as compared to being responsible for the managerial tasks such as counseling clients and managing staffs. The results of my study indicate that there is a shift in responsibilities from technical roles to more managerial tasks with the achievement of an advanced degree.

It takes knowledge, confidence and being able to clearly communicate to earn participation in more executive-level decision making, or have access to the "C-suite." While technical tasks are essential to the public relations profession, it is the managerial tasks that take practitioners to the next level in their careers. Melinda pointed out, "You are working with executives and need to earn their trust." It is having industry knowledge, being aware of bigger

picture strategies, and offering a unique and helpful opinion that essentially sets apart practitioners from being leaders to being followers. Melinda added:

I think it's [master's degree] helped me personally in terms of my, you know skills and thought process. In my analytical reasoning, the way I look at problems and problem solving. Um, so I think it helped me more intrinsically and probably you know helped me be a better manager.

In addition she felt that:

I would say that most of my writing that I do now is more executive-type writing. It's communication that's going to go out from um, a partner to a client or a partner to another partner. Or that our managing partner might be sending out internally or preparing for an interview. Ah, do an average press release or wring an average attorney bio, I do less of that now and that only really falls in when somebody's out.

Janet also believed that her advanced degree shifted her responsibilities from technical in nature to more managerial in scope. She stated that "At this point in my career, my value is not in the tactical skills that I do from day to day. It's not the press releases that I write. It's not the web copy that I edit. It's the ideas and strategy that I bring forward."

*Strategic.* A number of participants credited graduate school with opening up their minds to seeing bigger picture issues and understanding business *strategies*. While participants did not express any change in their day-to-day activities that would be attributed to obtaining an advanced degree, they did feel that being more knowledgeable about strategic thinking and management was directly related to the skills learned in graduate school. Jen credited her managerial skills with the skills taught to her in graduate classes.

I think especially towards the end when I got some of the required master's classes out of the way, a lot of the courses focused on strategy which is in my undergraduate classes it was more focused on tactics and how to write a press release, and how to do this and that. And I feel like the master's classes they're really challenging students to think at a more strategic level and a more bottom line level and how is this going to impact a company as opposed to just how to execute various functions.

Jen added that "...so it [my master's degree] has kind of helped me to shift my mindset to that overall, strategic component because certainly I like the creative elements and I've had to put that aside and focus more on the strategies."

When asked how his degree has affected his day-to-day work, Aaron, a communications specialist, credited his master's program with providing him with the skills necessary for being strategically savvy in his current role. In addition he identified research as an essential skill that he obtained from pursuing an advanced degree:

Um, I think it provided a sort of backbone for a more strategic thinking about the role of communications in an organization. Um, and their program in Maryland is very much research-based. Um, so it didn't have a lot of practical application I would say. But um, in terms of understanding the roles of research and the role of um, a broader understanding of communication as a business tool.

In addition to research skills, participants noted finding value in the communication skills honed in their master's programs. The classroom provides an open forum where diverse opinions are articulated and debated. These skills were identified as valuable in the workplace. Evan noted:

Yeah, I think that the process of sitting at the table and having good heated discussions with people about so many topics that we did in the process and in our classes. People have very different opinions and different worldviews. Um, and you get some of that other places as well but I don't think there's any place like the classroom where you can really just open up and disagree and be passionate about it. So I think that was good um, just learning about other people's perspectives on things. And kind of honing how you articulate your view.

Melinda also supported the fact that communication skills are a valuable skill learned from pursuing an advanced degree. She commented that "I think really to be successful you have to be trusted by your colleagues and those above you. I think that you have to bring good ideas to the table. I think you have to be um, unafraid to speak your mind in a measured way."

Participants noted that it was challenging to move away from the technical side of public relations and transition into performing managerial roles because it was these creative, fun tasks that initially attracted them to the profession in the first place. As previously stated, responsibilities that fall under the technician's scope include executing general research, writing press releases, and creating printed materials to support a public relation's campaign. These tasks are more creative than the responsibilities that fall under management roles (Dozier & Broom, 2006).

Maureen appeared to be frustrated when I interviewed her when she talked about not being able to participate as much in the creative roles of public relations. "It's really hard and it's really frustrating (to move away from the more creative aspects of the job)."

Jen also felt a sense of frustration with moving from a role that was more technical to one that is managerial in scope:

Yeah um, a lot of my time--now that I'm in the director role--is spent more on planning and supervision and communicating with the dean and some administrators here rather than actually writing or posting on Facebook or doing any of the actual creative work.

Which you know, I miss it sometimes and I find ways to allow myself to do that.

