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Educational Choices of Undergraduate Women in Public Relations: A Quantitative Study

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Educational Choices of Undergraduate Women in Public Relations:

A Quantitative Study

by

Moira K. Davis

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
School of Mass Communications
College of Arts and Sciences
University of South Florida

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Keywords: gender, diversity, public relations roles, glass ceiling

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Dedication

It was before I was ever a graduate student at The University of South Florida that I met Dr. Petersen. From our first meeting I knew that she was an admirable woman. Having worked her way through her Masters and then to her Doctorate, I knew that it was her from that I would learn the most from in the two years to come. I have never been more right. Thank you Dr. Petersen for helping me throughout my journey. Thank you for offering me numerous pieces of wisdom and for always leaving me motivated to go out into the world and be the best I can be.

I also have to thank my family and friends. If it wasn't for you all, who knows where I would be. Thank you Dad for always pushing me to keep on going no matter how much I wanted to give up and Mom, all the thank you's in the world couldn't express how much you have helped me. I couldn't have asked for a better mom and friend.

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Educational Choices of Undergraduate Women in Public Relations:

A Quantitative Study

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ABSTRACT

Public relations is one of the fastest growing majors chosen by college students throughout the United States, and most of these students are women. This thesis attempts to define the important role that women play in the practice of public relations and to determine why female students choose this major as their desired field of study more often than men. There is a need for such a study because in 1996 women accounted for only 37 percent of managers in marketing, advertising, and public relations, although they comprised 62 percent of all public relations specialists in this country. This research study seeks to outline the arguments for and against gender diversity efforts, within public relations practice, and to examine the motivations female college students may have for entering such a tumultuous field. To accomplish this purpose, this study will also borrow from established research in academic interest and career development in general.

Chapter One

Introduction

This thesis attempts to define the important role that women play in the practice of public relations and to determine why female students choose this major as their desired field of study more often than men. This is important because the field itself is struggling with numerous challenges such as salary discrepancies and the lack of female practitioners represented in dominant coalitions. These challenges stem in large part from the percentage of women and other underrepresented groups who go into public relations practice. The status of and prognosis for the many women who choose to stake their careers- whether as practitioners or as scholars -- on this vital organizational function are in jeopardy.

It is first necessary to define key terms that will be used throughout the course of this research study. The formal practice of what today is called public relations is less than 100 years old. Yet, during its relatively brief history, the practice has been defined in many widely differing ways, therefore, public relations does not have a universal definition. L.A Grunig, Toth and Hon (2001) defined public relations as “the function responsible for establishing and maintaining relationships with the public.” L.A. Grunig (1996) provided a definition that grows out of the Excellence research tradition¹. She defined public relations as the management of communication between an organization and its publics. The key element is the notion of managed communication – whether it is called public relations, communication management, or organizational communication.

¹ The Excellence research tradition proposes that public relations and communication management should describe the overall planning, execution, and evaluation of an organization’s communication with both external and internal publics – groups that affect the ability of an organization to meet its goals (Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier, 2002).

Public relations serves a wide variety of institutions in society such as businesses, trade unions, government agencies, voluntary associations, foundations, hospitals, schools, colleges, and religious institutions. To achieve their goals, these institutions must develop effective relationships with many different audiences or publics such as employees, members, customers, local communities, shareholders, other institutions, and with society at large (Grunig, L.A, 1996).

Another term that will be used frequently is *gender*, a word that has not been defined consistently, and has been thought of as a definition that combines biological and psychological characteristics (Choi & Hon, 2002). Other researchers such as Howard & Hollander (1997) defined gender as the culturally determined behaviors and personality characteristics that are associated with, but not determined by, biological sex. The present study has adopted the Howard and Hollander definition for use in this research.

Sex is another term that will be used extensively in this literature. This term is often used interchangeably with *gender*, which is incorrect. These two terms have very different meanings. For the purposes of the present research, sex will be defined as the biological characteristics that distinguish male from females (Howard & Hollander, 1997).

Numerous explanations have been published on the reasons why women have flooded public relations in such large numbers. When the influx of women began over 30 years ago, Smith (1986) wrote, “one reason for this ready acceptance of women is that public relations is a highly intuitive business which is a talent inborn in little girls (p.28).” Bates (1983) believed that employers hired women because “women have better

instincts and a different sensitivity to the communication needs of people and institutions and are therefore better suited for the practice (p.31).”

Donato (1990) also provided reasons for this influx including the sex specific demand for women, women as a “better buy,” new publics, female intensive industries, affirmative action, gender ideology, and women’s attraction to public relations.

“The sex specific demand for women” refers to the failure of the occupation of public relations to attract men after 1970. Donato (1990) made the point that the real earnings of male public relations practitioners declined during the 1970-1980 decade. This decline made way for the female practitioners that soon followed.

Broom and Dozier (1986) explained that women as a “better buy” refers to the surplus of women in entry level public relations jobs and their subsequent segregation into technical positions, whereas men were more likely to advance into higher paying managerial jobs. Because there is an overrepresentation of women in technical positions, these women provided a cheaper labor supply than did men (Donato, 1990).

“New publics” refers to the need for public relations to address the emerging groups of women who now own a large portion of the country’s wealth, do the majority of the shopping for the family, and have established voting strength (Grunig, Toth, & Hon, 2001). Donato (1990) added that women have come to represent a commercial value that they had not previously offered to business and society.

“Female intensive industries” are emerging as a result of this acquired wealth. These industries include banks, hospitals, and educational institutions. These fields are more attractive to women because they offer fewer sexist barriers than the corporate

world and provide flexible working arrangements for those practitioners who have to balance work and family life (Donato, 1990).

“Affirmative action” also explains some reasons why more women are hired into public relations. In the 1970s, employers faced for the first time, federal government pressure to hire and promote women into professional and managerial jobs. This initiative has affected many fields, not just public relations (Grunig, Toth, & Hon, 2001).

“Gender ideology” refers to the part of business and society where public relations is considered emotional labor; therefore, it is considered more suitable for women. Donato (1990) explained that public relations practitioners are called on to explain the actions of their employers, to listen to their complaints, and to raise money. All of these functions require social skills for which employers believe women are more suited.

The last of Donato’s (1990) reasons of why women flock to public relations is simply because they are attracted to the field. Grunig, Toth and Hon (2001) claimed that women are attracted to public relations because the field offers them good opportunities. Donato (1990) explained that although women in public relations earned only 60 percent of what men did in 1980, public relations still offered women more than the average female job.

Measuring the impact diversity plays in public relations has long been an interest of many scholars. Minorities in public relations, specifically women, have made many valuable contributions to the field and have yet to be recognized as innovators. According to Grunig, Toth, and Hon (2001), women are referred to as minorities because they represent only a small percentage of top management positions in business. Bates

(1983) suggested if women become a majority in public relations, which is the current trend, the practice would be typecast as “women’s work.” Further, he argued, it will lose what clout it now has as a management function and become a second-class occupation. In the process, gains made over 50 years to build and sustain the value of public relations were predicted to disappear.

Without settling the debate, it is important to acknowledge that by 2005 women are predicted to comprise nearly half of the total labor force in the United States (Dozier, 1988). They are also spending more time at work than did women of the past. At the same time, women are moving beyond the traditional female occupations and into careers formerly dominated by men (L.A. Grunig, Toth, & Hon, 2001). The demands of those occupations, along with economic necessity, have increasingly led women to work full time and year round. Throughout the last few decades there has been a shift in the public relations workforce from a male majority to a female majority. Dozier (1988) reported that the Department of Labor and the Bureau of Labor statistics conducted surveys of the labor force and found that women constituted a clear majority of working practitioners. A more recent figure places the percentage of women working in public relations at 58.6 percent, compared to recent figures that estimate 44 percent of the overall workforce is female (Creedon, 1993). She also noted that if college enrollments in public relations studies provide an indication of future trends, the female majority was destined to continue to grow. This majority has created numerous challenges for the profession, which will be discussed at length in the present research study.

According to Kosicki and Becker (1998), public relations is one of the fastest growing majors chosen by college students throughout the United States, and most of

these students are women. At the time of their study, Grunig, Toth and Hon (2001) claimed that about 80 percent of all public relations students in the approximately 200 universities offering communication majors were women. A 1998 study of journalism and mass communication departments placed about 11,210 U.S. undergraduates in public relations alone; about 4,000 others were in sequences that combined public relations and advertising (Kosicki & Becker, 1998). One could logically conclude that due to the overwhelming numbers of female students majoring in public relations during the past decade, these are the people who should now be filling upper management and executive positions in the field. However, this is not the case.

Two terms have become synonymous in studies pertaining to the large amount of women in the field of public relations. The first term is the “velvet ghetto.” According to L.A. Grunig, Toth, and Hon (2001), public relations was referred to as a velvet ghetto because companies loaded their public relations departments with women to compensate for their scarcity in other professional or managerial capacities that lead more directly to top management. Since public relations is considered a staff function rather than a line function, this adds to the problem of women reaching high levels of management. Staff functions are those that are more technical in nature. Individuals who perform staff functions usually are involved in the development of communications and rarely make business decisions or implement strategies (J. Grunig, 1992). This issue was explored in a 1986 research study that sought to describe the impact of the increasing numbers of women in the public relations field (Dozier, 1988). The report was based on three fundamental assumptions. The first assumption was that women were more likely to perceive themselves as filling a technical rather than a managerial role. The second

assumption was that women were paid substantially less than men. The third assumption sought to explain why, when other professions have gone from male-dominated to female dominated, those professions have all diminished in salary and status (Toth, 1988, pp. 41).

Yet another term frequently used in gender related research in public relations is the “glass ceiling.” This term is used to describe a real, yet invisible barrier that blocks women from obtaining top management jobs. In 1991, the Department of Labor defined the glass ceiling as those artificial barriers based on attitudinal or organizational bias that prevented qualified individuals from advancing upward in their organization into management positions (Wrigley, 2002).

L. A. Grunig, Toth and Hon (2001) reported that women have entered public relations in impressive numbers, yet their advancement to management positions has not kept pace. As with women in the U.S. workforce generally, women in public relations find they need to overcome a glass ceiling when seeking leadership positions in their organizations. In 1996, women accounted for only 37 percent of managers in marketing, advertising, and public relations, although they comprised 62 percent of all public relations specialists in this country.

L. A. Grunig (1995) contended that gender research to that point seemed to be largely designed to compensate for the absence of women, a phenomenon that was seldom questioned before gender became an issue. This research has brought about the challenges women face in the profession and has proposed solutions for making the workplace a more equal playing ground. Despite the extensive research on women in the

profession, most research on gender disparity in public relations has sought the opinion of those people who already practice in the field.

The present research is different. It is an attempt to explain the beginnings of that process wherein women choose a career in public relations by focusing on female undergraduate college students who choose public relations as their academic major. Graduate students and doctoral candidates are not included in this study because their undergraduate work may or may not have been in mass communications and/or public relations, and they may already be working in the field when they return to school for an advanced degree. A suggestion for further research would be to conduct a study extending this type of research to the graduate student population, but it is beyond the scope of the present research.

Ultimately, this research study will examine the arguments for and against gender diversity efforts within public relations practice, and to examine the motivations female college students may have for entering such a tumultuous field. To accomplish this purpose, this study will also borrow from established research in academic interest and career development in general. Specifically, such topics as public relations roles, public relations and education, challenges for women in public relations, salary, and the glass ceiling will be discussed.