There were no noticeable differences of role responsibilities due to gender or age. During data analysis I realized that each participant had unique day-to-day responsibilities that were based on their particular professional title. Furthermore, the industry an individual worked in was relevant to their tasks. Kara, principal of her own agency, stated that she has taken herself away from doing technical tasks because her time is more costly to her clients. She relies on her staff to draft technical projects, and she limits her valuable time to editing and presenting those to clients.

Janet who also is principal of her own agency finds herself splitting her time between technical and managerial tasks. She stated that "because of my position, working in-house I would say would be more on the technical side of things because you're spending more time on tasks that have been asked of you."

*RQ3: What are the gender-related outcomes in the public relations workplace of practitioners obtaining an advanced degree?*

The following section will highlight the major themes discovered surrounding RQ3. The themes that emerged are that practitioners have *increased confidence*; they notice a *gendered attraction* to the profession; and there is a noticeable *lack of male practitioners* in public relations.

*Self-confidence.* As stated previously, Aldoory (2009) reported that obtaining an advanced degree can help improve a woman's sense of empowerment through increased industry

knowledge and help in “mediating social change, in reproducing assumptions about women’s appropriate roles” (p. 115). A commonality between all of the participants who responded that they have an increased sense of confidence is that they were all female. This is noteworthy because no male participants felt that their confidence level due to an advanced degree, nor did they feel that confidence was a characteristic of a skill required for career success.

*An increased feeling of confidence* was noted as a direct result of obtaining an advanced degree in communications and/or public relations. Kara, who is principal of her own agency, stated, “From my standpoint, you need to be able to hold your own. Don’t be timid or meek but be bold and forthcoming with yourself. Confidence is key. Portray that to clients.” Kara added, “I’d rather get fired for telling the truth than not speaking my mind with a client.”

Joy felt that “I’m more confident. I feel like I have something no one can take away from me. Plus I’ve had an experience and I can speak about things with clarity and some degree of authority.”

Sara also felt that confidence is a skill that she not only possessed, but also is essential in the public relations profession to exude. She commented, “Um, confidence is not really a skill but that’s one. Confidence and poise. Confidence when you’re talking to clients and working with reporters. Your own abilities and your own expertise goes a long way.”

While Dylan never mentioned confidence during the course of our interview, he did realize that a valuable skill learned in graduate school is the fact that he understands the skills needed to be in a management position:

A master’s degree had me think more like a business manager. Thinking like a broad prospective of things I mentioned earlier. It helped me think beyond just the words on

paper. It helped me think about the ideas behind them and how the impact of rich communications can persuade people and bring about good change.

*Gendered attraction to profession.* Another theme that emerged was the fact that women and men are drawn to public relations for different reasons. Several participants expressed an association between women's tendencies to enjoy communicating, being detail-oriented, and being more cognizant of people's emotions and feelings. Maureen stated:

Um, I think women are drawn to this professional because women are perhaps more forthcoming and stronger communicators. Don't get me wrong, I've met plenty of men in this industry who are great communicators and excellent at what they do. But I feel that women feel so drawn to the field because they like to talk to people, they like to work with people, they like to write about and learn about people. So it seems like a natural fit. That seems so gender-biased but I do feel like it's somewhat true. We like to be able to tell a story that brings our communities together.

Jen also stated a similar observation:

I feel like I know that when I look to my colleagues and even my classes, I mean clearly there's a lot more women than men who are working in PR. And I think that's just because there's a social aspect that goes along with working in PR. And um, a networking aspect that women just gravitate towards. And PR is very event focused and I feel like women gravitate towards that event to plan and execute type of thing. So I think just the work that PR involves, women might be more suited to it, but that's not to say that I haven't met men who work in the profession who do a great job.

*Lack of male presence in profession.* Theme three, a lack of male presence, emerged when analyzing the data about what differences participants saw between male and female



practitioners in the field or male and female classmates in the classroom. Ultimately, the resounding answer was that there was really no differences besides the *noticeable fact that there were not many men.*

My participant sample related closely with the percentage of females in the public relations industry which is comprised of 85 percent women, according to Aldoory (2009). Out of my thirteen participants, 77 percent were women, and 23 percent were male.

Evan also noticed this trend and questioned whether it was that females were becoming more drawn to the profession, or if males were becoming less inclined to pursue public relations.

I suspect it's becoming less attractive to men rather than more attractive to women... I don't know that it's presented as a career with a chance to gain power. And power's what attracts, money and power... and I don't know if college has emphasized where you can go in the field. Ah, so if you're looking at it as a fun job, I think it's attractive to people. But if you're a guy looking to build a career with long-term growth opportunity [and] gain high positions in the company...you don't hear a lot about chief communications officers...So I wonder if guys don't have the sense of how this can get me there.

Only one participant felt that there was a difference between the male and female classmates in graduate school. Madelyn felt that her female classmates were more outspoken, honest, and opinionated. She expressed that male classmates were simply "spectators" and they often did not willingly speak up in class during ground discussions. She added that perhaps her male classmates were simply internalizing considerations, however she observed that their responses had to be coaxed. Women were more "Type A," and men were more laid back.

Participants felt strongly that professional experience and successes they have had in the classroom are two very different forms of credibility. Britney specifically stated that she was

hired for her job as a senior account executive due to her previous work experience and knowledge of the energy industry. She believed she was not hired because she had a master's degree. Similarly, Mary [perceived that real-world experience was more valuable in getting a job than a master's degree:

I will say there are people that I graduated with that had never been in front of a client. And I don't know what they're doing now. I know a couple of them couldn't get jobs afterwards because you have a masters you expect more pay, but they don't have the experience that someone who didn't get their masters and was practicing for two years, they're going to get the job because they have the hands on.

So while practitioners voiced their opinion that professional, practical experience is preferred in the "real world" for hiring purposes, practitioners still felt that the intangible skills including increased confidence, and increased industry knowledge, are still valuable takeaways from graduate school.

The majority of participants did not know how they would change the way men and women experience advanced degrees. This question seemed to throw participants off and they did not have an answer for it. After asking this question, multiple participants appeared uneasy and shifted in their chairs. I attributed this to feeling pressure to answer my question when they could not think of an answer they felt was fitting. The inability to answer this question could be attributed to participants being out of school for a long period of time. Many had difficulty recollecting specific details about their particular classes and classmates. Jen, a communications director who is pursuing her master's degree, considered her own experiences (planning a wedding, getting married, buying a house) when responding to my question.

And so I don't know that it could be changed but it should be considered that women of, you know, the age pursuing master's degrees, women in their mid to late twenties into their thirties are going through these big, life altering things as they're pursuing their degrees. And men might not have to invest quite as much time to these certain things. So I don't know if it can actually be changed but just the consideration.

Joy felt that no changes should be made, but that both genders see advanced education as a necessity in today's economy. "I think both men and women see it as very essential. And I think it's something that men and women both want. I don't think they see it any differently."

#### *Additional Findings*

Two themes emerged from my study that did not neatly fit into any of the research questions including *lack of interest* in having an advanced degree and a sense of *jealousy* surrounding pursuing/obtaining an advanced degree.

*Lack of interest.* Participants were asked how their bosses and coworkers treated them differently before and after they received an advanced degree. The majority of participants did not notice any difference in the way they were treated by peers and leaders within their organization. Some mentioned the fact that individuals would probably be surprised to know they had a master's degree because it was not something that participants had clearly communicated. Britney doubted that anyone in her organization knew that she had a master's degree, nor did she feel like they would really be impressed with that credential. She felt strongly that professional experience weighed more heavily than educational degrees in the public relations field. Melinda stated:

I think truthfully, everyone that I work with here would be shocked to know that I have a master's. Those who were around when I got hired and saw my resume know but I don't

have it on my wall at work. And my boss who's come since then doesn't need to know that I have one.

Maureen chuckled when I posed the same question to her.

Having a master's degree isn't anything here [the University where she works]. In fact, some of the lower positions here they say that a master's degree is preferred. I mean I think there's a lot of people here treating a master's degree like a bachelor's degree. A bachelor's is so much more common as we move forward as a society. And so I think having a master's degree might set you a part a little bit but it won't differentiate really anyone else.

*Jealousy.* Joy, an administrative assistant, noticed a feeling of resentment among her coworkers and bosses when she discussed pursuing her master's degree.

But I see that people who choose not to or didn't have the opportunity [to pursue a master's degree], then [they] don't want to talk about it. I've also noticed that some [senior] professionals when they heard I was getting a master's degree challenged me on it. "I don't even have a master's," they said.

Dylan also noticed some discontent among coworkers when he returned to school to pursue a master's degree in public relations.

I think there was some envious kidding when people realized that I was actually going to get it as opposed to just being a student. There's always people who say they're in grad school but they don't finish. But when I actually finished...actually did my thesis and turned it in and got the degree there was some friendly "Oh wow, do you want to be the president?" Why did you work so hard to do that?" "So what are you trying to do, pass everyone by?"