In compliance with generally accepted ethical guidelines for social science research, the researcher will keep confidential individual responses and will not report personal identification information in the final analysis. Aggregated results of this research will be publicly available in May 2004.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

The Need for Workplace Diversity

The issue of diversity has resurfaced over and over again regarding the public relations function. The question of why women and other minorities are seen as subordinate in a world dominated by the white businessman is often raised. Not only does the negative attitude toward the influx of women into public relations permeate the field, but it saturates virtually every other field of business as well (Grunig, Toth & Hon, 2000). Various alternative theories have been proposed and academic scholars have researched this phenomenon in sufficient depth to confirm that this problem does indeed exist. Rarely have these studies produced suggestions and recommendations as to what women can do in order to change the way they are perceived in the business environment. What has been demonstrated time and again is that diversity in the workplace does have a positive influence on business objectives.

Warren (1997) argued that promoting diversity in the workplace is one key initiative that will move companies beyond the ordinary. As competition grows even more severe, he said, it is no longer enough to be cost competitive. Today, competitive advantage can only come from being quicker with new and better products and services. It is only if diverse individuals work together in teams in a context where they can learn from the outcome of their actions that successful innovation will occur. The key idea in

Warren's judgement is that the presence of diversity in the workforce is a major source of innovation.

Numerous definitions of diversity have been presented by an array of scholars. Three of these definitions are relevant for this thesis. First, researchers Hon and Brunner (2000) defined diversity as the difference in ethnicity, race, gender, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, disability, veteran status, age, national origin, and cultural and personal perspectives. Second, the Society of Human Resource Management defined diversity as an organization's culture and systems to ensure all people are given the opportunity to contribute to the business goals of the company (Hon & Brunner, 2000). Fine (1996) presented a third definition of diversity as differences that can increase organizational effectiveness and market competitiveness.

In one discussion of diversity, additional definitions of gender differences and gender stereotyping are provided. Creedon (1993) maintained that gender differences are the set of attributes socially and culturally constructed on the basis of birth assignment as male or female. Dozier (1988) presented another example. He defined gender stereotypes as beliefs many people hold about typical characteristics of men and women. He argued that gender stereotypes could become self-fulfilling prophecies that can hinder the stereotyped groups; this is the current situation for women in public relations. Dozier (1988) concluded that female stereotypes work in concert with other factors to exclude women from participation in management decision-making. These factors taken together create a "glass ceiling" that blocks the participation of women practitioners in organizational decision-making.

Several demographic and business trends have combined to push diversity to the top of the business agenda. First, increasing diversity is a worldwide trend that has stemmed in part from the changing demographics of the United States. Hon and Brunner (2000) report that by 2055 or 2060, the majority of all people in the United States will be Latino, Black and Asian. At the same time, two-thirds of the increase in the U.S. labor force over the next decade will be women starting or returning to work (Hon & Brunner, 2000). Hon and Brunner (2000) argued that most organizations simply can't afford to overlook women or people of color, and that many organizations have come to realize that if they are not doing all they can to attract and retain members of underrepresented groups, they stand to lose a large portion of workforce talent.

From the research reviewed thus far, one could conclude that there are two schools of thought on diversity in the workplace relevant for the present discussion. Many agree that the more different kinds of people that contribute to the team effort, the better. One opinion on the importance of diversity in the workplace is that in order to manage diversity effectively, a corporation must value diversity; it must have diversity, and it must change the organization to accommodate diversity and make it an integral part of the organization (Glibert, Stead, & Ivancevich, 1999). Grunig, Grunig and Dozier (2002) agreed that the value of diversity in an organization can be explained by Weick's (1979) principle of requisite variety – the idea that organizations are most effective when they have as much variety in the organization as there is in the environment. The point made by these and other management scholars is that the changing diversity of the environment should be reflected in the corporate structure of America.

On the opposite side of the coin are those who oppose promoting diversity in the workplace. The opponents of workplace diversity seem to agree that increasing diversity and team-based work structures can spark office conflict. According to Pirisi (1999) ethnicity, religion, and gender are just a few of the major factors that lead people to clash over opposing viewpoints. She pointed out that even one's work or educational background can influence one's personal perspective. Additionally, Parisi (1999) said that people tend to shut out information that doesn't mesh with their own beliefs, especially when it comes from someone they don't like or trust. The fear here is that diversity awareness will create distant and unproductive employees.

Critics of diversity efforts say that diversity policies and programs have resulted in lowered standards for hiring and promotion as well as in quotas and reverse discrimination. Another argument is that champions of diversity are more interested in imposing "politically correct" thoughts and speech on organizations than heralding divergent opinions and experiences (Hon & Brunner, 2000).

Women in Business

Women are fairly new entrants to the world of business. American history shows that our country's value system was based on economic ideals and a strong foundation of entrepreneurship. In those early days, only men engaged in business practices. The early, traditional role of women made working outside the home unusual and the economic status of the nation as a whole made it unnecessary. Based on early belief systems, a woman's place was not in the office but in the home.

Despite the fact that it has become more socially acceptable for women to work outside the home, many individuals still adhere to old stereotypes and beliefs. Creedon

(1993) gave one example of such a stereotype. She maintained that in the mid 1800's empirical studies concluded that a woman's brain was somewhat smaller than a man's brain. This led scientists to argue that women were less intelligent than men, rather than to the recognition that brain size was relative to the physical size of one's body. This is just one of the many myths that to this day impact how working women are perceived in the business world.

Women in business today are forced to make choices on a daily basis. L. A Grunig, Toth, and Hon (2001) reported, after numerous focus groups and in depth interviews, that women can no longer be traditional mothers and corporate executives at the same time. These researchers claimed that women must make sacrifices to advance their careers, and women are generally less willing than men to do so. Turk (as quoted in L.A Grunig, Toth & Hon, 2001) explained, "any women in any business who sets her sights on top management must be willing to give up some things -- spend less time with family, or cut back on social or additional professional activities or decide not to have children (p. 99)." Quotations such as these initiate such questions from students as, do men ever have to make these decisions?

As in many other fields, throughout the world women have been virtually absent from top executive positions, and at the lower levels, women have been segregated into lower paying clerical occupations. The few women in executive news positions typically handled traditional women's features and less important reporting assignments. Women who do make it to the top may dissociate themselves from younger woman, believing that others should have to sacrifice as much as they did (Creedon, 1993).

Business Week (2003, May 26) reported recently that ninety percent of the world's billionaires are men. Among the super rich, only one woman, Gap Inc. co-founder, Doris Fisher made rather than inherited her fortune. Men continue to dominate in the highest paying jobs in most fields and women still face sizable obstacles in the pay gap, the glass ceiling, and the struggle to balance home and family commitments.

Equal Employment Opportunities (EEO) and affirmative action policies have been implemented in order to minimize gender inequities in the workplace. According to Purvis (2001), in most instances the opportunities to move beyond this entry level benchmark still are contrived, controlled, and limited by men despite women's impressive academic credentials, accomplished skills and proven job performance.

Creedon (1993) maintained that if not for the betterment of society, then business leaders need to eliminate gender inequities for the financial prosperity of their companies. Discrimination is more than a personal detriment to individual working women. It tends to lower productivity, affect morale, and under utilizes abilities.

Creedon (1993) argued that numerous working women possess impressive credentials and skills. Today's business organizations, given the competitive global economy, really cannot afford to overlook or dismiss the talents and potential of any of its workers regardless of sex. The resolution of workplace inequities will require significant social change over a long period of time. However, there are many ways in which individuals can assist in pushing along the social change necessary to establish parity in working relationships.

Women in Mass Communications

Just as women in business are relative newcomers in the workplace, women in mass communications fields are an even newer phenomenon. The progress of women in the mass communication workforce over the years has been slow at best, and there is evidence of slippage in some areas (Creedon, 1993). Creedon (1993) provided several reasons for this slowing progress. First, mass communication is a profit-driven, advertising supported business, and the entrance of women in the field has not offset these relationships. Second, females entering the news industry find that those who define the news are still predominately white males, and these editors and owners control hiring and firing decisions. Traditional professional attitudes also have contributed to the devaluing of women's concerns. Third, workplace routines and norms force reporters to confirm to dominant values, which are typically male, rather than act on empowering values, that are more closely associated with women.

Creedon (1993) proclaimed that one issue on the minds of many professional women in mass communications concerns the status of the field. According to Reskin & Roos (1990), professions that have been feminized in the past, such as certain areas of banking, teaching, and nursing, have seen a reduction in salary and status. Creedon (1993) argued that many women in the field wonder if the road to top management is closed due to the overwhelming amount of women entering the profession. This question was posed to numerous men in mass communications and their answers fell on a continuum of agreement.

One executive explained, "we don't have men and women at this company. We just have people (Cline & Toth, 1993, p. 185)." Others welcomed women into their departments, feeling that such skills as empathy and understanding were valuable to

organizational goals. At the other end of the spectrum were those that thought a woman's place was anywhere but in management. To quote one business executive, "I don't like to hire women managers since they will take time off when their kids are sick. They will only get pregnant and quit (Cline & Toth, 1993, p. 185)." Yet another focus group participant said, "In the past my clients wouldn't accept a women executive and I don't want to get them angry (Creedon, 1993, p. 186)." With many of these stereotypes still present in various business environments, it is difficult for women to obtain professional success.

Public Relations Roles

Gender inequities in the role tasks of female and male public relations practitioners are well documented. A number of studies have indicated that many women are segregated into the lower level technician role, spending the majority of their time on such routine activities as writing, editing, and handling media relations (O'Neil, 2003). Conversely, more men are promoted into the more powerful managerial roles, engaging in such activities as counseling senior management, and making key policy decisions. Even when women perform the managerial role, they still tend to spend more time on technician type activities than do men (Dozier, et al., 1988, and Toth & L. A. Grunig, 2000). Because technicians remain relatively isolated from important decision making processes, technicians do not have as much power as do managers within an organization's hierarchy.

The so-called "traditional role" of women generally has greatly evolved over the past three decades. Today, as compared with 1980, it is not unusual for women to be in the workforce while also balancing home and family life responsibilities. The problem

for women in business today stems from old stereotypes and traditional values. Frieze et al. (1978) suggested stereotypes that speak to masculinity and femininity have assigned power and dominance to men and subordination to women. Traditional sex roles for women have typically cast them as caregivers and nurturers. Sex-based stereotypes have worked against women in public relations in a number of ways and these stereotypes have caused women to take on specific roles in the workplace.

Choi and Hon (2002) contended that traits such as empathy, dependence, passivity, sympathy, sensitivity, nurturance, shyness, and being high-strung are described as “female characteristics,” whereas traits like rationality, activeness, dominance, competitiveness, self confidence, aggressiveness, independence, boastfulness, and hostility are more likely used to describe “male characteristics.” According to Buzzanell (1995), when women took over what had traditionally been men’s jobs, such as public relations, they felt they had to display stereotypical masculine traits to be respected. In essence, women emulated men because it was believed that men’s traits were required to be a successful manager.

The relationship between public relations roles and gender has ignited the greatest research response from the academic community. One operational definition of the term *role* provided by Toth (1988) is that it is the position in a given social structure, or the actor in relation to others, or on the activities of organizational members. According to research conducted by Broom and Dozier (1986), there were four roles public relations practitioners reported performing most often. They included the expert prescriber, the communication facilitator, the problem- solving process facilitator, and the

communication technician. These authors purpose in role research was to abstract distinct roles in the day- to- day operations of public relations practitioners.

Broom (1982) defined the expert prescriber as an authority on both public relations problems and their solutions. He said, this role takes shape when management is content with leaving the public relations function in the hands of the “expert.” Further, the communication facilitator serves as a liaison and mediator between the organization and its publics, making the practitioner serve as an information broker. The third role described by Broom was the problem-solving process facilitator, where the practitioner was a member of the dominant coalition and guided other members of the organization through problem- solving strategies. In this role many people may be involved in making public relations decisions. The last role, the communication technician, was one of the most common described in Broom’s (1986) research. This form of practitioner was responsible for creating the communication materials to implement the public relations decisions made by others.