### *Positive Outcomes of Advanced Degrees*

*Credibility.* Participants also expressed their opinions that having a master's degree not only looks great on a resume, but it also lends itself to providing a level of *credibility* that sets practitioners apart who do not have the M.A. listed after their name. When discussing how his degree has helped his career, Evan felt:

Um, it's good on the resume; it's good for the initial introduction. I think what it demonstrates is that I'm serious about the topic, not just doing it but understanding it. Um, and it's not just something I'm doing on a whim. It's what I'm about, kinda you know, professionally. So it's a piece of the equation. They want to know that you have experience of course um, but when you're talking to senior people typically they have some kind of advanced degree. So it kind of puts you on an equal playing field.

Evan, who did not have any previous professional public relations experience before obtaining his master's degree, also expressed his sentiments about credibility:

But I think having the master's degree and having 18 months thinking about the topic and being able to go in and sort of outline the plan for what I wanted to accomplish, I think it did lend an *air of credibility*. So it was really the one piece of credibility I had in that role aside from having some good operation experience, understanding the organization.

Kara discussed how many of her clients at her agency are highly educated with Ph.D.'s or MBA's and have leadership roles including CEO's and CFO's. These people are highly successful people and she believed that not only having her master's in public relations, but also being accredited public relations (APR) are influential *credentials* that proves to her clients that she is serious about her profession.

Mary added that “I think it’s [master’s degree] given me the ability to be very versatile and I think it *looks good on paper*. But I also think that when people know that you’ve pursued your craft beyond a basic four year degree it says something about how passionately you feel about it.”

## **Chapter Five**

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

The findings of this study have added to the current body of knowledge concerning advanced education and career progress among public relations practitioners. The study successfully supported my initial assumption. First, the results showed that practitioners, both male and female, went back to school to help advance their careers. The specific reasoning varied from good timing, to career necessity (bachelor's was in a different discipline). While the majority of participants said that an advanced degree did not necessarily increase their salaries, across the board they felt that a master's degree was an investment for the future and would not hinder their careers in any way.

Secondly, there was an apparent shift in responsibilities away from performing technical tasks like writing and editing, to taking responsibility for more high-level, managerial tasks. These skills in being able to see the big picture, being more strategic and tactical and being more business minded was directly correlated with the skills learned in graduate school.

Thirdly, there was a common theme that with an advanced degree came a level of confidence associated with a better understanding of the industry, honing speaking and writing skills and understanding bigger picture issues that effects public relations in industries across the board.

Finally, there were mixed findings regarding gender equality in the workforce, power, and work-life balance. It is interesting to note that only female participants discussed work-life balance as this is primarily considered just a female issue. Both male and female participants discussed opinions on gender equality, power structure within organizations and the field, and power.

The following section will address my study's findings in more detail, while also addressing practical and theoretical implications, limitations to my study, and areas for future research.

### *Theoretical Implications*

*Public relations roles.* There has been extensive theoretical research conducted on the four major roles that public relations practitioners perform in organizations (Grunig et al., 2006). It was through Broom's (1982) research, in which the four roles that encompass all of public relation's responsibilities – the expert prescriber, the communication facilitator, the problem-solving process facilitator as well as the communication technician, were defined.

Roles theory is an important body of research because having a clear definition of a role's responsibilities, expectations, and even limitations can create not only a stronger work environment, but it can also help to enhance the industry as a whole. Organizational expectations, future goals, and objectives can be fully realized when there are clearly defined roles and responsibilities. It removes confusion over responsibilities between colleagues and departments. In addition, having clear roles definitions also contributes to the salaries of public relations practitioners and how much satisfaction practitioners derive from their work (Dozier & Broom, 1995).

My study contributed to roles research by confirming that public relations practitioners are knowledgably defining specific roles in the industry. Participants clearly communicated the roles they perform. Each participant had the freedom to choose one or multiple main roles including media relations, internal relations, external relations, and community relations. These findings confirm the fact that public relations roles are now clearly defined within organizations which in turn, strengthens the organization as a whole.



Participants confidently reported the percentage that their daily tasks that were comprised of technical verses managerial tasks. Toth et al. (1998) found that female managers oftentimes performed both technical and managerial functions for a lower salary, and women performed mostly technician activities as compared to men who performed more managerial tasks even in the technician ranks. Female participants did not report taking on more responsibilities than men to prove to others that they are qualified to perform management tasks.