Shortly after Broom’s (1986) role research was developed, gender discrepancies started to become apparent in public relations practice. It was in his 1982 research that Broom discovered that women tended to cluster in the communication technician role, while men tended to be in more of a managerial role, serving as expert prescribers, problem-solving process facilitators, or communication facilitators. Grunig, Toth, and Hon (2001) claimed that women have been so socially programmed to take secondary roles that they almost apologize for being tops in their fields. Women doubt themselves frequently according to these authors, which may contribute to their inability to climb the corporate ladder.

Another reason some scholars have given for the large percentage of women serving in the technician's role is organizational culture. Grunig, Toth and Hon (2001) defined organizational culture as a historically transmitted system of beliefs, symbols, and values. As organizations change over time, their cultures usually shift in order to accommodate new societal norms, such as the entrance of women into the workplace. The problem with this idea is that organizational culture still places a large emphasis on the male worldview. In their own research, Grunig, Toth and Hon (2001) found that women are relegated to the technician's role in large part because of the job segregation that results from a masculine organizational culture.

Public Relations and Education

According to a recent article in *Business Week* (2003, May 26), for 350 year, men have outnumbered women on college campuses. Now, in every state, every income bracket, every racial and ethnic group, and most industrialized nations, women reign, earning an average of 57 percent of all bachelor's degrees and 58 percent of all Masters degrees in the United States alone. There are currently 133 females getting their bachelor's degree for every 100 male students. This number is expected to grow to 142 women per 100 men by 2010. Thomas G. Mortenson, a senior scholar at the Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education told *Business Week* that "women are on a tear through the education system (p. 30)."

This trend has been referred to as the "new gender gap." Scholars say that this new gap has developed because over the past 30 years, nearly every inch of educational progress has gone to women. According to a 1991 study conducted by the United States Department of Education, U. S. women were among the best educated in the world (as

cited in Grunig, Toth & Hon, 2001). Adelman (1991) agreed that for some time now women have generally been better educated than men who hold the same types of jobs.

Creedon (1993) suggested that women's educational excellence begins in high school. A massive study conducted by the United States Department of Education revealed that women's high school class rank exceeds that of men by at least 10 points. Creedon (1993) also reported that women outranked men in math, science, and foreign languages and were more likely to win scholarships to college. In addition, Creedon (1993) found that women earned their degrees faster and had higher grade point averages than men. Those women who went on to graduate school are considered more qualified as well.

Hon (1995) reported that college curricula could be contributing to women's hiring into communication skill jobs – i.e. the technician role – because the focus of their education was typically on technical skills rather than managerial skills. A 1991 study at the University of Maryland found that female undergraduate students in public relations were not aware of a gender bias in their field. If they were aware that the problem existed, they believed that it wouldn't affect them or their careers. In fact, these students said there was too much time spent discussing such gender issues in public relations during class (Wrigley, 2002).

Another problem offered by Creedon (1993) is that new graduates are coming out with public relations degrees, but if they are women, larger agencies tend to start them out as receptionists. Such agencies would never consider starting a man as a receptionist instead, they are almost always started as junior executives. Communicators across the country agree that women are not taken as seriously as men because they cannot be part

of the “gang” and therefore face resistance to becoming real members of the management team (Creedon, 1993).

L.A Grunig, Toth, and Hon (2001) have suggested tactics for making public relations more appealing to male college students. They reported that feminization of the field means many men have no desire to work for women, the salaries offered are too low, and affirmative action programs favor women applying for entry-level positions. Hunt and Thompson (1997) claimed that using quota systems to ensure that males appear in each class and in the same proportion as females is one approach to balancing the profession. This may help women achieve a higher level of credibility and elevate their status in the practice of public relations.

Keeping these things in mind, some scholars fear that bright young women who have much to contribute to the public relations profession may be better off in other fields where women have made greater strides toward equality (L.A. Grunig, Toth, & Hon, 2001).

Creedon (1993) interviewed an unnamed president of a major public relations agency who advised women, “if you want to get into top management, not just public relations management, get out of public relations all together. Go into some other line of area, such as finance or whatever is the route to the top (p.14).”

Challenges for Women in Public Relations

The field of public relations faces a great number of challenges on its own without also including issues brought about by gender discrepancies in general. First, the value of public relations is often overlooked due to the versatility and previous reputation of the field. Many business leaders see the public relations department as an unnecessary

cost and it is often the department that suffers most in a budget crunch or layoff. The argument has been made that if public relations practitioners can quantify their effectiveness within their organizations, companies will rely more on public relations efforts than ever before. Grunig, Grunig, and Dozier (2000) claimed that because of its intangibility, public relations often has been believed to suffer at budget time and particularly during financial crises, because there is no way to demonstrate its worth.

In the future of public relations, establishing and maintaining credibility may become the largest focus. According to Hutchins (2001), public relations needs to steer away from its flackery reputation earned during the Great Depression to its new role as a leader of strategic relationship management.

Unlike years previous, public relations practitioners are now responsible for much more in their jobs. Some researchers believe that this added responsibility might be one of the reasons women are being surpassed when it comes to promotion and salary. Wrigley (2002) agreed that the function is often responsible not just for public relations, but also for marketing communications, crisis management, employee communication, and more.

Along the same lines is the issue of encroachment. Although public relations practitioners are now responsible for more than ever before, other departments are starting to perform most or all of the public relations function. L.A. Grunig, Toth, & Hon (2001) defined encroachment as the management of public relations by non-public relations professionals. More and more organizations are grouping public relations under the marketing or human resources umbrella rather than segmenting them into different

departments. While these functions are important, many businesses are failing to recognize the assorted benefits that public relations can bring to the table.

Since the late 1980s when the field first became over 50 percent female, there have been several professional studies reporting gender differences in such areas as, sexual harassment, job satisfaction, hiring, salaries, and promotion (Aldoory & Toth, 2000).

The literature on the placement of women into public relations positions suggests that women have been increasingly hired in the field over the past 20 years. It also prevents evidence for the absence of women in positions of top management (Grunig, Toth & Hon, 2001). The United States Department of Labor reported that in 1979 women made up less than 44 percent of the public relations field. In 2000 that has drastically changed, with 70 percent of the field being female (Aldoory & Toth, 2000). According to the latest census, women account for 61.1 percent of all public relations specialists in the United States (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2001). Aldoory and Toth (2000) also pointed out another important trend – the hiring of women in public relations happened much more dramatically than the entry of women into all other occupations.

The Glass Ceiling

The creation of an invisible glass ceiling over upper management jobs of all types has ultimately developed a caste system in corporate America of men at the top and women lower down (Grunig, Toth & Hon, 2001). Although government reports and the work of researchers have confirmed the existence of a glass ceiling for women, no clear conclusions have been drawn about what has caused such a ceiling. In their research,

Wright, L. A. Grunig, Springston, and Toth (1991) concluded that even when presented with detailed and well-researched information regarding the glass ceiling and other inequities, men have denied the problem is real.

Stone (1987; as quoted in L. A. Grunig, Toth & Hon 2001), suggested that the glass ceiling was created as a result of women being less likely than men to aspire to upper management. Numerous studies conducted in the late 1970s also suggested that women's career goals were more conservative than men's, and that women had less effective strategies for achieving their goals. According to Wrigley (2002), this was still the case 25 years later.

Wrigley's (2002) research found that there are five possible contributors to the glass ceiling for women in public relations and communication management including denial by both males and females alike, gender role socialization, women not supporting other women, historical precedence, and corporate culture.

Researchers have concluded that denial serves as one of the largest contributors to the continuation of the glass ceiling. Wrigley (2002) believed that the denial of the existence of a glass ceiling was the result of a rather complicated process in our culture that works to maintain the status quo, and thus denies that discrimination against women is present in the workplace or elsewhere in our culture.

From the review of the literature, it is evident that both sexes are guilty of denying that a glass ceiling exists. According to Wrigley (2000), by denying that a glass ceiling exists, women are refusing to confront the structure for their inability to be treated fairly in the workplace. Blame is then turned back on the women herself, on a lack of experience or credentials, or not working hard enough. The structure is not questioned;

rather, women start to question themselves. Therefore, the status quo remains unchallenged.

While there are numerous believers in the glass ceiling phenomenon, there are also disbelievers. The 2000 Catalyst Census of Women Corporate Officers and top earners focused their attention on Fortune 500 organizations in a study that found that the percentage of women taking an executive leadership role in Fortune 500 companies was greatly increasing. The study reported that in 2000, 12.5 percent of corporate officers were women, and projected that women will represent 16.5 percent in 2005, 20.1 percent in 2010, and 27.4 percent in 2020 (Wrigley, 2002). Those who refute the glass-ceiling phenomenon believe that with such increasing numbers, few barriers presently exist for women pursuing careers in senior management positions.

However, Choi and Hon (2002) reported different statistics on the same population group. These researchers reported that women comprise only 10 percent of senior managers in Fortune 500 companies; less than 4 percent of the uppermost ranks of chief executive officers, presidents, and executive vice presidents; and less than 3 percent of top corporate earners.

Salary

One of the largest concerns for female public relations practitioners is the salary gap with male practitioners. In 1995, Simmons Market Research conducted a survey of Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) members and confirmed a salary difference based on sex. Aldoory and Toth (2000) confirmed that disparities continued between the salaries of men and women. The Salary Survey of Public Relations Professionals conducted in 1995 reported that on average, men's salaries were 45 percent higher than

women's. In 1998, *PR Reporter* found that men's median salary was \$72,000, which was \$16,000 more than women's average salary of \$56,000. Wrigley (2002) broke these numbers down further when she reported that for every dollar male executives make, women executives are paid \$0.68. *Business Week* (1997) also noted that in all its research, those women who do make it to the top are still paid substantially less than their male counterparts. While these studies used different populations, salary disparities still existed.

Although these most recent surveys indicate large salary disparities between men and women, there are also other factors to consider. Among them are age, years of experience, type of organization in which the practitioner is employed, and the role the practitioner plays within the organization. L. A. Grunig, Toth and Hon (2001) agreed that because women tended to have less public relations experience and were usually younger than their male colleagues, their salaries were lower. These authors also claimed that women tend to cluster in lower paying kinds of organizations and that they worked in lower paying fields, which may be additional reasons for the salary gap.

However, when such things as experience, age, and type of organization are held constant, a large salary gap still existed between men and women. Creedon's (1993) research demonstrated that the gender gap was apparent at every level of experience and increased as a practitioner's years in the field increased. Those findings were similar to studies commissioned by the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) in 1990 and then again in 1995 that assessed salary and other demographic information about its members. In those studies, researchers found that regardless of experience level, the

earnings of women surveyed tended to lag behind men's earnings (L.A. Grunig, Toth, & Hon, 2001).

Some have claimed that such salary disparity exists because the studies that are conducted are only done with members of professional organizations such as the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) or International Association of Business Communicators (IABC), and are thus not representative of the entire field. According to Professor Robert Kendall of the University of Florida, in 1999 there were more than 400,000 practicing public relations specialists and members of professional associations in public relations and that accounted for less than 15 percent of all people who may have been practicing in the field at the same time (Grunig, Toth, & Hon, 2001). Kendall maintained that those studies' results are inconclusive because their samples were not representative. Another argument regarding the salary gap is the idea that surveying public relations people who have joined a professional association should suggest that researchers know most about people who care enough about their work to seek to develop themselves professionally (L.A. Grunig, Toth, & Hon, 2001).

Another argument points out that women's pay, relative to that of men, is catching up and that the numbers of women serving as top executives and on boards of directors is growing each year (Wrigley, 2002).

Regardless of the argument, salary disparity has been one of the largest discussions concerning practicing public relations practitioners and researchers.

Sociological Issues

Some scholars have suggested that the most effective public relations efforts grow from a worldview that is feminine. According to L. A. Grunig, Toth and Hon (2001), this

means public relations that is practiced as balanced, two-way communication between an organization and its stakeholder groups to make the greatest contribution to organizational effectiveness. Another dimension associated with the feminine worldview is women's greater regard for establishing and maintaining relationships. Knowles & Moore (1998) concluded that about the only testable difference between men and women seems to be women's greater ability in interpersonal relationships.

Feminist public relations scholars have provided diverse voices on the meaning of gender in public relations, but most agree that feminism is its academic counterpart. Rakow (1989) believed that feminist theories are the lenses through which to see the gender issue in a different light by valuing things feminine and those characteristics traditionally relegated to women. Toth (2001) defined the term *feminism* as respect for all voices devalued by the dominant culture including but not limited to people of color, people with disabilities, people of different ages and socioeconomic classes, and lesbians and gay men.

Discussion of gender and public relations often leads to the discussion of various feminist theories. The argument of many feminist public relations scholars is representative of the structuralist perspective. This theoretical perspective assumes that the organizational environment may be the reason some female practitioners lack influence in their organizations. According to O'Neil (2003), the structuralist perspective refers to the varying behaviors of men and women due to conditions inside the organization. Structuralists contend that power is embedded in the organization and constrains the influence of women in a number of occupations including public relations.

According to the structuralist perspective, the structure of the organizational environment is assumed to be the primary determinant of outcomes such as career success and one's ability to exert influence. Because women statistically occupy the technician's role in larger numbers, women's positions in the organization have hindered the ability for all women to move up the corporate ladder (O'Neil, 2003).

Advocates of this socialization perspective maintain that women tend not to fare as well as men in organizations because their socialized behaviors are not as valued as those of men, regardless of structure. In contrast to this view, structuralist theorists believe that apparent gender differences in influence are due to power differences created by the organizational structure, not socialization.

Early research on gender issues contained few theoretical perspectives. For example, the research on salary surveys contained the assumptions of what we now know today as human capital theory. Toth (2001) reported that the human capital theory came from the work of economists who assumed that the investment in education and work experience was equally available to men and women. Human capital theorists assumed that factors such as job opportunities, job training, job tenure, and educational preparation were gender neutral. Another premise of this theory is that the choices made by individuals lead to specific outcomes.

Reskin and Roos (1990) identified factors that would stop the rational investment in education and work experience that led to salary increases. The factors included organizations having a preference for men over women, in some cases because they were a "better fit" for the salaries or because men had personality traits appropriate for the job. Other factors have also been identified, such as women's lack of inclusion in networking

groups, limited mentoring, inflexible work arrangements, sexual harassment, and lack of parental leave policies (Toth, 2001).

Other theories have also been proposed in order to understand the overall framework of excellent public relations departments or organizations as. The Excellence Theory² as proposed by J. E. Grunig (1992) is an extensive theory covering the organizational need and usefulness of the public relations function. This theory is one of the most popular and most highly regarded theories in contemporary public relations research. One major premise of the theory states that communication has value to an organization because it helps to build good long-term relationships with strategic publics. This theory is relevant to a discussion of gender disparities in public relations because existing research shows that women have better relationship building skills, and thus may be better suited for a career in public relations (J.E. Grunig, 1992).

J.E. Grunig's Excellence Theory maintains that excellent public relations requires diversity in race and gender if an organization is to understand adequately the diversity outside the organization. Grunig (1992) added that organizations that value diversity provide hospitable environments for the majority of women who now make up the public relations practice.

In sum, the feminization of the public relations profession will limit the potential of a public relations department if the organization discriminates against women, who frequently play the dual role of manager and technician. Excellent public relations departments and effective organizations have developed mechanisms to help practitioners

² The excellence theory sought to explain why senior managers with the most power in the organization – the dominant coalition – often failed to recognize and appreciate their dependency on the public relations function. It also sought to find out why public relations practitioners often lacked the expertise needed to meet that dependency even if the dominant coalition recognizes it (J.E.Grunig, 1992) .

gain the power they need to advance from the technician to the management role and to implement their understanding of two-way symmetrical public relations (L.A. Grunig, J. E. Grunig, & Dozier, 2002)

Chapter 3

Theoretical Perspective

Social Cognitive Theory

While there has been limited research conducted on why and how undergraduate students choose their colleges majors, there has been extensive research and numerous theories explaining career development in general. The social cognitive theory proposed by Bandura (1986) and further developed by Lent (1994), brought these two issues together. The basic premise of the social cognitive theory helps explain a number of important factors in student motivation for choosing an undergraduate major.

According to Lent, Brown, and Hackett (1994), Bandura's social cognitive theory highlights a variety of cognitive, vicarious, self-regulatory, and self-reflective processes. Lent, Brown, & Hackett (1994) explained that the social cognitive theory suggests that people act on their judgments of what they can do, as well as on their beliefs about the likely effects of various actions.

Bandura is also responsible for the social learning theory, which proposes that humans have evolved an advanced capacity for observational learning that enables them to expand their knowledge and skills on the basis of information conveyed by modeling influences (Bandura, 1986).

Lent (1994) expanded Bandura's original work and proposed a social cognitive theory of career development. While all of the above-mentioned processes are assumed to play an important role in guiding psychosocial functioning, Lent's framework emphasized three social cognitive mechanisms that seem particularly relevant to career

development. They include self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, and goal representations.

Self- efficacy refers to people’s judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994). This is the aspect of social cognitive theory that has received the most attention in career literature. Lent, Brown, and Hackett (1994) asserted that self-efficacy helps to determine one’s choice of activities and environments, as well as one’s effort expenditure, persistence, thought patterns, and emotional reactions when confronted by obstacles. Introduced into career literature by Hackett & Betz in 1981, self-efficacy has been found to be predictive of academic and career-related choice and performance indices.

Other important components of social cognitive theory are personal beliefs about probable response outcomes, termed “outcome expectations.” Outcome expectations involve the imagined consequences of performing particular behaviors of interest (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994). For example, “if I do this, what will happen?” Bandura (1986) provided examples of outcome expectations such as the anticipation of physical, social, and self-evaluative outcomes. Examples include monetary gains, approval from peers, and self-satisfaction, all of which may importantly affect career behavior as well as interest.

Social cognitive theory also holds that goals play an important role in the self-regulation of behavior. Lent, Brown, and Hackett (1994) defined a goal as the determination to engage in a particular activity or to affect a particular future outcome. They asserted that by setting goals, people help to organize and guide their behavior, to

sustain it over long periods of time even in the absence of external reinforcement, and to increase the likelihood that desired outcomes would be attained.

Lent's (1994) extension of the social cognitive theory added three models that are particularly interesting when relating them to career development. The socio-cognitive core of the framework includes interest development, choice, and performance. While all models will be explained to provide background knowledge of the theory, the first two models will be of particular interest for the purposes of the present research.

According to Lent, Brown and Hackett (1994), interest development begins over the course of childhood and adolescence. During this time people's environments expose them to a wide variety of activities of potential career relevance. They also observe or hear about others performing various occupational tasks. Not only are they exposed to diverse activities but they are also reinforced for pursuing certain activities over others. These activities in turn become possible career interests. Through repeated activity engagement, modeling, and feedback from those individuals deemed important, children and adolescents refine their skills, develop personal performance standards, form a sense of their efficacy in particular tasks, and acquire certain expectations about the outcomes of their performance (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994). These authors believed that this process repeats itself continuously over the lifespan, although it is perhaps most fluid up until late adolescence or early adulthood, when interests regarding broad domains of work activity tend to stabilize.

The choice and performance models extend from the interest development model. Once interests crystallize, choice will partly be determined by activities at which people view themselves to be efficacious and those that will produce the most desirable

outcomes (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994). When these choices produce the ideal outcome, the behavior is rewarded and thus performance peaks. It is important to note that, while various types of outcome expectations help to foster interests, Bandura (1986), believed that self-evaluative outcomes played an influential role in interest development. He argued that some of the most valuable rewards stem from the satisfaction derived from fulfilling personal standards, rather than in tangible payoffs. These three models work together and contribute to career interest in all of its stages of life.

Research Question

This review of the research literature has discussed the importance of valuing diversity based on Grunig's excellence research tradition, the history of women in business and more specifically in mass communication, public relations roles, public relations and education, as well as the various challenges faced by the public relations practice as a whole. However, the focus of this thesis was to in answer one fundamental research question --*What are the reasons female students have for entering the public relations major in a four-year bachelor's degree program?*

Rarely have research studies focused on why people, specifically women, are interested in mass communications careers. Because of the large percentage of women who enter this field each year, it was of the greatest interest to this researcher to explore the reasons for this trend. Most studies of the role that women play in the practice of public relations have focused on practitioners who are already in the field. The present study is the first of its kind to explore why students choose public relations as their college major in the first place.

Chapter 4

Methodology

Survey Methodology

When a research question seeks to gauge more than a quick snapshot of a public, quantitative survey research serves as the best method (Stacks, 2002). It is the goal of this research study to determine why female undergraduate students choose a college major in public relations, and quantitative survey methods are the most appropriate to document current conditions or attitudes (Wimmer & Dominick, 2000). Accordingly, a quantitative survey design was chosen to conduct this research because it will most logically be able to answer the primary research question -- what are the reasons female students have for entering the public relations major?

Surveys have certain well- defined advantages. First, they can be used to investigate problems in realistic settings. For example, newspaper reading, television viewing, and consumer behavior can be examined where they happen, rather than in a laboratory or screening room under artificial conditions. Second, the cost of surveys is reasonable considering the amount of information that can be gathered. A third advantage is that a large amount of data can be collected with relative ease from a variety of people. Survey research also allows researchers to examine many variables at once such as lifestyle information, motives, intentions, attitudes and demographics (Wimmer & Dominick, 200).

Another reason to use this form of research, according to Stacks (2002), is based on the goal of a survey to obtain data that can be generalized to a larger population of interest. While surveys are fairly long and complicated attempts to gauge how a

particular public perceives an issue or event or person, they allow the researcher to probe in a controlled and prescribed way why respondents feel as they do (Stacks, 2002).

While there are numerous advantages to using survey research, limitations also exist. The first and most important disadvantage is that independent variables cannot be manipulated in the way they are in laboratory experiments. Without control over independent variables, the researcher cannot be certain whether the relationships between independent and dependent variables are causal or non-causal. A second disadvantage is that inappropriate wording or placement of questions within a questionnaire can bias results. The questionnaire must be worded and questions placed unambiguously to elicit the desired information. A third disadvantage is the potential for talking to the wrong people. Choosing the wrong sample can be detrimental because if it is chosen incorrectly, the generalizations to larger populations will be wrongly based (Wimmer and Dominick, 2002).

Respondent Sample

The sample chosen to represent the population of undergraduate students at the brink of choosing an academic major in public relations were those registered students in two sections of an introductory undergraduate mass communication course at a large public university in the Southeast. The Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (ACEJMC), the agency responsible for the evaluation of professional journalism and mass communication programs in colleges and universities nationwide, accredits this university's program. Only 25 percent of the 450 journalism and mass communications programs in the United States are accredited by the ACEJMC. This university's mass communications program hosts student chapters of the major mass

communications professional organizations, including the Advertising Club (an affiliate of the American Advertising Federation), Kappa Tau Alpha (the national mass communication honorary society), the Public Relations Student Society of America, the Radio-Television News Directors Association, and the Society of Professional Journalists.

“Mass Communication and Society,” is the title of the class that provided the respondents for this study. It is designed to provide the history, theory, processes, and philosophy of mass communications and the mass media in the United States, and their relationship to the other major institutions of American society. It also serves as the course that will provide the most diverse sample selection because enrollment is always very high. This class serves as a prerequisite for all students who choose public relations, advertising, journalism, or telecommunications as their college major. Additionally, it is a general education course at this university, meaning that students from other disciplines are also enrolled. Students who chose a mass communication related major must successfully complete this course along with a mass media writing course before they will be allowed to take any other courses in the mass communication program curriculum.