In contradiction, both male and female participants did not notice any gender biases between assigned role responsibilities or an unfair distribution of work between male and female practitioners. However, some participants did indicate that gender bias issues probably existed in other organizations, or in different parts of the country. When discussing current or previous organizations they did not indicate any visible gender biases. It is possible that if an organization had gender biases they were not readily discussed except behind closed doors.

While gender issues were not brought to the surface during this study's interviews, it does not necessarily mean that gender biases within organizations did not exist. David and Wanda (2001) contend that the glass ceiling continues to exist because of maleness, which is the theory that powerful people act in ways to perpetuate their power. Male behavior is status quo, and there is often is an unconscious effort to maintain this dynamic. While individual men might not have made the rules that result in inequitable gender biases in the public relations workplace, the systems that perpetuate traditional maleness and femininity continue and have unequal outcomes.

One participant discussed how the roles of men and women have shifted dramatically because the university's new administrator is a powerful woman. In turn, this new leader has opened the door to allowing other women to occupy leadership roles within the university.

As stated previously, having clear role definitions contributes to the salaries of public relations practitioners. It is apparent that more research is needed to support or disconfirm this existing theory. The data collected from this study did not offer any clarification that having clearly defined roles contributes to salary increase among practitioners. Participants reported confusion whether their advanced degree was taken into account when considering initial salary and salary increases. More than likely, organizations will not clearly define how an advanced degree will affect a candidate's current and future salary. It is a candidate's responsibility to ask what kind of salary increase they will receive with an advanced degree. Candidates can also ask their employer to include their degree in their salary negotiation.

*Gender.* According to Hon (2009), strong and established gender-role expectations have lessened women's opportunities for managerial success, including promotion to leadership roles, access to power resources such as coalitions and networks, and positive performance appraisals based on unbiased judgment criteria and clear detailed feedback. Results from my study do not support gender biases as being an issue in the workplace. The majority of participants did not notice any difference in the way men and women were treated in their organizations. In fact, a few commented on how fair and unbiased their workplace culture truly is.

Joy confidently responded that her workplace is very equal because she sees women in leadership roles and men in less prestigious, more administrative roles. Whether her organization is truly removed of gender bias is impossible to prove, however she felt strongly that it was a non-issue. Another seasoned public relations practitioner commented on a balancing of opportunities for advancement between male and female practitioners that he has noticed during his thirty-plus years of practice.

One participant's response was surprising and did not follow the typical trend of answers regarding any observation of how men and women are treated differently in his organization. He recently overheard his boss comment on a potential hire for a senior position within the organization. His boss bluntly said that a female candidate was perfect for the position however since he initially wanted to hire a male candidate, he was not planning on hiring the woman. While this was only one response out of thirteen, this suggests that there is still gender discrimination within the workforce. While this might not be the majority opinion, it is possible that some leaders still feel that men would be a better fit for a leadership position over that of a female.

Despite extensive research on gender inequality, my study did not strongly point to this as an issue. It is possible that there are gender biases within the participant's workplaces however they had never experienced any issues personally. I believe that individuals would be hesitant to call out their organization for being gender biased unless they had strong proof or if they had a personal experience. In addition, participants might have experienced gender discrimination personally and did not feel comfortable enough to disclose this information during their interview.

My study did offer some support to Aldoory, Jiang, Toth, and Sha's (2008) research which explored perceptions of balancing work-family. A female participant observed that public relations offers work life flexibility that she enjoys. She stated, "I don't necessarily have to divorce myself so much as this is my personal life and this is my work life. I feel like PR does a really good job that I can bring in elements of my personal life into my work life."

*Leadership and gender.* Participants did not express any opinion that men in the public relations industry obtain and exercise power more easily than women because men have access

to resources for power, are placed in jobs with power, and maintain their positions through support of male networks and a male-intensive dominant coalition. On the contrary, participants did not report a bias toward men in their organizations. Both female and male participants never gave any inclination that they were either passed over or favored because of their gender. Further research is necessary to see if Choi and Hon's (1995) findings are a current trend.

While there was no verbal affirmation regarding gender bias in the interview for my study, the fact that participants were uncomfortable to discuss issues surrounding gender leads to question whether they were uncomfortable because they had personally experienced gender discrimination in some degree. More research is needed to further dive into this topic that remains an issue for women in the workplace in the field of public relations and beyond.

*Feminization of the field.* Feminization of the field became a concern in the 1980s when the number of women in the profession surpassed the number of men (Aldoory, 2009). According to the data collected from my study, this is still a very big concern with today's professional practitioners. This fear is generated by the fact that feminization affects the overall respect and status of those working in the profession as well as declining salaries and gender discrimination (Aldoory, 2005). Results from my research strongly confirm findings that public relations is a female-dominated field and it appears that this trend is not changing.

While the feminization of public relations does not appear to be lessening, there does appear to be increased empowerment with women in the field. My study strongly indicates that an advanced degree and corresponding increased industry knowledge does provide a positive result to obtaining an advanced degree. This increased empowerment can help with obtaining leadership roles in the future.

The results from my study beg further research to see why the feminization of public relations is still occurring, and does not appear to be slowing down. Further research is needed to untangle whether men are being less attracted to the profession, or women are becoming more attracted to it. It could also be a combination of both. One participant specifically voiced his opinion that public relations is becoming less attractive to male candidates because they are unable to see the professional opportunities that public relations offers.

I don't know that it's [public relations] presented as a career with a chance to gain power. And power's what attracts. Ah, so if you're looking at it as a fun job, I think it's attractive to people. But if you're a guy looking to build a career with long-term growth opportunity, a chance to, you know, gain high positions in the company...you don't hear a lot about chief communications officers. Um, making the big bucks and having a lot of power. So I wondering if guys don't have the sense of how this [public relations] can get [them] there.

This response strongly suggests that there is a continued feminization of the field. While this participant did notice a continued feminization of the field, he did not feel like his professional status was elevated because he is a male practitioner. When asked about how his advanced degree has helped his career, he discussed how an advanced degree puts him on an equal playing field with upper management. His perceptions illuminate how an advanced degree can increase a practitioner's power and professional status.

As a majority opinion, participants did comment on the fact that there are not many men in the profession. When asked about any differences they noticed between male/female practitioners or male/female classmates, many did not have any differences to note except for the

overwhelming fact that there were not many men in general in the classroom and in the profession.

According to Grunig et al. (2006), excellent public relations departments empower both men and women in addition to encouraging diversity of all racial, ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Without having a strong male presence in the field, there is also a lack of diversity among practitioners. My study elaborated on these findings. A male participant felt that the lack of fellow male classmates in his graduate class was discerning. While he did not feel like there was an “immediate threat” to the profession, he did express concern over the “lack of diversity” in general. Diversity promotes a workplace that is filled with different opinions and considerations. It is diversity that adds uniqueness to a workplace that could otherwise be one-note.

*Women’s choice of the technician role.* Grunig et al.’s (2006) research found that women may have less opportunity than men to gain strategic expertise because their time is already committed to completing technical tasks. More research is required to support or disconfirm these findings. In fact, the female practitioners that participated in this study balanced both technical and managerial skills in their daily responsibilities. Many stated that their more senior roles had shifted technical tasks outside of their job’s scope and had been replaced with more strategic work. While some participants mentioned that they missed spending time focused on the more creative “fun” projects, they understood that the strategic component of their position is a vital one that cannot be ignored.

*Educational advancement.* Dozier and Broom (2006) voiced their concerns that a research gap exists around whether advanced degrees in public relations/communications

prepares alumni with the necessary expertise needed for manager role enactment. My findings contribute to this lack of scholarly research.

Participants identified essential skills learned in graduate school including strategic management skills, analytical reasoning, and the ability to communicate thoughtful ideas clearly and confidently. The classroom leant an environment that allows graduate students to hone their debate skills. Being able to give and receive criticism in this profession is important. It's also important to appreciate other's perspectives on a subject and be able to clearly articulate your views as well.

While participants attended different master's programs, there was still a definitive overall feeling that graduate school taught different skills than those that were focused on in undergraduate study. Hon (1995) voiced her criticism that there is an emphasis on teaching the technical skills in undergraduate school with little or no focus on business skills. My study does support that there are skills obtained from graduate school that do add value to a practitioner's professional career success. After examining all of the data, there is little doubt that the skills being taught in graduate school, including thinking strategically, improving public speaking, or understanding the value of research, are helpful in the workforce in strengthened practitioner's advancement into leadership roles.

*Education and empowerment.* Results from this study suggests a positive correlation between increased knowledge and a sense of empowerment. Participants agreed that portraying a level of confidence is important when communicating with clients and upper management. The theoretical knowledge and business-sound skills obtained from pursuing an advanced degree is essential in a field that is built on knowhow. Participants credited the skills learned in their

master's programs with helping them be able to write well, communicate with deadlines, multitask, and balance multiple projects.

### *Practical Implications*

There are a few practical implications that can be suggested from the research of this study. The first is that a master's degree in public relations or communication is an advantage to practitioners wishing to advance their careers. One hundred percent of the participants saw the benefit in obtaining a master's degree and had no regrets about their decision.