Though the research subjects of interest in this study are female public relations students, all students, mass communication majors or not, were asked to complete the survey for several important reasons. The first reason is so that revealing the specific purpose of the study does not skew the data. Second, surveying a variety of students will provide comparison groups within and outside mass communication on the variables of

interest. This collection of data will thus be useful for future studies of this sort in all the fields of practice under the mass communications umbrella.

Measures

Four theoretical constructs were measured in this research study. They are perception, outcome expectation, gender, and self- efficacy. Two of these constructs, outcome expectation and self-efficacy, were borrowed from Lent et al.'s (1994) research on career development and adapted for purposes of mass communications and public relations. Because Lent, Brown and Hackett (1994) believed that the process of interest development repeats itself continuously over the lifespan and is perhaps most fluid up until late adolescence or early adulthood, the inclusion of their constructs adds national credibility to this research study. The complete survey instrument can be found in Appendix A.

The first theoretical construct, perception, refers to what respondents think of the various majors that make up the mass communication program at the participating university -- the advertising, journalism, public relations, and telecommunication sequences. Respondents were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with statements focusing on various desirable characteristics of each field, such as the high potential for making a lot of money, the field's glamour, opportunities for high levels of personal prestige or fame, and the power that can be gained from practicing in these fields. A Likert type scale was used to measure these variables, with a 1-7 scale, where "1" indicated strong disagreement with the statement and "7" indicated strong agreement with the statement. The survey items were taken from *Careers in Communication and*

Entertainment text which described common reasons students give for entering various fields of study (Mogel, 2000).

The second theoretical construct, outcome expectation, refers to what tasks students would expect to be performed by those who complete degrees in the four fields of mass communications practice. These measures were taken a Communication text that highlighted various tasks people reported performing in each of the four Mass Communication sequences (Mogel, 2000). Lent (1994) referred to outcome expectation as the imagined consequences of performing particular behaviors. The first set of measures helped to provide the answers to what tasks the respondents thought graduates in each of the four sequences would be doing in their mass communication career.

Respondents were asked a series of questions to determine their level of interest in various job functions across careers in mass communication for purposes of comparison with students whose interests were in other mass communications fields. These tasks were separated into managerial-level tasks and technician level tasks, also to facilitate comparison. An equal number of both types of tasks were included in the survey instrument. A Likert type scale was used to measure these variables, with a 1-7 scale where “1” indicated strong disagreement with the statement and “7” indicated strong agreement with the statement.

The third theoretical construct measured was gender. As stated in the literature review, *gender* combines biological and psychological characteristics and is not just based on whether a person is physically a man or a woman. Choi and Hon, (2002) identified specific traits that are more male-oriented, along with traits that are more female-oriented, and these were used as the measures for gender in the present research

study. Accordingly, respondents were asked to designate, on a Likert type scale of 1 to 7, where “1” means the characteristic does not describe the respondent at all and “7” means that the characteristic describes them to a considerable extent. Traits of dominance, self-confidence, empathy, aggressiveness, sensitivity, shyness, independence, nurturing, high strung, and competitiveness were measured. This section is designed to determine personality traits of the respondents so that they can then be compared with other measured variables.

The fourth theoretical construct was self- efficacy. This construct refers to people’s judgments of their own capabilities (Lent, 1994). Self-efficacy can be compared to confidence, or in this case, how good individuals think they will be at performing a specific task. This section asked respondents whether or not they believed they could successfully perform various job duties in mass communication professions. The same tasks listed in the outcome expectations section were listed here as well. Again these tasks were taken from texts featuring careers in Mass Communications (Mogel, 2000). There were three tasks from each academic area listed in this section. Again, a Likert type scale ranging from “1” to “7” was used to gauge respondent’s opinions. A response of “1” indicated great uncertainty that respondents could adequately perform the specified task, and a response of “7” indicated complete confidence that respondents could perform the task.

The respondents were also asked to answer various demographic questions that allowed the researcher to analyze the variability in responses. First, respondents were asked several questions to determine if they were or intended to be mass communication majors, and were thus taking the “Mass Communication and Society” class as a

prerequisite, or if they were taking the class solely as a general education requirement. Mass Communications majors were then asked to identify the specific sequence they were likely to choose within the mass communications program – advertising, journalism, public relations, or telecommunications. Other demographic questions included sex, year in college, age as of 11/01/2003, and preferred ethnic description. The later question was open ended to reflect research methodology findings that the most accurate measure of ethnicity is what the individual calls her/himself (Rodriguez & Cordero, 1992).

Survey Administration

This survey was distributed in a classroom setting by the researcher after the course instructor(s) strongly encouraged students to participate. Ample time at the beginning of the class was given to all respondents to complete the survey. To further entice respondents to answer all questions in the survey instrument, the researcher offered an economic incentive. Two \$25 certificates to a local grocery store chain were donated by that chain's management, and a subsequent drawing was conducted of all those who submitted complete responses, and who submitted a separately completed identification form to maintain anonymity of their survey responses.

The survey introduction contained a privacy statement reiterating the ethical code of social science researchers in general and the promises of the researcher in this study that respondents would not be personally identified at any point in the research study.

Statistical Analysis

SPSS for Windows Release 11 was used to analyze the 293 completed surveys. The level of significance accepted by the researcher was .05.

Simple descriptive statistics provided a demographic profile of the respondents and an overview of their responses to the opinion questions. The cross-tabulation procedure described the survey results in more detail.

Inferential statistics were calculated so that the researcher could determine which results occurred by chance alone as well as which results could be generalized to the larger population of interest in this study.

Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) is of particular importance because it allows the researcher to simultaneously investigate several independent variables. Specifically, the ONEWAY ANOVA procedure was used because it allowed the researcher to test whether two or more variables differed from one another (Stacks, 2002).

Chapter 5

Results

Overview

This research study had a total of 293 respondents. The total enrollment for the two sections of the Mass Communication and Society course from which respondents were recruited was 462 students, producing a 64.3 percent response rate.

Respondent Profile

There is one group that is of specific interest in this research – female, public relations majors. For comparison purposes, all sequence demographics are reported as well as the demographic distribution for those who indicated they were Mass Communication minors and for those who are not Mass Communication majors or minors.

The typical respondent who indicated s/he was a Mass Communication major (n=153) was a white (n= 105), 19 year old (n=65), female (n= 111), sophomore (n=55), public relations major (n=44). There was a very small population of those students pursuing mass communication minors (n=7). Those who indicated they were working toward a Mass Communication minor were most likely to be white (n=6), 20 or 21 years of age (n=3), female (n=5), juniors (n=4) who were minoring in public relations (n=4). For the purposes of statistical analysis, these students will be grouped with Mass Communications majors.

There was a large percentage of respondents who were not pursuing a Mass Communications major or minor. The typical respondent who indicated that s/he was not

pursuing a Mass Communications degree (n=134) was a white (n= 90), 19 year old (n=51), female (n=76), who was in her sophomore year (n=61).

The full demographic profile of respondents who indicated they were Mass Communication majors is reported below in Table 1. Tables 2 and 3 will describe Mass Communication minors and those who are not Mass Communication majors or minors.

Table 1: Mass Communication Majors Respondent Demographics

MASS COMMUNICATION MAJOR	n=153
<u>ADVERTISING</u>	34
<u>FEMALES</u>	24
<i>Freshman</i>	4
<i>Sophomores</i>	9
<i>Juniors</i>	10
<i>Seniors</i>	1
<u>MALES</u>	10
<i>Freshman</i>	0
<i>Sophomore</i>	4
<i>Juniors</i>	5
<i>Seniors</i>	1
<u>JOURNALISM</u>	23
<u>FEMALES</u>	13
<i>Freshman</i>	3
<i>Sophomores</i>	4
<i>Juniors</i>	6
<i>Seniors</i>	0
<u>MALES</u>	10
<i>Freshman</i>	1
<i>Sophomores</i>	5
<i>Juniors</i>	3
<i>Seniors</i>	1
<u>PUBLIC RELATIONS</u>	50
<u>FEMALES</u>	44
<i>Freshman</i>	4
<i>Sophomores</i>	26
<i>Juniors</i>	11
<i>Seniors</i>	3
<u>MALES</u>	6
<i>Freshman</i>	0
<i>Sophomores</i>	3
<i>Juniors</i>	3
<i>Seniors</i>	0
<u>TELECOMMUNICATIONS</u>	46
<u>FEMALES</u>	30
<i>Freshman</i>	2
<i>Sophomores</i>	16
<i>Juniors</i>	11
<i>Seniors</i>	1
<u>MALES</u>	16
<i>Freshman</i>	0
<i>Sophomores</i>	5
<i>Juniors</i>	9
<i>Seniors</i>	2

There are several findings in this table that are noteworthy. The first of these is the large percentage of female respondents overall (n=111). The female population

represented 72.5 percent of the total number of respondents who indicated they were pursuing a major in one of the four Mass Communication sequences. This number will be of special importance when the sex of respondents is compared.

A second important number that stands out was the large percentage of respondents who indicated they were pursuing public relations degrees (n=50). Within public relations 88 percent of the respondents were female (n=44). This was of special importance because it supports the findings on gender in public relations presented in the literature review.

The full demographic distribution of respondents who indicated they were working towards a Mass Communications minor are listed in Table 2.

Table 2: Mass Communication Minor Demographic Distribution

MASS COMMUNICATIONS MINOR	n=7
Advertising	2
FEMALES	2
<i>Freshman</i>	0
<i>Sophomore</i>	1
<i>Juniors</i>	1
<i>Seniors</i>	0
MALES	0
Journalism	1
FEMALES	0
MALES	1
<i>Freshman</i>	0
<i>Sophomore</i>	1
<i>Juniors</i>	0
<i>Seniors</i>	0
Public Relations	4
FEMALES	3
<i>Freshman</i>	0
<i>Sophomores</i>	0
<i>Junior</i>	2
<i>Senior</i>	1
MALES	1
<i>Freshman</i>	0
<i>Sophomore</i>	0
<i>Junior</i>	1
<i>Senior</i>	0
Telecommunications	0

Table 2 has two important figures that are similar to Table 1. Public relations represented the most populated minor (n=4) and 75 percent of public relations minors were female. Although there was only a small number of respondents who indicated they were Mass Communication minors (n=7), these numbers also match the information in the literature review.

The full demographic profile of those respondents who were not pursuing Mass Communication majors or minors is reported in Table 3. These numbers are reported for overall comparison.

Table 3: Non- Mass Communications Major/Minor Demographic Distribution

NON MASS COMM MAJOR/MINOR	n=133
FEMALES	75
<i>Freshman</i>	15
<i>Sophomore</i>	39
<i>Junior</i>	17
<i>Senior</i>	4
MALES	56
<i>Freshman</i>	13
<i>Sophomores</i>	20
<i>Juniors</i>	17
<i>Seniors</i>	6

Not surprising in any of the tables were the large numbers of sophomore students between the ages of 19 and 20. The course, *Mass Communication and Society*, is a mid-level class at the 2000 level, which is one that is usually taken during a student's second year in college. There was also a large population of junior students, perhaps because of the large transfer population from community colleges to the participating university.

Because there were so few Mass Communication minors, they were collapsed into the Mass Communication major classification for subsequent statistical analyses.

Theoretical Construct Overview

This research was designed to measure four theoretical constructs -- perception, outcome expectation, gender, and self-efficacy. Perception refers to the opinions respondents held about the various majors that make up the mass communication program. Outcome expectation refers to what tasks students would expect to be performed by those who complete a mass communication degree. Here, their level of interest regarding various mass communications tasks was measured. The gender construct was designed to find if respondents identified with predetermined gender traits proposed by researchers Choi & Hon (2002). The last construct is self-efficacy, which refers to people's judgments of their own capabilities. In this research study, self-

efficacy was measured by asking respondents their level of confidence regarding whether they personally thought they could learn to perform various mass communication job tasks.