While it is difficult to gauge exactly how an advanced degree helps career progression in public relations, this study highlighted the fact that it does not and will not hinder a career in any way. Participants noted the analytical and strategic skills learned in their higher education courses. These skills have benefited participants in their current careers by making them more aware of the big picture when looking at an organization's long-term goals, visions and values. In addition, the knowledge learned in graduate school contributed to an overall sense of confidence. In order to share thoughtful insights and opinions, participants talked about the need to know your craft and be able to communicate it in a thoughtful manner.

Another practical implication surrounds the topic of mentorship. A majority of participants credited a supportive boss or organization with providing the motivation to go back and finish a graduate degree. It would be helpful to look at mentorship in relations to obtaining advanced degrees. This support is essential in providing the opportunity for practitioners to not only see the benefits of getting a master's degree, but also allowing for the flexibility of work schedule and potential tuition reimbursement that accompanies obtaining a master's degree.



### *Limitations of Study*

My study was conducted with practitioners who were all located in and around the Houston area. In addition, a majority of participants attended the same program at the University of Houston. This limited sampling might not be representative of the opinions of other practitioners who live in different geographical areas or attended schools in different regions. As in other qualitative research, the findings from this sample cannot be generalized to the larger population.

A limitation to the data collection regarding public relations roles is the fact that some participants did not work in the field before going back to school to get their master's degree in public relations and/or communication. I was not able to fully examine how their roles changed after they received an advanced degree since comparing their role within a different industry would have been able to be validly compared.

One could argue that another limitation to my study is the fact that some of the interviews were conducted via telephone conversation. While I initially asked participants to use video chat like Skype or Face Time as an alternative to meeting in-person, I received an overwhelming unwillingness to utilize this technology. This unwillingness to use video chat could be attributed to uneasiness of using new technology. I believe that age played a role in participant's opting against using a video chat. One participant voiced her concern regarding age and willingness to use technology. She felt:

They [older practitioners] have a harder time transferring to the new technologies and the way that we [younger practitioners] do things... I see the younger women coming up and being more aware of the newer concepts and um technologies and then there's the older men who are fighting it. It's second nature to us. It comes naturally.

Unfortunately, without being able to sit face-to-face with all participants, I missed out on the visual nuances that were lost through the phone. I believe there was an uneasiness to discuss gender and without being able to see a participant I could not pick up on cues such as shifting in their seat, fidgeting, or making uncomfortable facial expressions.

Another limitation to my study is that participants were not given a definition of career success and there were mixed opinions as to what was considered in this topic. While each participant held a similar degree, each individual had different career goals and future aspirations. This creates a level of difficulty when trying to measure career success if each person has a different opinion as to what that entails.

In hindsight, I wish I had probed a little further to flesh out more information about gender issues with my study's participants. However, since participants were generous enough to volunteer for my study without any monetary incentive, I did not want to push sensitive topics that they were clearly uncomfortable discussing.

#### *Future Research*

It is apparent that the public relations profession is a female-dominated industry. In a practice that values diversity, it is not possible to reach that level of collaborative thought if there are no men to voice their opinions. Incorporating the ideas of others is what fosters excellent communications. Not only is it essential to incorporate all races, cultures into the public relations practice, but it is just as important to balance gender inequality in the field. Further research is needed to look into this issue and find out why men are not attracted to this career and to look at possible recruitment strategies to attract more men to the profession.

While participants agreed that the strategic tactics learned in graduate school were beneficial to practical workplace settings, a few voiced their concerns about the separating of

theory and practice. While it is essential to understand the theoretical implications to the field of public relations, these skills rarely come into play when working with clients or counseling upper management. This can make finding a job challenging to students who have yet to experience working in an agency or corporate setting. Preparing students to execute their knowledge in a practical way is an area of study that needs to be addressed.

While this study did prove the benefits of receiving a graduate degree, it would be interesting to look at the benefits of pursuing an M.B.A. as compared to a M.A. in public relations and/or communication. In addition, it would be interesting to look at the benefits of becoming Accredited in public relations (APR). APR is a certification program supported by the Public Relations Society of America in which participants are tested on topics such as industry knowledge, ethics. It is another way to show clients, coworkers, and others in the industry that you are serious about your craft and value practicing public relations ethically and to the best of your ability. All programs cost money, take a great deal of time and effort. It would be interesting to speak to those who have pursued one, or all of these programs to collect data on the values or lack thereof with each program.

## Appendix A

### Participant Information Sheet

#### Study: Public Relations Practitioners and Advanced Degrees

THE INFORMATION YOU PROVIDE HERE WILL NOT BE MATCHED TO YOUR NAME OR IDENTITY IN ANY WAY. The information you provide here will be kept strictly confidential. The information you provide will be combined with other participants' information into a combined background profile.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION!

1. What is your official title? \_\_\_\_\_
2. What type of business do you work in?
  - Corporate
  - Agency
  - Nonprofit
  - Government
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_
3. In what industry do you work? (circle only one, please)
  - Consumer goods
  - Education
  - Energy
  - Entertainment
  - Government
  - Healthcare

- Manufacturing
- Technology
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

4. What is your main role?

- Media relations
- Internal relations
- External relations
- Community relations
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

5. Please breakdown a typical day by tasks performed.

- a. Communicating with clients \_\_\_\_\_%
- b. Collaborating with coworkers \_\_\_\_\_%
- c. Conducting research \_\_\_\_\_%
- d. Supervising other staff members \_\_\_\_\_%
- e. Meeting with upper management \_\_\_\_\_%
- f. Conducting public relations with publics like media, customers, etc. \_\_\_\_\_%
- g. Writing \_\_\_\_\_%
- h. Creative/graphic design \_\_\_\_\_%
- i. Participating in social media \_\_\_\_\_%
- j. Other \_\_\_\_\_%

6. Please check your highest level of formal education:

- Some high school
- High school diploma (GED)

- Technical or junior college
  - Some college
  - Bachelor's degree
  - Master's degree
  - Doctoral degree
  - Other professional degree, please specify \_\_\_\_\_
7. How long have you worked in the public relations/communication field? \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix B**

### **In-depth Interviews – Interview Protocol**

I am conducting a study on public relations practitioners who have gone back to school to obtain an advanced degree in public relations (communications) and how this degree has affected their careers. I will ask some basic questions about the work you do, and I will also ask some questions about your advanced degree and how obtaining this education has affected your career. If at any time in the interview you would like me to clarify a question, please let me know. Also, feel free to refrain from answering any of these questions. I want to remind you that your name, your identity, your organization's name, and the programs you work on will NOT be revealed in any part of this study. Do you have any questions before we begin?

1. Tell me about your position at [organization]. (rapport-building)
2. What do you like best about the public relations profession? What do you like about that? (rapport-building)
3. What do you like least about the public relations profession? What don't you like about that?(rapport-building)
4. Take me through your day. (rapport-building)
5. What specific tasks do you perform in your job? (roles theory)
  - a. How much of each do you do these tasks?
  - b. In what ways is your job comprised of technical tasks, like writing press releases?
  - c. In what ways is your job comprised of managerial tasks, like counseling the client or planning communication campaigns?

6. In your experience, what differences have you noticed (if any) in the way men and women are treated in your organization? (gender)
7. What kinds of differences (if any) have you noticed between men and women practitioners in the work you do, like with your clients or the campaigns you work on? (gender)
8. In what ways do you think women and men experience public relations differently?
9. How is public relations a unique profession to work in, from a woman's/man's standpoint?
10. What made you want to go back to school to obtain a master's degree?
11. Tell me about your advanced degree? (educational advancement)
  - a. What program did you enter? What factors did you consider?
  - b. What is your exact degree and concentration (if any)?
  - c. What classes did you take?
  - d. In what ways did your employer support your education?
12. What kinds of differences (if any) did you notice between male and female classmates in your classes? (gender)
13. How has this degree affected your day-to-day work? (roles theory)
14. How did your bosses/coworkers treat you before you obtained an advanced degree? (organizational relationships)
15. How did your bosses/coworkers treat you after you obtained an advanced degree? (organizational relationships)
16. In what ways has this degree helped your career? (career change)
  - a. Please explain.



17. In what ways has this degree hindered your career? (career change)
  - a. Please explain.
18. What skills do you feel helps to achieve a level of career success (i.e., learned experiences, motivation, being a “people person”)?
19. What skills obtained from your advanced degree do you feel translated to your professional advancement? (In other words, were there things you learned during your time getting your advanced degree that helped you advance in your job?)
20. What are your career goals? (professional goals)
21. If you could change how women/men experience advanced degrees, how would you? (educational advancement)
22. If you could change how women/men experience working in public relations, how would you change it?
23. In what ways did obtaining an advanced degree hurt or help your career advancement?
24. That is all I have for now. Are there any questions you think I should have asked in order to get at how public relations practitioners make decisions?

Thank you very much for your time and your help.

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