The reported means for all the following tables are based on a 7-point scale. For the purposes of interpretation reported means of 1-3 will be considered minor or small, reported means of 4-5 will be moderate, and high means will be 6 or higher.

Table 4 represents a summary of female public relations student's perceptions of the four mass communication sequences, Advertising, Journalism, Public Relations, and Telecommunications. The responses are based on a 1-7 Likert scale.

Table 4: Mean Female Public Relations Majors/Minors Opinions on Perception Construct for Mass Communications Sequence Variables (n=44)

	Advertising	Journalism	Public Relations	Telecomm
<i>is desirable</i>	5.14	4.48	6.14	4.52
<i>has the potential for making a lot of money</i>	5.55	3.98	5.89	4.68
<i>is very glamorous</i>	4.09	3.59	4.66	3.93
<i>offers a high level of personal prestige (fame)</i>	3.73	4.19	4.82	4.30
<i>is a career that gives its members a great deal of power</i>	4.48	4.30	5.02	3.95

It was expected that, because the population of interest was female public relations students, this major would have the best perception. Based on the means reported in table 4 this proved to be true. The variables, *Public relations is desirable* ($m=6.14$) and *Public Relations has the potential for making a lot of money* ($m=5.89$), reported the highest means. This could be interpreted that female public relations students are interested in entering the field of public relations because it offers the highest salary potential.

Also producing high means were two advertising variables, *Advertising is desirable* (m=5.14) and *Advertising has the potential for making a lot of money* (m=5.55). While Advertising produced two high means, it also produced one of the lowest means. *Advertising offers a high level of personal prestige (fame)* reported a mean of 3.73. The variable with the lowest reported mean was *Journalism is very glamorous* (m=3.59).

Tables 5-8 are organized by gender in regards to the first theoretical construct, perception. A sort of the data in SPSS was conducted to separate the population of interest in this study, public relations students, so that only that group's responses to all opinion variables were analyzed.

In order to conduct an ANOVA with more than one factor, two new variables were created, *Mass Communication students*, comprised of Mass Communication majors and minors, and *Public Relations Majors*, that subset of Mass Communication students whose sequence major was public relations. These two new variables allowed the researcher to analyze the opinion variables for the primary group of interest.

The means, standard deviations and levels of significance of each opinion variable are reported with respect to the first theoretical construct, perception in Table 5.

Table 5: Male and Female Public Relations Majors Opinion on Advertising Variables Means – Perception Construct

	n	Mean	sd	sig.
<i>is desirable</i>				p=.178
Male	6	5.83	1.169	
Female	44	5.14	1.173	
<i>has the potential for making a lot of money</i>				p=.471
Male	6	5.83	.753	
Female	44	5.55	.926	
<i>is very glamorous</i>				p=.289
Male	6	3.50	1.378	
Female	44	4.09	1.254	
<i>offers a high level of personal prestige (fame)</i>				p=.290
Male	6	3.17	1.169	
Female	44	3.73	1.208	
<i>is a career that gives its members a great deal of power</i>				p=.166
Male	6	3.67	1.862	
Female	44	4.48	1.248	

Table 6: Male and Female Public Relations Majors Opinion on Journalism Variables Means – Perception Construct

	n	Mean	sd	sig.
<i>is desirable</i>				p=.633
Male	6	4.17	2.041	
Female	44	4.48	1.406	
<i>has the potential for making a lot of money</i>				p=.189
Male	6	3.17	1.602	
Female	44	3.98	1.372	
<i>is very glamorous</i>				p=.358
Male	6	3.00	1.414	
Female	44	3.59	1.468	
<i>offers a high level of personal prestige (fame)</i>				p=.064
Male	6	3.00	1.265	
Female	43	4.19	1.452	
<i>is a career that gives its members a great deal of power</i>				p=.013
Male	6	2.83	.983	
Female	44	4.30	1.340	

Table 7: Male and Female Public Relations Majors Opinion on Public Relations Variables Means – Perception Construct

	n	Mean	sd	sig.
<i>is desirable</i>				p=.515
Male	6	5.83	1.169	
Female	44	6.14	1.047	
<i>has the potential for making a lot of money</i>				p=.796
Male	6	6.00	1.549	
Female	44	5.89	.920	
<i>is very glamorous</i>				p=.135
Male	6	3.83	2.137	
Female	44	4.66	1.098	
<i>offers a high level of personal prestige (fame)</i>				p=.122
Male	6	4.00	1.897	
Female	44	4.82	1.084	
<i>is a career that gives its members a great deal of power</i>				p=.968
Male	6	5.00	1.673	
Female	44	5.02	1.229	

Table 8: Male and Female Public Relations Majors Opinion on Telecommunications Variables Means – Perception Construct

	n	Mean	sd	sig.
<i>is desirable</i>				p=.793
Male	6	4.33	1.751	
Female	44	4.52	1.635	
<i>has the potential for making a lot of money</i>				p=.781
Male	6	4.50	2.074	
Female	44	4.68	1.410	
<i>is very glamorous</i>				p=.346
Male	6	3.33	1.751	
Female	44	3.93	1.404	
<i>offers a high level of personal prestige (fame)</i>				p=.054
Male	6	3.00	1.789	
Female	44	4.30	1.472	
<i>is a career that gives its members a great deal of power</i>				p=.020
Male	6	2.33	1.862	
Female	44	3.95	1.509	

With regard to the five Advertising variables reported in Table 5, none showed statistical significance for differences between male and female Public Relations students, meaning the results could have occurred by chance alone.

Table 6 – the Journalism variables -- produced two noteworthy results. The variable, *Journalism offers a high level of personal prestige (fame)*, approached significance at a .064 level ($p=.064$). The Variable, *Journalism is a career that gives its members a great deal of power*, was statistically significant ($p=.013$). This means that there is a significant difference between the perception that the field of Journalism is a powerful field of study between male public relations students ($n = 6$, $m = 2.83$) and female public relations students ($n = 44$, $m = 3.95$).

The public relations variables reported in Table 7 showed no statistical significance regarding differences between male and female public relations students.

The Telecommunication variables reported in Table 8 produced two noteworthy results. The first was the variable *Telecommunications offers a high level of personal prestige*, which approached significance at an .054 level ($p=.054$). Though some part of these results could have occurred by chance alone, it is interesting that female public relations students ($m=4.30$) thought that Telecommunications offered more personal prestige than did male public relations students ($m=3.00$).

The second noteworthy result in Table 8 was the variable *Telecommunications is a career that gives its members a great deal of power* ($p=.020$), which revealed a significant difference between male and female public relations students. Once again, female Public Relations students ($m=3.95$) thought Telecommunications was a more powerful field of study than did male public relations students ($m=2.33$).

Table 9 presents the mean female public relations students opinions based on the outcome expectation variables. This table will determine what tasks female public

relations students think they will be performing once they receive their degrees in Mass Communications. These responses are based on a 7-point Likert scale.

Table 9: Mean Female Public Relations Majors/Minors Opinions on Outcome Expectation Construct

	Advertising	Journalism	Public Relations	Telecomm
<i>Admin. of major accounts at an ad agency</i>	4.27	N/A	N/A	N/A
<i>Review creative work</i>	4.82	N/A	N/A	N/A
<i>Create ads</i>	5.20	N/A	N/A	N/A
<i>Evaluating basic consumer trends</i>	4.23	N/A	N/A	N/A
<i>Making editorial decisions</i>	N/A	3.75	N/A	N/A
<i>Writing news copy</i>	N/A	3.59	N/A	N/A
<i>Supervising the work of others</i>	N/A	4.27	N/A	N/A
<i>Interviewing sources for stories</i>	N/A	4.41	N/A	N/A
<i>Writing press releases</i>	N/A	N/A	4.91	N/A
<i>Implementing PUR strategies</i>	N/A	N/A	4.90	N/A
<i>Making media contacts</i>	N/A	N/A	5.80	N/A
<i>Meeting with key decision makers to plan strategies</i>	N/A	N/A	5.84	N/A
<i>Reporting news stories</i>	N/A	N/A	N/A	4.59
<i>Operating cameras and other production equipment</i>	N/A	N/A	N/A	3.36
<i>Supervising radio/TV newscasts</i>	N/A	N/A	N/A	4.23
<i>Managing production of programs</i>	N/A	N/A	N/A	4.45
<i>Making hiring/firing decisions</i>	4.07	3.91	4.58	3.91
<i>Fact finding/Fact checking</i>	3.41	3.57	4.14	3.59

Very similar to the means reported in Table 4, the highest means reported for outcome expectation were the public relations variables. Female public relations students thought they would be *meeting with key decision makers to plan strategies* (m=5.84) and *making media contacts* (m=5.80) most often. There were two common variables among the four sequences, *making hiring/firing decisions* and *fact finding/fact checking*. Among these two variables the public relations means were the highest – *making hiring/firing decisions* (m=4.58) and *fact finding/fact checking* (m=4.14). This means that female public relations students thought they would be performing these tasks to a moderate degree.

Tables 10-13 list the means and standard deviations for each opinion variable in the second theoretical construct, outcome expectation, that related to various tasks in which public relations students personally would take an interest in performing.

Table 10: Male and Female Public Relations Majors Opinion on Advertising Variables Means – Outcome Expectation Construct

	n	Mean	sd	sig.
<i>Administration of major accounts at an ad agency</i>				p=.455
Male	6	3.67	1.506	
Female	44	4.27	1.885	
<i>Review creative work</i>				p=.439
Male	6	4.33	1.506	
Female	44	4.82	1.419	
<i>Create ads</i>				p=.433
Male	6	5.67	.816	
Female	44	5.20	1.391	
<i>Evaluating basic consumer trends</i>				p=.280
Male	6	3.50	1.517	
Female	43	4.23	1.541	
<i>Making hiring/firing decisions</i>				p=.365
Male	6	4.83	1.169	
Female	44	4.07	1.993	
<i>Fact finding/ Fact checking</i>				p=.435
Male	6	4.00	1.673	
Female	44	3.41	1.730	

Table 11: Male and Female Public Relations Majors Opinion on Journalism Variables Means – Outcome Expectation Construct

	n	Mean	sd	sig.
<i>Making editorial decisions</i>				p=.753
Male	6	3.50	1.761	
Female	44	3.75	1.819	
<i>Writing news copy</i>				p=.901
Male	6	3.50	1.643	
Female	44	3.59	1.675	
<i>Supervising the work of others</i>				p=.383
Male	6	3.67	1.506	
Female	44	4.27	1.590	
<i>Interviewing sources for stories</i>				p=.131
Male	6	3.33	1.366	
Female	44	4.41	1.633	
<i>Making hiring/firing decisions</i>				p=.375
Male	6	3.17	1.169	
Female	44	3.91	1.974	
<i>Fact finding/ Fact checking</i>				p=.926
Male	6	3.50	1.871	
Female	44	3.57	1.648	

Table 12: Male and Female Public Relations Majors Opinion on Public Relations Variables Means – Outcome Expectation Construct

	n	Mean	sd	sig.
<i>Writing press releases</i>				p=.081
Male	6	6.17	.983	
Female	44	4.91	1.682	
<i>Implementing public relations strategies</i>				p=.577
Male	6	4.50	1.871	
Female	42	4.90	1.620	
<i>Making media contacts</i>				p=.101
Male	6	4.83	1.722	
Female	44	5.80	1.368	
<i>Meeting with key decision makers to plan strategies</i>				p=.147
Male	6	5.00	1.095	
Female	43	5.84	1.326	
<i>Making hiring/firing decisions</i>				p=.913
Male	6	4.67	1.366	
Female	43	4.58	1.816	
<i>Fact finding/ Fact checking</i>				p=.339
Male	6	4.83	1.941	
Female	44	4.14	1.622	

Table 13: Male and Female Public Relations Majors Opinion on Telecommunication Variables Means – Outcome Expectation Construct

	n	Mean	sd	sig.
<i>Reporting news stories</i>				p=.598
Male	6	4.17	1.941	
Female	44	4.59	1.821	
<i>Operating cameras and other production equipment</i>				p=.512
Male	6	2.83	1.472	
Female	44	3.36	1.881	
<i>Supervising radio/TV newscasts</i>				p=.750
Male	6	4.50	2.168	
Female	44	4.23	1.927	
<i>Managing production of programs</i>				p=.720
Male	6	4.17	2.137	
Female	44	4.45	1.797	
<i>Making hiring/firing decisions</i>				p=.932
Male	6	3.83	2.229	
Female	44	3.91	2.009	
<i>Fact finding/ Fact checking</i>				p=.732
Male	6	3.33	1.966	
Female	44	3.59	1.689	

None of the ANOVAs showed statistically significant differences between male and female public relations student responses on these variables, meaning that these results could have occurred by chance alone.

Table 14 lists the means for female public relations students on the variables pertaining to the self-efficacy construct. The responses are based on a 1-7 Likert scale.

Table 14: Mean Female Public Relations Majors/Minors Opinions on Self-Efficacy Construct

	Advertising	Journalism	Public Relations	Telecomm
<i>Admin. of major accounts at an ad agency</i>	5.16	N/A	N/A	N/A
<i>Review creative work</i>	5.61	N/A	N/A	N/A
<i>Create ads</i>	5.48	N/A	N/A	N/A
<i>Evaluating basic consumer trends</i>	4.95	N/A	N/A	N/A
<i>Making editorial decisions</i>	N/A	4.73	N/A	N/A
<i>Writing news copy</i>	N/A	4.77	N/A	N/A
<i>Supervising the work of others</i>	N/A	5.25	N/A	N/A
<i>Interviewing sources for stories</i>	N/A	5.34	N/A	N/A
<i>Writing press releases</i>	N/A	N/A	5.64	N/A
<i>Implementing PUR strategies</i>	N/A	N/A	5.61	N/A
<i>Making media contacts</i>	N/A	N/A	6.07	N/A
<i>Meeting with key decision makers to plan strategies</i>	N/A	N/A	5.95	N/A
<i>Reporting news stories</i>	N/A	N/A	N/A	5.21
<i>Operating cameras and other production equipment</i>	N/A	N/A	N/A	4.33
<i>Supervising radio/TV newscasts</i>	N/A	N/A	N/A	5.07
<i>Managing production of programs</i>	N/A	N/A	N/A	5.14
<i>Making hiring/firing decisions</i>	4.80	4.77	5.02	4.77
<i>Fact finding/Fact checking</i>	5.07	4.86	5.07	4.53

The means reported in Table 14 are on average very high. Overall, this means that female public relations students are confident that they could learn to perform any of the Mass Communication tasks listed in the table.

Specifically, *making media contacts* (m=6.07), *meeting with key decision makers to plan public relations strategies* (m=5.95) and *implementing public relations strategies* (m=5.61) had the highest means. Again in this table there are two variables that are the same for each sequence – *making hiring/firing decisions* and *fact finding checking*.

Public relations variables produced the highest means for these two variables – *making hiring/firing decisions* (m=5.02) and *fact finding/fact checking* (m=5.07). These means can be interpreted that female public relations students feel moderately confident that they will be able to learn these job tasks.

Tables 15-18 report the means, standard deviations and levels of significance of public relations students responses to all the opinion variables with regard to the third theoretical construct, self-efficacy.

Table 15: Male and Female Public Relations Majors Opinion on Advertising Variables Means – Self-efficacy Construct

	n	Mean	sd	sig.
<i>Administration of major accounts at an ad agency</i>				p=.600
Male	6	4.83	2.229	
Female	44	5.16	1.293	
<i>Review creative work</i>				p=.921
Male	6	5.67	1.211	
Female	44	5.61	1.224	
<i>Create ads</i>				p=.348
Male	6	6.00	1.265	
Female	44	5.48	1.267	
<i>Evaluating basic consumer trends</i>				p=.677
Male	6	4.67	1.633	
Female	44	4.95	1.569	
<i>Making hiring/firing decisions</i>				p=.601
Male	6	5.17	1.602	
Female	44	4.80	1.622	
<i>Fact finding/ Fact checking</i>				p=.385
Male	6	4.50	4.50	
Female	44	5.07	5.07	

Table 16: Male and Female Public Relations Majors Opinion on Journalism Variables Means – Self-efficacy Construct

	n	Mean	sd	sig.
<i>Making editorial decisions</i>				p=.859
Male	6	4.83	1.602	
Female	44	4.73	1.336	
<i>Writing news copy</i>				p=.736
Male	6	5.00	1.789	
Female	44	4.77	1.508	
<i>Supervising the work of others</i>				p=.680
Male	6	5.00	1.789	
Female	44	5.25	1.508	
<i>Interviewing sources for stories</i>				p=.990
Male	6	5.33	1.366	
Female	44	5.34	1.311	
<i>Making hiring/firing decisions</i>				p=.541
Male	6	4.33	1.633	
Female	44	4.77	1.641	
<i>Fact finding/ Fact checking</i>				p=.971
Male	6	4.83	1.941	
Female	43	4.86	1.656	

Table 17: Male and Female Public Relations Majors Opinion on Public Relations Variables Means – Self-efficacy Construct

	n	Mean	sd	sig.
<i>Writing press releases</i>				p=.956
Male	6	5.67	1.633	
Female	44	5.64	1.203	
<i>Implementing public relations strategies</i>				p=.640
Male	6	5.33	1.033	
Female	44	5.61	1.401	
<i>Making media contacts</i>				p=.882
Male	6	6.00	.894	
Female	44	6.07	1.065	
<i>Meeting with key decision makers to plan strategies</i>				p=.793
Male	6	5.83	.983	
Female	44	5.95	1.011	
<i>Making hiring/firing decisions</i>				p=.792
Male	6	4.83	1.169	
Female	44	5.02	1.691	
<i>Fact finding/ Fact checking</i>				p=.889
Male	6	5.17	1.169	
Female	44	5.07	1.662	

Table 18: Male and Female Public Relations Majors Opinion on Telecommunication Variables Means – Self-efficacy Construct

	n	Mean	sd	sig.
<i>Reporting news stories</i>				p=.874
Male	6	5.33	1.633	
Female	42	5.21	1.718	
<i>Operating cameras and other production equipment</i>				p=.061
Male	6	5.83	.983	
Female	43	4.33	1.874	
<i>Supervising radio/TV newscasts</i>				p=.896
Male	6	5.17	1.329	
Female	43	5.07	1.734	
<i>Managing production of programs</i>				p=.782
Male	6	5.33	1.862	
Female	43	5.14	1.567	
<i>Making hiring/firing decisions</i>				p=.929
Male	6	4.83	1.941	
Female	43	4.77	1.660	
<i>Fact finding/ Fact checking</i>				p=.228
Male	6	5.50	1.378	
Female	43	4.53	1.856	

There were no statistically significant differences between male and female public relations students with regard to any of the opinion variables regarding self-efficacy.

This means that these results could have occurred by chance alone and thus may not be meaningful.

Of the statistically significant responses that were highlighted in Tables 5-18, it is interesting that the perception variables regarding the “power” of careers in Journalism and Telecommunications provided a meaningful distinction between male and female public relations students. Female public relations students believed Telecommunications and Journalism to be more powerful fields than did male students, yet the mean responses of each group showed that both groups *disagreed* with the statements that journalism and telecommunications careers gave their members a great deal of power.

Also within the perception construct, distinctions between responses by male and female public relations students to the prestige of careers in Telecommunications and Journalism only approached significant levels. Accordingly, there is not enough confidence that these results are meaningful to this study.

Table 19 lists the means, standard deviations and levels of significance of the various predetermined gender characteristics and the fourth theoretical construct, gender. Again, only Public Relations students' responses are analyzed.

Table 19: Male and Female Public Relations Majors Opinion on Personality Characteristics - Gender Construct

	n	Mean	sd	sig.
<i>Dominant</i>				p=.036
Male	6	3.67	.816	
Female	44	4.75	1.184	
<i>Self confident</i>				p=.528
Male	6	5.17	1.169	
Female	44	5.50	1.210	
<i>Compassionate</i>				p=.029
Male	6	4.83	.753	
Female	44	5.95	1.180	
<i>Aggressive</i>				p=.719
Male	6	4.83	1.169	
Female	44	4.64	1.259	
<i>Sensitive</i>				p=.216
Male	6	4.59	1.049	
Female	44	5.27	1.453	
<i>Shy</i>				p=.581
Male	6	2.50	2.074	
Female	44	2.88	1.424	
<i>Independent</i>				p=.124
Male	6	5.17	1.722	
Female	44	6.02	1.191	
<i>Nurturing</i>				p=.000
Male	6	3.33	1.966	
Female	44	5.59	1.187	
<i>High Strung</i>				p=.098
Male	6	2.67	1.211	
Female	44	3.73	1.468	
<i>Competitive</i>				p=.369
Male	6	6.00	.894	
Female	44	5.50	1.303	

Overall, female public relations students were moderately dominant, somewhat stronger in self-confidence, high in compassion, moderately aggressive, somewhat stronger in sensitivity, not shy, very independent, very nurturing, not very high-strung, and highly competitive.

There are a number of statistically significant findings in Table 19. In this study, female public relations students ($m = 4.75$) considered their personalities to be more dominant than did male public relations students ($m=3.67$). The strengths of both sets of responses were in the medium range of the 1-7 scale.

The compassion variable showed that female public relations students thought they were more compassionate than their male counterparts. Female student responses were high, with a mean of 5.95 on the 1-7 scale, while male student responses were more moderate, with a mean of 4.83 on the 1-7 scale.

The nurturing variable showed that female public relations students thought they were more nurturing than male public relations students. Female student responses were high, with a mean of 5.59 on the 1-7 scale, while male student responses were low, with a mean of 3.33 on the 1-7 scale.

Chapter 6

Discussion and Conclusions

It was the goal of this research study to determine why female students choose public relations as their undergraduate major more often than do male students. The research topic was of interest because of the overwhelming number of women who are currently entering the public relations profession. In this discussion section, each statistically significant finding will be analyzed in reference to the population of interest in this study -- female public relations students.

Kosicki and Becker (1998) reported that public relations is one of the fastest growing majors chosen by college students, especially by women. The demographic data provided by the respondents seemed to show support for much of the information proposed in the literature review, including the influx of women into public relations. Of all the majors represented, public relations was the most populated (n=50) overall as well as the most populated major by female students (n=44). These figures gave credence to the literature, which predicted that 58.6 percent of working practitioners are women.

Table 4, *Mean Female Public Relations Majors/Minors Opinions on Perception Construct for Mass Communications Sequence Variables*, provided interesting insight in comparison to the other Mass Communication major options. The variables, *Public relations is desirable* (m=6.14) and *Public Relations offers the potential for making a lot of money* (m=5.89), reported very high means. This means that female public relations students could be interested in entering the field of public relations because it offers the highest salary potential. Based on the literature, this seems to be a misconception. The literature review found salary was one of the challenges women face once they enter the

profession, especially when compared to that of men. According to Grunig, Toth, & Hon (2001), there is a statistically significant relationship between gender and salary even after controlling for the effect of the role, years in public relations, tenure in present job, participation in organizational decision-making, participation in evaluation research, and type of organization. An interesting recommendation for continued research would be to conduct a similar analysis with female students in the other Mass Communication majors to see if results are consistent.

The fundamental research question in this thesis sought to determine the reasons female students have for entering the public relations major in a four- year bachelor's degree program. With regard to the first theoretical construct, perception, there was not a statistical significance between male and female public relations students. One could conclude from this information that the perception of the field has a limited bearing on why female students choose public relations more than male students.

The second theoretical construct, outcome expectation, sought to measure how much interest respondents had in performing various Mass Communication tasks. An equal number of technical and managerial tasks were listed for the respondents to answer because the literature review reported that women are more likely to perform technical rather than managerial functions. This research however provided different results. Male public relations students were more interested in two technical tasks – writing press releases (m=6.17) and fact finding/fact checking (m=4.83). Female students were more interesting in performing two managerial tasks – implementing public relations strategies (m=4.90) and meeting with key decision-makers to plan strategies (m=5.84).

These results are important because they contradict those who argue that the reason why women don't appear in more management positions is because they prefer to work in more technical areas. This information may also lend support to glass ceiling research. It begs the question, if women have more of an interest in performing managerial type tasks, why aren't there more females in the boardroom?

This information may also lead to the assumption that female students choose a public relations major because of the tasks they think they will be performing once they complete their degree program. They seem to have high expectations for a field where women are an unappreciated group. Bandura (1986) and Lent's (1994) Social Cognitive Theory supports this thought because this theory suggests that people act on their judgments of what they expect to do as well as on their beliefs about the likely effects of various actions.

Female public relations students are largely unaware of the structuralist perspective, which assumes that the organizational environment may be the reason most practitioners lack influence in their organization (O'Neil, 2003). Wrigley (2002) continued this thought when she reported that female undergraduate students in public relations were unaware of a gender bias in the field. If they were aware, these students believed that it wouldn't affect them or their career.

The highest means reported for outcome expectation construct in Table 9, *Mean Female Public Relations Majors/Minors Opinions on Outcome Expectation Construct*, were the public relations variables. Female public relations students think they will be *meeting with key decision makers to plan strategies* (m=5.84) and *making media contacts*

($m=5.80$) most often. This table also lends support to women's interest in performing managerial type tasks.

The self-efficacy construct findings regarding differences between male and female public relations students were not statistically significant at the .05 level. Since the findings could have occurred by chance alone, we do not know whether or not students believed they could learn to perform various mass communication tasks was not a significant reason for choosing the public relations major.

These results are important to the future of the public relations field. There are a number of traditional norms in the business world that extend into public relations practice differentiating males and females and defining one as the "*better sex*." If the field of public relations is going to be seen as an important contributor to an organization, negative descriptions such as the "velvet ghetto" and the "glass ceiling" need to be eliminated.

These results may also be able to help university educators and administrators develop their public relations programs to encompass more than just the instruction of technical tasks. Creating a well-balanced graduate may better prepare female public relations students for managerial positions and dispel myths that women cannot handle the stress and responsibility associated with being a public relations manager.

There are a number of important findings in Table 19 with regard to the fourth theoretical construct, gender. Choi and Hon (2002) defined a number of traits that are considered to be traditionally male and traditionally female. Buzzanell (1995) claims that when women took over what had been traditionally men's fields, such as public relations, they felt they had to display stereotypical masculine traits to be respected.

The results of the statistical research performed in this thesis did not fully support these authors' ideas, but did show many positive correlations. These researchers defined dominance as a male characteristic and in this research it was found that female public relations students ($m= 4.75$) considered themselves to be more dominant than male public relations students ($m=3.67$). This variable was significant at a .036 level.

Two traditionally female variables were shown to be statistically significant, compassion and nurturing. Female public relations students thought that they were more compassionate and more nurturing than their male counterparts. One might conclude from these results that female public relations students at the undergraduate level don't buy into the idea that they must exemplify traditionally male personality traits in order to be respected.

A few limitations existed throughout the course of the research. As mentioned in the literature review, this is the first study of its kind to survey undergraduate students to explain why women choose particular majors so there was no previous research from which to draw. The researcher had to rely on sources that often reported the opinions of women already in public relations practice.

One of the goals of this research was to compare groups of students such as Mass Communication majors, minors, and those not pursuing a Mass Communications majors or minors. There were a very small number of Mass Communication minors ($n=7$), which made it difficult to infer anything about this group.

While it supported information in the literature review, another limitation was the low number of male public relations student respondents ($n=42$). If there were more male public relations respondents it would make the results more generalizable.

A major limitation in this research may lead to a recommendation for further research. The typical respondent was a sophomore, which means that the respondents haven't been exposed to the entire public relations curricula. A recommendation would be to duplicate this study with students as they are on their way out of the program, when their education at the undergraduate level is considered complete, and compare and contrast their responses to the four constructs. This duplication would also work at the graduate level based on the assumption that a Bachelor's degree prepares students for technical/entry level positions where a graduate level education prepares students more for managerial roles.

Yet another suggestion for further research would be to conduct the same analyses with female students from the other three Mass Communication majors using the same theoretical constructs. That may provide insight as to why female students choose other careers in Mass Communications, not just specifically public relations.

Chapter 8

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Appendices

Fall Semester 2003

Mass Communication & Society Students

I am in the final stages of completing the USF Master of Arts in Mass Communications program, and the following survey is part of a study I am conducting for my M.A. thesis. The purpose of this study is to gauge student perception of various careers in mass communication.

In this survey, you will be asked to provide your opinions about various aspects of the fields of advertising, journalism, public relations, and telecommunications. Your responses will be able to assist undergraduate advisors at this university to help students make course selections in the mass communications program. Your answers to this survey are strictly confidential and you will not be personally identified at any point in the published analysis.

As an incentive for you to participate in this study, all those who complete this survey in its entirety, will be eligible to enter a raffle to win one of two \$15 gift certificates to any Publix store in the Tampa Bay area. In order to keep your identity for that drawing separate from your responses to this survey, you will be asked to complete a separate slip of paper with your name and e-mail address. Winners of the gift certificates will be contacted by e-mail when all completed surveys have been returned to me.

Thank you for participating in this research study.

Moira K. Davis
USF School of Mass Communications
M.A. Student

Appendix A (Continued)

Section I.

Questions 1-4 ask for **your opinion about various aspects of the four sequences of study in mass communications**---advertising, journalism, public relations, and telecommunications. You will be using a scale of 1-7 to express your opinion, where "1" indicates that you *strongly disagree* with the listed statement and "7" indicates that you *strongly agree* with the listed statement. Please **write the number** that best represents your answer in the space provided, and please answer all of the questions.

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
Strongly Disagree *Strongly Agree*

1. The field of advertising

is desirable. _____
 has the potential for making
 a lot of money. _____
 is very glamorous _____
 offers a high level of personal
 prestige (fame) _____
 is a career that gives its members
 a great deal of power. _____

3. The field of public relations

is desirable. _____
 has the potential for making
 a lot of money. _____
 is very glamorous. _____
 offers a high level of personal
 prestige (fame). _____
 is a career that gives its members
 a great deal of power. _____

2. The field of journalism

is desirable. _____
 has the potential for making
 a lot of money. _____
 is very glamorous _____
 offers a high level of personal
 prestige (fame) _____
 is a career that gives its members
 a great deal of power. _____

4. The field of telecommunications

is desirable. _____
 has the potential for making
 a lot of money. _____
 is very glamorous _____
 offers a high level of personal
 prestige (fame) _____
 is a career that gives its members
 a great deal of power. _____

Appendix A (Continued)

Section II

Questions 5-8 ask you to indicate how much **interest** *you personally* would have in performing the following types of **tasks in various mass communications fields**. Please select the number between 1 and 7 that best represents your level of interest in a particular task, where "1" indicates that you have a *very low interest* in performing the listed task, and "7" indicates that you have a *very high interest* in performing the listed task. Please **write the number** that best represents your answer in the space provided, and please answer all of the questions.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
	<i>Very Low Interest</i>						<i>Very High Interest</i>	
5. Advertising Tasks								
Administration of major accounts at an ad agency				_____				_____
Review creative work				_____				_____
Creating ads				_____				_____
Evaluating basic consumer trends				_____				_____
Making hiring/firing decisions				_____				_____
Fact finding/fact checking				_____				_____
6. Journalism Tasks								
Making editorial decisions				_____				_____
Writing news copy				_____				_____
Supervising the work of others				_____				_____
Interviewing sources for stories				_____				_____
Making hiring/firing decisions				_____				_____
Fact finding/fact checking				_____				_____
7. Public Relations Tasks								
Writing press releases								_____
Implementing PUR strategies								_____
Making media contacts								_____
Meeting with key decision makers to plan strategies								_____
Making hiring/firing decisions								_____
Fact finding/fact checking								_____
8. Telecommunications Tasks								
Reporting news stories								_____
Operating cameras and other production equipment								_____
Supervising radio/TV newscasts								_____
Managing production of programs								_____
Making hiring/firing decisions								_____
Fact finding/fact checking								_____

Questions 9-12 ask about your **level of confidence** regarding whether *you personally* think you could **learn to perform various** mass communication job tasks. Please select the number between 1 and 7 that best represents your level of confidence in learning to perform a particular task, where "1" indicates that you are *very unsure* you could learn to perform the listed task and "7" indicates that you are *very confident* you could learn to perform the listed task. Please **write the number** that best represents your answer in the space provided, and please answer all of the questions.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
	<i>Very Unsure</i>						<i>Very Confident</i>	
9. Advertising Tasks								
Administration of major accounts at an ad agency				_____				_____
Review creative work				_____				_____
Creating ads				_____				_____
Evaluating basic consumer trends				_____				_____
Making hiring/firing decisions				_____				_____
Fact finding/fact checking				_____				_____
10. Journalism Tasks								
Making editorial decisions				_____				_____
Writing news copy				_____				_____
Supervising the work of others				_____				_____
Interviewing sources for stories				_____				_____
Making hiring/firing decisions				_____				_____
Fact finding/fact checking				_____				_____
11. Public Relations Tasks								
Writing press releases								_____
Implementing PUR strategies								_____
Making media contacts								_____
Meeting with key decision makers to plan strategies								_____
Making hiring/firing decisions								_____
Fact finding/fact checking								_____
12. Telecommunications Tasks								
Reporting news stories								_____
Operating cameras/other equipment								_____
Supervising radio/TV newscasts								_____
Managing production of programs								_____
Making hiring/firing decisions								_____
Fact finding/fact checking								_____

Appendix A (Continued)

Section III

Question 13. Please indicate on a scale of 1-7 your opinion of how much each of the following adjectives describes your personality, where "1" indicates the characteristic does not at all describe you and "7" indicates that the adjective describes you to a considerable extent.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	<i>Not at all</i>						<i>Considerably</i>
Dominant		_____			Shy		_____
Self-confident		_____			Independent		_____
Compassionate		_____			Nurturing		_____
Aggressive		_____			High strung		_____
Sensitive		_____			Competitive		_____

Please respond to the following questions about your personal characteristics. Please be assured that any personally identifiable information will remain confidential and your identity will never be released for publication.

Are you presently:

1. Pursuing a Mass Communications **major** _____
2. Pursuing a Mass Communications **minor** _____
3. Not pursuing Mass Communications as a major or minor _____

IF YOU ARE CURRENTLY PURSUING A MASS COMMUNICATIONS MAJOR OR MINOR, in which sequence do you intend to concentrate? (Please choose only one response)

- Advertising _____
- Journalism _____
- Public Relations _____
- Telecommunications _____

Appendix A (Continued)

Your Sex _____ Male _____ Female

Your Approximate Year in School _____ Freshman
_____ Sophomore
_____ Junior
_____ Senior

Your Age as of 11/1/2003 _____

Your Preferred Ethnic Description _____
(Some choices might be Asian, African American, Hispanic, or White. Please list a description that is meaningful to you.)

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY!