

ABSTRACT

Title of Document: A QUALITATIVE EXAMINATION OF GENDER AND POWER IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

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Gender and power shape the practice of public relations. Gender contributes to power differences which may, in turn, influence an individual's strategic decisions and communication styles. Because male and female public relations practitioners make meaning of their roles as public relations practitioners differently (Grunig, Toth & Hon, 2001; Krider & Ross, 1997), looking at the profession from the viewpoint of women – and women only – provides unique insight into these differences.

The purpose of this study was to examine qualitatively how women public relations practitioners make meaning of gender and power. Additionally, the study examined the overlap of gender and power and the implications they hold for professional practice. Whereas previous public relations scholarship has examined the concepts of gender and power separately, the secondary purpose of the study sought to examine these phenomena together.

Literature regarding gender, gender theory of public relations, power, and power-control theory contributed to this study. From the literature, three research questions were posed: How do women public relations practitioners make meaning of gender? How do public relations practitioners make meaning of power? and What are the intersections of

gender and power in public relations? To best illustrate and describe how women public relations practitioners experience the phenomena of gender and power, I chose a qualitative research method which utilized 45 in-depth, semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with women public relations practitioners guided by an interview protocol. I utilized a grounded theory approach to data analysis. From the data, arose several themes regarding gender, power and their nexus.

Results suggested that women practitioners made meaning of gender through contrasting definitions, as a function of a feminized public relations industry, as a function of pregnancy, childbirth and family responsibilities, through expectations and discrimination, and as an intersectional phenomenon involving one's race, age and geography. Participants made meaning of power as a function of influence, a function of relationships, knowledge and information, access, results-based credibility, negative force and empowerment. Women practitioners communicated that gender and power intersected through use of gendered appearances, management style, women's bonding together for power, the queen bee syndrome, leadership, women's self realization and confidence in their choices, and education of others.

The data extend our understanding of gender theory of relations and power-control theory of public relations. Results suggest that gender, for public relations practitioners, exists as a socialized and learned phenomenon. Power in public relations exists in a system and empowerment serves as an alternative meaning making model of power. Evidence suggests that gender and power do intersect in the meaning making of practitioners and that future research must focus on examining this overlap and educating students and professionals about gender and gender discrimination.

A QUALITATIVE EXAMINATION OF GENDER AND POWER
IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

By

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Dedication

Trust thyself: every heart vibrates to that iron string. – Ralph Waldo Emerson

This dissertation was a journey and I dedicate this work to all those who have helped me arrive at this point in my life.

A million thanks to my husband Brian for his unending support and love. To my parents Don and Lynn Reynolds and my brother Harrison, thank you for believing in me, for your constant encouragement and for your comic relief. To Amy Ely, thank you for your friendship and support.

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Table of Contents

Dedication.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
Table of Contents.....	iv
List of Figures.....	v
Chapter One: Introduction.....	1
Chapter Two: Literature Review.....	15
Chapter Three: Method.....	67
Chapter Four: Results.....	103
Research Question 1.....	103
Research Question 2.....	127
Research Question 3.....	166
Chapter Five: Discussion and Conclusion.....	189
Appendices.....	240
References.....	243

List of Figures

Figure 1.....	22
Figure 2.....	223

Chapter One: Introduction

Introduction

Gender and power shape the practice of public relations. Gender contributes to power differences which may, in turn, influence an individual's strategic decisions and communication styles. Because male and female public relations practitioners make meaning of their roles as public relations practitioners differently (Grunig, Toth & Hon, 2001; Krider & Ross, 1997), looking at the profession from the viewpoint of women – and women only – may provide unique insight into these differences.

Despite the increasing feminization of the public relations field, women public relations practitioners continue to lack power. This power struggle exists in subtle, yet real ways. Scholarship suggests women public relations professionals continue to experience a glass ceiling (Wrigley, 2002), receive lower pay (Aldoory & Toth, 2002) and lack organizational forms of power, employee support and inclusion in business networks (O'Neil, 2003). As van Zoonen (1994) explained, "power is not a monolithic 'thing' that some groups (men, capitalists, whites) have and others (women, working class, blacks) have not" (p. 4). Gender research offers one way to deconstruct, analyze and critique the individual, cultural and embedded relations of power that exist in public relations practice. Essentially, gender and power comprise the core of feminist theory (van Zoonen, 1994). By studying the concepts of gender and power, we are advancing public relations theory, which lacks sufficient exploration into the effects of the feminization of the field and in-depth understanding of the intersections of gender and power.

A qualitative analysis regarding the interplay of gender and power in a public relations context was necessary in order to understand the affects and benefits of the continued feminization of the public relations field. Because gender and gendered norms continue to shape and structure society and the public relations industry, the ongoing study of how gender and gendered norms affect and constrain our practices is necessary (Aldoory, 2009, p. 110). Studies examining power and gender have been limited (Aldoory, Reber, Berger & Toth, 2008; O'Neil 2003). For example, benchmark scholarship on power conducted by Berger and Reber (2005, 2006) failed to address gender as a function of power. Only recently have Aldoory, Reber, Berger and Toth (2008) examined previously collected data on power for gendered differences. Public relations research regarding power and gender has taken for granted the man/woman dichotomy, ranking men's status and values in the public relations profession as higher than women's status or values (Rakow & Natasia, 2009). Few researchers have explored how gender and power overlap in the field of public relations and how practitioners define and make meaning of the concept of gender.

Purpose of Research

Two purposes guided this dissertation research. Primarily, the purpose of this study was to examine qualitatively how women public relations practitioners make meaning of gender and power. Additionally, this study examined the overlap of gender and power and the implications they hold for professional practice. What can we learn about the current state and the future of the public relations profession by examining practitioners' conceptualizations of gender and power? Whereas previous public relations scholarship has examined the concepts of gender and power separately, the secondary

purpose of the study sought to examine these phenomena together. From this research, it was expected that a new model describing women public relations practitioners' meaning making of gender and power would emerge. Ultimately, the research goal was to find similarities among, confirm and expand upon gender theories of public relations, power-control theory of public relations.

Terminology

Public relations, gender and power involve complicated, and often contested, definitions. In this section, I define several core terms related to my dissertation research.

Public Relations – Public relations is a professional practice, a communication process, and a rich field of research. At a micro level, public relations can be defined as intricate face-to-face interactions between practitioners and employees, superiors or clients that feature openness, networking, listening, dialogue and mutual respect (Rhee, 2007). For purposes of this study, in which I sought to examine how individuals perceive and enact gender and power, I define public relations as an interactive, dialogic process in which public relations practitioners engage in strategic planning, relationship building and influence to manage the communication between an entity and its publics. I define it as such in order to align public relations with the more dialogic, relational – and sometimes strategic - nature of gender and power.

Public Relations Practitioner – According to Lattimore, Baskin, Heiman and Toth (2007), “public relations practitioners communicate with all relevant internal and external publics to develop positive relationships and to create consistency between organizational goals and societal expectations. Public relations practitioners develop, execute, and

evaluate organizational programs that promote the exchange of influence and understanding among an organization's constituent and publics" (p. 4). Practitioners whom I interview and whose experiences I recorded and analyzed worked as individual consultants, agency professionals, corporate professionals, not-for-profit professionals, government officials and various combinations of the above.

Gender – For this dissertation, I adopted a definition of gender as a socially constructed phenomenon. Wood (1997) explained that "Sex is a designation based on biology, while gender is socially and psychologically constructed" (p. 23, as cited in Grunig, Toth & Hon, 2000, p. 51). Thus, "sex" is the condition of being biologically male or female, whereas "gender" is the acting out or displaying of male or female traits. To illustrate this, Aldoory (2005) wrote, "Gender is a mechanism that structures material and symbolic worlds" (p. 670). She explained that gender, in addition to power, serves as a defining construct that guides social settings and social meanings. Similarly, Ashcraft and Mumby (2004) defined gender as "a complex, fragmentary, ongoing and contradictory accomplishment that unfolds at the intersection of communication and organizing" (p. 21). These definitions, I felt, captured the socially constructed nature of gender as a "tool" or "mechanism" for categorizing individuals.

Gender is a complex function that defines men's and women's roles in society. In this light, Kanter (1977) described gendered roles as located in the "differences between men and women as individuals: their training for different worlds; the nature of sexual relationships, which make women unable to compete with men and men unable to aggress against women; the "tracks" they were put on in school or at play; and even, in the most biologically reductionist version of the argument, "natural" dispositions of the

sexes” (p. 261). This occurs, Buzzanell (1995) explained, because “the ways of thinking about and enacting gender are so central to our organizing processes that we do not even notice how members construct jobs, tasks, occupations, and settings to sustain gender” (p. 332).

Individuals engage in a variety of roles, practices and traits associated with a respective gender. L.A. Grunig, Toth and Hon (2001) referred to these roles as “sex roles” and defined them as the positions that women and men occupy, and the masculine and feminine characteristics they display. To describe women public relations practitioner experiences, I used the terms gender and sex.

Power – Communication, sociology and management literature highlight the commodity, structural, discursive, cultural, and systemic interpretations of power. From these perspectives, I conceptualize power as an active system in which individuals engage interpersonal influence and social power, discourse, action and commodity in order to achieve an outcome. This conceptualization fuses definitions of power proposed by Levinger (1959), Scott (2001), Foucault (1980) and Barrett (2002).

Levinger (1959) explained that when an individual acts or communicates in order to produce an outcome, it can be described as social power. Social power is the ability to exert interpersonal influence through intentional actions in order to bring about a particular causal effect to further one’s personal desires or interests (Scott, 2001, p. 2).

French philosopher Michel Foucault explored power as a discursive and active element. Discourse is a means by which power relations establish themselves and produce notions of “truth” (Foucault, 1980, p. 93). Foucault asserted that individuals

serve as conduits of power and discourse (p. 98); power is exercised and exists in action (p. 89); and power circulates and functions as does a chain (p. 98).

Barrett (2002), citing Foucault, defined power as a complex system involving ‘micro level’ relationships among individuals (p. 36). He stated, “In Foucault’s epistemology, everything seems to be happening at once. Power suppresses an activity, then encourages it. Power is the cause of something that happens, but also its effect. Power opposes knowledge while simultaneously nourishing it. Power is ever on the move, generating coalitions and then disrupting them, settling momentarily on individuals and then flitting through institutions, leaving both individual and institution ravished or enriched in the process. Power is both positive and negative, intentional and unintentional. In Foucault’s famous expression, ‘power is always-already there’” (p. 36).

Empowerment – When individuals in an organization share power, they engage in empowerment. J.E. Grunig (1992) explained empowerment as the symmetrical concept of power, which involves “collaborating to increase the power of everyone in the organization, to the benefit of everyone in the organization” (p. 564). For this dissertation, I define empowerment as the collaborative sharing of resources and knowledge for the benefit of individuals in an organization.

Summary of Literature

Two bodies of literature inform this study and relate directly to the dissertation’s three research questions. First, the dissertation reviews literature regarding gender theory of public relations and practitioner’s prescriptions for the future study of gender. Scholarship suggested that gender is a socialized phenomenon which affects practitioners’ meaning making of public relations. Women public relations practitioners

experience ascribed traits and role prescriptions (i.e. Aldoory & Toth, 2002, Grunig, Toth & Hon, 2001, Pompper, 2007); discrimination and stereotypes (i.e. Frölich & Peters, 2007, Weidman, 2001); pay differences (i.e. Aldoory & Toth, 2001; Hon, 1995); sexual harassment (i.e. Serini, Toth, Wright and Emig, 1998); the glass ceiling (Wrigley, 2002); lack of power (L.A. Grunig, Toth & Hon, 2001); and race-related effects (i.e. Pompper, 2007; Kern-Foxworth, 1989, 1991).

Second, the dissertation reviews scholarship regarding power and empowerment. It details components of power-control theory (i.e. J.E. Grunig, 1992, Pfeffer, 1981) and power-related research in public relations. Scholarship suggests that practitioners experience power through use of formal and non-traditional practices (Berger & Reber, 2006); acquisition of knowledge and skills sets (i.e. Dozier, Grunig & Grunig, 1995), bonding together in groups or coalitions (i.e. L.A. Grunig, 1992), engagement in discourse (Edwards, 2009); and education of others about their value and contributions (Moss, Warnaby and Newman, 2001). The review of literature suggests that power is theorized in diverse ways and that few studies have examined power and gender in public relations from the perspectives of women practitioners.

Summary of Research Method

To best illustrate and describe how women public relations practitioners experience the phenomena of gender and power, I chose a qualitative research method which utilized 45 in-depth, semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with women public relations practitioners guided by an interview protocol. Prior to collecting data, I received IRB approval for the study. Participants were recruited during the months of June through November 2009 using purposive, maximum variation and snowball sampling methods. I

sent an e-mail letter to a sample of women public relations practitioners who had participated in a previous study that asked them to participate in my dissertation research. After submission of the letter to previous study participants, I engaged in purposive and maximum variation sampling by sending the e-mail recruitment letter to participants of varying race, age, geographic location and professional capacity. Specifically, I contacted women who held a variety of leadership positions in public relations, ranging from CEO, vice president, independent consultant and manager. I also sought recruits who worked in a variety of public relations environments, such as agency, corporate, not-for-profit, U.S. government and U.S. military. Furthermore, I contacted women in the geographic locations of California, Tennessee, Florida, Virginia, Maryland, and Washington, D.C. One limit was set upon my sampling procedure: I only recruited women who had worked in a public relations capacity for at least five years. To screen for this requirement, I asked women via e-mail or via phone if they had worked in the industry for at least five years before commencing the interview.

To analyze the qualitative data, I utilized a grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Throughout the entire research process, I evaluated the study to address rigor, sensitivity to research subjects, personal biases and research approaches.

Necessity and Significance of this Research

Scholars continue to call for a more holistic, theoretical and qualitative approach to the study of public relations (Grunig, 2006; Toth & Cline, 2007). Toth and Cline (2007) argued that research has studied the issues regarding increasing numbers of women in public relations, but has not yet significantly built theory to explain the relationship between gender and public relations (p. 87). L. A. Grunig (2006) has called

for more integrative analysis of women's work lives that examines their "commitments not only to the employer and to the profession, but to their partners, their children, their parents (and their partners' parents), and to their neighbors" (p. 124). This approach, she explained, would enable research that uncovers the issues, business rationales, policies, and moral responsibility related to treating employees as "worthwhile individuals rather than merely means to an organizational goal" (p. 124). Furthermore, L. A. Grunig (2006) suggested that research seeking to understand and enhance careers of women can also help people of color, gays and lesbians, older workers, individuals with disabilities, and other nontraditional practitioners of public relations. She suggests that "the study of women in public relations provides an excellent model of women in the workplace as a whole... especially because public relations is, in essence, a microcosm of the workplace" (p. 135). With this study, I sought to better understand how gender and power can contribute to the empowerment, work-life balance and enrichment of all public relations professionals and practices.

Eaton (2001) argued for the inclusion of race, class, gender and other intersections into our theorizing about mass communication (p. 42). She explained, "When we envision social vectors as a multicultural matrix and not an additive model, we begin to realize the necessity of simultaneously including race, class, gender, and other intersections in our thinking and work. Any linear separation of vectors is artificial and incomplete" (p. 42). Therefore, this dissertation research examined ways in which meaning making of gender depends on race, age and geography.

Public relations scholars have called for non-comparative research that analyzes the causes of gender differences, rather than demonstrates the differences between men

and women (Toth & Cline, 2007). With this dissertation, I sought to answer this call. I aimed to illustrate and theorize about the multiple forms of gender identities and power experiences that women experience in the public relations workplace. I studied how gender and power simultaneously work to affect women's experiences in public relations, which was needed in order to advance our understanding of gender as a contextual, varied, socialized process. Research in public relations needs to continue to better address not how men and women differ in their meaning making and practices of public relations, but in how gendered identities are constructed, discussed, reinforced and subjected to power relations. Shields (2008) explained the need for research to continually go beyond the male/female dichotomy, stating "Simplistic catalogs of difference resist theory's demonstration that focus on the descriptions of difference and similarity do not aid us in understanding when and how gender operates as a system of oppression or as an aspect of identity (p. 303).

This qualitative dissertation has the ability to enrich the study of and theory regarding public relations, gender and power. It can be a significant tool to describe women's experiences in public relations, contribute to gender and feminist theories of public relations (Aldoory, 2005; Grunig, Toth & Hon, 2001; Hon, 1995) and educate students and practitioners in the discipline. Rakow (1989) argued, "Locating the historical development of public relations with the focus on the inseparable gendered context within which it developed will help us better understand the contemporary 'feminization of the field'" (p. 290). Thus, research such as this may provide a tool to better understand the feminization of the public relations field and illustrate ways in which gender equality in public relations can be achieved. With the results of this study, I

built upon current gender theory research (i.e. Grunig, Toth, & Hon, 2000, 2001; Hon, 1995; O'Neil, 2003).

Scholars have called for research that seeks to diversify our notions of power in public relations (Berger, 2007; Eaton, 2001). Berger (2007) has argued for continued research on power, stating “there is more work to do. Excellence Theory has shown a crucial pathway to power discussions about the practice, and revealed some of the breaks. We need to expand our vocabulary of power and to better understand organizational power in its many forms, as well as its implications for teaching and practice” (p. 227). Eaton (2001) called for public relations researchers to change definitions of power to include concepts of women’s empowerment. She stated, “Identifying differences among women’s access to power and levels of privilege will also refute the essentializing assumptions that all women are equally oppressed by patriarchy” (p. 51). This dissertation has built upon the previous power research of Berger and Reber (2005, 2006) by detailing power in its various forms - as well as by contributing to recent findings on power and gender by Aldoory, Reber, Berger and Toth (2008). This research has illustrated, in-depth, how women public relations practitioners make meaning of power – and empowerment – in diverse ways. We must continue to ask if women public relations practitioners make individual choices to empower themselves, as power-control theory dictates, or do they conceive and enact power differently?

This dissertation was the first to examine the nexus of gender and power in public relations. It contributes to our theorizing of gender and power by illustrating the ways in which these concepts relate and affect practitioner meaning making of public relations. Studying this nexus complicated our understanding of gender and power: these

phenomena do not exist separately as static elements, yet combine to benefit and also oppress women practitioners.

Ultimately, the goal of this dissertation was to 1) address specifically how women public relations practitioners make meaning of gender and power and 2) address what implications the intersections of gender and power hold for the practice of public relations.

This dissertation was delimited to women because we must better understand how women's meaning making of gender and power affect their interpersonal practices, sense of empowerment and gendered identities in the workplace. Power in public relations is not simply reduced to a male/female or manager/technician role dichotomy. Instead, women enact and experience gender and power differently among themselves. The experiences and meaning making of women in the public relations field are constantly evolving and continued gender research, such as this study, appropriately examines these changes and experiences. The dissertation research was opened up to all public relations practitioners – rather than delimited to members of an executive team who are assumed to “possess” power – in order to better understand the ways in which power acts not as a possession, but as a relation, system and process.

Limitations of the Study

This study is limited by its sample of public relations practitioners. Lack of funding, difficulty finding contacts outside of my geographic region and a limited data collection timeline prevented me from collecting a sample as diverse as I had intended. Specifically, my sample is skewed toward independent or agency Caucasian women public relations practitioners from the mid-Atlantic region.

In order to attain a more diverse sample, I conducted telephone interviews with public relations practitioners in California, Florida and Tennessee. Because telephone interviews do not allow for face-to-face interaction, these interviews, I felt, were shorter and lacked the same level of detail and intimacy as the in-person interviews.

Additionally, some face-to-face interviews were conducted at or near practitioners' place of work. The less private location may have prevented my participants from fully disclosing their workplace experiences or voicing their interpretations of gender and power.

Personal bias and background present an additional limitation. As a former public relations practitioner who experienced gender and power-related phenomena, it is possible that my experiences influenced the manner in which I interviewed practitioners and coded, analyzed and presented my research findings. To counteract my personal bias, I conducted member checks, bracketed my biases during data collection and analysis and I grounded my research questions, interview protocol and data analysis in the public relations, power and gender literature and theory.

Organization of Dissertation

In this introductory chapter, I have detailed the goals and the necessity for the research, reviewed scholarship regarding public relations, gender and power, outlined the qualitative research method, defined the research terminology and explored the benefits this research may hold for theory and practice.

In the second chapter, I review the theoretical literature regarding public relations, gender and power that frame this study. The chapter offers comprehensive reviews of

literature regarding gender and power, then delves into theory and applications of each in public relations contexts.

In the third chapter, I explore my rationale for choosing a qualitative research method. Additionally, I detail my methods for sampling, data collection, analysis and evaluation.

Lastly, this dissertation presents results related to each research question and discusses the implications of each. It concludes by discussing the dissertation's contributions to theory and practice, directions for future research of gender and power in public relations and limitations of the study. References, figures and appendices are placed at the end of this dissertation.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

The purpose of this study was to examine how women public relations practitioners make meaning of gender and power. In this chapter, I present two core bodies of literature and theory relevant to the study of gender, power and their intersections. These sections are followed by three research questions that structure the study.

First, I review literature regarding public relations and gender theory. Gender and feminist research has made great strides in theorizing why women in public relations experience gender-related phenomena such as lower pay, discrimination, work-life balance difficulty and ultimately, loss of power. Second, I offer literature pertaining to power and public relations. Power literature, historically, has assumed that power exists as an individual or organization's possession, rather than a shared relational system. Such definitions of power may not adequately address women's issues in public relations or match how women public relations practitioners actually experience power. Thus, in the power section, I bring forth literature regarding empowerment and feminist critiques of power, which hold that power is uniquely gendered and relational.

Together, these bodies of literature and the three research questions that follow will create a framework from which to analyze and describe women's meaning making of gender and power, and the nexus of gender and power in public relations. Due to the exploratory nature of this study, I felt it was necessary to begin each section with an overview of the subject matter before proceeding to more specific applications of the topics within public relations contexts. Throughout the literature review, I utilized

research from public relations, organizational management, sociology and philosophy, all of which show promise for understanding public relations, gender and power.

Public Relations and Gender

During the 20th century, public relations evolved from a male-dominated to an increasingly female-dominated industry. In the wake of this evolution, the public relations profession has experienced a unique set of gender-based phenomena which have positioned the field as a “velvet ghetto” (Toth & Cline, 1989). Public relations scholars have found that under this changing environment, women in public relations have experienced systematic gender discrimination, less pay, lower status and less influence (Grunig, Toth & Hon, 2001, p. 5). In order to further understand the feminization of public relations and the positive implications of this feminization process, research must understand the concept of gender and the ways in which our lives and organizations are gendered (Rakow, 1989).

Definitions of public relations do not reflect the gendered, often feminine nature of the practice. Traditionally, public relations has been described as the management of communication among employees and between an organization and its publics. Cutlip, Center and Broom (2000) defined public relations as “the management function that identifies, establishes, and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the various publics on whom its success or failure depends” (p. 6). Lattimore, Baskin, Heiman and Toth (2007) defined the practice similarly, yet broadly, stating:

“Public relations is a leadership and management function that helps achieve organizational objectives, define philosophy, and facilitate organizational change. Public relations practitioners communicate with all relevant internal and external publics to develop positive relationships and to create consistency between organizational goals and societal expectations. Public relations practitioners develop, execute, and evaluate organizational programs that promote the exchange of influence and understanding among an organization’s constituent and publics” (p. 4).

Although a management function, public relations involves a rhetorical process, in which individuals and organizations engage in dialogue and debate in order to “foster social harmony” (Heath, 2006, p. 67). Public relations practitioners utilize discourse to frame information and perspectives in order to influence and facilitate organizational decision making and communication. This discursive framing process requires that information be “interpreted and judged before recommendations are advanced and conclusions formed” (Heath, 2009, p. 3). At the most micro level, public relations can be defined as intricate face-to-face interactions between practitioners and employees, superiors or clients that feature openness, networking, listening, dialogue and mutual respect (Rhee, 2007).

Thus, for this dissertation, I draw upon both management and rhetorical perspectives to define public relations as an interactive, dialogic process in which public relations practitioners engage in strategic planning, relationship building and influence to manage the communication between an entity and its publics. I define it as such in order

to align public relations with the more dialogic, relational – and sometimes strategic - nature of gender and power.

The public relations field offers a rich context for examining the organizational and gendered roles that individuals communicate, negotiate and perform. In the section that follows, I review theoretical scholarship regarding public relations and gender theory. Specifically, I trace the history of gender theory and feminist theory of public relations, bring forth key premises of gender theory and public relations, and address gender scholars' prescriptions for the future study of gender and public relations. Ultimately, literature from this section on gender and public relations offers a framework for better understanding how gendered roles – and all that define and accompany them – affect practitioners' meaning making and performance of public relations.

History of Gender Research in Public Relations - Research on gender and public relations has examined the marginalization of the public relations function and made meaning of women's discrimination in the field (Aldoory, 2005; Aldoory & Toth, 2002; L.A. Grunig, 2006; Grunig, Toth, & Hon 2001; Hon, 1995). Scholarship has evolved from a liberal feminist perspective to an increasingly critical approach to gender and power relations.

Applying Tetreault's (1985) feminist phase theory, L.A. Grunig (2006) explained that gender research of public relations has evolved through six phases. The first phase, male scholarship, often ignored or patronized women's experiences. Compensatory scholarship, the second phase, typically featured only profiles of successful women, as defined by male standards. The third phase, bifocal research, assumed that men and

women are inherently different, often resulting in dichotomizing or separatist research on men's and women's experiences. In the fourth or feminist phase, research strove to understand women's experiences using their own stories and experiences. The fifth or multifocal phase, positioned gender on a continuum, recognizing similarities and differences in masculine and feminine existence. Most recently, L.A. Grunig has added a sixth, "integrative," phase which examines and promotes women's ties to the community, the home and the workplace. These phases serve as a tool in which to understand gender research: all phases or categories exist and still receive attention today.

Aldoory (2005) also traced the evolution of public relations and gender research. She argued that three types of studies have helped build a paradigm with which to examine gender. First, descriptive studies have focused on the status of women in the profession. Second, explanatory research has developed gender and public relations theory. Third, more critical research has encouraged systematic changes in gender ideology, research, and theory (p. 670).

Key Premises of Gender Theory in Public Relations

Numerous concepts comprise gender theory in public relations. L.A. Grunig, Toth and Hon (2001) cited issues regarding women's employment in public relations. These issues included the sex-specific roles demand of the workplace, employers' assumption that women are the "better buy," the creation of women in the workplace as a new "demographic," the rise of female-intensive industries, affirmative action policies, gender ideology, and assumptions regarding women's attraction to public relations (Grunig, Toth & Hon, 2001, pp. 33-34). For purposes of this research, I have chosen to discuss selected

overarching principles regarding gender theory and public relations which relate to the dissertation research questions I propose. They include gender, socialization, traits and roles, discrimination, the pay gap, sexual harassment, the glass ceiling, the double or triple “shift,” power, job satisfaction and race.

Gender – Gender theory in public relations assumes that all individuals possess a “gender” and that gender, in turn, affects individuals’ social, work and power relations. Aldoory (2005) stated that gender scholarship focuses on how gender and power define, construct and guide social settings and social meanings. Gender structures both our material and symbolic worlds (p. 670). Rakow (1989) offered a comprehensive definition of gender for the public relations context. She wrote, “Gender is not something we **are** but something we do and believe. Our gendered identities are taken up and sustained through our interactions with others; our sense of a stable identity, a gendered core that makes us feel male or female, is held together by accumulated memories of our interactions and our culturally specific notions of gender” (p. 289, emphasis in original). Organizational and individual discourses shape socialized notions of gender (Wilson, 2001). Wilson explained that actions, events and organizations can become gendered. Because discourse privileges certain topics and excludes others, it reproduces organizational values and defines acceptable types of identity (pp. 2-3).

Throughout time, the definition of gender has evolved in public relations research. Aldoory (2005) explained that early research often defined gender as “female.” This defining practice implied that *only* women are affected by gender constructions, stereotypes and false expectations. Research has often ignored the systemic and organizational factors that are gendered that define roles in organizations.

Fausto-Sterling (2000) utilized a continuum metaphor to describe gender and sexuality. This metaphor placed male and female on the opposite ends of a biological continuum, but recognizes that an infinite combination of anatomical combinations, such as hermaphrodites, exist (p. 31). The author argued that because myriad combinations of sexuality and gender exist, yet society only recognizes strict masculinity and femininity, this suggests that our notions of gender, masculinity and femininity are cultural, perceived concepts (p. 31). Perceptually, we are bounding gender into two identifiable categories. Masculinity and femininity as two separate concepts are blending and changing: Fausto-Sterling asserted that, "There are both househusbands and women fighter pilots. There are feminine lesbians and gay men both buff and butch. Male to female and female to male transsexuals render the sex/gender divide virtually unintelligible" (p. 101). Ultimately, the author hypothesized that masculinity and femininity will overlap to "render the very notion of gender difference irrelevant" (p. 101).

Rich (1994) also utilized a continuum metaphor, but explained that science, medicine, and politics have built a language and practice of compulsory heterosexuality that has nearly erased the existence of lesbian or homosexual existence from our understanding of gender. Compulsory heterosexuality assumes that women, by nature, need and seek to form sexual, friendship and professional relationships with men – and men only. However, Rich (1994) explained that all humans, in actuality, do not exist in such tightly constrained male/female, heterosexual lifestyles and thought processes. She argued that science and politics must, instead, recognize gender and sexuality on a continuum, of what she calls "Lesbian Existence." On the continuum of lesbian

existence, all forms of female sexual partnerships, friendships, family and work support systems, and modes of survival are recognized. This concept offers a means of challenging compulsory heterosexuality and argues that there are multiple ways of experiencing sexuality and gender.

Fausto-Sterling (2000) has criticized and expanded upon the concept of the gender continuum. She explained that a linear continuum model of masculinity and femininity assumes that as one becomes more feminine, he or she becomes less masculine – or vice versa. Instead of using the continuum concept, which illustrates gender as polar opposites of male and female, citing (Grosz, 1994), she proposed that we visualize gender as a "Möbius strip," which is an artistic representation that mimics the infinity sign. Therefore, instead of a "pure" male and a "pure" female and everything in between, we must understand that masculinity and femininity constantly draw upon each other and form infinite combinations in the human body and mind. The inside of the Möbius strip represents our infinite notions of the body and biology, whereas the outside of the strip represents our infinite notions of culture and experience: both nature and nurture exist simultaneously to inform our understanding of gender (p. 24).

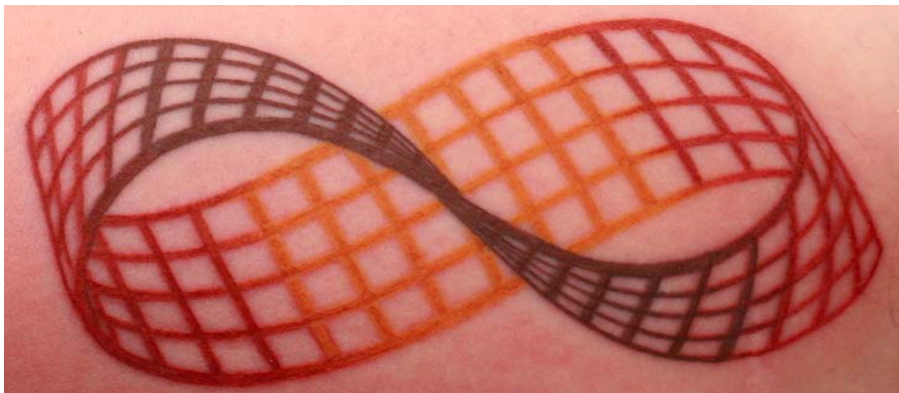


Figure 1 - Möbius Strip

Source: blogs.discovermagazine.com

Socialization – Gender theory in public relations holds that gender role socialization can explain why men and women possess or perform certain masculine or feminine traits. L.A. Grunig, Toth and Hon (2001) referred to these roles as “sex roles” and defined them as the positions that women and men occupy, and the masculine and feminine characteristics they display. For example, Hon (1995) explained that focus group participants attributed role socialization to gender discrimination in the workplace. One woman said, “The values that are important – conflict, confrontation, power, dominance, macho strength – have been socialized into men.” She suggested that women’s socialized traits, such as caring for children, are devalued (p. 46). Likewise, Aldoory and Toth (2002), in their study regarding gender discrepancies in public relations, found that individuals perceived that women are socialized to be less aggressive. Participants said that male employees are taught from a young age to feel a sense of entitlement to move up in an organization’s hierarchy; that men “act” like managers early; and that women felt that men who had wives at home expected them to do the same, and had less work expectations for them. Aldoory, Jiang, Toth and Sha (2008) found that both men and women public relations practitioners succumbed to socialization. Practitioners shared that societal expectations and norms created work-life balance pressures (p. 9).

In a later study, Aldoory and Toth (2004) found that participants believed women made better leaders in public relations because of the socialized traits they have acquired, such as empathy and collaborative efforts, which in turn create a transformational leadership style. They concluded, however, that organizational culture, general business

and economic environments, and socialized gender stereotypes all work to constrain women's leadership style.

Traits and Roles – Gender and socialization often affect individuals' roles and traits in an organization. Often, women, by basis of gendered hiring practices, occupy the less respected “technician” role – instead of the “manager” role (Aldoory & Toth, 2002; Grunig, Toth & Hon, 2001; Hon, 1995; O'Neil, 2003). A 1995 study by Broom and Dozier, however, found not statistically significant connection between gender and role prescriptions. Instead, the authors asserted that role differences resulted from individuals' years of experience in the public relations field (p. 18).

Stereotypes and decisions of workplace superiors also affect role designations. Hon (1995) found that women were stereotyped into roles. She argued that women need to “conceptualize their role in broader terms than that of the helper” (p. 38).

Complementing public relations gender and roles research, management scholar R. M. Kanter (2003) found that a disproportionate number of women managers work in low-profile jobs such as first-line supervisors or staff professionals. Although they perform the management function, their lower status job role results in powerlessness (p. 140). Kanter explained this phenomenon, stating that women become powerless when their superiors place them in patronizing or “safe” work positions. Their superiors do so in order to “protect” female employees or when they fear association with a woman who may experience failure. Furthermore, women lose power when superiors display a lack of support for their role, judge them on the criticisms of other employees, and place them at fault for mistakes out of their control (p. 141).

Practitioner gender and race intersect to influence role prescriptions. Pompper (2007) found that managers directed Latinas into work roles that only dealt with Hispanic clients or parts of public relations projects that needed Spanish-language fluency or cultural understanding (p. 300). In this sense, they were given the role of “symbol” or “representative.” In order to attain status and work opportunities, Latinas in Pompper’s (2007) study expressed the need to suppress their female and Hispanic identity, because it conflicted with their work identity and aspirations (p. 305). This complements Kanter’s (1977) finding that tokens will not typically draw attention to themselves, perform exceptionally well, or “show up” a dominant individual. Instead, women tokens worked to assimilate into the work culture and gain peer acceptance (p. 215).

Whereas individuals may display both “masculine” and “feminine” traits, such as “aggressiveness, athleticism and stoicism” and “passivity, nurturance, gentleness and emotionality,” respectively (Sha, 2001, p. 157), research has found that women display a unique set of communication traits in the workplace. Aldoory’s (1998) study of female public relations professionals found that women utilize descriptive, relationship-building language that involved “hedging,” accommodating, and group-building strategies. Similarly, Aldoory and Toth’s (2004) study regarding public relations practitioners’ leadership style preferences, found that women’s leadership traits include helping others, looking out for people, using communication skills, developing good rapport and listening (p. 175). The authors asserted that because women prefer transformational leadership and feminine traits, they may be more suited than men to be public relations leaders (p. 179). Sha (2001) argued that what may be perceived as feminine or a

“women’s trait” in the United States, however, may not be perceived as such in other societies and cultures.

Discrimination – Gender theory in public relations asserts that gender differences result in discrimination. Often, masculine standards and organizational policy formulated by men ignore or discriminate women in the workplace (Hon, 1995). Aldoory and Toth (2002) cited sex segregation as a leading cause for this discrimination. They argued that women move into different occupations (such as public relations) at different rates. Employers permit women to enter fields that are no longer of interest to men, because women are assumed to have specific characteristics that make them better at certain tasks (p. 107).

Myths or stereotypes, and the lack of access created by them, perpetuate discrimination. Frölich and Peters (2007), who conducted a study of women practitioners in Germany, found that industry stereotypes included women’s lack of “management competence,” and “chattiness.” Common terms used to describe this stereotype included “PR Bunny,” “PR Clone,” “Agency Snipe,” and “PR Slut” (p. 241). Frölich and Peters (2007) explained that stereotypes such as these can contribute to female practitioner’s isolation, devaluation and “ghettoisation.” Like stereotypes, myths also hold gendered consequences. Hon (1995) described the myth that women have become public relations practitioners to dodge numbers or because they cannot write well.

Discrimination may also occur as a result of one’s appearance or identity (Aldoory, 2001; Weidman, 2001). Weidman (2001) for example, found that women in mass communication experienced discrimination based on sex, age, race, class, sexual

orientation, looks, size, physical ability, voice, work style – or any combination of those factors (p. 87). Weidman found that age, size and race were variables that figured strongly in women’s stories of discrimination. Regarding age, she wrote, “As we have gotten older, the women I know have looked back and realized that some of the discrimination we experienced in our teens and early 20s was tied to our youth and our lack of experience in the world” (p. 89). Discussing size, Weidman stated, “Petite women like myself often get treated like children, and our ability to do our job is sometimes questioned. Our size may even be used as a justification for inequitable treatment, when the real reason is probably sexism...” (p. 90). In terms of racial discrimination, women of color are often underrepresented (Aldoory, 2001; Weidman, 2001). Aldoory (2001), argued, “People of color are discriminated against by being absent in public relations, which is a symptom of the same White male system striving to retain its power” (p. 107). In order to cope with discrimination, Weidman (2001) found that individuals changed the way they dressed and “laughed some things off” (p. 97).

Pay gap – Gender discrimination, in turn, results in unequal pay for women in the public relations workforce. *PR Week’s* 2007 salary survey cited that women practitioners with five years or more of experience earn an average of \$85,000, whereas men with five years or more of experience earn an average of \$124,000. Aldoory and Toth (2002) identified factors that explain the gender/salary differential. They cited women’s lack of negotiation tactics, socialization of men and women, gender discrimination and sexism, women’s attempt to balance work and family, recruitment and retention efforts for men and historical parity as causes for the pay gap in public relations (p. 123). Anderson’s (2003) study regarding women’s pay gap across all business contexts, complements

Aldoory and Toth's findings. Anderson found that several barriers inhibit women from earning equal pay, including "work-life balance challenges, a lack of awareness among senior executives, and inadequate networking, mentoring, and visibility opportunities" (p. 1).

Socialization, in particular, may contribute to women's lower pay in the profession. Grunig, Toth and Hon (2001) found that women public relations practitioners experience "indoctrinating" discourses of devaluation early in life which lower their self esteem and effect salary negotiation (p. 296). The authors also cited that women have been socialized to take fewer risks than men, and women and men differ in their salary expectations (p. 298). Earlier research by Hon (1995) explained that women were often socialized that it was "not nice to talk about money; it's embarrassing" (p. 49). She also cited that women receive less pay because they lack self esteem and undervalue their own worth.

Sexual harassment – Gender research in public relations seeks to uncover the visible and invisible forms of sexual harassment. Serini, Toth, Wright and Emig (1998) found that sexual harassment practices in the public relations workplace included men's ignorance of the sole woman in a meeting, questioning of women about their plans for marriage and children, the making of jokes about women in the workplace, and the assumption that women who receive promotions did so by sleeping with those in decision-making positions. Women respondents who experienced sexual harassment in the workplace reported that it negatively affected their performance.

Hon (1995) described the practice of “lookism,” which is a form of sexual harassment that focuses “either positively or negatively – on women’s appearance than the job performance” (p. 54). Interestingly, Hon (1995) and Grunig, Toth and Hon (2001) found that women engage in lookism, too. For example, one participant said that she might not take a beautiful woman as seriously as an average looking woman (p. 55). Women practitioners may also take part in lookism for attention and power. Grunig, Toth and Hon (2001) found, for example, that women practitioners stated that lookism could advantage women by captivating men, getting men’s attention, and using “all your resources” (p. 313).

The Glass Ceiling – As gender discrimination occurs over time, it results in the “glass ceiling” for public relations women. Wrigley (2002) defined the glass ceiling as an invisible or unspoken organizational barrier that prevents women from excelling and achieving equality in the workplace. In her study of women public relations practitioners’ perceptions of the glass ceiling, she found that women who worked in public relations denied the presence of a glass ceiling, but told stories and described traits that suggested the existence of a glass ceiling. Results found that a “Good Ole Boy” network still exists in organizations, that the glass ceiling occurs as a result of socialization and historical precedence, and that organizations continue to perceive women as “helpers” and men as “managers” (p. 38). The study suggested that changes to socialization practices must occur in order to eliminate the presence of the glass ceiling in the public relations field.

The double or triple shift – In order to combat the glass ceiling, gender research has examined how women often work harder and longer to achieve success (L.A. Grunig, 2006; Grunig, Toth, & Hon, 2001; Hon, 1995; van Zoonen, 1994). L. A. Grunig (2006)

found that female public relations practitioners often feel as if they “do it all.” Respondents in her study described their blended roles as “counselor to senior management, conscience of the corporation, expert technician, and nurturer of the family” (p. 134). Hon (1995) found that some women are socialized to serve as both the “breadwinners” and the “caregivers” thus balancing several roles at once. van Zoonen (1994) described women’s dual family and work responsibilities as “obstacles for the entrance and advancement” of women communication professionals (p. 52). Mass communication and journalism professionals are often required to work non-traditional hours and travel on short notice, whereas public relations and advertising professionals may not have such strict schedules. Therefore, women may turn to the public relations profession in order to partake of more flexible hours and available childcare facilities in order to better balance work-life responsibilities (p. 53).

Power – Gender research in public relations argues that gender creates power differences in society and the workplace. L.A. Grunig, Toth and Hon (2001) explained that one’s power in public relations is often the *perception* others hold of power, one’s multiple resources, relationships and characteristics, and one’s expertise in strategic management. Aldooray (2005) argued that organizations often wrongly assume that power is “property” that can be given away or that individuals can possess (p. 673). She explained that the empowerment of women by authority reinforces women’s dependence on paternalistic protectionism. Instead, research must examine the multiple relations of subordination and analyze how these relations are being constituted (p. 673).

Power can reside in the individual practitioner, the public relations department, and within an organization itself (L.A. Grunig, 1992). Informal and formal groups of

individuals join to create systems of power that can impact the public relations department. In order for women to employ power, L.A. Grunig, Toth and Hon (2001) found that women engaged in “blowing their own horn,” networking, highlighting their individual accomplishments to the organization, and working to notify the “right people” of current issues and accomplishments (p. 274).

Research suggests that female public relations practitioners often lack power in comparison to their male counterparts (Grunig, Toth & Hon, 2001; O’Neil, 2003). Female practitioners can lack organizational forms of power and face relegation to the technician role, lower degree of employee support, token status among a male-dominated team, lack of mentors, exclusion from networks, and lack of respect and value (O’Neil, 2003, p. 154). Wrigley (2005) also found that women enact power over each other. In her study regarding the “Queen Bee” syndrome, she addressed men’s continuing power in the corporate hierarchy and women’s adoption of masculine, authoritarian forms of communication despite the feminization and diversification of the field. Wrigley used the “Queen Bee” syndrome term to describe women who discriminate against their female colleagues and seek control of power and authority, instead of favoring ethical, diverse and relationship-building practices. In order to empower women, Wrigley suggested that organizations offer mentorship programs, entrepreneurship opportunities, diversity awareness training, and equal salary and promotion opportunities in order to eliminate the “Queen Bee” syndrome and empower women (pp. 22-27). Similarly, Hon (1995) hypothesized that the “Queen Bee” syndrome is the convergence of women trying to promote themselves at the expense of others and the result of an environment in which only the meanest women can be promoted (p. 48).

Job Satisfaction- The dynamics of the public relations profession affect women's job satisfaction. Serini, Toth, Wright and Emig (1997), in their examination of women in public relations, found that women seemed to find a freshness and openness in the changing environment of public relations (p. 111). Female public relations practitioners equated job satisfaction with "new opportunities; changing workplaces, the change in women; respect for women, their needs, and their profession; improving benefits; and workplace challenges" (p. 112). Furthermore, the authors found that "women felt that being recognized for what they did and having people appreciate their contributions were also important parts of satisfaction" (p. 114). Women cited the need to feel like "valued members of the organization" (p. 114).

Women public relations practitioners may also experience a lack of job satisfaction. Aldoory and Toth (2004b) found that female research participants cited feeling a lack of control when family-related obligations affected their work (as cited in Toth & Cline, 2007). Moreover, men and women participants framed work-family responsibilities as a women's issue. Krider and Ross (1997) found that women experienced sexism; received less awards and recognition compared to male colleagues; identified with multiple roles such as mother and professional; and felt that job stress, long work hours and conflict resulting in feeling "burned out." At times, women participants expressed dissatisfaction with their role as a "superwoman" practitioner. One woman said, "The superwoman syndrome is not healthy! I feel really good when I hear young women say that they don't want to fall into that syndrome" (p. 444). To cope with conflicting identities, women reported creating new terminology to express their feelings or experiences and wanting to return to a simpler form of life.

Race - Race can be defined as a socially constructed phenomenon by which individuals categorize, construct and enact reality (Frankenberg, 1993) based on the color of one's skin. According to Frankenberg (1993), "Race, like gender, is "real" in the sense that it has real, though changing, effects in the world and real, tangible, and complex impact on individuals' sense of self, experiences and life chances" (p. 11). Scholarship has found that gender intersects with race to affect women professionals' and public relations practitioners' career choices, career progress, perceptions of job performance, access to informal and formal professional networks, and low organizational status and power (Bell & Nkomo, 2003; Pompper, 2007). For example, Bell and Nkomo (2003), cited their study of black and white women in corporate America, in which they found that African-American women managers felt they had to outperform both their male and female white colleagues to succeed. Furthermore, Bell and Nkomo found that African American women "felt they were held to a higher standard because they were always fighting the stereotype of being incompetent, despite having the right educational and experience credentials" (p. 12).

In her study of Latina public relations practitioners, Pompper (2007) found, specifically, that Latina public relations practitioners endured sexism by Latino public relations professionals and reporters, discrimination by Anglo clients and bosses, and work-life balance stress (pp. 298-300). In order to deal with gender and racial discrimination in the workplace, Latina women passively endured these phenomena by "developing a thick skin" (p. 301). Other Latina women actively combated these phenomena by "standing your ground" and "demanding respect" (p. 301). Still other

women sought family support, mentorship, networking opportunities and education to endure these workplace challenges (p. 302).

Research by Kern-Foxworth (1989, 1991) has championed the professional contributions and insight of African American, Asian American, Latin American and Native American public relations practitioners. Kern-Foxworth (1991) argued that minority groups have been underrepresented and undervalued by marketers and ethnic minority practitioners can bridge cultural and communication boundaries between a public relations agency and its ever-increasing diverse and global client base (p. 30).

Frankenberg's (1993) study of whiteness found that white women participants made meaning of race through experiences of oppression and privilege, encounters with racist discourse of difference which assumed that individuals of color were fundamentally different or inferior compared to whites, and demarcation and maintenance of racial boundaries. Interview participants voiced, often unconsciously, their awareness of oppression and discrimination among Black citizens, whereas they interpreted whiteness as "neutral" or privileged. Frankenberg concluded that race, racial dominance and whiteness exist as complex, historically situated lived experiences (p. 21).

A Black feminist perspective frames social constructions of race, class, gender, sexuality, age and ethnicity as systematic forms of oppression. African-American women have systematically been oppressed through their exploitation as "labor essential to U.S. capitalism," through the historical denial of their rights and privileges as citizens, and through controlling images and stereotypes African-American women as "mammies, jezebels" (Collins, 2000, p. 7). This perspective asserts that the experiences of women are

not the same: women experience intersecting and situated forms of knowing and experiencing race, gender, oppression and privilege.

Recommendations for the Future Study of Gender and Public Relations

Scholars have called for the continued examination of the effects of gender on the public relations profession. Specifically, researchers have argued for increasingly integrative and intersectional research to address the tremendous diversity and complex experiences of women public relations practitioners.

Integrative Research – Scholars have argued that a more holistic, feminist approach to research can benefit the study of public relations because it seeks to examine and explain the complexities that comprise gender and power relations. Hon (1995) has argued for integrative work that changes corporate policy and challenges masculinism in management. Organizations should make the workplace more “family friendly” with daycare and parental leave policies. L.A. Grunig (2006) thus proposed an integrative analysis of women’s work lives that examines their “commitments not only to the employer and to the profession, but to their partners, their children, their parents (and their partners’ parents), and to their neighbors” (p. 124). This approach, she explained, would enable research that uncovers the issues, business rationales, policies, and moral responsibilities related to treating employees as “worthwhile individuals rather than merely means to an organizational goal” (p. 124). L. A. Grunig (2006) stated that “the study of women in public relations provides an excellent model of women in the workplace as a whole... especially because public relations is, in essence, a microcosm of the workplace” (p. 135).

Gender scholars promote continued research that understands public relations students' perceptions of gender, for educators' teaching of students and practitioners about gender and for educators' modeling of values in public relations classrooms (Grunig, Toth & Hon, 2000; Sha, 2001; Sha & Toth, 2005). Specifically, Sha and Toth (2005) argued that educators must educate students about gender-related challenges in the field and offer them solutions for overcoming these issues (p. 98). Grunig, Toth and Hon (2001), similarly, asserted that educators' modeling of feminist and ethical values to students in the classroom will ultimately teach students to integrate values into decision making and consider collaboration, cooperation and diversity (p. 64).

Intersectional Research - Scholars have also called for an increasingly intersectional approach to gender-related public relations research (Eaton, 2001; Toth & Cline, 2007). Eaton (2001) argued for the inclusion of race, class, gender and other intersections into our theorizing about mass communication (p. 42). She explained, "When we envision social vectors as a multicultural matrix and not an additive model, we begin to realize the necessity of simultaneously including race, class, gender, and other intersections in our thinking and work. Any linear separation of vectors is artificial and incomplete" (p. 42).

Public relations scholars have called for non-comparative research that examines the causes of gender differences, rather than demonstrate the differences between men and women (Toth & Cline, 2007). Shields (2008) explained the need for research to continually go beyond the male/female dichotomy, stating "Simplistic catalogs of difference resist theory's demonstration that focus on the descriptions of difference and

similarity do not aid us in understanding when and how gender operates as a system of oppression or as an aspect of identity (p. 303).

Gender research regarding public relations suggests a highly complex system of gender discrimination, socialization and power relations in public relations. Public relations scholars argue that gender research must evolve to encompass gender in a more holistic and intersectional nature. From the body of gender research reviewed, I posed the following research question - **RQ1:** How do women public relations practitioners make meaning of gender? With this question, I sought to explore how women define and interpret the concept of “gender.” I hoped to uncover the discourse, perceptions and experiences they use to make meaning of gender. How do women’s unique identities and experiences affect these definitions? I also sought to better understand how women practitioner’s concepts of gender influence their public relations practices, approaches, or relationships.

Power theory in public relations also offers a rich lens for understanding the systems of individual practices, organizational structures, discursive forces and gender roles. In order to better understand how power affects public relations, I now turn to literature and theory regarding the definitions of power, types of power and applications of power to public relations and gender.

Power

The purpose of this section is to define power and empowerment, to discuss the applications of power to public relations and to explore the relations of power and gender in public relations. It seeks to link the contexts and theories of power to the contexts and theories of public relations in order to further build a framework for examining gender and power in public relations. Power research in public relations has historically

examined power as a function of individual influence and organizational structure, rather than as a discursive, systematic or feminist process. Thus, this section engages in a comprehensive review of the diverse perspectives of power before addressing literature pertaining to power and public relations.

Perspectives of Power

The concept of power has been defined as personal capacity or ability (i.e. French & Raven, 1968; Mintzberg, 1983; Pfeffer, 1992), organizational property and knowledge (Clegg, Courpasson & Phillips, 2006; Pfeffer, 1981) as discourse (i.e. Foucault, 1980), as embedded and cultural practice (i.e. Pfeffer, 1981; Danaher, Schirato & Webb, 2000), as a system of various components and relationships (i.e. Barrett, 2002; Danaher, Schirato & Webb, 2000), and as a negative force (i.e. Scott, 2001). The historical and contemporary perspectives and criticisms of power are reviewed below.

Power as Personal Property - Scholars have often described power as a capacity or something “tangible” that individuals “possess” or enact (Foucault, 1980; French & Raven, 1968; Mintzberg, 1983; Kanter, 2003; Pfeffer, 1981, 1992; Scott, 2001). Mintzberg (1983), for example, stated that power was the *capacity* to affect the behavior of other people (p. 5). Individual capacities for power include personal energy and endurance, ability to understand others, skill in creating and achieving goals, personal toughness, ability to engage in teamwork (Pfeffer, 1992), one’s access to resources and information, the ability to delegate and make decisions quickly and the ability to reward talent (Kanter, 2003). Postmodern philosopher Michel Foucault (1980) explained that historically, power was defined not only as capacity, but also as individual possession. He described it as “a right, which one is able to possess like a commodity, and which one

can in consequence transfer or alienate, either wholly or partially, through a legal act or through some act that establishes a right..." (p. 88).

Scholars have argued that when power is theorized as one's capacity or possession, power also exists as a product or value of that possession – such as reputation (Barrett, 2002; Kanter, 2003; Pfeffer, 1981; Scott, 2001) Power is "the ability of the participants to convince others within the organization that their specific tasks and their abilities are substantial and important... power is affected by the capacity of organizational participants to enhance their bases of power and to convince others in the organization of their necessity and value" (Pfeffer, 1981, p. 98). According to Kanter, one's power accumulates when he or she enacts roles that enable autonomy, discretion, relevance and recognition (p. 137). Similarly, Pfeffer (1981) wrote that "those subunits or individuals who can provide the most critical and difficult to obtain resources come to have power in the organization...Power derives from the ability to furnish those resources on which the organization most depends" (p. 101). Thus, individual sources of power are both explicit and perceived. Regarding perceived power, Barrett (2002) described individual power as hinging on one's reputation. He explained that in some cases, individuals are seen as the "tainted individual" whereas in other cases individuals are perceived as the "individual with the halo" (p. 30).

French and Raven (1968) defined five types of explicit and perceived power which one possesses in relation to others. These include reward power, coercive power, referent power, legitimate power, and expert power. The authors defined "reward" power as "power whose basis is the ability to reward." The strength of reward power increases

with the magnitude of the rewards which one perceives that another can mediate for him or her (p. 263).

Coercive power is defined as the expectation someone holds that he or she will receive punishment if he or she fails to conform to another's influence attempt. For example, French and Raven explained that "the ability to fire a worker if he falls below a given level of production will result in coercive power" (French & Raven, 1968, p. 263).

Legitimate power is defined as an individual's job title, role or position of authority. "The notion of legitimacy involves some sort of code or standard, accepted by the individual, by virtue of which the external agent can assert his power" (French & Raven, 1968, p. 265).

French and Raven (1968) described referent power as one's attractiveness or personal charisma. They explained that referent power is the condition that one avoids discomfort or gains satisfaction by conformity based on identification, regardless of another's responses. This desire to associate oneself with another due to attractiveness or "power" is often unconscious. (p. 267). Lastly, expert power is one's extent of knowledge in comparison to his or her abilities or to an "absolute standard." Often, however, an expert "is seen as having superior knowledge or ability in very specific areas, and his power will be limited to these areas" (pp. 267-268). French and Raven (1968) explained that all five of these forms of power vary greatly and grow stronger depending on the "basis of power" (p. 268). Furthermore, Buchanan and Badham (2008) explained that these five forms of power are related and can exist simultaneously.

Scholars have also examined power as the accomplishment of tasks and the production of outcomes as a result of individual's ability or capacity (i.e. Mintzberg, 1983). When an individual acts or communicates in order to produce an outcome, it can be described as social power (Levenger, 1959; Scott, 2001). Social power, a form of causal power, exists as a relationship between two agents referred to as the 'principal' and the 'subaltern.' In this relationship, the principle exercises power and the subaltern is affected by this power (Scott, 2001, p. 2). Levinger (1959) defined social power as an "individual's potentiality for influencing one or more other persons toward acting or changing in a given direction. According to this definition, social power is the ability to exert interpersonal influence" (p. 83). Elaborating on the notion of influence, Scott (2001) explained that the exercise of social power involves an intentional intervention: If an action is not intentional, it is not an act of power. "An intention or a desire rests upon a felt or perceived interest that the principal believes will be furthered if he or she brings about particular kinds of causal effects in the field of social relations" (p. 2). Thus, under social power, individuals are assumed to act on behalf of free will and are capable of resistance to acts of influence. Ultimately, Mintzberg (1983) argued that the concepts of (social) power and influence should be thought of synonymously (p. 5).

Scholars argue that power, however, exists not as the property of a sole individual, but exists within groups of individuals. Danaher, Schirato and Webb (2000) argued that "If we look at history in the twentieth century we will find that it is not a case of the people holding power, or even delegating power to individuals or groups, but as a case of groups becoming powerful by 'standing in' for the people, or by claiming to speak for or represent the people" (p. 73). The authors note that power cannot be owned,

but instead it moves around and through groups. However, power differs in its representation among groups: some groups are dominated, and some groups are simultaneously the dominators and dominated (p. 74).

An individual or group does not necessarily need to act in order to wield power (Danaher, Schirato & Webb, 2000; Scott, 2001). “Power – like knowledge and money – can be held in readiness for use whenever it is needed. The anticipation of its use, furthermore, means that power can have significant social consequences even when there is not explicit and overt intervention by the principal” (Scott, 2001, p. 5). Drawing upon Foucault, Danaher, Schirato and Webb (2000) noted that power is most effective when it is a capacity that is hidden from view.

Power as organizational property – In contrast to the individual commodity perspective, researchers and philosophers have defined power as the property of or a function of an organization and its structure (Barrett, 2002; Kanter, 2003; Pfeffer, 1981, 1992). Pfeffer (1981) argued that “power is, first of all, a structural phenomenon, created by the division of labor and departmentation that characterize the specific organization” (p. 4). Structural power is embedded in all institutions, societal roles, beliefs, values and norms, conforms to the shape of the stratification system and produces patterns of advantage and disadvantage over time (Barrett, 2002, p. 66). Pfeffer (1992) explained that structural forms of power include job position, control over information, social position in the organizational communication network, lack of internal dissent and the centrality of one’s job function to the organization. Taking an organizational stance, Kanter (2003) explained that power is a reflection of a healthy, positive work environment. Organizational sources of power include lines of supply, lines of

information, and lines of power, which are all based on connections with individuals (p. 137).

Power is often perceived as an organization's possession of knowledge and skill. Clegg, Courpasson and Phillips (2006) explained that power exists in "forms of knowledge that constitute, structure, and shape" organizations. This organizational "knowledge management" focuses on "the brain rather than the body, the fusion with the moral economy of social capital, and the combination of coactive with coercive power" (p. 89). Pfeffer (1981) explained that organizations or departments possess power when they become or are perceived as "irreplaceable." Therefore, by demonstrating, controlling and monopolizing on certain knowledge or skill, organizations or groups of individuals wield power.

Power as discourse - Scholars have theorized power as a discursive, active phenomenon (Arendt, 1959; Barrett, 2002; Danaher, Schirato & Webb, 2000; Edwards, 2009; Scott, 2001). According to Danaher, Schirato and Webb (2000), discourse is language in action. Discourses are "windows... which allow us to make sense of and 'see' things. These discursive windows or explanations shape our understanding of ourselves, and our capacity to distinguish the valuable from the valueless, the true from the false, and the right from the wrong" (p. 31). Discourse is socialized and enculturates individuals (Foucault, 1980; Scott, 2001). People learn to control themselves or act in a certain manner through the discourses they hear or encounter (Scott, 2001, p. 11). Thus, power is theorized as discourse because discourse has the ability to shape individual action and counter argue ideas, thus focusing our attention "on how a text is framed in order to covertly promote vested interests" (Barrett, 2002, p. 72).

French philosopher Michel Foucault (1926-1984) developed the concept of power as discourse. Foucault (1980) explained that discourse is the means through which power relations establish themselves and produce notions of “truth” (p. 93). “There can be no possible exercise of power without a certain economy of discourses of truth... We are subjected to the production of truth through power... the relationship between power, right and truth is organized in a highly specific fashion” (p. 93). Discourse, therefore, has a disciplining effect: An individual or legislative body articulates a certain truth, which in terms inspires a “natural rule or code” that is adopted by society (Foucault, 1980).

Foucault’s discursive perspective of power contradicts the notion of power as a possession or a commodity. Instead, Foucault (1980) explained that power is best theorized as action. He explained, “We have in the first place the assertion that power is neither given, nor exchanged, nor recovered, but rather exercised, and that it only exists in action” (p. 89). Foucault added, “Power must be analyzed as something which circulates, or rather as something which only functions in a form of a chain...” (p. 98). Individuals serve as the conduits of discourse and power: “...individuals are the vehicles of power, not its point in reflection... The individual, that is, is not the *vis-à-vis* of power, and at the same time, or precisely to the extent to which it is that effect, it is the element of its articulation. The individual which power has constituted is at the same time its vehicle” (Foucault, 1980, p. 98).

Power as cultural and discreet - Because individuals internalize discourse and organizational norms, power is often invisible and intangible (Buchanan & Badham, 2008; Clegg, Courpasson & Phillips, 2006; Pfeffer, 1981; Scott, 2001). Buchanan and Badham (2008) explained that power can be taken for granted or “embedded in social and

cultural norms and in routine practices” (p. 46). It is “woven into what we take for granted, the order of things, the social and organization structures in which we find ourselves, the rule systems that appear to constitute the ‘natural’ running of day-to-day procedures” (p. 53). Furthermore, power is organized around the shared “values in which individuals have trust and confidence, and that define positions of leadership” (Parsons, 1963, as cited in Scott, 2001, p. 10). This type of power is effective because it is “discreet, non-obvious, sometimes more difficult to observe, and therefore much harder to challenge” (Buchanan & Badham, p. 46).

Embedded and invisible forms of power occur when individuals “internalize” organizational cultures and routine procedures. Clegg, Courpasson and Phillips (2006) explained this phenomenon as “where an individual has so internalized commitment to a rational institution...that the commitment shapes their dispositions in such a way that their will knows little or no resistance to its formal rationality, then this represents obedience to an institutionalized will to power” (p. 108).

Socialization accounts for this phenomenon. “Socialization involves the inculcation of norms and values that are central to the profession and that are, not incidentally, useful to the organizations in which the professionals are going to work” (Pfeffer, 1981, p. 10). Thus, organizations may socialize and wield power when individuals become entrenched in their daily routines, keep to traditional forms of thought and practice, or consistently yield to organizational domination or discipline procedures.

Power becomes solidified and difficult to change or resist when “ways of doing things in the organization, patterns of authority, and standard operating procedures take on the status of objective social fact” (Pfeffer, 1981, p. 298). Pfeffer explained that individuals may stop questioning an organization’s power distributions, decisions and rules. This occurs when organizational practices “become defined as part of the organization’s culture and are seen and accepted by participants in the organization as a natural part of their membership in that particular social system” (p. 298). Individuals and groups in an organization, then, succumb to organizational power when they become stuck in the “status quo.”

A lack of workplace turnover often accounts for high levels of implicit organizational institutionalization and powerlessness (Pfeffer, 1981). This lack of change in the organizational hierarchy creates a solidification of roles, rules and practices that become the norm. Pfeffer (1981) explained, “Since those who are already in power have some built in advantages in this political struggle, resulting from their very positions in the organization, the most frequently observed trend is for the ever-increasing degrees of institutionalized control” (p. 318). For example, company owners who have managed their own firms most often find it difficult to relinquish control. Bringing in an outsider to manage daily operations and instituting fixed terms of office for boards of directors and executive management can reduce institutionalization and breathe new life and power into an organization (Pfeffer, 1981).

Ultimately, when power becomes so internalized that individuals accept discourses or societal values as truth, they engage in Italian philosopher and politician Antonio Gramsci’s concept of “hegemony.” Danaher, Schirato and Webb (2000) stated,

“Gramsci argued that powerful groups don’t necessarily have to impose their values on the less powerful by the use of direct force. Often, less powerful groups come to accept that the differences in levels of power and economic wealth within a society are natural and just, and so will consent to the rule of their ‘betters’ Hegemony works at the levels of people’s minds, because they come to believe or think that the operations of power in society are natural and just, rather than being forced to accept social relations” (p. 48).

Power as a system - Scholars have argued that power exists not as a single entity or process, but as a complex relationship in which many elements exist simultaneously (Barrett, 2002; Danaher, Schirato & Webb, 2000; Edwards, 2009). Barrett (2002), citing Foucault, explained this philosophy: “In Foucault’s epistemology, everything seems to be happening at once. Power suppresses an activity, then encourages it. Power is the cause of something that happens, but also its effect. Power opposes knowledge while simultaneously nourishing it. Power is ever on the move, generating coalitions and then disrupting them, settling momentarily on individuals and then flitting through institutions, leaving both individual and institution ravished or enriched in the process. Power is both positive and negative, intentional and unintentional. In Foucault’s famous expression, ‘power is always-already there’” (p. 36). Likewise, power is not as “substance, structure, institution, personality characteristic, ideological mechanism, a possession, or a system of domination at the societal level. Instead, Foucault defined power as a complex ‘micro level’ relationship between individuals” (Barrett, 2002, p. 36). Developing upon this concept, Danaher, Schirato and Webb (2000) asserted that power, from a systems perspective, can flow from one point or area to another, depending on changing alliances and circumstances...power is mobile and contingent” (p. 71).

Power as negative - Power is often framed as a negative force (Barrett, 2002; Scott, 2001). Barrett explained that power is often assumed to be “an unfair resource, as for example, when a person ‘pulls rank’ in order to get her or his way. Another assumption is that power-hungry people are morally flawed” (p. 67). Instead, however, organizations often need an individual in a position of power in order to succeed or simply exist. Barrett (2002) cited a football team in need of a coach or an orchestra in need of a conductor as contradictions to the power-as-negative possession assumption. As a negative force, power has also been wrongly assumed to function as an agent of corruption. However, Barrett (2002) asserted, “Without power where would the women’s movement, the anti-racists movement, gay and lesbian rights and the advancement of people with disabilities today?” (p. 69). Scott (2001) argued that Foucault’s notion of discourse as social control or “discipline” is the negative embodiment of power. Instead of acting according to free will, Scott asserted that individuals act as subjects who succumb to the authorized discourses of social control (p. 11). Danaher, Schirato and Webb (2000), however, argued that Foucault’s discursive, disciplining approach to power is positive and productive, for it ultimately affects who we are, what we do and how we perceive ourselves and the world around us (p. xiv).

Critique of Power Theories - Feminist and gender scholars have criticized the traditionally negative, patriarchal and commodity definitions of power (Eaton, 2001; Rakow & Nastasia, 2009; van Zoonen, 1994). van Zoonen (1994) explained, “...power is not a monolithic ‘thing’ that some groups (men, capitalists, whites) have and others (women, working class, blacks) have not. Society is not constituted by orderly and dichotomous divisions of oppressors and oppressed. As the experience of black feminists

has made perfectly clear, one can be subordinated in one relation (of woman vs. man) and be dominant in another (of white woman vs. black woman)” (p. 4). Similarly, Eaton (2001) criticized the “commodity” and “domination” notions of power, arguing that they are too simplistic and assume that only select privileged individuals, traditionally identified as White, middle-class, heterosexual and male, possess power (p. 20). Historical definitions of power cannot enable us to understand women’s meaning-making of power. Eaton (2001), for example, argued “...concepts like *patriarchy* as originally theorized fail to explain power inequities between women (e.g., by equating all women as oppressed regardless of differences attributable to class, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc.) and women’s own active participating (i.e., agency) in social practices that often disempower them (e.g., adhering to extreme diet and exercise regimes)” (p. 21).

Critiques have led to the redefinition of power as empowerment. To explain this transition, Darlington and Mulvaney (2003) explained that traditional power models include an individual’s needs to conquer, dominate, and ultimately satisfy one’s own needs. Empowerment, however, holds that individuals share and collaborate for the common good of the self or group. It fulfills the needs of others, rather than oneself (p. 16). L.A. Grunig (1992) also linked feminist philosophy to the conceptual change of power to empowerment. She explained that feminists (i.e. Hartsock, 1981) often reject traditional forms of power and instead, utilize forms of empowerment. Grunig wrote, “Hartsock made an important distinction between power as domination and the feminist definition that embraces working together, energy, effective interaction, and perhaps – most important – empowerment” (p. 492).

Empowerment – Thus, when individuals hold a sense of personal agency and/or share power, they engage in empowerment. Under a personal agency perspective, Aldoory (2009) suggested that empowerment is when “individuals have a sense of ability and confidence within that might be used to change something in their lives” (p. 111). Taking a more collaborative perspective, Eaton (2001) highlighted the consensus-building nature of empowerment referenced by bell hooks (1984). Feminist scholar bell hooks defined empowerment as “Power defined as ability, strength, action (resulting in personal accomplishment), and energy can be generated through activities involving consensus, rotating tasks, and internal democracy” (p. 49).

Interpreting empowerment as an extension of power, J.E. Grunig (1992) defined empowerment as the symmetrical concept of power, which involves “collaborating to increase the power of everyone in the organization, to the benefit of everyone in the organization” (p. 564). Citing Frost (1987), J.E. Grunig developed upon this empowerment concept. “Current writings and research on empowerment ... treat... empowerment as the use of power to create opportunities and conditions through which other actors can gain power, can make decisions, can use and expand their abilities and skills, can create and accomplish organizational work in ways that are meaningful to them...” (p. 539, as cited in J.E. Grunig, 1992, p. 564).

Scholars, however, have criticized the concept of empowerment as failing to fully conceptualize the complex nature of power relations that exist in society. Cheater (1999), for example, argued that empowerment envisioned as postmodern “expandable, vocal power” assumes a democratic transfer of power without resistance or access.

“Conceptualizing power as postmodern, warm-fuzzy, expandable not only conceals its

hard edges; this cloak of opacity also discourages nasty questions of who benefits and how, and runs the danger of collapsing objectives, processes and outcomes alike into an undifferentiated rhetorical empowerment” (p. 7). Therefore, in order to fully conceptualize the concepts of power and empowerment, it may be helpful to theorize power and empowerment as two phenomena that exist simultaneously in concert.

Communication, sociology and management literature highlight the commodity, structural, discursive, cultural, negative and collaborative interpretations of power. From these perspectives, I conceptualize power as an active process in which individuals negotiate organizational structure, interpersonal influence, discourse and cultural expectations in order to achieve an outcome. Simultaneously, I view empowerment as the collaborative sharing of power among individuals. Now that the various perspectives to power have been reviewed, I will now address research findings regarding power and public relations.

Power and Public Relations

Power research in public relations has examined the ways in which organizational structure affects practitioner power (i.e. L.A. Grunig, 1990, 1992); the ways in which individual roles affect practitioner power (i.e. Berger, 2005; Kanter, 1977; O’Neil, 2003; Serini, 1993); and the ways in which gender affects practitioner power (i.e. Aldoory, Reber, Berger & Toth, 2008; O’Neil, 2003; Tam, Dozier, Lauzen & Real, 1995).

Theoretical research relevant to this dissertation study of public relations and power is examined below. Specifically, this section addresses research regarding power-control theory, practitioner power, gender and power, and the empowerment of women in public

relations, all of which form a framework for the study of gender and power in public relations.

Power-control theory - Power-control theory offers one explanation for the existence of and shift of public relations practitioner power in organizations. The theory states that dominant individuals within an organization make decisions by choice, rather than environmental influences (J.E. Grunig, 1992; Pfeffer, 1981). Environmental forces, however, do constrain the strategic choices available to these individuals (Dozier & Grunig, 1992, p. 413). Specifically, Dozier and Grunig (1992) stated that the power-control perspective asserts that “dominant coalitions determine organizational structure in a manner that satisfices overall organizational needs as well as the divergent interests of members of the dominant coalition” (p. 407). Furthermore, power-control theory explains how specific and often unsatisfactory organizational structures and cultural practices may remain in place overtime. Dozier and Grunig (1992) wrote, “...the self-serving structural preferences of members of the dominant coalition are not necessarily optimum from an overall organizational perspective. But these structural decisions do satisfice overall organizational needs while permitting the coalition to retain power and control through a relatively stable, unchanging organizational structure” (p. 407). Ultimately, Dozier and Grunig (1992) posited that power-control theory, when applied to public relations, assumes that individuals wield and maintain power through controlling resources, socializing successors, and operating in closed or mechanistic systems.

In his study of power-control theory, Berger (2005) defined three types of power enacted by public relations professionals: power over relations, power with relations, and power to relations. These serve as authoritarian types of power, relationship-building

forms of power, and resistance practices in response to dominance, respectively. Berger found that these forms of power exist in a state of constant, shared change. In order for public relations practitioners to maximize their power, they must enact more “activist” practices that work on behalf of the whole organization in opposition to authoritarian systems of dominance.

Practitioner power - Public relations practitioners continually enact, gain and maintain power. Berger and Reber (2005) found that practitioners use their power most often during crisis situations and when creating communication messages on behalf of their organization. They also found that practitioners lacked power most often during the strategic decision making process and when executives perceived them as technicians rather than managers. In order to wield power, Berger and Reber suggest that public relations professionals use rational arguments, coalitions of fellow individuals, lessons learned from past experiences, and assertive behaviors.

Alpha and omega practices, components of power-control theory, represent two tactics public relations practitioners use for gaining and maintaining power. In Berger and Reber’s (2006) study of power and public relations, respondents described alpha approaches as formal strategies of persuasion such as data-driven, formal research reports, organized coalitions and committees of employees, and assertive communication techniques. Omega approaches described by respondents included non-traditional strategies such as “whistle-blowing” and identifying organizational wrongdoings, leaking sensitive information to the press without permission, disassociating themselves from the dominant coalition, and mobilizing employee activist groups. Although practitioners felt as if some omega approaches were unethical, they felt as if omega approaches brought

about change within an organization quicker than alpha strategies. Ultimately, the authors found that practitioners use strategies of dissent and resistance alongside the traditional strategies of working within the system in order to practice effective public relations on behalf of an organization. Data collected by Aldoory and Toth (2004b) found that women public relations practitioners engage in resistance or omega-like strategies. Focus group participants voiced that they left traditional public relations roles to start their own businesses and transitioned to different public relations industries in order to have more flexibility (as cited in Toth & Cline, 2007).

Similarly, Holtzhausen (2000) argued that practitioners must become individual activists who reject forms of discrimination, injustice and abuses of power. Using Lyotard's concept of "tensors," she suggested that practitioner activism and organizational conflict can bring new meaning, creative thinking, and equality to all members of the workplace. Holtzhausen and Voto (2002) further suggested that practitioners disassociate themselves from the dominant coalition or key decision-makers of an organization. Then, practitioners can work outside the systems of domination and authoritarian power to enact more inclusive, relationship-building public relations practices.

In order to gain and enact power, practitioners must exert influence. Berger and Reber (2005) found that practitioners who completed a survey regarding power in organizations defined influence as "shaping decisions or actions within an organization" (p. 10). According to Reber and Cameron (2003), public relations practitioners view their organizational influence as a "bridge-building" activity. In this role, public relations practitioners enact power and influence through dialogue. Often, two-way symmetrical

communication and dialogue exhibit positive organizational influence. Sriramesh, Grunig, and Dozier (1996) found in participatory cultures that “individuals can intervene at any point and affect the process. Communicators can intervene most easily by changing the nature of internal communication rather than trying to manage cultural change” (p. 257). Thus, dialogue and communication often serve as the “act” in which organizational influence and change occurs.

Acquired skill sets and professional experiences can also increase the power of public relations practitioners. In his survey of professionals, Berger (2005) found that 43.3 percent of practitioners surveyed recommended that individuals entering the profession obtain strong technical skills and knowledge. Dozier, Grunig and Grunig (1995) suggested that public relations practitioners can gain power by accumulating knowledge of both technical skills and managerial skills, and by implementing them into their daily activities. Serini (1993) found that the effective possession and management of knowledge and credible information increases a practitioner’s influence within an organization. For example, she found that a corporation’s news messages were selected and defined almost exclusively by the organizational advertising and communication department.

Power research in public relations has argued that in addition to the acquisition of skills and experience, individuals exert more power and influence when they function together in a group, rather than as individual practitioners. L.A. Grunig defined this group of powerful individuals in an organization as a “coalition.” To do so, she cited Stevenson, Pearce, and Porter’s (1985) definition of coalition as “... an interacting group of individuals deliberately constructed, independent of the formal structure, lacking its own

internal formal structure, consisting of mutually perceived membership, issue oriented, focused on a goal or goals external to the coalition, and requiring concerted member action” (p. 251, as cited in L.A. Grunig, 1992, p. 487). Public relations professionals can empower themselves when they form coalitions themselves or join other coalitions of prominent decision makers.

The Excellence theory of public relations has argued that public relations practitioners must hold membership in one coalition described as the “dominant coalition” - a group of key organizational decision makers - in order to best practice public relations. A practitioner with dominant coalition membership can determine if the public relations department receives more “power” within the corporation as a whole (Dozier, Grunig & Grunig, 1995). Public relations practitioners and departments with powerful access to key decision makers within an organizational hierarchy have more opportunity to educate others about the value of public relations and practice effective communication management (L.A. Grunig, 1992).

Organizational culture and workplace interactions may also affect public relations practitioner power. Berger (2007) explained that cultural factors contributing to practitioner empowerment include a supportive organizational context or a “culture for communication;” the support of top management; and equal opportunities for practitioners of diverse ethnic, cultural, and racial backgrounds (p. 225). Serini (1993) found that interpersonal interactions in an organization affected practitioner power and control over factual information. She stated that “power was shared between public relations staff members and sources, each of whom brought unique elements to the situation and negotiated from their area of expertise” (p. 10). Furthermore, time

limitations and personal credibility and trust affected practitioner power. Specifically, time limitations increased practitioner power by giving “a rationale for decreasing the number of people involved in the clearance process” (p. 11). Being seen as a credible, trustworthy person further empowered practitioners by allowing them greater access to information.

In a public relations context, Edwards (2009) found evidence that discourse defined and increased public relations practitioners power as symbolic capital – “the economic, social or cultural capital that attracts symbolic value and, thereby, becomes worth more than its material attributes suggest” (p. 253). Public relations practitioners increased their reputation, legitimized themselves and justified their existence through discourse using letters, presentations, speeches, press releases and e-mails (p. 266). These discourses, in turn, defined practitioners’ perceived value, reputation, proximity and expertise in the eyes of organizational decision makers (p. 267).

Research has found that public relations practitioner roles affect the ways in which they are perceived within an organization and demonstrate power. Scholars and practitioners continue to divide public relations roles into Dozier’s (1984) and Dozier and Broom’s (2006) two distinct categories: the technician role and the manager role.

Technician role skills include the writing and production of internal and external messages, including press releases, newsletters, speeches, slide shows, videos, graphics, brochures, advertisements, fact sheets, news articles, and web pages (Dozier, Grunig & Grunig, 1995). Berger (2005) found that technician skills were valued more by dominant coalition members and executives than managerial skills (p. 14). However, Berger and Reber (2005) found that 20 percent of public relations practitioners felt they lacked

influence and power when perceived as a technician (p. 15). Manager role skills include the evaluation of research and recommendations regarding the implementation and use of one-way or two-way communication models (Dozier, Grunig & Grunig, 1995, pp. 59-60). The management functions that can potentially empower practitioners include strategic decision-making knowledge and specialized public relations-specific work experience. Berger (2005) found that more power is often associated with the “manager” role. Dozier and Broom (2006), citing power-control theory, explained that one’s amount of experience is related to performance of the manager role and more power is associated with the manager role because “environmental imperatives demand it” (p. 151).

In order to earn respect and power, practitioners must exceed their role expectations and educate others of their value. Moss, Warnaby and Newman (2001) found that practitioners must demonstrate quality of their work, high levels of expertise, a thorough understanding of their organization and the business – in addition to their typical technician or manager responsibilities. According to Moss, Warnaby and Newman, an individual’s inability to understand and perform these additional business and financial management tasks presents an especially difficult barrier to public relations practitioners seeking inclusion within the strategic decision making team (p. 298, 300). Most importantly, practitioners cannot lack management skills and must communicate the value of their role to organizational decision makers. Respondents shared that it was critical that public relations professionals educate senior management on the importance attached to their role within organizations and develop positive working relationships with all management levels. One practitioner explained that “because the chief executives rarely come from a communications background, their expectations of the

public relations function might often be fairly limited” (p. 296). Ultimately, public relations practitioners carry a large burden of educating colleagues, learning and implementing a diverse skill set and demonstrating the value of public relations.

Ultimately, Edwards (2009), in his study of power and public relations, found that power existed simultaneously in myriad forms. For example, Edwards found that access to organizational and staff networks, relationships among professionals founded on respect, possession of practical knowledge, and use of discursive elements increased individuals’ symbolic value and power (pp. 263-266).

Power, Public Relations and Gender

Public relations scholarship suggests that women and men make meaning of and perform power differently (Aldoory, Reber, Berger & Toth, 2008). Through a re-examination of previously collected data, Aldoory, Reber, Berger and Toth found that men defined power as “having a seat at the table,” “a voice in decision making” and “winning.” Women in the study defined power not as “winning,” but as “shaping actions and decisions,” “having a seat at the table,” and “having a voice.” Men and women, however, both agreed that their most common sources of power were professional experiences and relationships with others. Aldoory, Reber, Berger and Toth’s (2008) study also examined how men and women utilize different vocabularies of influence in order to accomplish public relations. The authors found that men most often advocated by “citing ethics codes, integrity, and transparency” and “using facts and rational arguments.” To accomplish these, men used terms such as “confront, combat, challenge,” and “oppose.” The authors found that women advocated using “facts and rational arguments,” citing “ethics codes, integrity, and transparency,” using “legal standards”

and referring needs of stakeholders. To accomplish their tasks, women often used terms such as “express,” “discuss,” and “voice.” Ultimately, the authors concluded that men and women “perceived that personal power increased through experience but organizational power increased through relationships with others. There were few gender differences in definitions of influence and in primary sources of power, which might suggest an interplay of professional norms with gender norms.”

Research has suggested that female public relations practitioners often lack power and influence. Organizational measures of power that female practitioners lack include their relegation to the technician role, the degree of employee support, token status among a male-dominated team, lack of mentors, exclusion from networks, and lack of respect and value (O’Neil, 2003, p. 154). In her feminist analysis of public relations, O’Neil found that female practitioners had a significantly lower amount of formal structural power than male public relations practitioners. Structural forms of power were especially important, because they increased perceived organizational influence. Female practitioners’ reduced formal structural power, in turn resulted in loss of influence (O’Neil, 2003).

Women, in order to maintain gender expectations or to enact power, often engage in indirect aggression (Litwin & O’Brien Hallstein, 2007). These passive-aggressive acts typically consist of idealized gender role and friendship expectations, which are idealized assumptions about how women will behave; and self-constrained behavior, which is self-silencing to preserve a relationship or to avoid conflict (p. 119). Litwin and O’Brien Hallstein’s respondents shared that direct aggression, in particular, involved cutting people out of work teams, manipulating co-workers to act against others, refusing to

show support for each other, and engaging in hurtful, personalized gossip (p. 120). The authors suggested that this behavior between women probably reflects the historical power relations in which oppressed groups internalize the negative stereotypes about their own group and turn on each other (p. 127). They stated that women learn and utilize manipulation and indirect competition as survival mechanisms in the context of patriarchal systems (p. 127). Ultimately, power relations are intertwined in work, unspoken rules of behavior and communication norms that are fundamentally premised on masculine forms of interaction (p. 129).

Empowerment of Women in Public Relations - Public relations research has sought to better understand women's empowerment and the strategies in which women can empower themselves. Tam, Dozier, Lauzen and Real (1995) argued for the empowerment of women, stating, "female managers must obtain more power in organizations. Not only must they have the authority as mentors to send subordinates to training courses and training positions, women need greater involvement in strategic decision-making activities" (p. 270).

Scholarship has found that women can employ a variety of strategies to empower themselves, including mentoring relationships, entrepreneurship and work-life balance decisions. Tam, Dozier, Lauzen and Real (1995) found that mentoring relationships affect the professional growth of and career advancement opportunities for public relations practitioners. Female practitioners with female superiors provide the optimum gender pairing for active and intense mentoring relationships (p. 268). They found that female practitioners with male superiors, however, performed a management (often perceived as more powerful) role more often (p. 269). Tam, Dozier, Lauzen and Real suggested that

women practitioners may best empower themselves when they associate themselves with influential or powerful mentors.

Scholarship has found that women often separate themselves from traditional organizational structures in order to empower themselves. Gill and Ganesh (2007), in their study of women entrepreneurs, found that women conceptualized empowerment as successfully enacting the entrepreneurial self by achieving autonomy, engaging in risk-taking, innovation, ambition, and aggressiveness, and searching for something better (p. 272). Business was a form of self-expression and a natural extension of themselves (p. 279). In difficult situations, women empowered themselves by reframing the situations. They framed challenges as “mental stimulation,” practiced determination in the face of discrimination, took pride in their involvement in a particular geographic area, and utilized supportive groups (p. 283). Aldoory, Jiang, Toth, and Sha (2008) also found that public relations practitioners felt satisfaction and empowerment from leaving their current work settings. They found that their participants began freelancing, consulting or home offices (p. 13).

Work-life balance changes have been found to empower women to achieve their public relations career goals. Serini, Toth, Wright and Emig (1997) found that work-life balance changes made it possible for women to work and have a family. Women entering the field and holding more management-level positions are contributing to this empowerment (p. 112). Public relations practitioners incorporated several work-life balance strategies to increase job satisfaction, according to Aldoory, Jiang, Toth and Sha (2008). They found that practitioners – especially women – altered communication patterns, adjusted their personal routines and utilized new communication technologies to

increase the work-life balance. For example, regarding the use of new technology, one participant said, “The more that an organization embraces the technology, the easier it is to achieve that work-life balance” (p. 12).

Research has suggested that women’s personal career choices affect their sense of empowerment and illustrate their “buying into the system” (Grunig, Toth & Hon, 2001, p. 326). Many women public relations practitioners must choose how and when they balance work and family responsibilities. Research respondents argued that women must make sacrifices in order to succeed in their careers and that the price for success is often less time spent with children or family. Grunig, Toth and Hon (2001) found that women practitioners often encountered ‘career versus family’ decisions in the time period between a woman practitioner’s fifth and tenth year of employment (p. 327).

Despite increased feminization, diversification and empowerment strategies, Kanter (2003) found that some organizations may choose not to adopt empowering strategies. She explained that “giving up control is threatening to people who have fought for every shred of it” and that “people do not want to share power with those they look down on.” Managers especially do not empower individuals if they “fear losing their own place and special privileges in the system” (p. 157). This suggests individual and organizational forms of power and empowerment differ in workplace contexts.

Various forms of power, as the literature suggests, can enable or inhibit individuals to exert influence, make decisions and utilize one’s full range of capabilities. Power can exist as organizational structure, as personal “property” and as embedded

norms and cultures. Individuals must wield influence, prescribe to cultural norms and traits, or sometimes leave organizational structures altogether in order to enact power.

The concept of power and empowerment in public relations has received moderate theorizing; however, little research has theorized power beyond the traditional definitions of individual commodity. Recent scholarship by Aldoory (2005) and Edwards (2009) have begun to conceptualize power in public relations as more discursive and systemic. Moreover, few public relations studies have addressed the concept of power in regards to gender, from the perspective of women. From the body of literature regarding power, I propose the following research questions - **RQ2:** How do women public relations practitioners make meaning of power? With this question, I wish to explore how women practitioners' gendered identities affect their conceptualizations of power. I hope to understand how they perceive power - as sources of individual power, organizational power, discursive power, embedded or implicit existences of power? How does the concept of empowerment compare to their definitions of power? How does their meaning making of power affect how they practice public relations? **RQ3:** What are the intersections of gender and power in public relations? With this question, I seek to build upon the first and second research questions to build a solid understanding of how gender and power affect public relations practice. Do women envision gender and enact power in a markedly different way? What do these differences mean to the practice of public relations? Do the data support a new model of feminine public relations, new concepts of public relations power, or reinforce our current understandings of public relations, gender and power?

Conclusions

Ultimately, gender and power provide rich contexts in which to examine public relations practices. The literature regarding public relations and gender revealed that gender affects public relations practitioner roles, pay, employment status and power. The power literature explained that not only gender, but also individual and organizational resources, discourses, structures and power affect public relations practice. Past research has often examined public relations, gender and power separately. Previous studies have not examined how women define gender and its effects on their practice, how women's meaning making of power in public relations may differ from traditional, patriarchal definitions of power, and how power and gender intersect simultaneously in public relations. Most importantly, public relations research lacks analysis of the nexus of public relations, gender or power. A study seeking to understand the socialized, mutually constitutive nature of gender and power is overdue. Ultimately, theories of gender and power provide a strong framework with which to examine the relationships among gender and power-related phenomena that occur in the public relations field. Therefore, in order to better understand, describe and explain how gender and power affect public relations practice, I offer the following research purpose and research questions.

Purpose and Research Questions

Gender and power exist in the structures of organizations, within its employees and leaders, and within the relationships and dialogues that take place. Qualitative studies, such as this in particular, can examine, illustrate, and clarify the meaning of gender and power as they affect the practice of public relations.

The purpose of this study is to better understand how women public relations practitioners make meaning of gender and power. It is expected that women public

relations practitioners differ in their definitions of gender and power and experience power and gender as a complex system.

In this chapter, I have presented the major theoretical and descriptive literature that forms the basis for this dissertation on gender and power in public relations. From the literature, I propose three research questions to guide my inquiry. They include:

RQ1: How do women public relations practitioners make meaning of gender?

RQ2: How do women public relations practitioners make meaning of power?

RQ3: What are the intersections of gender and power in public relations?

In the following chapter, I will discuss my choice for using a qualitative research method, as well as my sampling, data collection, data analysis and research evaluation methods.

Chapter 3: Method

In the following chapter, I review the rationale for utilizing a qualitative methodology, discuss the strengths and purposes of qualitative methodology, and detail the data collection, analysis, evaluation and presentation methods I incorporated.

Rationale for Qualitative Methodology

The goal of this research was to examine women's meaning making of gender and power in public relations through *their* voices. It is primarily an exploratory study in which I sought to describe and explain women's experiences, rather than test or prove a theory. The conversations I hold with women in public relations produced lengthy amounts of descriptive data which I analyzed and categorized according to each of the five research questions. According to Corbin and Strauss (2008), "qualitative research allows researchers to get at the inner experiences of participants, to determine how meanings are formed through and in culture, and to discover rather than test variables" (p. 12). A core reason for conducting qualitative research, they explained, is to "enter into the world of participants, to see the world from their perspective and in doing so make discoveries that will contribute to the development of empirical knowledge" (p. 16). Therefore, a qualitative methodology is most appropriate for this descriptive study of women's experiences.

Purpose of Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is an approach to conceptualizing a research problem, gathering data, analyzing it, and presenting findings. Denzin and Lincoln (2003) described it as "a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible...qualitative research involves

an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (pp. 4-5). Lindlof (1991) defined it as that which “examines *the constitution of meaning in everyday social phenomena...*Qualitative research seeks to *preserve the form, content, and context of social phenomena and analyze their qualities*, rather than separate them from historical and institutional surroundings” (p. 24, italics in original).

The purpose of qualitative research is to examine, using a “naturalistic, interpretive approach...how social experience is created and given meaning” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 13). It seeks to better understand a “phenomenon of interest” and “develop insights, and report those insights to others” (Potter, 1996, p. 13). Researchers who approach a research problem qualitatively, “stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationships between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry. Researchers emphasize the value-laden nature of inquiry. They seek answers to how social experience is created and given meaning” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p.13). Ultimately, qualitative researchers aim to capture an individual’s point of view, examine the constraints of everyday life and secure rich descriptions of an individual’s experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003 p. 16).

Strengths of Qualitative Research

The qualitative method is strong for its ability to produce extensive amounts of “thick” descriptive data and illustrate the complexities of human experience (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Geertz, 1973; Hodder, 2003; Potter 1996; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Descriptive data richly explain a phenomenon in ways that quantitative

data cannot. Corbin and Strauss (2008) explained that “it is the descriptive details that add the richness and variation and lift the findings out of the realm of the ordinary. It is depth of substance that makes the difference between thin, uninteresting findings and findings that have the potential to make a difference in policy and practice” (p. 306). Hodder (2003) explained that it is the thick description of experiences and contexts that allows practices, historical situations, and particular meanings to be understood (p. 169). Qualitative research is also important for the context and meaning it brings to peoples’ complex experiences. For example, Rubin and Rubin (2005) explained, “numbers do not tell a story... boiling down answers into numbers strips away the context, losing much of the richness and complexity that make research realistic” (p. 2). Similarly, Patton (1990) explained that the strength of qualitative analysis is its ability to look at a phenomenon holistically.

Participant Selection

For this dissertation research, I interviewed 45 women public relations practitioners between June 2009 and November 2009 who represented various races, ages, geographic locales, levels of education, job titles and professional experiences. I expected women of differing backgrounds to provide new, rich and varied understanding of the concepts of gender and power. Sampling procedures were limited to those women who have had more than five years of public relations work experience. This was to ensure that practitioners had a sufficient amount of professional experience on which to reflect in their discussion. According to Rubin and Rubin (2005), recruiting individuals with relevant, first-hand experiences and knowledge regarding the research questions produces the richest and most convincing data (p. 65).

My sampling method incorporated snowball, purposive and maximum variation sampling procedures. Prior to my dissertation research, I conducted a similar study regarding gender which interviewed 10 women practitioners who identified themselves as leaders in the public relations industry. This list of women practitioners served a core set of contacts from which to begin a snowball sample. According to Patton (1990), snowball sampling involves locating information-rich key informants or well situated people and asking them to identify individuals who know information regarding the research questions. Thus, I interviewed several of these practitioners for my dissertation research and then asked if they would recommend other experienced women public relations practitioners for the study. The practitioners recommended a significant number of public relations practitioners who then participated in my study.

After I began conducting the snowball sampling process, I used purposive and maximum variation sampling methods to find additional public relations practitioners from differing backgrounds and experiences. Rubin and Rubin (2005) explained that a research study's credibility increases when one interviews individuals who reflect a "variety of perspectives" and who can offer "complementary understandings" or "different vantage points" (p. 67). The purposive and maximum variation sampling methods assisted me in finding practitioners with experiences and from geographic locations that differed from my snowball sample. According to Patton (1990), maximum variation sampling aims to capture and describe the central themes or principal outcomes that cut across a great deal of participant or program variation. Purposive sampling, according to Merriam (1998), is "based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the

most can be learned” (p. 61). I reached a purposive, more diverse range of women practitioners via the social networking Web site for PR professionals, “PROpenMic” and via the social networking site “Twitter.” Using Twitter, I “followed” a sample of Caucasian, African-American and Hispanic-American public relations practitioners across the United States. I found these public relations professionals to follow on Twitter by searching Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) chapter Web sites. The Web sites often list professionals who were on Twitter, post messages or highlight calendar events about “Tweet-ups” involving public relations professionals. Upon finding appropriate individuals to interview via Twitter or PR Open Mic, I sent them a recruitment letter via e-mail or via the Twitter direct message function explaining the research, the confidentiality measures I would take, and how their participation would benefit our understanding of the public relations profession (see Appendix A). Ultimately, I ceased the sampling and interviewing process once I established a “saturation point” or when “no new data are emerging” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). I felt as if I reached a saturation point when research participants repeated similar themes and did not give responses that differed from the participants whom I interviewed earlier.

As a younger Caucasian female, I took special care to recruit and remain sensitive to women who differ from me regarding race, age and professional experience. I attempted to recruit a diverse sample in order to achieve a broad understanding of women practitioners’ myriad experiences and to solicit practitioner perspectives that differ from my standpoint and viewpoint regarding public relations. It was expected that women of different races, classes and backgrounds may perceive or identify differently with their gender and workplace practices. I knew their standpoints could lead to better

understanding of women's diverse experiences in life and understandings regarding gender and power. Pompper (2005), citing Green (1994), explained that researchers of backgrounds that differ from their respondents can put respondents at ease by highlighting the emancipatory purpose of their research and by showing appreciation for the complexity of race and gender. Therefore, when I solicited women public relations practitioners of diverse backgrounds, I was explicit and transparent about the purposes of my research and also explained my sincere goal to learn more about my participants' experiences in public relations.

The resulting sample of women public relations practitioners emerged as thus:

- *Work environment*: 16 practitioners worked at a public relations consulting agency, 6 practitioners worked in a corporation, 3 practitioners worked for the U.S. government, 11 practitioners worked as independent consultants, 1 practitioner worked for the U.S. military, 8 practitioners worked in not-for-profit organizations.
- *Race*: 1 participant identified herself as Asian-American; 4 practitioners identified themselves as African-American; 36 participants identified themselves as Caucasian-American; 2 participants identified themselves as Indian-American; 2 participants identified themselves as Hispanic-American.
- *Leadership status or job title*: 21 participants identified themselves as public relations managers or associates; 13 participants identified themselves as owners or presidents of their own consulting operations, 2 participants identified themselves as both professors and consultants of public relations, 9 participants identified themselves as vice presidents.

- *Geographic location:* 2 individuals worked in Tennessee, 3 individuals worked in Florida, 2 individuals worked in California and 38 practitioners worked in Virginia, Maryland or Washington, D.C.

The sample was skewed toward those who were Caucasian, worked in the Washington, D.C. or Baltimore, Maryland, metro regions and had significant experience in public relations. In terms of age, practitioners ranged from their late twenties to their mid-sixties; however, the majority of practitioners were in their thirties. Regarding education, three practitioners had a Ph.D., several practitioners had an M.A. or an M.B.A. and all practitioners had received their B.A. or B.S.

Data Collection Procedures

To collect my data, I conducted face-to-face, semi-structured, in-depth interviews with women public relations practitioners that ranged from 45 to 120 minutes in length. In a semi-structured interview, “the researcher determines the structure of the interview and agenda through the questions asked” (Corbin & Morse, 2003). According to Leech (2002), this semi-structured, in-depth interview format best works to gain rapport with interviewees, collect a maximum amount of data and test hypotheses or research questions.

I used a brief question guide or protocol to loosely steer the interview process (see Appendix B). Rubin and Rubin (2005), Leech (2002) and Yin (2003) recommended that the interview protocol include a list of questions that vary in order and encourage rich description and explanation. In my interview protocol, the questions I asked linked directly to the three research questions that guided this study. To make sure all interview questions linked to the research questions, I wrote “RQ1,” “RQ2,” or “RQ3” next to each

question. This enabled me to visualize how each question linked to my research questions and to achieve a balance among the three questions. For example, for my first research question which sought to understand how women practitioners make meaning of gender, the question guide listed the following interview question with the RQ1 notation next to it: *All individuals possess a “gender” and gender is a prominent area of study regarding the public relations profession. How do you define “gender”? (RQ 1).*

To test the clarity and completeness of the interview question guide, I engaged in a pretest of the guide with one public relations professor / professional and one friend before I began this study. The individuals who helped with the pretest suggested several edits for how the questions were worded. Per the individuals’ recommendations, I edited the protocol after this pretest in order to clarify the questions and improve the order of questions.

The question guide utilized broad, open-ended and specific questions to encourage and structure the conversation. Leech (2002) described types of questions to include in a protocol. “Grand tour questions” ask individuals to describe a typical day in your office. “Example questions” will ask individuals to give examples of times when they used a particular technique or faced a particular challenge, for example. “Prompts” keep respondents talking. Prompts are similar to “probe” questions. They may include a floating prompt such as “why?” Lastly, the interviewer should take care to remain silent and listen to the respondents. This will ensure that the speaker has substantial time to form a response. In addition to managing questions of an the interview, Fontana and Frey (2003) recommended that the researcher take notes regularly during an interview, write everything down from the interview, try to be as inconspicuous as possible in note

taking, and analyze interview notes often (p. 79). I incorporated the differing question types into my protocol and took notes on a legal pad during each interview. After each interview, I used the legal pads to write more detailed notes about interviewee responses and my interview impressions and experiences.

During the interview process, I engaged in the following interview protocol: First, I introduced myself as a graduate student at University of Maryland's Department of Communication, informed the participant about the purpose of the study, reviewed the confidentiality agreement/statement of informed consent with them, and answered any questions the participant posed. I then asked the participant for permission to record the interview in order to best capture all responses. If the interview respondent agreed, she initialed the "I agree to be audio-taped" section of the confidentiality agreement. Second, I conducted the face-to-face interview using the various recommended questioning and note taking techniques provided by Leech (2002) and Fontana and Frey (2003). Third, I thanked the individual for participating in the interview and explained that I may contact them later to ask any questions, seek clarifications on responses or to share and discuss the interview transcripts with them. I concluded the interview by answering any questions the participant had, reviewing the confidentiality procedures I would take with their interview, and by thanking them again for their participation.

Because some practitioners lived in Tennessee, California and Florida, I engaged in telephone interviews with these research participants. The telephone interview procedure mirrored that of the in-person interview procedure except that I dictated the confidentiality statements to them via phone and received a verbal statement agreeing to be interviewed and audio-taped.

In-depth, semi-structured interviews present several opportunities and problems for the data collection process. Less structured interviews “provide a greater breadth of data” than structured interviews (Fontana & Frey, 2003, p. 74) and mimic the routine, everyday conversations in which individuals engage (Fontana & Frey, 2003, p. 64). Ultimately, in-depth qualitative interviews can help the researcher to “understand experiences and reconstruct events in which you did not participate,” describe “social and political processes,” “fill in historical blanks,” better understand “personal issues,” and “shed new light on old problems” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 3).

Problems with semi-structured interviews include researcher bias, being too empathetic, participant interaction and participant discomfort. Yin (2003) advised that the researcher remain aware that interviews may fall victim to bias, poor interviewer recall and participant’s poor articulation of responses (p. 92). Similarly, Rubin and Rubin (2005) explained that being too empathetic poses a research risk. “If you identify too closely with those you study, you may only ask follow-up questions that show your interviews in a favorable light; you may fail to question about the whole matter” (p. 81). Denzin (1989, p. 116) also noted that “gender filters knowledge” and how the interviewer and respondent interact (as cited in Fontana and Frey, 2003, p. 82). Interviews are also unpredictable. Participants may take control of the interview, change the subject, guide the pace of the interview, imply that the interviewer was asking the wrong questions or become hostile or threatening (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 12). Finally, during interviews, participants may experience discomfort “revealing what they consider ‘sensitive information’ when the tape recorder is on” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 28).

To overcome these qualitative interview issues, I engaged in the following practices: In response to Yin (2003) and Denzin (1989), I thought about how my gender, perceptions and biases might affect my question asking. I realized my perspectives about gender and power may not be the same as my interview respondents; therefore, I bracketed (i.e. Gearing, 2004) my biases and perceptions. I did not share my perspectives on gender and power with my research respondents and I tried to manage my facial or physical responses to my participants' responses. Specifically, I tried not to smile or nod my head in response to particular statements, which might influence how interviewees responded. Some practitioners also showed difficulty forming responses or took time for them to think through a concept or an idea. Again, I realized that my body language, facial responses or handling of these circumstances could influence practitioner responses. In these circumstances, I practiced silence – and waited – rather than offering an “example response” or further prompting. After a few seconds of silence, I noticed that participants did often come forth with a response to questions. If practitioners could not articulate a response after a period of time, I would then 1) attempt to rephrase and pose the question differently or 2) move on to a new question. My goal with this questioning process was to communicate to participants that I was not rushing them, that I was there to listen, and that their responses were valued.

I also sought to address Rubin and Rubin's (2005) warnings about researcher empathy by being as “investigative” as possible. I engaged in empathy and listened intently to my participants responses; however, I asked questions, probes or follow-ups that sought different or alternative angles to a practitioner's response or story. Sometimes, I encouraged participants to tell me how they thought others in the industry

might perceive an issue, how others reacted to particular actions they took, or how they, themselves, thought about themselves after they said or did a particular action.

Regarding respondent interaction and discomfort during interviews, I often encountered participants who would ask “Is that [statement] okay?” or “Is that right?” after they gave a response. During these encounters, I would state that I was there to learn how they (the practitioner) made meaning of public relations and that there was no such thing as a “right” or “wrong” answer. Finally, to address Corbin and Strauss’ (2008) warnings against participant discomfort, I engaged in reflexive practices, adapted to unexpected situations and worked to establish a relationship of trust with my interview participants. A few times, practitioners requested that certain client names, company names or examples remain confidential. I respected these requests.

Throughout the in-depth, semi-structured interview process, I worked to gain substantial rapport with the research participants. Fontana and Frey (2003) explained that because the goal of interviewing is to understand, the researcher must establish a rapport with respondents; “that is, the researcher must be able to take the role of the respondents and attempt to see the situation from their viewpoint” (p. 78). To build rapport, Leech (2002) recommended that the interviewer put respondents at ease and appear knowledgeable and professional, but less though than the participant. This practice will prevent individuals from leaving pieces of information out because they assume the interviewer already knows it. To encourage maximum conversation, Leech recommended that the interviewer listen extensively. Interviewers, to show that they are listening, should often restate what the participant said. However, one must avoid reinterpreting what the respondent has just said, as this can damage rapport and intimidate the

interviewee. To establish a rapport with my interview participants, I asked them what location would be most comfortable for them to meet. In the majority of circumstances, we met at a coffee shop or book store outside of the practitioner's workplace or home. This location allowed participants to speak their minds without being overheard by colleagues, etc. Before the interview, the participant and I often bought coffee or food and discussed a "neutral" topic or two like the weather or summer activities.

During the qualitative interviews, I also worked to establish trust and engage in empathy. Rubin and Rubin (2005) suggested that researchers establish trust by enlisting a friend or colleague to vouch for them, by communicating about shared backgrounds they hold with interview participants and by reassuring participants of confidentially procedures. To gain trust prior to the interview, I established a shared background by chatting with respondents about working in the public relations field, sharing with them that I was a public relations practitioner before I returned to pursue my Ph.D. In many cases, practitioners and I had worked in similar public relations capacities or held similar professional interests. Following the recommendation of Rubin and Rubin (2005) several practitioners whom I interviewed did, in fact, vouch for me to other practitioners during the sampling and recruiting process. Practitioners stated that they told fellow colleagues about my research goals and that I was a University of Maryland student conducting her dissertation (essentially, they confirmed that I was who I said I was). Rubin and Rubin (2005) also recommended that researchers enact empathy by showing "caring interest in the content of what the interviewee is saying and the emotion expressed" (p. 81). To establish empathy, I asked questions that allowed me to better understand and imagine what my participants have experienced, even if the questions were slightly off topic (p.

81). In many cases, I practiced empathy when I listened to stories or “confessions” that women had regarding gender or power issues they faced in the workplace. Many times, I was able to understand where they were coming from, because I too, had experienced those issues. Being able to compare my personal experiences with those of my respondents helped me to ask detailed probes and follow-up questions and conduct a richer analysis of my data. At other times, I was not able to empathize with my participants’ responses. I found that I often asked more detailed probes and follow-up questions after these responses in order for me to better understand, and later analyze, how the practitioner made meaning of a certain phenomenon.

After each interview was collected, I took great care to ensure the confidentiality of my interview respondent contact information, interview audio tapes, interview notes and interview transcripts. All audio tapes were marked with the date of the interview and kept in a container in the researcher’s apartment. All written notes and transcripts were stored in a confidential location at the researcher’s apartment. All interview respondent contact information was kept confidential in a Microsoft Excel file on the researcher’s personal computer, which was not connected to a server or database.

After I had conducted 10 interviews, I began the process of transcribing the interview audiotapes. For the first 25 interviews, I incorporated a complete transcription process. I transcribed everything that was uttered in the interview, including verbal placeholders such as “Uhh” and “Umm.” As I began to notice themes and patterns in the data, I partially transcribed the remaining 20 interviews, leaving out verbal placeholders or participant anecdotes that did not correspond to my research questions.

Data Analysis Procedures

According to Wolcott (1994), the data analysis process is the formation of themes and patterns. It addresses the identification of essential features and the systematic description of interrelationships among them. Analysis may be employed evaluatively to address questions of why a system is not working or how it might be made to work better.

For this dissertation research, I used the grounded theory approach to data analysis and interpretation. The grounded theory method, formalized by Glaser and Strauss (1967), seeks to explain and theorize about a phenomenon directly from the data. It applies a systematic approach to the study, analysis, and interpretation of data. Grounded theory is also sensitive to the complex relationships, intervening conditions, causal conditions, contexts, and implications that phenomena share with larger phenomena (categories)(Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

The grounded theory approach uses systematic, constant comparison of data throughout the data collection, analysis and interpretation sequence. For example, Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Denzin and Lincoln (2003) explained that the constant comparison of data should not wait until after all the data has come in. Instead, they suggested that after conducting one or two interviews, focus groups or participant observation sequences, the researcher should begin to code the notes and transcripts of them, create a list of codes, devise categories and then compare them as the researcher continues to conduct additional interviews, focus groups, and participant-observations.

Corbin and Strauss (2008), Strauss and Corbin (1990) and Glaser and Strauss (1967) called this analysis process open coding, axial coding and selective coding. Open coding is the first step in the data collection and analysis process. During open coding, I

broke down the data into comprehensible phenomena or categories. The categories emerged organically as certain topic areas or key words appeared continually in the data. For example, some categories or phenomena that arose early in the interview process included “gender is male/female,” “power is influence” and “power is knowledge.” I applied descriptive codes, pattern codes or interpretive codes to sections of data in which categories or phenomena presented themselves. The purpose of this open coding process was to get at the themes, patterns, or descriptions that arose from the data. An example of a descriptive code I incorporated existed when women participants said, “I think power is about how you influence others.” I then applied the descriptive code “Influence” to that statement.

After open coding, I engaged in the data analysis process of axial coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). During axial coding, often referred to as pattern coding by Miles and Huberman (1994), I took all the open codes and phenomena described and related them to particular relationships, causal conditions, interpretations, intervening conditions. The goal of axial coding is to make sense, give direction, and begin to theorize about the relationship of all the categories and codes. In particular, a number of phenomena may then be grouped under a larger, broader category. An example of a pattern code that I incorporated existed when women stated that when they felt like they were being “talked over” in meetings and they then had to “assert themselves” or “be aggressive”. I applied the pattern code of “Assertiveness/Aggressiveness” to illustrate the pattern of women asserting themselves when they felt unheard. In axial coding, I began to interpret these behaviors by looking to see if there was a chronological process for their occurrence, doing if-then tests of the

behaviors, tracking down rival explanations of these phenomena, and seeking to find any evidence that might refute or support these current phenomena, codes, and categories. One particular instance that prompted me to track down rival explanations and find refuting evidence was when one woman from Tennessee stated that the way women practitioners were treated in the South was different from how women practitioners were treated in the rest of the country. She stated ways in which male public relations practitioners in the South treated or discriminated against their woman colleagues. I applied the pattern code “Geography affects patterns of discrimination” and then sought out and spoke with other practitioners in Tennessee and other practitioners in Florida and California to see how they made meaning of gender similarly or differently.

Lastly, I incorporated the technique of selective coding. According to Strauss and Corbin (1990), this is “the process of selecting the core category, systematically relating it to other categories, validating those relationships, and filling in categories that need further refinement and development” (p. 116). Selective coding occurs later on in the data analysis process when the researcher must form a coherent, analytical “story” from the data patterns. Often, I weighed the worth of categories and data, making final choices between what will “achieve the tight integration and the dense development of categories required of a grounded theory” (p. 121). Strauss and Corbin offered an ordering pattern to assist me with the selective coding process. They recommended that the researcher arrange the data to better understand how “A (conditions) leads to B (phenomenon), which leads to C (context), which leads to D (action/interaction, including strategies), which then leads to E (consequences)” (p. 124). Finally, to arrive at a fully grounded and developed data, I “filled in” the categories, patterns and connections created with

appropriate data, quotations, and passages to explain and illustrate the theory. An example of how I arranged my categories and codes to better understand how “A leads to B, which leads to C, D, and E” such as that occurred with data surrounding the “Queen Bee Syndrome.” Often, transcripts exposed responses in which participants described the Queen Bee Syndrome, yet they did not explicitly call it the “Queen Bee Syndrome.” For example, I noted that in some contexts, workplace conditions or individual actions lead women to perceive the workplace in specific ways or take certain actions that represented the Queen Bee Syndrome. When I encountered data involving these related phenomena and conditions, I would interpret these responses as Queen Bee Syndrome and apply the “Queen Bee Syndrome” interpretive code.

Ethical Considerations

During the entire research process and after the final write-up, I evaluated the ethics of my dissertation research. To ensure the ethical and legal treatment of research participants, I followed guidelines set by and sought (and received) approval of my study by the University of Maryland internal review board (IRB). IRB approval ensured and documented that my research would result in minimal, if any, harm to my informants. During each interview, as part of the interview protocol, I explained that my research has been approved by the University’s IRB and I would explain any potential harm our discussion might cause. For example, forms of harm a participant may experience include the “invasiveness” or personal nature of the interview process and the overflow of emotions that might arise from recalling particular life events (Angrosino and Mays de Perez, 2003). If I noticed that a participant seemed to feel uncomfortable discussing a

particular topic or if she wishes not to answer, I opted to stop the question at hand and take the interview in a new direction of discussion to relive some of her discomfort.

An example of stopping an interview question and skipping to another occurred once during my data collection process. In the process of interviewing an African-American respondent how race and gender played a role in her life, I noticed that she took out her Blackberry and began to check e-mails on it and ceased to make eye contact with me – even though she elicited a very detailed response. Because she stopped eye contact, I perceived that the race-based question was causing her to feel uncomfortable (because I was not a member of her race) and I sensed that the interview was getting a bit tense – even though it is quite possible that she had a deadline and needed to check her messages. Therefore, I did not ask follow-up questions regarding race and moved on to my questions related to power. I felt the switching of questions helped create a less tense environment, renewed eye contact and enabled the participant to discuss a more “neutral” topic. Not asking follow ups during situations such as this resulted in missed opportunities for gathering potential rich information. In future studies, I plan to not assume what my participants are thinking or feeling, but to ask them how the interview process is going and to not be wary of asking follow-up questions and probes in all circumstances.

My race, age and status as a graduate student affected the power dynamics of each interview and the way in which I analyzed and presented data. As a Caucasian in the United States (in which Caucasians represent the racial majority) I recognize that I hold a position of racial privilege in comparison to the African American, Asian, Indian and Hispanic participants whom I interviewed. Because my position in the racial majority

differed from my participants,' it may have constrained participants' responses or my interpretation of these responses. It is possible that participants, during the interview, a) simplified their discussions on race in public relations so that I (an outsider) would understand where they were coming from, b) chose not to address certain race-based topics, or c) sought to tell me (the researcher) what I thought I wanted to hear. When addressing the topic of race during each interview, I sought to practice empathy and convey that I was there to learn as much as possible about their experiences in the profession. When addressing the topic of race during my data analysis, I found that race intersected with gender in participants' responses – and took great care to enable the myriad voices of all participants shine through. My age and my graduate student status, in contrast, may have lessened or balanced the power differential between myself and my participants. Instead of being the ultimate ever-knowing researcher, my age (younger than the majority of my participants) and student status helped me to convey that I was a student who wanted to learn from them. Therefore, this aspect of my status may have enriched and lengthened participant responses because practitioners felt encouraged to help me (a student) to learn about their experiences in the profession.

To remain honest to my participants and empower them in the research process, I disclosed as much information about my identity (race, age, student status, former professional status) before each interview took place. During the interview process, I sought to enact and convey an ethic of care – by communicating to participants that I cared about their experiences in the public relations profession and that I was eager to hear their stories. Naples (2003) stated that researchers' enacting an ethic of care can help eliminate power and experience differences between a research and participant (p. 63).

After each interview, I told participants to not hesitate to call or e-mail me if they should have any questions, concerns or comments about the research.

Researcher Reflection and Evaluation

Researcher Reflection - To reflect upon the data collection, coding and analysis process and emergent themes, I incorporated “memos,” member checks and observer comments (OCs). Memos are notes written by the researcher regarding any themes, ideas, or issues regarding the research. Miles and Huberman (1994) explained that memos can occur as place holding memos, discussion memos, illustrative memos or clarifying memos. Memos contain a date, relate to key concepts being discussed, and link to particular places in the field notes, to previous case analysis discussions, or to case summaries. Furthermore, memos can be written on what is puzzling, as alternative hypotheses in response to another memo, to propose a new pattern code, to integrate a set of marginal remarks made on field notes, when analysis does not have a clear concept in mind but is struggling to do it, when there’s a general theme or metaphor that pulls together discrete observations. During the interview and analysis process, I often wrote memos to myself using Microsoft Word on my computer or penned on the backs or fronts of my interview legal pads and printed transcripts. I wrote notes about what data I thought was most helpful to my dissertation, reminders to myself to track down alternate explanations or tweak a question, or whether I thought an interview went well or not.

If I was uncertain about or required more clarification regarding emerging themes or segments of data, I conducted “member checks” with the research participants. To conduct member checks, I contacted interview participants via e-mail and asked them to review selected transcript segments or simply answer additional questions regarding their

experiences. I often conducted member checks after I transcribed interviews. I noticed that some participants would conclude a story or a response saying “I don’t know if I explained that correctly” or “I don’t know if that’s what I really meant, but I think it’s the best way I can explain it now.” After I encountered a statement like that, I would often copy-and-paste a transcript of the questionable interview segment in an e-mail asking the respondent if she felt that her response reflected what she meant to say. All of my member checks resulted in positive responses and confirmations that yes, the passage reflected what they meant to say.

During the data transcription and analysis process, I also utilized observer comments (OC). I would insert an OC immediately after transcribing a particular passage that I felt was rich, indicative of an emerging theme, or in some cases relating to what another respondent said. My OCs highlighting emerging themes and linking participant responses to others were especially helpful, for they assisted me in creating descriptive, pattern and interpretive codes.

As a qualitative researcher, I am aware that the research process has a considerable toll on me personally and professionally. I created support groups and journaled in order to better evaluate my experiences and my role as a researcher. Below, I detail these procedures in more depth.

Evaluation - Age, sensitive subjects and research sites produce emotional, difficult relationships with participants. Often, the researcher develops relationships with people that last far beyond the research study. This must be evaluated. Qualitative research takes a tremendous toll on the individual physically, cognitively and

emotionally. According to Lee-Treweek and Linkogle (2000), the researcher must have support groups in place as they conduct research. Therefore, to navigate these sensitive issues, I sought the support and constructive criticism and review of my work from my dissertation advisor, my colleagues, and my friends. In one particular case, I had some discussions regarding power with my husband and my friend that prompted me to feel unsure about how to interpret some data related to power in my dissertation. During a meeting with my dissertation advisor, I discussed my experiences and thoughts about power. This discussion process helped me to separate my personal worries or interpretations of power and my power data from those interpretations of those around me.

As a researcher, I have remained aware that participant relationships can have harmful implications to the validity of my data and take a harmful emotional toll on the participants and myself. Wolcott (2002) advised the researcher to not become too involved with participants and to assess the validity of data that comes from individuals. He explained the repercussions of using and publishing data that that may be tainted by romantic, friendship, or perhaps angry feelings toward to participant. Ellis (1995) explained that regardless of member checks, the participants of a study may never be "on board" or feel comfortable with your analysis and write up. Researchers must know when to draw the line between member checking and validating – and simply publishing what you, as the researcher, found as truthful, plausible, and realistic. According to Ellis (1995), even though we use direct quotes and develop close relationships with participants, we can never truly know the validity, trust, and "real" experiences of our participants. Specifically, throughout my dissertation research I maintained professional

relationships with my respondents and did not forge friendships with them. I valued the trusting professional interview relationship I created with all my interview respondents and engaged in several follow-up practices: 1) I sent each interview respondent a thank-you note via e-mail thanking them for their participation 2) I sent all interview respondents an “executive report” of my research findings for them to review and keep on file. The executive report was a listing of the data examples I used under each theme. The executive report did not include my interpretations of the data beyond how I organized them under the research questions, categories or themes.

Ultimately, however, the final dissertation was a product of my interpretation. Several participants requested a copy of the final report. When I submit the final document to practitioners and for publication in academic journals, I will demonstrate my accountability to my research subjects and the public relations profession. My interpretations of the findings, implications on the practice and directions for future research will expose ways in which practitioners often misunderstand the concept of gender and engage in forms of discrimination and power-control that oppress them in the profession. The document also reveals ways in which women practitioners can bond together, take on leadership positions, and avoid giving in to gender stereotypes in order to empower themselves.

Researcher Reflexivity, Background and Approach

I am aware that my professional and personal backgrounds have affected how I conducted my research, analyzed the data and interpreted my findings. My past professional experiences, in which I experienced gender discrimination and ethical dilemmas, inspired me to conduct this research regarding gender and power. As a former

public relations practitioner, I participated in professional coping strategies and tactics according to my organization's cultures and systems and celebrated my small triumphs within the workplace. During both public relations jobs I held, I experienced forms of gender discrimination and bullying. These experiences prompted me to exit the public relations industry, return to graduate school for my Ph.D. and pursue the study of power and gender in public relations. I felt a great need to understand WHY these phenomena occurred to women in public relations. Why were women still experiencing gender discrimination and sexual harassment in the public relations industry?

As I begin to embark on my journey as a researcher of gender and power, I situate myself as a scholar of gender. My dissertation research aimed to examine women's meaning making of gender and power in public relations through their voices. It was an exploratory study in which I sought to describe and explain women's experiences, rather than critique systems of oppression, test a theory, or incite action.

I sought to be as reflexive as possible about my various identities, memberships, privileges, beliefs and experiences with oppression. To do so, I engaged in reading selected texts and journaling about my identity. To better understand how my position as a white woman informed my understanding of race, I read Ruth Frankenberg's (1993) "White women, race matters: The social construction of whiteness" to better understand how my status as a white woman was one of privilege that was often invisible to me. It better enabled me to understand how race has historically existed as a socialized construction of difference – with "white" as the "center" or the "norm," and other races as the margins or "other." I then re-read Patricia Hill Collins' (1998) *Fighting Words* and Collins' "Black Feminist Thought" to better understand how race has functioned as a

process of marginalization and difference which privileged whites yet oppresses non-whites in America. Journaling about race enabled me to better understand some of my assumptions and biases about race. I realized that my status as a white researcher may have also constrained, influenced and impacted the responses of participants who did not share my race. Additionally, I journaled and thought about how my sex (female), age (31, yet people assume I'm in my twenties), race (white), upbringing in the South (from Richmond, Virginia), and religion (raised Protestant, yet recently converted to Catholicism), education (hold a graduate degree), class (middle class), sexuality (heterosexual) and marital status (married), political status (independent) combined to form my unique, intersectional identity.

During the data analysis process, I examined and reflected on my researcher biases and how they played a role in my data analysis and interpretation. Again, I journaled and spoke with my dissertation advisor about how my experiences in public relations, my identity and my perspectives of power form a unique lens through which I might perceive or bias my data. Interestingly, throughout the dissertation preparation and research process, I traced the evolution of my biases and understandings of power. A large majority of research regarding power in public relations focuses on power-control theory and assumes that those in power will act in ways that enable them to gain or maintain power. My dissertation prospectus literature review reflected this bias in public relations research: it was skewed toward literature identifying power as a commodity or possession that can be attained by individuals. During my dissertation prospectus defense, committee members brought this bias to my attention and suggested that I broaden my literature review and my understandings of power. In the wake of this

recommendation, I have expanded my literature review – and my personal understanding of power - to involve perspectives that do not assume power as a commodity. Although I possess a multi-focal approach to power and I approach gender as a socialized phenomenon, I worked to choose key themes and categories for presentation in my dissertation that arose naturally from the data, which were brought up most consistently by research participants. I did not set constraints on the number of themes or the types of themes that arose from the data.

Ultimately, in order to differentiate between the participants' data and my perceptions of it, to evaluate the interview process and my researcher-participant relationship, and to evaluate myself as a researcher, my notes and journaling about my experiences helped me to document and examine all procedures, issues, questions, feelings, and milestones regarding my research.

Validity

I structured and evaluated my dissertation research in regards to validity. In qualitative research, validity has referred to the quality or rigor of the research. Qualitative scholars have challenged the traditional, more quantitative notions of validity. Our understanding of validity as a single, verifiable “Truth” has evolved to an understanding that several “truths” and interpretations of a phenomenon can exist. Through this new approach to validity, we can view research as “valid” if it is crafted well, stands up to scholarly debate and is useful and practical to scholars and professionals alike.

Lindlof (1995) explained that traditionally, validity revolved around the truthfulness of findings and “whether the research instrument is accurately reporting on the object of interest” (p. 237). He explained, however, that traditional quantitative notions of validity do not apply to qualitative research. “A world consisting of multiple, constructed realities does not permit the researcher to identify any single representation as the criterion for accurate measurement. And because the inquirer operates reflexively as a participant, it is doubtful whether the usual way of conceiving internal validity has much relevance” (Lindlof, 1995, p. 238). Similarly, Angrosino and Mays de Perez (2003) argued against the traditional concept of validity as “Truth.” They wrote, “The validity of the traditional assumption, that the truth can be established through careful cross-checking of ethnographers’ and insiders’ reports, is no longer universally granted, as contemporary social and behavioral scientists are increasingly inclined to expect differences in testimony grounded in gender, class, ethnicity, and other factors that are not easy to mix into a consensus” (p. 110). This statement applies well to my own dissertation research in which I will examine how women practitioners make meaning of gender and power. I must remember that the women with whom I will speak will formulate meanings and “truths” that revolve around their specific personal experiences and realities, rather than one single “Truth” about gender and power. Meanings and realities are relative and constantly change and evolve.

Scholars have cited several techniques for increasing the rigor of qualitative research. Corbin and Strauss (2008) cited Creswell’s (1998) and Creswell and Miller’s (2000) procedures for increasing rigor. The authors recommended that the researcher have lengthy engagement in the field, use triangulation techniques, incorporate peer

review techniques, use negative case analysis, clarify the researcher's own biases, conduct member checks, achieving rich, use thick description, and conduct external audits (Creswell, 1998, pp. 201-203, as cited in Corbin and Strauss, 2008, p. 299). Corbin and Strauss (2008) also cited Chiovitti and Piran (2003) in reference to validity as the "rigor" of qualitative research. To improve a qualitative study's rigor, one can engage the participants in the research process, compare participants' responses regarding a phenomenon to theoretical statements about the phenomenon, explain the researcher's personal view about the phenomenon of study, detail the researcher's criteria for the study, and specify how and why participants were selected for the study. These techniques improve the rigor of a study because they enable a researcher to evaluate herself and improve her research techniques, to evaluate and improve data collection and analysis techniques, and remain transparent about her research procedures through the entire research process.

Scholars suggested that research can more accurately and validly describe a phenomenon if the researcher incorporates participants in the research process. Potter (1996) cited Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) who recommended that the researcher show participants the research report and "ask if it corresponds with their perceptions of their own beliefs and practices" (as cited in Potter, 1996, p. 198). These practices correspond to the technique of member checking. Regarding member checking and validity, Lindlof (1995) stated, "Member checks can be important situations of interpretive validation. Much of what the researcher wants to accomplish is a depiction of the subjective world of the other, so it is the other whose judgment may matter most" (p. 241). I incorporated my participants in the research process and used the member

checking technique to make sure my interpretations of the data accurately reflected participants' statements and interpretations.

Kvale (1995) outlined the concept of validity in qualitative research. He argued that validity equates to knowledge that is socially constructed through craftsmanship, communication, and action. These three concepts of validity and my techniques for incorporating them into my dissertation research are discussed below.

Craftsmanship – Kvale (1995) explained that excellent craftsmanship of a study, well thought out research design and the credibility of the researcher will improve the validity of a qualitative research study. “Craftsmanship” of qualitative research involves “continually checking, questioning, and theoretically interpreting the findings” (Kvale, 1995, p. 27). It is the engagement of “quality control throughout the stages of knowledge production” (p. 27). Well crafted research will stand the “test of time” and weather attempts to falsify it. Kvale (1995), regarding strong craftsmanship, stated, “validity is ascertained by examining the sources of invalidity and the stronger the attempts of falsification a proposition has survived, the more valid and the more trustworthy the knowledge” (p. 26).

To improve the craftsmanship validity of my research study, which involved qualitative interviews, I utilized several techniques which will make my study well crafted throughout the *entire* research process. Using the recommendations of Kvale (1995, pp. 27-28), I grounded my study in theory (power-control theory and gender theory) and to the specific research questions of the study (linked my protocol questions to research questions); designed my research well (learned research lessons from an earlier study on gender and conducted a pre-test of the interview protocol); continually

questioned and checked interview data; evaluated my transcription of the interview data (using memos and OCs); aimed for logical interpretation of data (using grounded theory approach); sought verification of interview data (using member checks); and gave an extensive report of the data.

Communication – According to Kvale (1995), “Communicative validity involves testing the validity of knowledge claims in a dialogue” (p. 30). In other words, if a research study is deemed valid by other scholars and professionals in the research field, it can achieve communicative validity. Through the process of achieving communicative validity, scholars will debate the trustworthiness of the research, how the researcher interpreted his or her findings, and how the researcher crafted his or her arguments. The more consensus scholars, critics and professionals achieve about the research, the more communicatively valid it can be. Ultimately, Kvale (1995) explained that “Communicative validity here approximates an educational endeavor, where truth is developed in a communicative process, both the researcher and subjects learning and changing through the dialogue” (p. 32). To help improve the communicative validity of my research, I held meetings with my dissertation advisor to review some of my results and my interpretations of the results. I will also present my dissertation to members of my dissertation committee and other scholars for debate and review. I will incorporate into my dissertation research their recommendations for strengthening my study design, for examining my interpretations of the data, and for improving my dissertation’s argument and logic.

Practicality – If a research study and its findings are usable, applicable and practical to the scholarly and professional community, it can achieve “pragmatic

validity.” Kvale (1995) asserted that pragmatic validity involves putting research into action in order to improve and further our knowledge of a phenomenon. He wrote, “pragmatic validity involves the ethical dimension. It represents a stronger knowledge claim than a mere agreement through a dialogue. A pragmatic validation rests upon observations and interpretations, with a commitment to act upon interpretations. Actions speak louder than words” (p. 33). Kvale’s use of the collaborative action research example to explain pragmatic validity especially spoke to me. He wrote, “In collaborative action research, researchers and subjects together develop knowledge of a social situation and then apply this knowledge by new actions in the situation and then apply this knowledge by new actions in the situation, thus, through praxis, they test the validity of the knowledge” (p. 34). Similar to Kvale’s example, I can improve the pragmatic validity of my dissertation research by publishing it, presenting my findings to the professional community such as AEJMC, and incorporating it into practice by making copies available to the women public relations practitioners whom I interviewed. If the professional community uses my research to evaluate and change organizational policy, or if my research inspires practitioners to re-think how women in the public relations profession make meaning of power and gender, my research will have gained some form of pragmatic validity. Ultimately, Kvale (1995) argued, “research becomes a means of transforming culture” (p. 35).

Well designed and excellent research results in valid research. Kvale (1995) explained this by stating, “the quality of the craftsmanship results in products with knowledge claims that are so powerful and convincing in their own right that they carry the validation with them, such as a strong piece of art. Ideally, the research procedures

are transparent and the results evident, and the conclusions of a study are intrinsically convincing as true, beautiful and good... In this sense, valid research would be research that makes questions of validity superfluous” (p. 38). By crafting my research well, it can stand up to debate and criticism, and if it is practical to scholarly and professional communities, my hope is that it will be valid in its own right.

Reliability and Generalizability – Reliability serves as another standard by which research can be evaluated for its quality. It is the test of whether a technique yields that same result each time (Babbie, 2001). Corbin and Strauss (2008) argue that a condition for the quality of research is a researcher’s awareness of how her biases and assumptions affect data collection and analysis. Scholars must examine the effect the researcher has upon the research and the effect the research is having on the researcher. Because judgment, bias and point-of-view differs among researchers and produces different observations, analyses and interpretations, scholars argue that reliability is not appropriate for qualitative research (Babbie, 2001, p. 299). While conducting this dissertation research, I strove to identify and control my biases and assumptions. Nonetheless, I understand that my assumptions of power and gender and how I interpreted the data will be different from other individuals who conduct a study such as this. Therefore, I confirm that reliability is not appropriate for this research. Furthermore, generalizability involves whether findings of a study can be compared or applied to other audiences. Again, the goal and purpose of qualitative research and this dissertation were to describe and offer context to the experiences of women public relations practitioners. The results of this study are not generalizable to the public relations industry at large.

Limitations

As with any research, I recognize that sampling, data collection, data analysis and data presentation may be constrained. Furthermore, I am aware that my personal history, research experiences and worldview may affect how I conduct research. Below, I discuss several research limitations of this dissertation.

This dissertation is limited due to sampling constraints. During the data collection process, I did not have the time frame or funding to travel outside of the Washington, D.C. and Baltimore, Maryland, areas. Therefore, the majority of my participants hail from Virginia, Washington, D.C. and Maryland, save a few from Florida, California and Tennessee. I strove to incorporate a variety of purposive sampling methods to best recruit public relations practitioners who ranged broadly in terms of age, sexuality, race, geography, experience and expertise. However, in order to collect the richest data, felt it was important to conduct interviews face-to-face, rather than via telephone, which constrained my geographic reach. Ultimately, the dissertation sample was not as diverse as I had intended.

Interview environments also posed some limitations to the research. In some circumstances, I had to meet respondents at a conference room in their agency or corporation's office. At times, I could sense that the conversations were constrained or perhaps "censored" because of the interview location. It is possible that individuals who participated in interviews at the office or close to the office did not provide as thorough or completely unhindered responses. Interviews I conducted via phone were also limited. I was not able to see or gauge participant facial or body language-related responses to my questions. I noticed that interviews conducted via phone were also shorter: there was less time to chat before and after the interview in order to build rapport. However, because

interviewees were not speaking to me face-to-face, it is possible that they might have felt less inhibited in their responses, for better or for worse. Thus, my telephone data may be constrained.

As a qualitative researcher, I am the instrument of my research; therefore, my race, age and student status (and my backgrounds, biases and perspectives regarding my identity) affected and perhaps limited the data collection and analysis process. Because my race and age identity differed from some of the participants, I found that I sometimes took what participants had to say at face value and was complicit in their responses. I tried to remain “politically correct” and avoided asking race- or gender- related questions that may have made participants or me feel uncomfortable. As a result, I missed several opportunities to ask challenging follow-up questions or probes that addressed race and gender issues in public relations head-on. Similarly, I realize that I did not recognize times when my participants were complicit and even taking active part in gender-, race- or power- related phenomena that were serving as forms of discrimination or oppression for women public relations practitioners. Often, I did not challenge their experiences, responses and perspectives on gender, power and public relations during the interviews and during the data analysis process. To account for and work to eliminate this limitation in future research, I plan to incorporate probes and follow-up questions in interviews that will seek challenge participants and their meaning making of phenomena, to find alternative explanations for phenomena being discussed. Likewise, during the data analysis process, I will seek for alternative explanations for phenomena, complicate my findings by displaying opposing standpoints or themes and continually work to understand how my personal (mis)understandings and biases affect my research.

Ultimately, I hoped that exploratory qualitative research such as this could illustrate the unique experiences of women public relations practitioners, build upon public relations theories of gender and power, and inspire a more diverse, empowered public relations profession. In the next chapter, I detail the themes and results that arose from the data that I collected and analyzed.

Chapter Four: Results

The purpose of this chapter is to present the findings pertaining to the three research questions addressing gender, power and the nexus of gender and power in public relations. Specific evidence for each of the three research questions is addressed below:

RQ1: How do women public relations practitioners make meaning of gender?

Participants made meaning of gender 1) through contrasting definitions, 2) as a function of a feminized public relations industry, 3) as a function of pregnancy, childbirth and family responsibilities, 4) through expectations and discrimination, and 5) as a phenomenon involving one's race, age and geography.

Contrasting Definitions – Participants made meaning of gender using definitions and examples that differed significantly. Some participants defined gender as male/female whereas other participants defined gender as a socialized or cultural phenomenon.

Participants who defined gender as male/female made meaning of gender as a function of one's biological sex. One practitioner explained, "My father was a physician, so I tend toward the clinical. I define [gender] as male/female. I'm aware of sex changes and people who choose to be gay or lesbian. I don't think those qualify as gender (Caucasian American, age: forties, Maryland)." Interestingly, some practitioners used the terminology of "black and white" to describe gender as categorical, oppositional difference between the sexes. For example, one individual stated, "I guess [gender is] masculine/feminine, male/female. That's the pretty standard black and white. You can get into the nitty-gritty, but I keep it pretty basic (Caucasian American, age: fifties, Virginia)." Another participant using the black/white analogy asserted, "How do I define gender? Well, I could see it very much as a black and white issue. It's male or female. Of

course, you have your medical oddities of people who, for whatever reason have two X chromosomes or two Y chromosomes or some other bizarrrity. I tend to see it in general as very black and white. There are the exceptions, but I would say that 90 – 95 percent fit in those two categories (Caucasian American, age: thirties, Washington, D.C.).”

Whereas some practitioners gave a strict male/female-based interpretation of gender, other practitioners made meaning of gender as male/female, yet they also linked this concept to separate “preconceived notions” involving masculine or feminine traits. One individual, for example, said, “If someone looks at you, it is pretty clear if you are male or female. If someone looks at you, there are preconceived notions (Caucasian American, age: fifties, Virginia).” Another participant mentioned how gender is often perceived as traits that are attached to the concepts of female and male or feminine and masculine – and that males and females do not necessarily have to enact or possess certain traits. Interestingly, this participant “packaged” her definition in a way that I, the researcher – who understands that gender reaches well beyond male/female biological difference - would understand. She expressed personal conflict with these gender designations. She stated:

Male gender. Female gender... I have a lot of masculine tendencies. But then what does that mean, to have masculine tendencies? I’m a go-getter, to be ambitious, to be type-A, to be the boss, to be in charge, to make money, to be able to control situations. And that’s just a personality type or a way of being. It’s not necessarily tied to being male or female... And then to be sensitive as man, people say you’re feminine. I think my husband is very sensitive and very nurturing and very maternal, but that’s

sexist to say. Why can't he just be paternal? He is good at parenting.

That's how I define it, but that's not how I define it. Yeah, he has a lot of feminine characteristics and I have a lot of masculine characteristics... I just say that because I know you understand it. It just packages it (African American, age: thirties, Washington, D.C.).

Participants, however, also made meaning of gender as a socially constructed phenomenon. Definitions commonly involved the terms “perceive,” “construct,” and “cultural concept.” When asked to define gender, one woman said, “I think it is the way each person in society perceives their role. It's the way we interpret one's sexual role. It's a construct.” Other individuals elaborated on this concept. For example, one participant expanded upon how gender is defined by societal norms and values:

I just think that gender is constructed socially as male and female. Now, whether you have the other sexes, transgender, gays, lesbians, whatever, there are still traits that are highly masculine, highly feminine according to society's norms and values, and if I were to pick out a pink book bag, someone within this society would automatically think that I had a girl. That's what gender represents. It's the social construction of gender. It's defined by what society has constructed it to be (African American, age: forties, Washington, D.C.)

One participant confessed that she interpreted gender as a social construct because she learned it as such in school. She defined gender as energies or series of traits that males and females can both share – that were not necessarily connected to biological sex. She explained,

That's interesting because I did women's studies as a student.

Academically, it's a social construct. I don't think about gender in that sense. I think about it more energetically. People have a masculine energy, but they may be a woman. They are more direct and to-the-point. That is a male approach, a traditionally male attribute. There are some women who have that energy. There are definitely ways – one is direct, another is more indirect and more receptive. That's male and female. I don't know if that's men physically and women physically. It's an underlying personality level (Hispanic American, age: forties, California).

Another participant articulated and expanded upon the idea that gender is socially constructed rather than biological. She utilized the term “continuum” which contrasted with other practitioners' “black/white” or categorical conceptualizations of gender as purely male/female. She explained,

Gender is a cultural concept. It really has nothing to do with biology...And I think gender is definitely a continuum. And as we have more transgender folks in the workplace, I think twenty years from now, we are going to have a very different conversation about what gender is. And there is going to be a much greater appreciation from that culture construct (Caucasian American, age: forties, Virginia).

The results reveal that some practitioners cannot articulate the concept of gender, whereas others recognize that it is a socialized, cultural system of ideas and meaning making. Whereas some practitioners articulated a definition of gender, other practitioners recognized gender through their personal experiences in the industry.

A Women's Industry - Women public relations practitioners made meaning of gender as a function of the public relations industry being a "women's" or a "women-dominated" industry. Participants asserted that public relations was a women's industry because a) there is a large percentage of female employees, b) women are uniquely suited for public relations, and c) public relations offers women work-life balance opportunities. Practitioners, however, also expressed negative perceptions and interpretations of public relations as a gendered industry. These perceptions and experiences combined to affect how practitioners perceived gender, the public relations industry and their professional roles.

The visibly gendered and stereotypically female composition of the public relations industry is one way in which practitioners made meaning of gender. One woman stated, "It's almost a stereotype that somebody who is in public relations would be a woman (Caucasian American, age: fifties, Virginia)." Another individual said, "I know that for the most part, public relations is a heavy field for women. There are men, but when you look at the percentage of men to women at this company, it's much higher women. I think that's the biggest thing that I see with gender." Participants, however, explained that the industry in which they worked affected the gendered composition of public relations. A woman shared however, that industry type affects the gendered makeup and practices of public relations. She stated,

This firm is a minority, woman-owned firm. I mean, it's just sheer numbers. It feels like you are working with all women all the time. I spent the first seven years of my career in sports. It's male-dominated. As a woman, things are just different there. Things that would absolutely be

considered inappropriate in my office now, were never – there. The conduct, conversations, terminology, expectations – they are just different (Caucasian American, age: forties, Washington, D.C.).

Women practitioners perceived public relations as female-dominated due to sheer numbers, but also because women are uniquely equipped with certain traits and skills that are ideal for practicing PR. One individual explained,

It's an industry that is predominately women. I think that's because women are good communicators and I think we are very skilled at having a gut instinct about how to greet people and how to communicate (Caucasian American, age: thirties, Washington, D.C.).

Another individual mirrored this idea. She stated, "Certain characteristics that lend themselves to success in PR are more female. Being diplomatic. Being a good host or hostess. Being a bit of a nanny sometimes. Juggling a lot of things. All those are things that women do very well, historically. Maybe that's why it's perceived as a women's field (Indian American, age: forties, Washington, D.C.).

Still, some women public relations professionals perceived public relations to be a women's industry due to the profession's unique work-life balance opportunities and flexibility. Results framed women public relations practitioners as primary caretakers of family member and children who needed the flexibility of public relations in order to balance home and work responsibilities. Research participants cited the public relations industry's "have it all" atmosphere, flexible schedules and convenient use of technology and telecommuting. Connecting public relations as a women's world to women's need for flexibility, one individual said, "It's a women's world and it think it's an industry that

women can be successful at...I hope it's true that women can have the "have it all" type of thing. It's not necessarily a 9 to 5 job, so you have the flexibility of raising children and working different hours" (Caucasian American, age: twenties, Florida). Increased technology and telecommuting are ways in which women may find more flexibility in the public relations industry in order to balance work and family. One participant stated,

[PR] is extremely family-friendly. When you start out married or unmarried...it definitely impacts your career very much... it's very lucky to find a place that is supportive and flexible when you are looking at family. The 9 to 5 mold might not work. They use technology. It could be very easy in a lot of places if workplaces would embrace technology. But a lot of times they don't use the tools they could. Telecommuting could work well if embraced (Caucasian American, age: forties, Maryland).

Similarly, one participant described public relations as an industry that offers women work-life balance options and flexibility. She championed telecommuting and how it led to a more flexible, cost-effective and "greener" workplace:

For women in particular, for anyone who is family oriented, there's flexibility and long time opportunity to balance a career and family. It affords a good work-life balance. There are some pure virtual options. Allowing people the flexibility to work from home with very little overhead on a day-to-day basis is easy...I once had a conference over Google Web Chat. I didn't have to jump in my car. They appreciated it, because they didn't have to drive in. No one had to go farther than her desk (Caucasian American, age: thirties, Virginia).

Public relations practitioners noticed that the industry was currently – and perhaps increasingly – female. Some research participants called for an increasing balance of male versus female workers in the industry. Participants also stated that public relations was an environment that was well suited for *all* individuals. One practitioner illustrated this sentiment well:

The one thing I like about PR is that it's one of the few industries that no matter what your gender, no matter what your sexual orientation, no matter if your personal, political or religious beliefs, there is room for everyone in this industry. I believe that it is one of the most democratized industries. I have seen very little prejudice or discrimination in this industry (Caucasian American, age: thirties, Virginia).

Whereas some practitioners felt the gendered nature of public relations affected the industry positively, other practitioners felt as if the increasingly female make-up affected the public relations field negatively. Some practitioners utilized “ghetto” or “pink collar” terminology to refer to the feminization of public relations. One participant referred to public relations as such and offered insight about the future of the industry. She stated,

There's a big picture issue that anytime the field becomes dominated, they call it the pink collar ghetto – there's a lessening of the field. I don't think that's happening yet to PR, because the upper echelon is male-dominated. There are many women running top spots. We have been breaking the glass ceiling over the last 20 years. There is a mindset of letting it not

become like teaching or nursing because it's a female dominated profession. I think as long as we continue to request being at the table when decisions are being made we can keep it from becoming that (Caucasian American, age: fifties, Virginia).

Practitioners cited negative implications of feminization and called for an increasingly diverse or balanced gender make-up of the highly female public relations industry. For example, one practitioner attributed the lack of gender diversity in her nearly all-female organization to conflict resolution inability.

This is an interesting dynamic in my firm. I went to a conference at Yale that talked about gender issues. She used the example that if you are at a playground and you see guys and there is an argument and they have an argument, and they settle it, and the game continues. With women, if someone pisses somebody off, the game stops and that's it. And it may or may not ever be resolved. I think that couldn't be a better example of what the dynamic can be in an agency that is run mostly by women and managed mostly by women (Caucasian American, age: thirties, Washington, D.C.).

This quotation and thought process hints at the essentializing of women practitioners in the industry and how gender may be utilized as an excuse for other interpersonal dynamics at hand. It assumes that all women practitioners hold similar traits and lack conflict resolution skills, whereas, it may simply be a function of the organizational culture.

Childbirth and Family Care – Women public relations practitioners also made meaning of gender through its associations with childbirth and family care - and the implications of these for women in the public relations industry. Specifically, women practitioners, who expressed that they bear the majority of family care responsibilities in comparison to their male counterparts, expressed that gender and childbirth a) positively and negatively affected their advancement in public relations, b) affected work-life balance, and c) created workplace expectations and perceptions of discrimination. Interestingly, however, women practitioners who were not mothers or primary caretakers in a family also cited ways in which gender was evidenced by childbirth and family care in public relations. Women practitioners highlighted the stress, “mommy guilt” and gendered expectations associated with balancing motherhood and career responsibilities.

Participants stated that childbirth and family milestones served as *key* points when women public relations practitioners made decisions about their place or their future in public relations. In many circumstances, childbirth and family re-routed women practitioner’s career goals, calling for them to cut back hours or even leave the profession entirely. One practitioner, who was not married or a mother, offered her interpretation of this phenomenon and why it occurs:

Mary - Unfortunately, the way it works is we have puritanical ways of looking at things... women should stay at home and take care of kids. In PR, if your spouse has a job, he is the one waiting for you. Women, as they move up ranks, they will leave the profession.

Katie - When do they leave?

Mary - Women in PR will slow down a lot when they get married or have a child. Also, when they get disheartened. They think they'll go to parties, travel, all these great things. When you start, you have to work long hours. When you divide it up compared to what other fields do, you're working 60 hours a week but you make 30K a year!? Just leave and be a teacher! (Hispanic American, age: thirties, California).

Positive and negative experiences regarding gender and pregnancy or childbirth affected women practitioners' decisions to stay in or quit the public relations industry. One woman, for example, explained her uneasiness with telling a male boss about her pregnancy, but how his response positively affected her childbirth work experience as she remained in the public relations industry:

I've been in offices where people reacted badly to a coworker being pregnant. It's 'Oh my god, this is going to be such a pain' ... Luckily, I didn't have that problem. I had a boss where that woman, because of that experience, I was afraid to tell him, and I gave him the news and he was like - it was by phone, he could hear my hesitation... He said, 'well, you're going to work until you have the baby, right?' I said 'yes.' He said, 'You are going to come back to work after you have the baby?' 'Yes.' And he goes, 'Congratulations!' I was like, they actually don't care!? He was like, 'No, we know you have to take maternity leave, but we'll deal with it!' And that made it even much easier to go and give him all I could in the job, because I was supported emotionally that way. He said, 'I don't have

a problem with it, why should you?' (Caucasian American, age: fifties, Virginia).

Some public relations practitioners, however, cited experiencing negative employee or boss' reactions to pregnancy and childbirth, which can result in the exiting of a job or the public relations profession altogether. One woman, who was not married or pregnant, shared the story of her boss' pregnancy and resulting exit of her job:

The CEO was not supportive of [my boss's] pregnancy. He screamed at her. He did not understand how she could have gotten pregnant. She had morning sickness, but the boss compared her to his own wife and other women in the company saying, 'So and so didn't miss a day, why did you?' This was the turning point. My boss left the company after she gave birth. She did not return after maternity leave. She thought about taking time off, but left. The CEO thought that because his wife's pregnancy was easy, her pregnancy would be, too. He suggested that [my boss] get a nanny. She tried to negotiate being able to leave work at 6 p.m., but the boss wouldn't let her leave. [My boss] said, 'why should he dictate my life here.' (Caucasian American, age: twenties, Maryland).

Practitioners communicated that the public relations industry has not yet found an appropriate way in which to deal with pregnancy and family planning, citing how corporate America continues to abide by masculine values or structures. This negative experience regarding pregnancy and family care can contribute to gender-based discrimination and work-life balance strain. One woman stated,

I'm not sure our industry, at least, has figured out an effective way to deal with family planning. I think the expectation is...It's the women who have the kids and actually have to... not everybody takes time off, but for the most part, a woman who has a kid almost always has to take time off. I'm not sure if the idea of job sharing or the idea of planning well enough for when someone is going to be out... I don't think there is a long-term strategy here with women and families... I'm not sure if corporate America has figured out how to cultivate the growth of women the way – because it's so traditionally a male-dominated structure. You can't move up if you take time off. (Caucasian American, age: forties, Washington, D.C.)

Childbirth and marriage not only compete with women's decisions to remain in or leave the public relations industry, but they also compete with working practitioners' abilities to balance work and family and fulfill job responsibilities. Women practitioners shared that both work and family responsibilities fell on them, often making work-life balance precarious. One practitioner shared, "I had two children when I was in my thirties here. I think the impact of going out on maternity leave and stuff slows down progression in career paths. Sometimes it's been tough when the kids were sick or you had to pick them up at a certain time when they were younger. And so you make allowances. Sometimes the work-life balance is much tougher on women professionals." To illustrate the ways in which family responsibilities affect women's public relations job responsibilities, one Caucasian married practitioner with children explained how women need to have a husband or a partner in order to balance difficult work hours and expectations in the public relations industry. She added that companies must make

allowances in order for families to leave to take care of sick children and not suffer at their jobs.

In many circumstances, the responsibilities associated with balancing childcare and work expectations resulted in a sense of being overwhelmed or guilt for women public relations practitioners. In turn, it affected their career and work-life balance decisions. One woman, who left the public relations industry, expressed her feeling of being overwhelmed:

My gender affected my career path. If I will go back to work there are definitely certain criteria because of my kid and my home responsibilities. I tell my husband all the time ‘You are lucky,’ because I can have a flexible lifestyle because if I had to do this wife and child stuff working, I would kill you...If I do have to go back to work, I would definitely get a maid, a nanny and a personal assistant, because I’m not doing it. I don’t know how those mommies did it before me, but I’m not doing it. I don’t care what women say – ‘oh you can do it all.’ Well, no I’m not. Because right now, I’m missing out on the things I used to do as an individual and I don’t like it. I’m not doing it (African American, age: forties, Washington, D.C.).

The practitioner explained how childbirth and family responsibilities affected work-life balance and career decisions, but also resulted in feelings of guilt. She shared,

When you have a child, especially if you already have a career - in your mind, this child thing is a road block. This is a bump. I’ll be pregnant. I’ll work up until my due date. I’ll push this kid out. I’ll do a little bit of

maternity live. I'll put the baby in day care and I'm out. It doesn't work like that, because you are emotionally attached, you have a different body, you are tired, that child sucks up all of your energy, that child does not care if you have work to do. I don't even get on the computer because [child's name] will come and flip the lap top down and say, 'No computer mommy.' The mommy guilt is ridiculous (African American, age: forties, Washington, D.C.).

Perceptions, Expectations and Discrimination – Women public relations practitioners communicated that gender perceptions, expectations and socialization account for the workplace stereotypes and work-life balance decisions that are placed upon them. Many participants made meaning of gender through the negative expectations and discrimination they had experienced. One woman explained how negative expectations and stereotypes frame gender in a way that impedes women's success in public relations, often calling for women to work harder in order to dispel these perceptions:

You see the "Barbie" syndrome a lot. There was that show "Power Girls" on MTV. It was so stupid. But that tends to be the image of women in public relations. It focuses on special events and movies and it's so unrealistic. So I think the issue of gender in public relations is how you deal with the expectations. Number one we have to work harder to be taken seriously. I think for younger women, it's more difficult for younger men, because you do have that Barbie syndrome. You feel like you have

to work harder to be taken seriously. (Caucasian American, age: sixties, Virginia).

Participants explained that appearance-related expectations, such as dress and age, affected their meaning making of gender as public relations practitioners. For example, one practitioner offered a story to illustrate how gendered dress and appearance expectations affected her in public relations.

There was an interview I did that was last minute and I had to get to the studio... The top part of me was what matters. I had to wear color. I thought oh, I need to wear a bright color. I ended up with a pinky-red jacket and a bright necklace and earrings...But I thought it was really important that I thought about that because I was representing my organization. And if I hadn't, it would have looked sloppy. Casual is a very difficult thing for women to define. Business casual women never know what to wear. We have Friday casuals, but I'll wear a jacket. Men look distinguished with gray hair - I look old. It's not fair. But I do think the whole thing of dressing for an interview is important. People do pay attention (Caucasian American, age: sixties, Virginia).

Another practitioner shared her experiences managing gendered dress, appearance and age-related expectations. She explained how she was counseled to take on a more assertive, traditionally masculine communication style in the workplace to counteract her younger, feminine appearance:

I have a good friend who was a corporate recruiter for years and at lunch she said, 'If it's a man interviewing you, you would be more competitive

if you wore your hair up than if you wore your hair down, that's what the research says.' When I was in technology, my supervisor who was 10 or 15 years older than I said, 'You know, I am 5 foot 1 and I look very young. People are going to think you are twelve and you need to just go in there and assert yourself and use big broad motions and thump on the table and make yourself look tall.' And I tried that. And it worked in certain situations. When I transitioned into [industry], I had to unlearn some bad behaviors and really be comfortable with *my* style, not the style that a supervisor or a consultant says that you have to do. (Caucasian American, age: forties, Virginia).

To interpret why appearance expectations are gendered in the workplace, and perhaps based on 'mistaken' interpretations, one woman stated, "The point I am trying to make is I still think men have an unfair advantage in the workplace... Sometimes our nurturing and our warmth that is natural, our colorful wardrobe – for a male dominated workforce can be mistaken for whimsy. So you are crashing through that barrier constantly to say that I am valid and real, too" (Caucasian American, age: forties, Virginia).

Practitioners recognized that expectations and professional treatment differed for men and women in the public relations industry. To explain this concept, one woman shared her experience:

Anne - If you're too assertive it can be seen negatively, but if a guy is assertive it's seen as okay...we have to be a little assertive and sometimes girls/women are expected to do it with a smile, but guys are expected – it's

okay for them to be short and curt. If a girl did that, it would be ‘oh what’s wrong with her?’

Katie – Do you have an example of this?

Anne – For example, with the reporter, they totally misquoted my client and totally misrepresented the story they were supposed to do, and I called him up after the fact and said this is not what we discussed, this is bad journalism and I was telling him that it’s not acceptable. And his response was, ‘Well, I’m never going to work with you again.’ So, it was one of those things that if I had been a guy and I hadn’t been so friendly, he would have probably been like ‘Dude, I was wrong’ (Caucasian American, age: thirties, Washington, D.C.).

For participants, gender-based workplace expectations and stereotypes led to discrimination. Forms of discrimination included hiring and advancement restraints, the “old boys’ network” and being ignored or “talked over” in meetings. For example, one practitioner explained that she felt glass ceiling practices continue to exist in public relations. She stated,

There are still many types of companies where women have not risen to the levels... For every woman who advances to a high level in a public relations agency, there are many others that are dominated by men. And I know, for example, [name] is fantastic and she is semi-retiring...She is a bright talent, but by the way, is a very big woman, and that has not kept her down. Immensely talented woman and she is stepping down and a man

is replacing her. So, I think there is still a glass ceiling. (Caucasian American, age: sixties, Virginia).

Practitioners explained that forms of discrimination differed depending on context, industry and clientele. For example, one practitioner stated that women were not allowed to work on certain accounts due to client and employee preferences. She said, “I think sometimes it’s hard with some clients. Especially, we’re working on a lot of international stuff and sometimes those clients, as a rule, where a woman is not going to be their choice from their perspective, and even sometimes there is an old boys’ network industry thing (Indian American, age: thirties, Washington, D.C.).

Whereas hiring practices and client preferences served as measurable forms of discrimination in public relations, men’s ignorance of women served as a less blatant discrimination tactic. Participants discussed feelings of “being talked over,” lacking respect and lacking a voice in comparison to male colleagues. For example, one woman shared,

Susan - I was the only woman there. It was a pretty small group there. I did find that a lot of times in meetings I would be talked over. It would have to work extra hard to get my point across and make sure that I was listened to.

Katie – Do you have an example of where you were talked over? What did you do?

Susan - Oh, I said, 'Excuse me, I am in the middle of...' ...if it happens more than once – and it has, I say, 'Look I'm here for a reason, I've got to get this out there' (Caucasian American, age: forties, Maryland).

Similarly, another practitioner shared her experiences of being ignored on the basis of her gender, one woman explained,

I was the only woman. The leadership of [organization] was male and there were a lot of differences in communications. I had to make sure that during discussions, I jumped right in. I was never going to be given an invitation to join the conversation...It was the males communicating together and then I was there. So I had to assert myself – and I did. Which meant I was probably seen from outside as assertive, but possibly people would take it as aggressiveness. Nobody was going to stop to let you in, type of thing (Caucasian American, age: fifties, Virginia).

The section above illustrated how practitioners made meaning of gender through the stereotypes, age- , gender -and appearance-based expectations that exist in the public relations industry. These expectations influenced women's dress and communication decisions, as well as how women were perceived in their places of work.

Gender, Race, Age and Geography Intersections - Women's identities and meaning making of gender were linked to age, race and geography. Age, race and geography were cited as ways in which they experienced difference – and in turn, experienced forms of gender-based discrimination and expectations.

Age appeared to be an especially critical factor in how female practitioners interpret gender when they are younger and newer to the public relations profession. It served as an additional factor that contributed to women's sense of gender discrimination and stereotyping. For example, one woman explained how gender and age intersected to affect how women and men benefited in the industry. She said, "There was an interesting dynamic being a younger woman working with older men. People look at youth... Young women versus young men, it's not the same. I never behaved as if it was different, but as I've grown older I noticed that men get the benefit more than women do (Caucasian American, age: thirties, Virginia). Age and gender also simultaneously affected how women practitioners were perceived and taken seriously. One woman explained, "I had been emailing or talking on the phone with a client, and he thought I was a 60 year old short brunette. The idea to have an expertise, to be taken seriously, you must be short... Short with brown hair. He had a very specific image in his mind. It goes - if you have that experience you must be older" (Caucasian American, age: thirties, Virginia). Similarly, another practitioner explained how her youth was linked to others' perceptions of her lack of expertise in public relations. Working extremely hard was one method she used to fight the youth- and gender-based perceptions. "At 23 years old, [the perception] was something I was constantly fighting through, you joke it off, you damn well do your best. You have to. But when you are younger and you're a woman, you better be sure that you are putting 120 percent out there (Caucasian American, age: thirties, Virginia).

Practitioners offered insight into *why* gender and age affect men's perceptions of women in the workplace. One individual explained, "It usually happens when [men] are flustered and don't agree. It's not that I'm female and young. It's they are used to getting

their own way and not being challenged. If I'm a male, they'd attack in a different way. Men have a hard time seeing women in a professional role. Men have a hard time separating the person or the woman from the role" (Caucasian American, age: thirties, Virginia). This quotation explains how the public relations workplace may still operate in the masculine-based expectations and professional practices. Youth and gender serve as facets of one's identity used to challenge women's professional expertise and place in public relations environments.

Gender and race also intersected to inform women's identities and meaning making of gender in public relations. Often, African American, Asian or Indian participants cited race as being a more salient component of their identities than gender. Caucasian participants, however, often did not include race in their meaning making of gender – unless it was in terms of how their race differed from those with whom they worked. Respondents' stories demonstrated how the social construction of race (or the color of one's skin) constructed forms of difference in the public relations profession. Racial minority practitioners cited race as another form of discrimination or oppression, whereas racial majority practitioners did not cite race as a form of discrimination or oppression. Age, gender and race intersected in public relations practitioners' experiences – and served as forms of discrimination and oppression. Judgments on women's abilities and levels of expertise were made not what appears on one's resume, but by one's age and race. One African American woman explained,

When I got the job at the [organization], I was the youngest director, the only African American and I was a woman. And that was painful beyond compare. Just getting discriminated against by the white man, getting

discriminated against by the older white woman saying, ‘oh, you remind me of my daughter.’ I’m not your daughter, I’m your boss! So that age thing, when I went to get jobs, I knew that people were looking at me thinking, ‘If we are going to pay you six figures, you need to have at least twenty years of experience.’ (African American, age: forties, Washington, D.C.).

Women public relations practitioners were perceived in the industry based on their gender, race, and even cultural or ethnic background. A practitioner explained how gender and race both affected her identity, but her racial and cultural background often played more prominently in her role as a professional. She explained, “It’s been more issues of being from a different culture. Most of the time, I don’t let that get to me. Over the years the fact that I look different and speak different. I’m from India – but people think I sound British. I don’t let it get to me. From a cultural point of view, once I start working, that changes completely” (Indian American, age: forties, Washington, D.C.).

Race, for Caucasian practitioners, was an invisible entity that did not intersect to create a sense of gender-based discrimination, but served as a socially constructed category by which they could understand “difference” or what she was *not*. Interestingly, a sole Caucasian-American practitioner mentioned race during her meaning making of gender. However, she noticed her race because she, as a white woman, was a “minority” in her particular agency. She explained, “My first job was at a female-owned Hispanic agency. I was a minority because I’m not Hispanic. It was mind-opening and a lot of fun” (Caucasian American, age: forties, Maryland).

Race and gender simultaneously affected women public relations practitioners' sense of professionalism and visibility. In a sense, one woman's overlapping identity as a Black woman resulted in her "invisibility" compared to white, male counterparts. Rather than fight or change gender- and race-based discrimination in public relations practice, her coping mechanism was to ignore it, but to work hard in order to rise above differential treatment.

I think that in the African American PR community, but with what I have observed in mainstream organizations and corporate organizations and with White organizations, it's a lot of men. I notice that when a lot of blogs are featured, such as the major PR blogs like PR News or whatever, when they do their links, it's usually like White men blogs. I'm determined to break that. My fodder is here. I'm here too. I just ignore it and keep going. What is there to dwell on? It is what it is. I feel like if women want to be visible and be seen, we have to be there, we have to show up...I don't think of gender. I don't even think of race. I don't think of those things. I just do what I do. If you're doing what you're doing right, people will see you (African American, age: thirties, Washington, D.C.).

Geography also intersected with race and gender to affect women's experiences and discrimination in public relations. Depending on one's location in the United States, a women may experience more gender discrimination than others. Whereas gender equality may have been achieved in large cities of the East Coast or West Coast, the South remains a "man's world." One Tennessee practitioner explained, "One thing I

have observed is despite all the progress in terms of racial and gender areas, it's still, especially in [city] and in the South, very much a man's world. It's very much a white man's world" (Caucasian American, age: forties, Tennessee).

Ultimately, results revealed that race, age and geography serve as ways in which individuals in public relations are categorized and perceived through difference. Whereas practitioners may hold high levels of expertise in the public relations profession, the socialized expectations and meanings surrounding age, race and geography serve as methods by which women are discriminated.

Results of the first research question suggested that practitioners define gender differently and make meaning of gender through their experiences with the feminization of public relations, pregnancy or family responsibilities, expectations and discrimination, and race, age and geography.

RQ2: How do women public relations practitioners make meaning of power?

Women public relations practitioners made meaning of power as 1) a function of influence, 2) a function of relationships, 3) knowledge and information, 4) access, 5) results-based credibility, 6) a negative force and 7) empowerment. Specific evidence for each of these themes is discussed below.

Influence - Women public relations practitioners made meaning of power as influence. In the words of one practitioner, "Power is influencing. It *is* influence. When people respect your opinion, you do have power" (Caucasian American, age: thirties, Virginia). Participants described influence as discursive and active practice involving a) the way in which individuals communicate and b) the way in which one brings individuals to a result or decision.

Women practitioners stated that influence existed as how one communicates by a) being subtle and non-confrontational or by b) being assertive and aggressive.

Participants made meaning of influence as a subtle, non-confrontational communication. For example, one practitioner illustrated influence as communicating using subtle guidance. She said, “You don’t have to be forceful or aggressive. For example, working with the media, we decline interviews. [Earlier in my career], I’d put all of the information together and let my supervisors decide whether to do an interview or not. Now, I say, ‘It’s good to do this interview because it’s a good story and a good opportunity.’ I guide them (Asian American, age: fifties, Virginia). Another practitioner described power as influence that is “quiet” and does not involve confrontation or “ruckus.” She explained, “Power, hmm...Sometimes power is influence. What I like to see is that quiet power. That quiet power in terms of that person who gets stuff done, follows through, and doesn’t have a whole lot of ruckus with them. I am very much into ‘sometimes it’s better to be quiet’ (laughs) (African American, age: thirties, Washington, D.C.). Similarly, one government public relations practitioner described her non-confrontational influence style:

“I try *not* to approach people in a confrontational way, but more like, ‘Hey this is what I think we should be doing, what do you think? Where would it be best to do that?’” (Caucasian American, age: twenties, Washington, D.C.). Yet another practitioner described her subtle influence style as communicating in “suggestion mode.” She explained, “The way you [influence] is to listen and offer counsel – ‘Have you thought about trying it this way? I know this has worked beautifully, what if... would that work,

would you think?’ Doing it in a suggestion mode instead of ‘you have to do this’”
(Caucasian American, age: sixties, Virginia).

While some practitioners influenced by communicating quietly or subtly, other practitioners influenced by communicating assertively or aggressively. Practitioners described assertiveness as speaking confidently and negotiating. Aggressiveness was illustrated as bossiness, “jumping in,” and establishing control. One practitioner described how assertiveness was essential to her job as a government public relations professional.

And being assertive... I’ll be hard on [reporters] – backing up my point of view and saying you need to correct this and this is why... So you are fighting a battle to get things corrected after the fact and as well as fighting before hand to prevent bad stories from coming out... You have to have both a mastery of the facts on your side and make a compelling argument and be assertive... You have to understand the dynamics at play and be really assertive about backing up your case and it’s hard... You have to be patient and focused on it and determined to get it right
(Caucasian American, age: twenties, Washington, D.C.).

The government public relations professional then expanded up her definition of influence. She defined it as assertive communication that involving strategic negotiation with her colleagues. The practitioner described times in which she had to use assertive communication in order to manage and prioritize her boss’s schedule. She said, “Even being assertive within your own staff about like - she needs to be spending her time doing this, this and this. And that’s something you have to do to be successful professionally,

but also to make your boss successful. You have to be able to negotiate with your staff members, but you also have to be strategic” (Caucasian American, age: twenties, Washington, D.C.).

Illustrating influence as communication involving more aggressiveness than assertiveness, some practitioners cited using bossiness or nagging. One practitioner who described her influence style as “bossy,” explained how she communicated rules to affect individuals’ behaviors. She said, “I boss them around at trade shows. They call me ‘The Trade Show Nazi.’ They are not allowed to go to the bathroom without asking permission. They are not allowed to go to lunch without asking permission. These are rules that I started at the beginning and it left them kicking and screaming to this point, but now they understand why [they] can’t just go off because no one is going to be there to answer questions” (Caucasian American, age; thirties, Virginia). Similarly, another practitioner described her assertive / aggressive influence communication as “nagging.” She stated, “To influence decisions, I feel like I am nagging them all the time. I’m constantly reminding them that communications has to be a part of every single decision. They have to think about communications when they are doing everything and how they are going to communicate this to the various publics” (Caucasian American, age: thirties, Virginia).

Practitioners cited using deliberate aggressiveness to communicate and wield influence. Participants often stated that they enacted aggressiveness only after other forms of communication or influence were unproductive or exhausted. Describing how she influenced her boss using aggressive communication, one practitioner shared, “I try to be as proficient as possible and you know, I’m a loud mouth, so you are going to hear

my voice. I'm very combative. So I'm sure that plays a role in me being as aggressive as I am, because I am not afraid to tell you what I think is wrong" (African American, age: forties, Washington, D.C.).

Similarly, another practitioner touted aggressiveness as influence – and as an essential skill or communication trait of the public relations industry. She argued, "And if you are introverted or don't want to be involved, this is not the industry for you. I say 'aggressive' all the time. It's my favorite word. You have to be aggressive. You can't be quiet and get the story. You can't be quiet and express your feelings. You have to be aggressive" (African American, age: forties, Washington, D.C.).

Women practitioners often had aggressively "jump in" or interrupt during conversations and meetings in order to make a point. To describe aggressiveness – and how it differed from how she was originally socialized to act - one woman explained,

We're all taught not to break into a conversation, because it's not polite, but I felt at the time, that in order to be able to make a few points myself – instead of listening - and listening is very important – but when I actually felt that I had something that needed to be said, I had to jump in. I grew to not have any qualms about it if you are speaking. I would have jumped right in if I felt that was the time for my point to be made. I learned that if you wait for the opportunity, it may never come and then the meeting is over and you've lost the meeting. (Caucasian American, age: fifties, Virginia).

Similar to "jumping in," one practitioner shared that aggressiveness meant "not waiting to be invited" to an organizational discussion or platform. She argued, "If you're waiting

to be invited, then you aren't doing your job. Because there are these meetings and sessions where you won't be invited because they don't think about you and they don't think about communications... Sometimes people don't know what they need, so you have to look at where the opportunities are where you can plug in and help people to add value to your organization" (Caucasian American, age: fifties, Virginia). Regarding the use of aggressiveness as a "last resort," one practitioner explained how she utilizes assertiveness before she implements confrontational communication. She said, "I almost always get the corrections I want made. I think it's because I'm assertive and I have good relationships with the reporters. I've been really tough on reporters and said no, this is wrong. But I also try to go out of my way to be helpful and friendly. Being confrontational isn't the first step for me. It's usually after several steps. I think for some managers, they hesitate to hire someone if they didn't think they could be assertive enough" (Caucasian American, age: twenties, Washington, D.C.).

Public relations professionals defined influence not as how an individual communicates, but as how one brings an individual or a group to a decision or an outcome. For example, one practitioner explained, "True power is when you can influence outcomes. And oftentimes those outcomes are influenced by processes. If you are in a position where people respect your opinion and agree to implement your recommendations on those processes and strategies and outcomes that is power" (Indian American, age: forties, Washington, D.C.).

Bringing individuals and groups to a final decision involved persuasion, pointing to past examples, involving employees in strategic decisions, working together in groups,

and disseminating key messages. Describing influence as a persuasive process that leads individuals to a decision, one practitioner explained,

I think there's a lot of power behind public relations to change public opinion or shape a person's opinion or persuade people... You have to understand what motivates people, what incentivizes behavior and how you can change it... If you could figure out what is incentivizing somebody and what could push the needle on an issue, then certainly you hold all the cards (Caucasian American, age: twenties, Washington, D.C.).

Often, public relations practitioners must influence organizational decision makers to *not* take an action using persuasion and risk taking. One practitioner shared how she engaged in persuasive conversation with her boss to counsel him to not create a new organizational web page because it was not appropriate for the audience the company meant to reach. She added, "I actually advised him in the other direction, instead of saying, 'okay, got it, we'll do another one' when they didn't need another one. And his credibility went [up]. Some bosses want you to say 'yes sir' and go out and do it. But why did they hire you? So... that is hard to do, because you are always taking a risk" (Caucasian American, age: fifties, Virginia). A practitioner's ability to influence a final outcome depends on organizational culture. Persuasive attempts to influence key decision makers may not produce a desired result. A woman explained how she failed to prevent organizational decision makers from taking an action that would produce disastrous results because it was in the company's "DNA" and overall business strategy to perform contrary to what she was advising the company to do. She shared that later, practitioners

can instead influence by pointing to past mistakes in a way that said, “I told you so.” The practitioner shared her experience with influence,

Well, it ended up being probably almost a year of negative press... We got a Lemon Award which is a bad award for customer stuff... And that is something where I wasn't able to shift the strategy. You have to work within it. Give your best advice. And the company did learn from it. I don't think they did that again. For years after that all we had to say was, 'remember the Lemon Award.' And then they would re-think things. However, influence only goes so far. Power is tied into the business culture. Afterwards, [my boss] said things like 'you should have lain down in front of a train. You could have stopped it.' But I said, 'I don't know. We could have stopped it, but they would never have known what we were stopping.' The business DNA was to test... I don't think we could have stopped it (Asian American, age: fifties, Virginia).

Influencing individuals to adopt a decision or outcome also involves conducting or presenting research and including employees in decision making along with making persuasive appeals. One professional explained:

I brought them research and then presented and they said, 'Let's do this, but let's involve the employees.' So, the employees were involved in the name change... It was bottom-up in every sense and then brought to the board saying this is what the customers and the employees want and they said okay... To get them to be okay with [the name and decal change] was

a serious battle and it ended up they didn't 'get it' and there were a lot of 'who moved my cheese' e-mails saying you are changing the game on me and I don't like it. It came to a head where I had to go meet with them one early morning and I brought the general manager with me and I told him he needed to come and he was going to back me up... I had to come in and make a case to the employees. (Caucasian American, age: forties, Virginia).

Whereas some public relations practitioners utilize persuasion and research to influence individuals to a decision, other practitioners use groups or coalitions. Groups were used by public relations practitioners to acculturate individuals, to unify individuals regarding an idea or task, and to frame decisions as the "group's decision" rather than an individual's decision. For example, one practitioner explained how she formed a group in order to better explain the need for all of her organization's departments to house a public relations professional. She said,

So I pulled a group together. So it's development, learning, cross fertilization, cross promotion of ideas... Now, when they talk about cross-departmental groups they'll point to this one... Now, all of the departments that didn't have [a PR pro] now have one. Which is great. I could have seen that as powerless, like why didn't they listen to me right away? Or, I could see it as I'm influencing them over time. Now they have them... I said, 'Well, look you actually need three or four [PR pros], but let's start with one.' And just a few months ago she was in a big department head meeting and she said, 'I can't believe we ever got along without [the PR

person] and he is not enough.' I was over in the corner saying 'YES!'
(Asian American, age: fifties, Virginia).

Practitioners also used one-on-one meetings and groups not only to acculturate organizational members, but also to provide a sense of legitimacy to the rules she wished to enforce. One woman explained,

I met with individuals one-on-one. I had their people in. I tried to come at it from all different angles. So, we formed a visual identity review group...And people who wanted exceptions needed to come through a review committee. Instead of coming through me as an individual, who then you could look at me and say 'Oh, it's her whim, she made a bad decision.' It comes before a panel of people from these departments who needed their help. They were helping police usage. But I also co-opted the people who might have been the biggest offenders (Caucasian American, age: forties, Virginia).

Similarly, another public relations practitioner explained how she formed groups to get various parts of an organization to work together on a public relations initiative. She stated,

I formed a global marketing council used to share resources, share information and to communicate in both ways back and forth. It enabled the company to present itself as one voice instead of 25 subsidiary voices with past, predictable results. To get people to see the necessity of a more

professional IMC plan, versus everyone just running and doing everything independently was good... (Caucasian American, age: fifties, Virginia).

Rather than moving individuals to take a specific action, influence can also produce a less tangible end result: moving individuals to think of an organization in a particular way. One practitioner defined this type of influence stating,

You have the power to mold what the outside environment thinks of the organization. What you put out there is what's seen. [Reporters] don't have the time to research everything. Your information is how they are getting it. What you put out there is more than likely what is being seen. That is very powerful. An influence. That's pretty powerful, because you can influence an entire organization (Caucasian American, age: twenties, Florida).

Ultimately, influence is the combination of how one communicates and the final outcome that it produces. One practitioner described this combination well when she shared a story regarding how crafting a message in a particular way resulted in her desired outcome of individuals repeating and spreading a message. She explained,

I think the influencer part is key. Going back to that example with the video, I saw firsthand the power of crafting a message and putting it in a package that people can take, process and then carry on. So they become like your little bees pollinating with your message. We sent the video to all the members of the health club at the open house. I was listening to a girl who was doing demonstrations to other girls who were coming into

the studio...The stuff that I had put upon the screen she was saying it exactly – hitting all of my messages. And that was power. Being able to create a message and give it to someone and unwittingly it becomes the messenger and you can just sit back. I think that’s influential (African American, age: thirties, Washington, D.C.).

Some public relations practitioners defined influence not only as how one communicates or moves individuals to a decision, but also how one “builds bridges” or engages in relationships with others. Defining power as influence that involves making an impact and connecting with individuals, one practitioner explained,

Obviously [power] is the ability to influence. With that comes the responsibility. I can influence you in a good way or a bad way. Power is not an issue. It’s how you wield it. It’s about how you are using your power. I think that we all have power. You can find it. It doesn’t take that much. There are questions you can ask yourself about your inner values, your purpose in life, your mission. You will find your power in a blink of an eye. But, you haven’t done anything. My idea is how do we walk around with it? How do we responsibly use our influence to make an impact? Some people are moved by a need to create shock and awe. I am more of a bridge builder. For me that is how I look at my influence. Using it to build bridges (Hispanic American, age: forties, California).

Relationships – Women public relations practitioners made meaning of power as relationships with individuals. Specifically, public relations practitioners forge relationships with individuals for power by a) creating partnerships and trust b)

conveying helpfulness and c) employing strategy or manipulation. Relationships were often formed with bosses, colleagues, clients, media personnel or other strategic connections. Power resulted from the number of and strength of relationships that practitioners held with these individuals. Practitioners communicated that relationships and relationship-building were integral, valuable and powerful to public relations practice. Explaining the overall value of relationships to public relations and power, one practitioner said,

I think the culture of public relations is one where people always recognize the value of making connections even if you don't know the immediate use of them. They recognize the importance of connecting across the board... You really understand how important a whole community is and how many people work together to make something happen. And when you understand how it takes so many people working together to make something happen, you understand the value of cultivating and taking care of those connections (Caucasian American, age: sixties, Virginia).

Similarly, another practitioner explained the connection of relationships to power in public relations. Relationships enable practitioners to achieve an end result. She said, "In an organization, the person who has relationships has power - whether it's a relationship with the media, a relationship with sponsors. A person who can deliver results, a person who can make whatever the end result is. Whoever can make that happen has the power" (African American, age: thirties, Washington, D.C.).

Public relations professionals defined power as positive relationships built on partnership and trust. Partnerships are formed between companies and clients and among colleagues in a workplace. For example, one participant defined the relationship with her client as, “It’s a partnership. I always think of it as a partnership. I am there to help them, I’m not there to get the glory. I also really believe that as a consultant, my job is to tell them what they need to hear, not what they want to hear... In that way, it’s a partnership” (Caucasian American, age; forties, Washington, D.C.). In addition to employee-boss partnerships, practitioners forge positive partnerships with clients and organizational entities. One public relations practitioner expressed the value of positive relationships with corporate franchisees as a function of breaking down communication barriers. She said,

There’s a love/hate relationship among the franchisees with corporate. We have good relationships with them. Calls have helped to take down another wall. They like if they can ask any question. The open forum makes relationships more open. We were nervous. We asked, ‘What kind of questions are we going to get?’ I wish we had more participants. Now, we have a 30 to 40 percent participation on calls (Caucasian American, age: thirties, Virginia).

Collaborative partnership in which peers in an organization are united for a cause also result in power. She shared,

From my experience, power is from insight and collaboration. I am powerful when I am aligned with my peers in the organization, than if I

am the outlier...I have no power going to my boss as a lone wolf with an idea, but I have lots of power within the organization when we are locked arms united in an idea. So that collaboration is critical to power (Caucasian American, age: forties, Virginia).

Relationships were especially powerful, or enabled practitioners to achieve a desired result, when they were founded on trust. One public relations professional who works in the restaurant industry explained how a trusting relationship enabled her to accomplish a task. She said,

The one individual who is most in to our interior look can be kind of difficult to work with. But because I have forged a relationship with him, he trusts that my opinion is going to match up with his. That I have the same goal that he does for the company...over time he has understood that I have the same goal and I want things to look good. And I was able to get his approval for an experimental menu board that everyone else in the company said we would never get approval for. But he trusts me, so I was able to get it done (Caucasian American, age: thirties, Virginia).

Whereas participants explained that power results from collaborative and trusting relationships, women public relations practitioners also argued that power results from relationships that are forged through helpfulness. One practitioner articulated well what “helpfulness” in a relationship was. She said,

When I say helping other people, I mean that you are being considerate of someone who is looking for a job or you know someone who wants to

make a transition into the industry or into another industry and you're being mindful of this every day. You are able to connect and help them out and say I just met with 'so and so' and they have a position open – you should contact them...It's that element of being able to make this connection beyond what is on the surface (Caucasian American, age: forties, Washington, D.C.).

Asking “How can I help you?” is one way in which practitioners demonstrated helpfulness, and in turn, built relationships. One participant said, “But to be successful in this business, you thrive in public relations based on relationships. That's how you go find out about new leads and learn how to pitch people. That's how when your business is down, you go out and you say, 'Hey what's going on, how can we help you?'” (Caucasian American, age: forties, Washington, D.C.) Helpfulness, then, can extend one's influence. One practitioner shared, “The other thing is I try to be really, really helpful. When these department heads have problems, I try to reach out to them and say 'I heard you are having a problem, how can we help?' By helping them solve problems, that's being a good team player and that extends influence as well. 'Oh she's really helpful. Oh that team, they are really helpful’” (Asian American, age: forties, Virginia).

Practitioners, however, also forge relationships for manipulative or strategic reasons. Instead of recognizing the value of a relationship itself, some practitioners touted the result or benefit brought forth by a relationship. In other words, some practitioners develop relationships asking “What's in it for me?” One practitioner stated,

What is in it for me? I am always thinking like a PR person. And that's with relationships, too. I don't know right now that you need something from me, but if I can think of something that I think I need from you I'm going to do something for you first. And it's worked out...Because, it's useful, but I don't know now what it's useful for, but I might need her later. And so yeah, that's manipulative, and I'm very clear about who I am. But I don't try to manipulate to harm, but I try to manipulate so that everyone is benefitting from the situation. I never try to burn my bridges (African American, age: forties, Washington, D.C.).

Other practitioners answer "What's in it for me?" by strategically forging relationships for power with those who have connections. One individual explained,

I like to look for people who are dynamic and who are doing impressive things... Those are people who are connected to lots of people. It's kind of like you are getting more bang for your buck. If you know her and you tell her your situation, and say, 'Hey, I'm looking for, you know, writing assignments' and she has a network of people who might need that.

Whereas if I talk to someone who is small like me, they might know one other person, but they are not in the same position. That's kind of my strategy (African American, age: thirties, Washington, D.C.).

Relationships can also strategically obtain public relations practitioners a 'seat at the table' – or membership in a key decision-making group. Public relations practitioners,

through relationships, can then be contacted by decision makers and have an opportunity to demonstrate their value. One practitioner explained,

Being at the table has to do with relationships. What have you done lately and how are you helping us? In meetings it doesn't mean that you take over completely, we play a coordination role... If there are three agencies involved, we coordinate communications. So people know that if there are more than three agencies there, they'll invite us in. That gets us to the table (Asian American, age: forties, Virginia).

Relationships also enable public relations practitioners to strategically gather information and knowledge. Explaining how relationships are tied into power and information, one practitioner said,

Relationships with your peers who work in the industry are important. Usually, you'll end up collaborating with people within your own firm. But people within my practice area or specific industry of corporate responsibility, they are the people I get information from. And in this industry, information is power. (Caucasian American, age: forties, Washington, D.C.).

Practitioners, ultimately, expressed that knowledge and information played another key role in their meaning making of power. The next section explores the connection between power and knowledge or information.

Knowledge and Information - Women public relations practitioners made meaning of power as a function of one's knowledge and information. Specifically, power

was a function of a) practitioners' information possession and control, and b) practitioners' industry, business or finance knowledge. Illustrating power as the collection and control of information, one practitioner said,

In our organization, that whole question of knowledge is power fits us to a tee. People tend to - whatever information they can find and gather, they hold on to it for dear life. A good example of that is we've tried to set up an Intranet where people would be able to go on and log presentations and marketing materials. Nobody ever wanted to do it because they felt like, 'This is my information I'm not going to share it.' So that's how power is in the organization (Caucasian American, age: thirties, Virginia).

Knowledge of an industry, business or finance, and strategy and politics increased public relations practitioner power. Citing how having expansive knowledge of the industry in which one works equated to practitioner power, one government public relations professional said,

With the city, you have to know about everything... Now, as a PR person, you are never doing just PR. You are always doing the work of others. Now, I had to bone up on everything about development, real estate, land use, mixed use in a day or two and then train [individual] and talk about the legislation and what we were doing in relation to this. You have to know everything about everything. Especially in government... Anything you can think about, that functions for you for a tax payer wherever you live... That comes right to the organization and that comes to the PR

person. And that PR person has to know at the drop of a hat what they're doing (African American, age: forties, Washington, D.C.).

Whereas some practitioners gathered industry knowledge, other practitioners communicated that they gathered business and financial knowledge for power. Business and financial knowledge enabled public relations women to understand how an organization functioned – and how public relations could play a role in the overall operation and strategy of an organization. One practitioner explained the value of financial knowledge stating,

I think power is the ability to build value and the ability to be recognized by colleagues as having that ability. People need to have specific knowledge. Knowledge in business and finance is extremely important. If they don't know it, they are therefore not taken seriously by management. In order to talk to a CEO of multi-million dollar company, you need to know what he or she is up against and recommend a series of answers that are adequately sophisticated. The best advice is to become knowledgeable about business and finance. (Caucasian American, age: fifties, Virginia).

Similarly, another participant championed gaining financial and business knowledge. She said, "There are just a lot of things that could go into your financial understanding of the business and that is pretty essential to advancing yourself within the company.

Understanding how the finance side of it works. So, that's something I've really tried to do and become better at (Caucasian American, age: forties, Washington, D.C.).

In addition to business operation and finance knowledge, participants communicated that knowledge of strategy and office politics was also essential to practitioner power. One practitioner explained that strategic knowledge she gained from her APR preparation enabled her to bring more value to her organization. She shared,

Once I got my APR and I understood a very theoretical, textbook, research-based approach to public relations, I brought way-more value to my role in the organization in a science-based, analytical organization. So, when I'm at the table and I say, 'No you don't go with broadcast media for that. This is a very complex message and there's another tactic that we are going to use and here's why,' they get it. They get it! (Caucasian American, age: thirties, Virginia).

Similarly, another practitioner argued how business strategy knowledge was essential to public relations practitioner inclusion and success. Power involved how one used knowledge and information appropriately and strategically. She said, "I've seen it happen where people have great ideas or a lot of energy or they're good writers or they're good story people, but they don't have the requisite strategic business perspective and so they end up coming up with ideas that don't make any sense and therefore, they end up being marginalized because the 'big cheeses' look at them and say 'that's dumb'" (Asian American, age: forties, Virginia).

Possession of strategic knowledge regarding office politics and working effectively with individuals also affected practitioner power. One woman explained,

You can do all of the things, you can use all of the tools, but ultimately your success is going to be more dependent on knowing the linkages

between issues, knowing who people are and having relationships with people...I think political knowledge, but if you say political with a small “p.” Everything we do is political. Political is connections. It’s working with people...For someone who works on issues management, you have to have a good understanding of the people involved in an issue...You can teach how to do the things involved in issues management – media monitoring, doing this, doing that. But if you don’t have the other, it’s not about all the tools you bring or you do not. It’s about the effectiveness (Asian American, age: forties, Virginia).

Practitioners explained that information and knowledge equated to one’s power. Women public relations practitioners, however, expressed an understanding that one’s information and knowledge depended on one’s access to it. To illustrate the relationship between knowledge and the importance of access to it, one participant stated,

To me, the power comes from the ability to tap in and unleash the ideas and the intellect and the creativity of people around you. And that collectively, brings power to an organization, brings power to a team or empowers your clients... I know there is so much experience, expertise creativity and great ideas in the 180 people in the office here. How do you tap into that? ...I am still in the learning curve and the learning mode about how do I really harness all the access here that [company] has when faced with an issue with a client...To think about the base of knowledge, the people I knew, who knew what (Caucasian American, age: sixties, Washington, D.C.).

Access – Women public relations practitioners made meaning of power as access.

One practitioner explained, “I think power is access. Access to the people who have information, ideas, resources that you need” (Caucasian American, age: forties, Washington, D.C.). Participants communicated that power revolved around access to people and information. Illustrating how power involved access to people, one practitioner referred to the “Golden Rolodex.” She shared, “Power in PR is being able to pick up the phone and call anyone you want to call. If someone says, ‘Hey we’ve got someone coming to town and that person needs to meet the mayor’ and you can say, ‘Oh, yes absolutely we can get the governor there.’ It’s a Golden Rolodex of golden contacts. It’s all about connections...” The practitioner later elaborated on the types of individuals one must have access to. She stated,

You need to know reporters in your town or your industry and you need to know the publishers of those publications. You need to know the money behind those organizations as well as the people who put those stories together. You need to know government officials – elected and appointed. You need to know the business leadership in your industry and in your city...Those are the main things. Being connected in media, government, industry, business are key. Even in clergy. (Caucasian American, age: forties, Tennessee).

Practitioners gained access to individuals through online and offline networking. Sites such as Twitter, LinkedIn and Yahoo Answers gave practitioners access to a variety of public relations peers and clients. One practitioner explained,

Always be networking. Network with your peers. Network with people who are more senior... Twitter has created a great community for me. It goes offline and online. There are a lot of people who I've met on Twitter that I've gone on to meet over the phone or in person via Tweet Ups or to say we should go have coffee because we live here. It's expanding that network of people you know. If you are starting out, you want to find groups who are more experienced or find people who are in the same boat. I think that professional associations are really important... And just the nurturing contacts idea. Don't burn bridges is important (Caucasian American, age: forties, Washington, D.C.).

Gaining access to people involved joining organizations and finding mentors. One individual explained, "In order to succeed in public relations, organizations are helpful. If you are unsure about yourself, talk to people. Gaining access is good. Find mentors" (Caucasian American, age: thirties, Virginia). Similarly, a government public relations practitioner described how access to people resulted in one's value and power. She argued that access and power involved, "Making sure you are spending time meeting other staffers, or making sure that you are meeting other reporters, because then you are gaining access. Your value as a press person both on and especially off the Hill is a lot of times what you know and what you can communicate, but also who you know" (Caucasian American, age: twenties, Washington, D.C.).

Women public relations practitioners also made meaning of power as access to information. For example, explaining how access could increase individuals' power, one practitioner said,

It's information shared, not withheld. You know, it's this attitude of holding information and keeping it to yourself or putting it out there. For me, I can understand why people would feel they'd give up power by sharing information, but in fact, you expand and increase it...For example, we set up an education seminar and pulled everybody together and set up an education consortium. And you're sharing templates; you're cutting back on duplication of effort. It allows people to get more done if you're not wasting time on things that people have already done (Caucasian American, age: fifties, Virginia).

Practitioners communicated that one's access was linked to credibility. Often, work results, personality and "track record" afforded one access to people or information. Explaining the link between access and credibility, one practitioner shared a story of her CEO:

She's had to prove to people... She has access, but what gives her the power, and it's interesting to watch, she has that personality that people are like 'I can believe you.' She's very authentic...She delivers on it, too. That's what people look at first. They are like alright, I'll believe in you, I'll trust in you. Other people try to do it, but it comes down to they don't have her magnetism or her personality... And so, I think a man in that situation wouldn't necessarily have to prove that. I 100 percent do it by showing people, like proving people that I can do it. It's all through demonstrating and results. I'm not a good salesperson. Track records, delivering (Caucasian American, age: forties, Washington, D.C.).

One's credibility and trust, ultimately, also equates to power. In the section below, I explore in-depth how women public relations practitioners made meaning of power as credibility and trust.

Credibility and Trust – Women public relations practitioners made meaning of power as a function of an individual's credibility. Credibility, for participants, resulted from trust and producing results or high-quality work. Explaining power as credibility, a practitioner defined it as one's authenticity. She said, "Power is someone who has credibility. I would define that internally. Someone who you can tell is coming from an authentic place" (Hispanic American, age: forties, California). Another practitioner defined credibility as when you have a "seat at the table." She explained, "Power is having a seat at the table and being able – not just being at the table, but having your opinions and your input sought after. You can be at the table and still have no power, but once you're there, providing value by your being there" (Caucasian American, age: fifties, Washington, D.C.).

Practitioners who defined power as credibility explained that credibility was based on superiors' or colleagues' trust in them. One practitioner noticed that as levels of trust increased, so did her professional credibility. This in turn, enabled her to work more autonomously. She explained, "At first, my superiors would supervise, manage and 'check in' on how I was managing the company Twitter account. Now, I have gained their trust. They don't check what I am doing." Another practitioner equated credibility with trust. She shared examples of how she and her boss gained trust - and credibility followed:

Gaining trust - it's not speaking until you have something to contribute. It's listening. It's answering the phone at 8 p.m. at night – answering the phone at dinner... I learn by watching... My boss was not a good manager, but was good with clients. He wouldn't say a *word*. But at the end, you learned that he was listening. He would sit during a meeting and look at his Blackberry and listen. At the end, he said 'Here is what we are going to do.' Clients really reacted to this. They took his advice. Because you didn't take part in the storm, you're part of the calm (Caucasian American, age: thirties, Washington, D.C.).

Practitioners also build trust by offering their insight, which in turn affects client trust and credibility. One woman stated,

I think it's important that your client understands that you're balancing what they need to get done with what they ought to get done...they are paying you for your valuable insight, but they are also paying you to be realistic in terms of how they should get things done. Thinking about not how this is going to play for an external audience but an internal audience. If you are able to show them that there is an immediate need, but that's what they need to do to look good for their boss, then they will be more open to listening to you when you are helping them with thinking strategically...and I think that's part of building trust (Indian American, age: thirties, Washington, D.C.).

Another practitioner explained that trust grew from strong relationships and constant, complete communication with clients. She said,

It comes down to trust. You want to put a lot of time in and give them what they want. Find their goals... It's a shared vision. If you don't have that relationship, then you're not going to really know what your client wants, and if you don't really know, the client won't be happy at the end of the project. Constantly giving weekly reports – that's part of the relationship... Keeping in touch... They know what's happening (Caucasian American, age: forties, Washington, D.C.).

Producing results or quality work was another way in which practitioners established credibility, thus building power. Explaining how results contributed to her colleagues' valuing her input and her earned power as a public relations practitioner, one individual stated,

It's the results ultimately that count. Here, while certainly in the beginning, I could have said, 'Oh, I'm powerless.' I wrote these beautiful plans. But they are not snapping to. They are not doing everything I wrote in this plan. I was certainly frustrated. I could have said, 'Oh I have no power.' Today, it didn't happen overnight, there's a ton of stuff where people will not move without showing it to me first or calling me, or getting my opinion. They say, 'I know you're really busy, but we really value what you have to say.' You have to earn it (Asian American, age: forties, Virginia).

Not only can results increase the credibility and power of individual practitioners, but also they can increase the credibility of the public relations department. Packaging or reporting on results is one way participants keep the accomplishments and credibility of

the public relations department fresh in the minds of their colleagues. One public relations department head called results reports her “secret weapon” and explained,

I do a lot of packaging of results. (Shows me report.) It just reminds people of what happened...We have a – my secret weapon - is a product we do every day. I call it media notes...Now, it’s a must read... It’s such a secret weapon because it is so valuable if they read it and we have a section on the bottom called communication notes. That’s where we put our stuff...So, we’re showcasing what we’re doing. We have 400 people following us on Twitter. Our recent Tweet about this was re-tweeted to 2,000 people. We’re packaging our own stuff and selling it in a soft way in a must-read tool. That’s why it’s our secret weapon (Asian American, age: forties, Virginia).

Practitioners confessed that results did not come easy: they were the product of hard work and sacrifice. Thus, hard work served as a core component of how public relations practitioners gained credibility and trust through results – which led to power. For example, one individual described working 14-hour days to “prove herself” as a quality practitioner and earn credibility. She said, “In our organization, people tend to work extremely long hours...So, when we are in Japan, we work 14 hour days. When you are at home, you work 14 hour days as well. So, in order to prove myself, I’ve worked those long hours, too. If the guys can do it, I can do it, too. It’s not exactly the best scenario for work-life balance, but they see that I am willing to put the effort in and work just as hard as they are” (Caucasian American, age: thirties, Virginia). In addition to working long hours, practitioners also championed “going above and beyond” their duties

as a practitioner in order to increase credibility and power. One woman shared, “Always help out and be willing to stay. That’s what gets you noticed. Don’t just do what’s on your to-do list” (Indian American, age: thirties, Washington, D.C.). The woman explained that the person who only does what’s on the list is going to get noticed in a bad way, but the one who goes above and beyond the list will get noticed in a good way. She added how results and “going the extra mile” contributed to her credibility as a practitioner. She explained,

I think results speak infinitely... You think through all the things that [the client] would want you to think through. And I think that’s the way to show your value. What are you bringing that’s a little different? Every time. Whether it’s a memo or anything or an idea. I think of what about this can I do that’s above and beyond the obvious. You have to get the obvious done, but then it’s what are you doing that’s the extra mile, the extra thinking? ...I’ll see an interesting article and I’ll send it to a client with a note, ‘Hey, did you see this? Would you think of doing something like this?’ ...It’s always thinking about the task in front of you. (Indian American, age: thirties, Washington, D.C.).

Power as Negative – Women public relations practitioners made meaning of power as a negative element. Practitioners communicated that power mostly is “invisible” when it is “good” or benefits others, but is noticeable when it is “bad” or misused. One practitioner explained the “good” versus “bad” notions of power stating,

I think that there are two kinds of power. Negative and positive. Power that is negative is very demeaning. Those are all the bad managers. They

are things that keep organizations down. In those, you see a lot of turnover...That's one sort. Then there's the power that raises people up. That's about making the right decisions, getting things done, the shared vision, giving people the opportunity to come up with you (Caucasian American, age: thirties, Virginia).

Describing power as purely negative, one practitioner said, "When I think of power, I think of scratching your way to the top and not caring who you hurt on the way up. I see power as a very negative thing" (Caucasian American, age: sixties, Washington, D.C.). Similarly, another practitioner shared, "To me, power has kind of a negative connotation. I'm not saying it should have a negative connotation and I think that it... I always think of history of Western civilization and that power corrupts. It has had a very negative history for a long period of time" (Caucasian American, age: twenties, Washington, D.C.). Another practitioner explained how power was negative and began to refer to power as "good" in terms of empowerment. She said, "I don't like the word power. It makes me recoil. It doesn't belong anywhere in my organization. We don't speak in those terms. We are not very hierarchical. It's a very empowering place. And so, you really don't have this situation where 'you do as I say'" (Caucasian American, age: fifties, Washington, D.C.).

In the section above, women public relations practitioners' meaning making of power was examined as functions of influence, relationships, knowledge and information, access, credibility and trust, and negative force. In the section that follows, I examine how women public relations practitioners used the term "empowerment" to make meaning of power as a positive force, and as a function of opportunity and mentorship.

Empowerment – Women public relations practitioners often eschewed the term “power” and used the term “empowerment.” Participants made meaning of power as empowerment when power occurred as a) a positive element, b) freedom, c) support and opportunities and d) mentorship.

Participants defined empowerment as a positive force or element. One practitioner who viewed empowerment positively said, “I guess I see empowerment as having a much more positive connotation, obviously. I see empowerment as what happens when you give somebody the skills and resources they need to succeed at a task or at a particular goal” (Caucasian American, age: twenties, Washington, D.C.). Defining empowerment as a positive energy, another practitioner explained, “It’s like a special energy that you get that you can feed off of when you are in a group of people... it’s like an energy that you are feeding off of. That energy propels you to take it to the next level. Or whatever challenge you are dealing with, and I am able to glean from them that I am that much stronger, that okay, I can conquer this challenge, I can grab this new business, I can deal with the situation” (Hispanic American, age: forties, California).

In addition to describing empowerment as positive, practitioners defined empowerment as freedom. Freedom existed as a) the ability to think for oneself and b) not be “micromanaged” by superiors. For example, one practitioner defined empowerment as freedom to think stating, “Empowerment is freedom to think, freedom to dare, and the freedom to do. If you are not allowed to think, then you are not going to grow and explore ideas... and then you won’t try, and if you don’t try, you won’t have experience to figure out. The way to empower is to allow them freedom to think” (Caucasian American, age: forties, Maryland). Another practitioner explained,

“Empowerment is feeling like you can present an idea or something creative. It’s freedom to have an idea, even if it doesn’t go through successfully to the bosses at first”

(Caucasian American, age: twenties, Florida). Similarly, another practitioner explained that empowerment depended on whether you worked in an organization whose culture valued open thinking and ideas. She explained, “You need an environment where creativity is valued and I think that most public relations people think they work best when they are in an organization that is open to new ideas. ‘Because we’ve done it that way’ is the worst reason to do something. And organizations that don’t value creative and new ideas that PR people can bring to the table - it can get very frustrating to work in those organizations” (Caucasian American, age: forties, Maryland). Similarly, another practitioner described empowerment as freedom in terms of having a boss who supports you and allows you to think and learn. She said, “I’ve had bosses where you’re never going to be able to do it the way they want. But, they have to give you the freedom to learn and grow and still try and steer you along the way...That empowers everyone” (Caucasian American, age: forties, Maryland).

Women public relations practitioners communicated that empowerment was freedom that did not have to be “given” to you by a boss or colleague. Instead, practitioners described empowerment as freedom that one could take for herself. One woman explained this saying, “To be empowered, well what do you do in business? You have to show that you have skills, judgment and maturity and perhaps empowerment means all of those things, but I am not sure if you can empower someone. They have to empower themselves” (Caucasian American, age: fifties, Virginia). Another individual

described empowerment as something you “take” on your own. She offered a story in which she empowered herself by acting upon autonomy and opportunity. She shared,

We were given some autonomy, but we took it and ran with it. We just had to make a decision. Part of it was just action and move. And that made me realize how much autonomy we took for ourselves. I guess we were fortunate that it worked and was successful, but so part of it is knowing what needs to be done, getting a critical mass of authority and then using your good judgment and then working with a trusted small group of people to go forth and make decisions and get things done (Caucasian American, age: sixties, Washington, D.C.).

Participants explained that empowerment and freedom occurred when superiors or bosses were “hands off” or did not engage in “micromanagement” of employees. For example, one practitioner stated, “[My boss] empowers us to do what we do best. She sees us as experts in our field and she lets us be creative. She trusts us with our skills. Autonomy is a good word for that. She is not at all a micro-manager. She doesn’t have time for that. She needs people to step up” (Caucasian American, age: twenties, Maryland). Similarly, another practitioner explained, “Empowerment is having supervisors who are hands off every day. I like that he does his own work, I do my own work, and I am able to make my own decisions” (Caucasian American, age: twenties, Virginia). Yet another practitioner explained freedom as “not being micromanaged.” She said, “A lot of my personal empowerment comes from that I’m not micromanaged. They trust me to do my job and I do my job well. Sometimes clients look at agencies and things it’s going to be perfect every time. We can all strive to be perfect but when

everyone's makes best effort that's all you can ask... human element. As long as I keep delivering in that fashion there will be no questions asked" (Caucasian American, age: forties, Maryland).

Women public relations practitioners made meaning of empowerment as support and opportunities. Empowerment occurred when individuals were given support and opportunities by others or when individuals or a group of worked together to support each other. Often, an "opportunity" included a chance to offer an idea or opinion, learn a new skill, grow as a professional, or even make a mistake. Describing empowerment as the giving of an opportunity to contribute an idea, one woman said, "I think people feel empowered if you've given them the opening or the opportunity to contribute. They feel empowered because they've been asked for their opinions, their views, and then in turn, people feel valued for what they bring to the table. And that builds upon itself. And so, that certainly what, to me - that's one aspect of empowerment" (Caucasian American, age: sixties, Washington, D.C.). Similarly, another professional described empowerment as having the opportunity to contribute. She said,

It's giving people the opportunity to succeed, to present ideas...One of the things that empowers people is we have rules that no one during a brainstorm session says anything negative about anyone's idea. That is the quickest thing that is going to shut down creativity... A brainstorm session should be a positive experience and that's how you get creativity out of all levels. I think that's empowerment (Caucasian American, age: fifties, Washington, D.C.).

Empowerment was also the opportunity to learn and face new challenges. One practitioner described empowerment as such stating, “I think that giving them opportunities to grow on a daily basis. Challenging them. Stretching them. They always say that we don’t promote to the next level here until you are already working at that next level. So we see people who are at a junior level taking on really challenging assignments and really growing, and that’s important” (Caucasian American, age: sixties, Washington, D.C.). Often, opportunity involved having the chance to learn or make a “mistake.” One practitioner described this aspect of empowerment:

One of the things I tell [employees] is, ‘I expect you to make mistakes. I want you to learn. I’m not always going to be there.’ I try to give people the ability and the confidence to grow and learn. That doesn’t mean that sometimes I am going to make mistakes...If they screw up, they repair it. Giving people that allows you – and seeing them grow, that is empowering (Caucasian American, age: fifties, Virginia).

Whereas some practitioners made meaning of empowerment as being given opportunities, practitioners also made meaning of empowerment through mentoring.

Women public relations practitioners communicated that empowerment was being mentored, having a mentor-mentee relationship, or receiving assistance from others. Mentors served as individuals who provided knowledge, opportunities or guidance in terms of career goals. In some cases, empowerment did not result from formal mentor relationships, but from individuals serving as support systems or “cheerleaders.” Linking empowerment to mentorship – and directing individuals to opportunities - one

practitioner stated, “One area of empowerment is related to building confidence and self esteem... It goes back to mentoring and it’s not just mentoring on ‘Here’s how you do this proposal.’ It’s mentoring on someone’s career development and experience” (Caucasian American, age: sixties, Washington, D.C.). Complementing practitioners’ linking of empowerment to mentors who provide opportunities, one practitioner described a “good” mentor. She said,

A good mentor has the ability to share all your knowledge without fear that someone is going to take it, use it, and go against you. [My former boss] had no fear when teaching me anything. He strongly believes that we owe our younger generation our knowledge – because our profession will die. If you don’t show it, the industry will die. The ability to listen, more than talk. To provide tools to your employees to be able to perform their jobs. Also a coach on a professional level. They will help you find your core strengths within you. Really, everybody has these abilities – a mentor will help you find out (Hispanic American, age: thirties, California).

Another practitioner explained that she felt empowered when someone enabled her to see “the big picture.” Describing a mentor as someone who provides “big picture” professional assessment or assistance, one woman said,

I think that kind of individualized training has a lot of value and that is one way to empower people... It’s that whole thing where you are so amassed in the details that you can’t step back and see the bigger picture. And

sometimes having someone sit down with you and walk you through that, it can be beneficial and empowering as far as going out and selling you skills sets to other people” (Caucasian American, age: twenties, Washington, D.C.).

Not only can formal mentors empower individuals, but also they can empower entire organizations through a mentors’ transfer of his or her knowledge and support to employees. One practitioner explained this notion by saying,

Empowerment is teaching people to use their own power, whether it’s an individual or organization. In a mentor-protégé relationship, that’s a huge part. It’s showing your protégé what they can do or what they are already capable of doing. Same with organizations...There is usually a founder who has been affected, starts the organization, brings in people, grows in stature, money, and then other people join. Then, there comes a point where it grows bigger. You empower the person to step back from day to day operations and become a role model and empower the board or role models to take bigger role and grow. Lots of organizations don’t grow, because they are wrapped around a founder and founder’s organization. It’s a critical step when they’ve outgrown the founders’ power and personal resources. They have to grow and become an empowered organization (Hispanic American, age: forties, California).

Mentoring relationships can be informal yet still empower individuals. Many practitioners received the mentoring and support from friends, family members, or

colleagues who served as personal cheerleaders. Describing the informal notion of mentorship and empowerment, one woman said,

I think empowerment comes from confidence that someone has in themselves to be able to do something, but it's also that circle of people around them, whether it's family or friends, or their peers that have that same kind of confidence in them to do the job. It's not that kind of encouragement, it's not like 'yay, go team' it's 'you can do this, so go do it.' I don't think there's enough of that (Caucasian American, age: fifties, Washington, D.C.).

One practitioner described how her neighbor served as an unlikely, but highly empowering mentor. She shared, "Well, none of us got here by ourselves. For me, I had a neighbor...Just in passing, I was telling her, and she knew I was retired. She said, 'Oh, would you want me to take a look at your resume?'" And I thought oh, sure. She gave me the best critique there ever was that probably helped me get a job" (Caucasian American, age: fifties, Virginia). The practitioner then shared that empowerment resulted from having informal mentors who served as "cheerleaders." She explained, "You have little cheerleaders along the way...And they just keep coaching you and encouraging you. As long as you have that little push you can get things done. But you can get discouraged easily. Sometimes you really need that... Later on, I have to say my husband. We both met at school. We bounce things off of each other all the time. We're each other's cheerleaders" (Caucasian American, age: fifties, Virginia).

Ultimately, women public relations practitioners made meaning of power in seven distinct, yet connected ways. They described power as influence, relationships, information and knowledge, access, credibility and trust, negative force and empowerment. Women described empowerment as positive, support and opportunity and formal or informal mentorship. In the following section, I examine the overlap of gender and power in public relations.

RQ3: What are the intersections of gender and power in public relations?

Gender and power come together in women public relations practitioners' meaning making of public relations. Specifically, gender and power intersected through 1) use of gendered appearances, 2) management style, 3) women's bonding together for power, 4) the queen bee syndrome, 5) leadership 6) women's self realization and confidence in their choices, and 7) education of others. Illustrating the overlap of gender and power – and the expectations and implications involved with this overlap, one public relations practitioner said,

I think a lot of times, women are more comfortable with being perceived as being timid or not being powerful, because if you're powerful you're a bitch, or you're a lesbian and that's not necessarily the case. So, I don't know. How would I define it? I go back and forth. I think having masculine tendencies and being a powerful person as a woman– they'll think you're masculine, but why can't you be a powerful woman? (African American, age: thirties, Washington, D.C.).

Evidence for each of the themes regarding the overlap of gender and power in public relations is reviewed below.

Gendered Appearance, Femininity and Power – Women public relations practitioners communicated that gendered appearances and femininity gave individuals power by getting them noticed and giving them a “foot in the door.” For example, participants argued that stereotypically attractive, feminine women received more attention and opportunity in the workplace, resulting in more power. However, practitioners stated that use of gendered appearances must be followed up by strong results and professionalism in order to maintain credibility and power. Explaining how a woman’s attractiveness garnishes more opportunity and access, one practitioner said,

I mean it’s easier for an attractive woman... It’s easier to have access to some people. You get hired for jobs... I think that exists because people see public relations as going out and meeting with the public and they want someone who – you don’t need to be Julia Roberts – but you need to be attractive, poised, well dressed – dress makes a difference – to represent them. And I know instances where women have not been hired because they were overweight. And I know where women have not been sent out to represent an organization or to clients because of their appearance...if you are “cute” people will spend more time with you, especially men, and give you longer interviews, go out of their way to do things for you, call the cab for you (Caucasian American, age: sixties, Virginia).

Another woman shared how her femininity and charm enabled her to influence. She said,

I mean I do take advantage of times when I can be charming to a man and get him to do what you want him to do... You know, I think men especially, see another woman as less threatening when you are charming instead of if you come in and say, 'This is the way we're going to do this.' ...And then you can kind of get them... who do I want to influence and what do I want them to do?... and that's part of it. You don't necessarily need to be working with me, but I can't have you actively work against me. If I can be charming enough to get you neutral or say what you need to hear to get you on my side, that's all the better (Caucasian American, age: forties, Washington, D.C.).

Women public relations practitioners cited coupling appearances with knowledge and results for power. One participant explained, "In PR, it really is a lot about looks and appearance. If you are good looking and you combine that with. That's not gender – that's... the golden-haired [girl] and the whole stereotype. And if you combine that with being articulate and smart, those people go for broke" (Caucasian American, age: fifties, Virginia).

In addition to conveying charm, women cited that gendered appearances can seem less threatening to men and thus influence power. A practitioner said, "In some cases, [my gender] has been an advantage. Men in management find you less threatening. They may not compete as aggressively as with a male. When doing business with people outside of a company or with a client, people tend to let their hair down more. In building relationships and gathering info with media and securities analysts, there's a

certain chemistry that comes from male/female relationship when the person you're trying to cultivate is male" (Caucasian American, age: sixties, Virginia).

Women public relations practitioners explained, however, that appearances, charm and femininity only affect power so far: looks must be bolstered by hard work and results. For example, one woman explained the relationship between femininity and smarts or results. She said, "As a woman, we have power, have to be smart about how we use it. Some provide sexual favors. Or, you can kill men with kindness. Maximizing yourself and your personality without having to put on a low-cut blouse, short skirt, high heels. You can, but you won't go far. But in terms in how we are – we are caring, attentive, listen more, all these qualities – they all help" (Hispanic American, age: thirties, California). Later, she added, "Some people have made it because they have been able to take advantage of the way they look and the way they dress. Your external beauty only goes so far. Unfortunately, the PR label is how you have to act, look a certain way at events. You have to look professional, but your work will be your calling card." Another practitioner mentioned how women must counteract looks with something else, because looks can play upon negative stereotypes. She explained, "I think when you are a cute, tiny female, you can get someone to listen to you – just once. The pressure is on then, because you can't screw it up. You don't want them to think you're just the blonde" (Caucasian American, age: thirties, Washington, D.C.) Lastly, one woman practitioner highlighted younger women's use of attractiveness to get ahead. Again, she hinted that appearances and sexuality may work at first, but cannot work alone for women practitioners:

There is a difference because being okay with being attractive and using sexuality. But, there is nothing wrong with making sure that you are attractive. Superficial as it is, it will help you. There is a fine line between using attractiveness and using sexuality. It should not be a substitute for knowing your job and what you do - or having the ability to do it. I've met young women who seem smart, but because they are pretty or attractive, they have gotten away with a lot. I don't want to sound like an old ditty, but that will only get you so far (Indian American, age: forties, Washington, D.C.).

Management Style - Power and gender come together through women public relations practitioner management styles. Participants argued that power and gender intersected when women's management styles involved both stereotypical masculine and feminine traits.

Practitioners communicated how women's management style involving emotional ability, coupled with the ability to balance work and family, gave them power in the workplace. One woman explained,

The whole aspect of women being able to naturally multi-task. That's a real thing. (laughs). I think [Name] is a prime example. She's got two kids, two really young kids, working for herself and she manages it all. That's a prime example of what a female brings to the table naturally. Across the board. Also, I think that there is – for the multitasking part – the feeling, the emotion. That's what we bring to the table. We are emotional creatures. We know that people don't want the extra emotion

when it comes to business. But that sensory level of being able to size up certain things, or be adept at picking up certain vibes (African American, age: thirties, Washington, D.C.).

In contrast, many participants identified power with stereotypically male management characteristics. Women practitioners often compared their management style with a man's style. For example, one practitioner said, "I think people who are perceived as powerful in the field tend to have male characteristics. When you look at an organization, at that very top level there are men, but if a woman, it's a very strong woman. You have to be able to make tough decisions..." (Indian American, age: forties, Washington, D.C.). Another practitioner shared how she adapted her communication style to a more masculine style in order to wield power. In turn, this style labeled her as "aggressive" when her male counterparts were not labeled as such. She explained, "I think I did get the reputation of being aggressive. If you want to look at it in a gender way, would a male have gotten the reputation of being aggressive doing the exact same things? I don't know. All the men were doing them. I basically patterned my communications on what I was seeing around me. I didn't feel different from anyone around me" (Caucasian American, age: fifties, Virginia). Similarly, another participant argued that men's management style of conveying confidence equated to power – and women's lack of confidence and deference to men results in women's powerlessness. She said,

Powerlessness - that might be a woman thing. Men don't show it. Men don't talk about it. They have it too. They have frustrations. They have fears. They have lack of confidence issues. They just don't show it. They

BS their way through it. They bravado their way through it. So, when we look at them, we think oh they are confident, they know what they are doing, they are going to push their way through. They have the power. They just have the power because we let them have it! I mean. I don't think we are any less powerful than anybody else, I think it's just we let that happen (Asian American, age: forties, Virginia).

Women public relations practitioners cited one woman CEO of a public relations and public affairs firm as the embodiment of the overlap of gender and power. They argued that the CEO demonstrated both feminine and masculine management styles, which in term, enabled her to achieve power. One practitioner, for example, described how the CEO integrates stereotypically feminine management styles, such as caring, with her strong leadership ability, thus embodying power and empowerment. She argued,

I think that is exemplified by [name]...That caring nature goes over to client relationships. It works with the clients you have. They think here is [organization] and [name] and she is so concerned and cares about my company and more importantly about me the client as an individual and the challenges or opportunities that I am facing. It comes across, that kind of caring nature, and leads to the empowerment of employees - that you care about them as individuals. I think [name] would be the first to say that fulfilled employees make happy clients. So, I think that not only is empowering, but gives [name] power...Perhaps women are able to do that better...I think studies have shown that as well. Management styles of

women. I think that is the advantage. (Caucasian American, age: sixties, Washington, D.C.).

In addition to demonstrating both masculine and feminine management styles, managers must also recognize the overlap of gender and power in the workplace in order to contribute to individuals' power. Participants argued that women public relations practitioners gain power when management embraces gender. For example, one woman said,

I think it depends on the leadership. On how leadership embraces people's different roles and whether gender is a factor for them. Been in a place where director was woman – a lot of power. I've been in an organization where the creative director was male, he may not have been powerful to employees under him, he had influence with CEO who would work with staff...If they think gender relates to power its' going to trickle down (Caucasian American, age: forties, Maryland).

Similarly, another practitioner said that power in public relations was linked to management's recognition of gender and the variety of work-relevant skills that women bring to public relations through their work-life balance experiences. She stated,

Acknowledging that however they get the experience, it's important experience. One thing that happens more with women than with men is the taking off of a couple of years... Making sure that your life experience is recognized... It doesn't matter if you got the knowledge in a class, or if you got the knowledge because you were putting together the 6th grade outing as a parent volunteer. And then you go to a communications office

and you put together a ribbon cutting ceremony (Caucasian American, age: fifties, Virginia).

Women Bond Together for Power - Women public relations professionals made meaning of the overlap of gender and power as the bonding together of women for power. Participants argued that women create their own “old women’s’ network” that rivals men’s “old boys’ network.” Often, women practitioners bond together over professional topics, shared experiences of childbirth or work-life balance. These networks of individuals are formal or informal.

Professional organizations are one way in which women public relations practitioners bond together for power. One practitioner explained that these organizations empower by enabling women to interact with individuals who share their work values and identities. She said,

It’s good to have these networks of female-based organizations... But I believe it’s important because it is empowering to see people like you... I like – there’s this organization that I’m looking into – their Website is “Make Mine a Million” for women business owners and their whole concept is about empowering women to do their business and having them succeed. And that’s the thing I’m attracted to. I’m attracted to it because I can fit in and I can identify with certain things (African American, age: thirties, Washington, D.C.).

Similarly, another practitioner cited the organization Women Unlimited as empowering for women. She shared, “Women Unlimited. They work with women in organizations,

Fortune 50, and it's all about mentoring and keeping it going so that the women at all levels of organizations...Keep these women going – keep the circle so that people are working at all levels and helping each other out” (Caucasian American, age: thirties, Virginia). Additionally, another practitioner highlighted the benefits of networking and women formally registering their companies as women- or minority-owned. Registering as such enables these companies to attract and find work. She explained, “Now, there is networking that goes on among women. That is beneficial. There are women's groups that can be tapped and formed. It can also be beneficial if you've got a firm and it's owned by a woman - you can be considered minority-owned and you can go after certain business” (Caucasian American, age: forties, Washington, D.C.).

Whereas formal networks can affect the power of women public relations practitioners, so too can informal networks. Informal networks were often created by women public relations practitioners who share similar work-life balance experiences. Highlighting the informal nature of how women bond together for power, one participant said, “Maybe that's why there are so many women in public relations, because we all support each other. So yeah, we are always there for each other. It doesn't mean we are not there for the guys in the office, but there are just many more women” (Caucasian American, age: sixties, Washington, D.C.). Informal groupings of working moms, friends or neighbors who lend each other support were significant. These groups enable women to balance work and family responsibilities and empathize about the challenges of the workplace. One woman stated,

We have a group of play date girlfriends who are all pretty much working moms who all have kids who are [Name's] age... So if I can get with them

that lessens the pain. I would pack my girl up, let her go to my friends' houses and I'd be in the basement or up there with my lap top for four or five hours. I'm still in the house, but thank the lord for my girlfriends! My neighbor, she'll call and say, 'I'm coming to get her.' You need that. It's all women. It's what is being said here (African American, age: forties, Washington, D.C.).

Still, another practitioner explained how women can forge relationships with other women in the public relations industry through their shared understandings and experiences as mothers. Women who understand the stress and challenges of balancing motherhood and work can bond together to share opportunities or build influence. The practitioner shared examples of times when she had received public relations work and generated work leads for other women because of their similar statuses as mothers. She added,

I always use the example of the white male on the golf course networking. Case in point. We talk... We just struck up this relationship around our kids... So, it's something that I've been able to build relationships with whether it's media relations or clients. People understand. If they have kids – especially if they have young kids – they understand where you are going and you have that common ground. But that's something that women have that men don't have! There are so many women in business and editors and we can leverage that. That's how I look at it (African American, age: thirties, Washington, D.C.).

Queen Bee Syndrome – Conversely, women public relations practitioners described the nexus of gender and power through their experiences, stereotypes and expectations surrounding the way in which women do *not* bond together or mentor other women. In some circumstances, one woman practitioner or a group of woman practitioners can act in a way that monopolizes information, avoids mentoring or challenges other women’s competition or advancement. This practice or stereotype was often referred to as “Queen Bee Syndrome” by participants. Describing the Queen Bee Syndrome, one woman said,

Where there have been women who have been good mentors, there are a lot of women who just will not mentor. We used to call it the Queen Bee Syndrome. What is shocking me – It used to be people who are in my mother’s age. But you are seeing it again. Another generation of women who are in their 50s who are not mentoring anyone. And that’s contributing to it. Essentially by their behavior they are saying that all these people who work for them are not important (Caucasian American, age: forties, Washington, D.C.).

Another participant also linked the Queen Bee Syndrome to competitiveness and generational differences. She cited the struggles of women, who decades before, had difficulty reaching, and then maintaining, a position of power. She said,

You can have a woman executive who feels very strongly about hiring and promoting and advancing other women, or you can have a situation where... ‘I’m the top woman in the office and I don’t want to have any

competition.’ And I don’t think that’s the case as much with men because men expect to be in the top positions and they expect there to be men in top positions. So I think as the industry has become more female dominated that has become less and less an issue... I think it’s as much a generational thing. In the days where there were very few women in the corporate suite, it was a much bigger deal for a woman to get there and it was a lot harder to stay there (Caucasian American, age: fifties, Washington, D.C.).

Therefore, women who fought for a position of power, may later feel as if they have more to lose or a need to fight in order to keep the position for which they fought so hard.

Yet another practitioner described Queen Bee Syndrome as how a woman did not allow individuals to provide input and avoided conflict resolution. It created negative consequences in the office. The participant linked it to gender stating,

[She said] ‘I really don’t want to hear people not buying in. So, I’m going to establish it and that’s the deal and we’ll put in metrics and measure our success.’ But what you are avoiding is the opportunity to... It’s all positioned as... it’s just going to hold up the process. [She said] ‘Change is good and everyone needs to accept it and it’s just going to hold up the process if we involve more people. So this is what is happening and we’re going to go with it.’ And what is happening is an erosion of trust among

the leadership. And a loss of values (Caucasian American, age: thirties, Washington, D.C.).

Practitioners linked the existence of Queen Bee Syndrome to the overlap of gender and power. For example, one woman shared,

For her it was power. She would do anything to get to the top and she didn't care what she did to the people down below. And I think there are men like that too, but sometimes it's women. It's power. In the past, when there were not as many women rising to the top, I think that was the way it worked. You had to be tough. You didn't care who you hurt on the way (Caucasian American, age: sixties, Washington, D.C.).

One practitioner argued that women do not support each other and display Queen Bee Syndrome traits due to insecurity. She explained,

I would say insecurity. I usually think that when people aren't helpful they are insecure or threatened. Because it's not about you, it's about them. Sometimes they are afraid. I don't understand it at some levels because it goes against everything I believe in. I think certain settings are worse than others. Clearly, the sciences. It's much harder for women in the sciences than in the arts. Because there are fewer of them and because it's harder for them to stay and they burn out.

Another practitioner linked the Queen Bee Syndrome to gender. Interestingly, she claimed that the stereotype occurred because an individual "is a woman." She argued,

Unfortunately, and maybe this is just another generality of women, but I think we have a hard time sharing sometimes. And so maybe they don't want to let go of power and give it to someone else and help them grow... Even though she is a VP, and she is at the top of her game, she will not give me an inch, unfortunately. I think a lot of it has to do with she is a woman. When other organizations or people in our company are better at promoting, are better at giving you a good pat on the back kind of atmosphere (Caucasian American, age: thirties, Virginia).

Blaming Queen Bee Syndrome practices and stereotypes on the fact that an individual is a woman - even though the practitioner herself is a woman - reveals a way in which this practitioner tries to separate herself from her own gendered identity and the negative stereotypes associated with it in the public relations industry. The practitioner speaking is a woman, yet she refers to herself as possessing a different gendered identity from that of the woman VP. This represents a meaning-making and coping mechanism for gender socialization and expectations in public relations. Rather than blaming the individual, the participant is blaming gender.

The section above displays how women practitioners, in a sense, place expectations upon their superiors to "give" them power or opportunity. Practitioners, however, explained that the Queen Bee Syndrome was not practiced by or experienced by all women public relations professionals. Participants juxtaposed stories of the Queen Bee Syndrome with examples of how women practitioners served as excellent colleagues or mentors. One practitioner, for example, mentioned how she has encountered industry

women who engage in contention and competition, but also others who offer to mentor.

She shared,

There is so much contention between women in industry. I had one boss who was a Black woman, and we got along just fine, but don't let me do something that was beyond my little role. I would get checked immediately! That kind of stuff. I've always said that I hate working for women. It's so bad to say, but it is that whole competition thing. The whole one ups thing. You just sense it. Here you are – I see what's going on. I don't know if that is inherent in women. I don't know what that is. But there is a nice balance. One of my first mentors was a Black mentor at the engineering magazine company. She was older, very wealthy, and she took me under her wing and took me to events and all this lavish stuff. And she was like you can have this, too. You can have this too. I was 22 and she was taking me to black tie affairs. I was like wow, I didn't even know black people did this kind of stuff... the mentoring and the building relationships (African American, age: forties, Washington, D.C.).

Another practitioner shared how she actively worked to include individuals in the decision-making process, rather than exclude them, which defied the culture of her organization. Tying this to gender and power, she stated,

When you are in companies – major hard-hitting companies – you have to be a very confident, strong individual that is very...beyond assertive, it's almost aggressive. That was not my personality type. I was more of a very

inclusive person. I like to get input from a variety of people. Kind of collectively together come up with a decision... I really wanted consensus.... Now, maybe, women perhaps it's more common that women will have a more collaborative, consensus, inclusive approach and openness rather than dictatorial approach, which you can find in various individuals (Caucasian American, age: sixties, Washington, D.C.).

Leadership – Women public relations professionals made meaning of the nexus of gender and power through women's acquisition of leadership positions. Several participants recognized that the public relations industry was heavily feminized, yet few women held leadership positions. They stated that women who achieved a leadership position, and in some cases struck out on their own, demonstrated a defiance of gender discrimination or a gender "handicap." Describing how power and gender related to women's holding leadership positions or becoming independent consultants, one woman said,

I'm encouraged to see more women as the chief communications officer. There's a lot of concern and I haven't - that PR is too dominated by women - particularly at the lower level. And the senior level, there is, particularly considering how many women are at entry level jobs. It's the females who are turning PR. Interesting to see how, in 10 years women will adapt and take on careers. For example, the nature of our work is changing. There are a lot of women who have chosen to be independent consultants because of the work freedom. I think you'll be seeing more

and more workplaces go to flex time in order to keep a talented work force
(Caucasian American, age: forties, Virginia).

Another practitioner linked gender and power through the discussion of leadership roles. She argued for women to ignore socialized, cultural barriers to advancement and seek out resources to assist them with empowerment. She explained,

I think there are a lot of ingrained cultural tendencies across most cultures where it's not natural for women to take a leadership role or a more authoritative position. For them, it's more necessary to experience or have some kind of empowerment resource...But I guess the analogy that comes to mind is when you're playing golf, you talk about people's handicaps. I think for women, the handicap may be a bit greater than for men. If the bar is here, you've got a greater handicap, and you need more empowerment to be able to cross that (Caucasian American, age: twenties, Washington, D.C.).

Self Realization and Choices – Women public relations practitioners confessed that in some circumstances, women have to make critical choices about how they balance family and work and define success and power. Participants communicated that gender and power came together through women's personal self realization and confidence to make choices that best suited one's career goals or lifestyles. In a sense, women felt empowered when they "claimed authority" over their lives and careers. For example, one woman described the nexus of gender and power as recognizing your personal attributes and expertise. She said, "It's about being able to...for me being about to own what my

gifts are and working with client about gifts and letting them get that out there...just claiming authority. For myself as experts and my clients as experts. Have to get out there and say I know this stuff. That's empowering and scary at the same time" (Hispanic American, age: forties, California).

One practitioner described the overlap of power and gender as choosing a lifestyle that best suits your needs as a mother and a public relations professional. Power and empowerment resulted from this newfound self realization of "this is who I am." She shared,

...All of a sudden I was a mom and I had to say, 'I can't do it, I have two young kids.' I felt maybe it was unprofessional or I shouldn't talk about it. It hit a point where this is what my reality is. I'm not going to have my kids screaming in background or bring them along to client meeting. This is who I am. I will get the job done if you hire me, but I'm not there 24/7. I may say that this evening my son has soccer practice. It's kind of meshing those two worlds. It's empowering to be comfortable now to say those types of things. Those are the more defining moments in my career (Caucasian American, age: thirties, Virginia).

In addition to self realization, the deliberate choices women made also reflected the intersection of gender and power. A public relations practitioner explained how making choices affected her career path, yet enabled her to spend time with her children. She shared,

And the truth is that you can't do it all. Do I sometimes think could I have achieved more with my career? Yes. Did I make choices that I wouldn't

have done? ...One thing I did was choose a middle route in that I did advance and became a vice president. The first time I became a vice president, it was in an organization that was very close to my home. And now, the responsibilities are greater, being close to home and choosing not to take the job helped with that balance. Could I have had a more high-powered job farther away? I think the fact is that women still become the primary care givers...I wish I could say I could do it all, but you can't do it all. I don't think I would have made different choices. I'm glad I had that time with my son and my step children (Caucasian American, age: sixties, Virginia).

Women practitioners also communicated that they made the choice to not let gender discrimination or gendered work practices keep them from achieving work goals. One woman explained her choice and determination to find new outlets for her work stating,

I'm all about trouble shooting and figuring a way around. If he's getting clients, how did he get clients? Well, somebody saw him in the newspaper. How come I'm not in the newspaper? Let me find somebody who is going to cover me in the newspaper. Find somebody who is going to feature me on their blog. It's like, instead of crying about what men are getting that you're not getting, figure out how they got what they got. If it's not just the old boys club, but if it was talking to an editor or talking to a client or networking at a function, start doing it. And there are tons of stuff that we get that they don't get (African American, age: thirties, Washington, D.C.).

Yet another practitioner linked empowerment to the choices that women make. She equated power and status to hard work, arguing that women who expect to achieve power without hard work need to assess the choices they make. In a sense, she chose to ignore that gender discrimination, organizational structures, practices and cultures are in place to constrain and oppress women – no matter how hard they work. She argued,

Women really need to think about the choices they make. I am constantly hearing women complain that they do not have the title they want or somebody else is making twice as much money as they are making, but they made choices in their career at different points for work-life reasons or for whatever reasons that contributes to that. So, it's not some great conspiracy. Sometimes it is. Take responsibility for you. They see somebody who is 32 and has a VP title and they are somewhere else and has a manager title and I said well, if you want to work 80 hours a week, you too can have this job. If you want work at the White House, great, but you are going to be working all the time. That's fine. But don't go there and complain that you are working a lot. I think that women have a tendency to do that more than men. We sometimes don't take responsibility. Maybe it's because we think that we've gone through so much... (Caucasian American, age: forties, Washington, D.C.).

Education – Women public relations practitioners argued that the intersection of gender and power rests on the education of men and all individuals about how to manage gender issues in the public relations industry. Training is needed to break down socialized workplace discrimination practices and to promote an empowering, diverse work force.

One practitioner called for education and cited the Rooney Rule, named after Dan Rooney, who pushed for diversity throughout the National Football League. She explained,

...the education for empowerment is needed. For the idea of women to be empowered in this industry, to go anywhere, the education needs to focus on the men in this industry and not the women. I just don't think men, broadly speaking, have the intentions or are trying to keep women down. I just think they don't know any better...It's gotta be like, educated out. You've got to teach them. It's learned behavior. Well, and this is not the best analogy, but in professional football ten years ago, there was this rule instituted called the Rooney Rule. Any head coaching vacancy in the NFL, a team must interview at least one minority candidate. Because for the 40-plus years that the NFL was around, the only people who were getting jobs were the old white men. And the reason they were getting those jobs is because they were in that 'fraternity'. They went to school together and they came up coaching together. They weren't exposed to - until they were educated to why this is important and until they were forced to do it. The fact of the matter is, the head coach of the Steelers who won the Super Bowl last year is 38, African American, he's really talented, but he would never had gotten a shot unless someone said, 'We have to make a decision about this behavior. We don't get it.' It's that access thing. The owners need to be educated (Caucasian American, age: forties, Washington, D.C.).

Results of the third research question illustrate that power and gender came together in the meaning making of public relations practitioners. The gender and power nexus existed through their experiences with gendered appearances for power, management styles, women's networking and bonding for power, the queen bee syndrome, acquisition of leadership positions, women's self realization and confidence and education.

In the following section, I will discuss the implication of each theme, explore ways in which the results contribute to theory and practice, present theoretical propositions regarding gender and power, discuss the limitations of the study and propose several directions for future research.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This exploratory dissertation research sought to understand how women public relations practitioners make meaning of gender and power and to examine how gender and power intersect in public relations contexts. The literature review exposed the need for continued gender research in public relations, the lack of power research from the perspective of women practitioners and the dearth of scholarship that simultaneously addresses both power and gender in public relations contexts. To examine the systems of gender and power that exist in public relations, I interviewed women public relations practitioners of varying professional experiences, identities and geographies in order to understand how they perceive, define and explain gender and power. Their stories revealed that gender factors greatly in women practitioners' lives, that power exists as a complex system of discourse, action, culture and perception and that gender and power appear together to benefit and to hinder public relations practice.

In this chapter, I will examine the implications of my research findings and propose a model of power in public relations. Furthermore, I will discuss how this dissertation builds upon gender and power theories of public relations, explore the contributions to professional practice, and point to new directions for the research of gender and power in public relations.

Implications

The first research question sought to understand how women public relations practitioners make meaning of gender. It addressed how women public relations practitioners define, perceive and enact gender in the workplace. Findings suggest that women's gender definitions differ markedly and that workplace experiences, the

gendered make-up of the industry and work-life balance needs affect women practitioners' meaning making of gender. Women's meaning making of gender in public relations faces a unique dilemma. On one hand, participants tout the industry's flexibility and suitable environment for women practitioners; on the other hand, practitioners expose the industry's gendered expectations, stereotypes and work-life balance constraints. Implications of each gender-related theme are discussed below.

Gender Definitions – Women public relations practitioners define gender differently: some define it as sex or biological difference, whereas others define it as culture or socialization. Interestingly, some practitioners who referred to gender as sex labeled it as “black and white” - implying that gender is binary and oppositional in which men and women hold separate traits. It is possible that practitioners define gender as strictly male/female because outward physical appearances are often the most visible, accessible ways to gauge differences between men and women. Therefore, meaning making of gender is framed as sexual difference. Fausto-Sterling (2000) explained that traditional American and European forms of science and culture have solidified and perpetuated the notion of two separate genders, which have thus influenced our meaning making and perceptions of gender today (i.e. p. 101). As the researcher conducting interviews, I did not offer any scholarly definitions of gender to participants before asking them to respond to the question “How do you define gender?” The results illustrate how individuals make meaning of gender *on their own terms* by grasping at categorical sex differences – which is that by and through which all socialized ideas, practices and meanings about gender are attached. Practitioners are identifying that

gender is somehow *about* sex or the concept of male/female, but don't yet understand the socialized and cultural meanings and expectations that make up gender.

Some practitioners, however, defined gender as a socialized phenomenon. Many participants who defined gender as such had taken gender-related or Women's Studies courses throughout their education. This suggests that our meaning making of gender is a learned process affected by our personal experiences and education. Rakow (1989) explained this process: "Our gendered identities are taken up and sustained through our interactions with others; our sense of a stable identity, a gendered core that makes us feel male or female, is held together by accumulated memories of our interactions and our culturally specific notions of gender" (p. 289). Still, other practitioners defined gender as a "continuum." The continuum reference still denotes difference – as gender is now placed on a line of polar opposites; however, it does acknowledge that many gender identities and differences do exist. Defining gender as a continuum (Fausto-Sterling, 1997; Rich, 1999) – or even further, as a circular Möbius strip (Grosz, 1994; Fausto-Sterling, 1997) highlights that men and women can share gender traits, and that women themselves possess and enact diverse feminine *and* masculine identities.

Feminization of Public Relations Industry – Results illustrate the feminized nature of public relations and suggest that women choose the industry for its perceived flexibility and compatibility with women's communication styles and traits. Participant responses highlighting public relations as an industry in which women can display their natural talents as good communicators and good hostesses points to participants' understanding of gender as categorically female or male, in which women display a stereotypical set of traits that, ultimately, differ from men. This suggests that practitioners

may be complicit or actually enacting in the stereotypes about women and gender that structure and affect the public relations industry. Meaning making of public relations as a feminized industry produced both positive and negative perceptions. On one hand, the public relations industry was framed as an “ideal” workplace that offered women family-friendly policy and flexibility. On the other hand, practitioners recognized that the feminization of public relations can relegate it to a “ghetto” or “pink collar” career field that lacks diversity and influence. Grunig, Toth and Hon (2001) found, similarly, that the feminization of public relations has led to women experiencing gender discrimination, less pay, lower status and less influence (p. 5).

Pregnancy, Childbirth and Family – Women practitioners’ understanding of gender surfaced through their experiences with pregnancy, childbirth and family responsibilities. Results suggest that women’s experiences and/or stories of other women’s experiences influence practitioners’ decisions to remain in or exit the public relations industry. Furthermore, these milestones complicate women’s ability to balance work and family responsibilities. Grunig, Toth and Hon (2001) explained that practitioners often encountered these ‘career versus family’ decisions in the time period between their fifth and tenth years of employment (p. 327). Interestingly, the pregnancy, childbirth and family responses contradict women’s meaning-making of public relations as an ideal “have it all” field. Participants illustrated how gender and gendered role expectations - positioning women as solely responsible for childcare – prevented them from achieving job satisfaction and work-life balance. Women were often at the mercy of sympathetic supervisors, colleagues, spouses or partners. Participants’ citing of not being able to adequately perform a public relations job unless they had a husband or a partner

suggests one way in which traditional masculine workplace standards and structures – and even heterosexism – organizes gendered practices in public relations and affects practitioners’ work roles. It begs the question – how could a single mother or guardian balance the responsibilities of being a public relations practitioner with gender and societal expectations?

The fact that women practitioners in their twenties or thirties who cited not being mothers were making meaning of gender through the concept of childbirth and family care demonstrates the way in which discourses regarding childbirth and family care in public relations are powerful. Before some women are experiencing pregnancy and childcare (and discrimination and challenges associated with this) they are readily attaching “gender” to this set of experiences and expectations. This reveals the socialized nature of communication, practice and gender in public relations. Discourse and organizational culture or expectations may be socializing women to be wary of pregnancy in public relations. Practitioners, in turn, organize their lifestyles and work-life balance situations to suit organizational or superiors’ expectations.

Expectations and Discrimination – Participant responses exposed the continued existence of gender-based expectations and discrimination in public relations. In particular, women communicated facing appearance and age-related expectations that played to the “ideal” female practitioner as older, well dressed and thin. Hon (1995) explained that masculine standards and organizational policy formulated by men serve to ignore or discriminate women in the workplace. Participant responses reflected this phenomenon. Statements such as “Sometimes our nurturing and our warmth that is natural, our colorful wardrobe – for a male-dominated workforce can be mistaken for

whimsy” and “If it’s a man interviewing you, you would be more competitive if you wore your hair up than if you wore your hair down” explained how women altered and managed their appearances to appeal to masculine workplace standards. Results suggest that dress expectations serve as a form of oppression and control in the public relations workplace. Different standards of dress and appearance are placed on women in the industry, and women comply to these standards in order to succeed – sometimes unknowingly.

Participant examples of being “talked over” or prohibited from serving on certain accounts illustrated how socialization may account for women practitioner’s discrimination or invisibility. Male practitioners may treat women differently because they have been socialized to communicate aggressively or may hold socialized, learned perceptions about gender roles in the workplace. Whereas women practitioners may serve on various U.S.-based accounts, they may be refused by international clients because these individuals possess even different socialized notions of gender or expectations regarding gender roles. Hon (1995) explained how role socialization contributes to gender discrimination. Her focus group respondents cited how values of confrontation, power and dominance have been socialized into men, whereas values of caring for children have been undervalued and socialized into women. Similarly, Aldoory and Toth (2002) found that individuals perceived that women are socialized to be less aggressive. Thus, findings of this dissertation assert that gender socialization – especially masculine-based gender socialization – accounts for women’s differential treatment in the public relations workplace.

Gender, Race, Age and Geography Intersections – Participant responses revealed that race, age and geography add depth and complication to women’s meaning-making of gender. All public relations practitioners do not make meaning of gender the same: gender is influenced by a professional’s background, identity and workplace experiences. Caucasian women practitioners, for the most part, did not factor race in their identities; however, African-American, Asian, Indian and Hispanic women did identify with race. Results suggest that when Caucasian women do make meaning of race in public relations, they do so in terms of how others’ race differs from their race. These findings reflect Frankenberg’s (1993) study of Caucasian women. Interview participants voiced, often unconsciously, their interpretation of whiteness as “neutral” or privileged, but race as oppression, discrimination or difference. Thus, Caucasian women public relations practitioners may not mention race because their “privileged” or “neutral” status as the racial majority in the United States does not afford them experiences in which they recognize racial difference, oppression or discrimination. When African-American, Asian, Indian and Hispanic practitioners made meaning of race, they did so in terms of their culture, upbringing and appearance. Young minority practitioners cited that youth, paired with race, increased their perception of gender discrimination. Results illustrate how race, in particular, offers a new lens or dimension through which individuals experience, relate to and interpret gender.

The second research question sought to examine how women public relations practitioners make meaning of power. It addressed how women professionals define, experience and perform power in the workplace. Practitioner conceptualizations of power conflicted with theoretical conceptualizations of power in some respects. Whereas

theorists have defined power metaphorically as a commodity, a system, discourse or culture, practitioners define power through their perceptions, possessions or experiences. Participants described power using examples of that which enabled them to “have” or “enact” power and influence. For example, whereas “relationships” were not “power,” per se – the possession of and access to relationships affected practitioner power. Examples of power existing metaphorically as discourse, action, commodity, culture and perception were evident throughout practitioner responses. Implications of each theme related to power are examined below.

Influence – Practitioners made meaning of power as influence. Results suggest that public relations practitioners define influence as a process involving both discourse and action, with an ultimate goal of moving individuals to a conclusion. Foucault (1980) explained that power is best theorized as action, stating, “We have in the first place the assertion that power is neither given, nor exchanged, nor recovered, but rather exercised, and that it only exists in action” (p. 89). Practitioners of this study influenced outcomes by actively presenting research or pulling together groups of employees. Similarly, Foucault (1980) explained that discourse is also a means through which power relations establish themselves. “There can be no possible exercise of power without a certain economy of discourses of truth...” (p. 93). How practitioners influenced using discourse differed markedly: some practitioners engaged in subtle, nonconfrontational communication, whereas other practitioners engaged in aggressiveness. Persuasive communication, nagging, threats and aggressive communication were common ways in which practitioners influenced. This evidence suggests that practitioners may utilize opposing forms of influence interchangeably to produce desired outcomes or persuade

diverse audiences. Results suggest that different practitioners may use different forms of influence depending on their status in an organization, race, age, appearance. For example, some practitioners may use aggressiveness and nagging because other forms of influence have been used before unsuccessfully.

Relationships – Relationships, for participants, existed as a function of discourse as well as a commodity or conduit of power. Power depended on the acquisition and strength of relationships as well as how one communicated helpfulness and fostered trust. Scholars have explained that discourse shapes our understanding of ourselves (Danaher, Schirato and Webb, 2000) and socializes or enculturates individuals (Foucault, 1980; Scott, 2001). Thus, communication establishing trust or conveying one’s intent to help may be thought of as the “glue” practitioners use to create and bind relationships. Relationships, however, were also used strategically or manipulatively in order to affect practitioner power. When practitioners use relationships as a function of “What can you do for me?” then relationships exist as a conduit of power. Relationships as power complement the critical reflections of power and empowerment. On one hand, relationships are power as a commodity used to influence others or satisfy one’s needs. On the other hand, relationships are an empowering function of sharing and collaborating for common good (i.e. Darlington & Mulvaney, 2003). Evidence suggests that similar to influence, opposing types of relationships – partnerships of trust or manipulative relationships - can be acquired and used to achieve desired outcomes.

Information and Knowledge – Results suggest that the possession of information and knowledge bolsters women public relations practitioner power. Again, like relationships, information and knowledge serve as another commodity which affords

practitioners influence and power. Power depends on one's acquisition of knowledge and one's control or management of information. Knowledge one acquired for power was specific: Practitioners sought to gain specialized management and finance, industry-specific or political and strategic knowledge. These results complement previous literature on public relations and power. Berger (2005), Dozier, Grunig and Grunig (1995) and Serini (1993) reported that the acquisition of specialized knowledge and credible information enhanced practitioner power. Thus, practitioners may maximize power by both gaining specialized knowledge and controlling the flow of information.

Access – Results suggest that power not only depends on one's acquisition of relationships and information, but also it rests on one's access to them. For public relations practitioners, power means access to media professionals, legislators and community members. Internet social media websites and networking organizations offer practitioners access to people; company intranets and file-sharing programs offer practitioners access to information. Evidence suggests that access may best result in power when one's access is demonstrated or used to produce information or recruit people. As one professional explained, access was implementing her "Golden Rolodex," to recruit an individual and tell a client, "Oh, yes absolutely we can get the mayor there." On power as access that one demonstrates, Pfeffer (1981) wrote that "those subunits or individuals who can provide the most critical and difficult to obtain resources come to have power in the organization...Power derives from the "ability to furnish those resources on which the organization most depends" (p. 101). Therefore, access is a means of actively wielding of power.

Credibility – Women public relations practitioners’ meaning making of power involved one’s personal credibility that was derived from trust and hard work. Trust existed as a product of listening and understanding an issue, developing strong relationships with superiors or clients and offering constructive insight. Hard work involved producing measureable results and accomplishments. Practitioner credibility, which is not tangible, may not reflect French and Raven’s (1968) category of “referent” power existing as a product of one’s attractiveness and charisma. Instead, women practitioners’ illustrations of power may best reflect French and Raven’s (1968) category of “expert” power resulting from one’s demonstration of their expert knowledge and ability. Therefore, as one produces results, it demonstrates their knowledge and fitness as a public relations practitioner, thus increasing clients’ or superiors’ trust – which in turn, affects one’s credibility and power. Practitioner meaning making of power as credibility represents one way in which power is perceptual, rather than tangible.

Negative Force – Results suggest that women public relations practitioners make meaning of power as a negative entity. This conceptualization is based less on practitioners’ personal experiences with power and public relations, but rather on their perceptions of the industry. Practitioners did not cite their own negative experiences with power, but instead made perceptual statements such as, “When I think of power, I think of scratching your way to the top and not caring who you hurt on the way up. I see power as a very negative thing.” Interestingly, participants statements regarding negative power focused on how one’s actions or power harmed other individuals. Grunig, Toth and Hon (2001) defined this notion of power as “exploitive power” (p. 192). Similarly, Barrett (2002) explained that power is often assumed to be “an unfair resource, as for example,

when a person ‘pulls rank’ in order to get her or his way. Another assumption is that power-hungry people are morally flawed” (p. 67). Much like credibility, power as negative force, serves as another way in which public relations make meaning of power as a perceived phenomenon.

Empowerment – Conversely, results suggest that women public relations practitioners make meaning of power as “empowerment” – or power involving freedom, creativity, support and mentoring opportunities. Grunig, Toth and Hon (2001) defined this notion of power as “productive power” (p. 192). Practitioner statements regarding power centered on how one’s actions or power could help individuals. Participants often denied the existence of “power” in public relations and instead, actively engaged the term “empowerment.” Perpetuating the negative/positive power metaphor, practitioners defined *disempowerment* as being micromanaged and lacking a boss’s trust. Participants in this study also argued that empowerment was “power,” opportunity or freedom that could be “taken” by individuals for themselves. Again, this evidence refutes traditional notions of power as a commodity that can be given and which some individuals possess and some do not. This notion mirrors assertions by gender public relations scholar Aldoory (2005) who stated, citing Baker Miller (1992), that “redefining power as the capacity for change rebuts the myth that women are powerless or that power is unimportant for women” (p. 676). Thus, participants of this study were actively creating change and enacting power by harnessing autonomy and taking opportunities for themselves.

The third research question sought to understand how gender and power intersect in women public relations practitioners’ meaning making. How do public relations

practitioners perceive, define and perform public relations as simultaneously gendered and powered? Participants explained that certain communication traits in public relations were gendered and socialized. For example, one practitioner cited how women were characterized as a “bitch” or a “lesbian” when they displayed stereotypically masculine or powerful traits. She questioned these expectations stating, “...they’ll think you’re masculine, but why can’t you be a powerful woman?” Evidence reveals that a distinct and active intersection of gender and power exists in public relations. Results suggest that women public relations practitioners actively engage gender expectations or stereotypes for power, while they also actively fight or create alternative solutions to them.

Gendered Appearances, Femininity – Practitioners utilize gendered appearances, femininity and “charm” to facilitate influence and power. When practitioners discussed gender, they did so in a way that framed discriminating treatment related to gendered appearances as perpetuating stereotypes and discrimination. Hon (1995) and Grunig, Toth and Hon (2001) defined the differential treatment of women practitioners based on appearance as “lookism” and cited it as a covert form of sexual harassment (p. 312). Specifically, practitioners cited the “Barbie” stereotype depicting the ideal female public relations practitioner appearance as thin, attractive and feminine. However, when participants discussed the overlap of gender and power, these very same gendered appearances and stereotypes were used for power, to get noticed, or to “get your foot in the door.” Dissertation responses reflect earlier findings related to “lookism” and power. Grunig, Toth and Hon (2001) found, for example that women argued that lookism could advantage women by captivating men, getting men’s attention, and using “all your resources” (p. 313). Evidence of women’s *use* of lookism exposes a rift between women

practitioners' meaning making of gender and power. Whereas women practitioners believe playing up their femininity and charm helps them achieve power, they are actually actively participating in and perpetuating the industry's gender stereotypes, lookism and sexual harassment.

Power for women practitioners depends on appearances combined with results. The participants spoke of ways in which masculine standards and appearance expectations serve to oppress and challenge women in public relations. Evidence suggests that a pretty feminine appearance will get you "noticed" in the workplace, but your work will help you stay there. This form of thinking, however, assumes that women must be noticed by male superiors or women who accept and abide by masculine standards and expectations. Are male public relations practitioners noticed first by appearances, too – or judged by their work alone? It assumes that women simply cannot be "noticed" and judged for their work and results. Furthermore, practitioner statements reveal that men find women who display femininity in the workplace as less threatening. Again, this form of thinking presents several assumptions about women's place in the public relations workforce. Women who are assumed to be less threatening are equated as less equal and less competent. Participants may not realize that being perceived as nonthreatening may result in their being ignored or "written off" as competent professionals.

Management Style – Results suggest that gender and power work together when women practitioners display both stereotypically "female" and "male" management styles. Practitioner responses illustrate how management traits in the profession are inherently gendered – and that traits historically categorized as "male" or "masculine" are linked to power. For example, one woman said, "I think people who are perceived as

powerful in the field tend to have male characteristics.” Aggressiveness and dictatorial styles in particular, were identified as “masculine,” whereas caring and helpfulness were identified as “feminine.” Responses also depicted differences in gender socialization and workplace expectations. One practitioner illustrated how power may be linked to gender through the way in which men “bravado their way through it” and do not display fear or weakness, whereas women may not shield their emotions and defer to men who do. Practitioners who display both traditionally masculine and feminine traits may best meet the communicative and strategic needs of the industry. They display traits that have historically been valued in the workplace, but they also exhibit traits that can foster caring, relationships and a sense of community. These results reflect previous statements regarding women’s empowerment in the profession. Grunig, Toth and Hon (2001) theorized that as the 21st century becomes more heterogeneous, traits associated with women will be valued more, thus increasing the empowerment of women public relations practitioners in management roles (p. 194). Evidence from this dissertation, therefore, reveals that this evolution in the public relations industry may be occurring.

Women’s Bonding Together – Power and gender intersect when women public relations practitioners network, collaborate and form interpersonal bonds over shared experiences. Practitioners create, join and maintain women-only groups – much like an “Old Boys’ Network” - for power. Responses illustrating ways in which women support and seek out opportunities for each other reflect the concepts of empowerment, coalition building for power and power-control. For example, J.E. Grunig (1992) used the phrase “collaborating to increase the power of everyone in the organization, to the benefit of everyone in the organization” (p. 564) to define empowerment. Similarly, L.A. Grunig

(1992) suggested that individuals can best wield power and influence when they function as a group or coalition. Still, power-control theory applies to women's bonding for power. Power-control theory asserts that individuals in a group make decisions by choice to gain or maintain power, operate for the interests of group members, often operate in closed (i.e. women-only) systems (Dozier & Grunig, 1992; Pfeffer, 1981). The way in which women bond together for power is uniquely gendered: it is often initiated and organized around women's specific shared experiences and understanding of childbirth and family responsibility. Practitioner responses such as "If [women] have kids – especially if they have young kids – they understand where you are going and you have that common ground. But that's something that women have that men don't have! There are so many women in business and editors and we can leverage that. That's how I look at it" demonstrated this gendered bond for power.

Women practitioners' informal, yet intentional bonding together for power and creation of "old women's' networks" that serve to separate them from male counterparts demonstrates women's application and use of a masculine-based system and practice for power. As "old boys' networks" offer a separate realm for men to network and procure advancement opportunities, so too do "old women's' networks." These separate networks, however, may not promote collaboration among all professionals in the field. Whereas they do enable women to empower women, it may also further separate and segregate the public relations industry.

Queen Bee Syndrome – Power and gender are linked through the metaphor of the Queen Bee Syndrome – in which women withhold support and opportunity from each other. Specifically, practitioners described the Queen Bee Syndrome as women's

choosing not to mentor other women, women's dictatorial management style which prevents the sharing of decision making, and women's insecurity or tendency to "one up" each other. Practitioner responses demonstrate how Queen Bee Syndrome exists as a uniquely gendered stereotype about how women selectively prevent women from achieving success, decision making opportunity or support. Participants in this research study explicitly used the term "Queen Bee Syndrome" to identify women's disempowering practices. This suggests that Queen Bee Syndrome may not be generational and perhaps has risen in consciousness or meaning-making of women public relations practitioners in regards to power.

Results describing the Queen Bee Syndrome, however, suggest that women public relations practitioners harbor expectations regarding women's treatment of other women in the profession. Participants offered stories of individuals who did not display stereotypical feminine communication styles in the workplace (collaboration, caring, mentoring) and applied the label of "Queen Bee" to them. Evidence suggests that women practitioners may be stereotyping other women in the industry. Furthermore, results suggest that workplace expectations of how women should act derive in some part from gendered stereotypes. All women are different and capable of enacting and displaying a full spectrum of communication traits and practices. Some practitioner statements reflected this: Women in public relations simultaneously control information and power systems, but they also engage in mentoring and collaboration.

Leadership – Women public relations practitioners equated the holding of leadership positions – especially the title of CEO – with the defiance or success over gender socialization and discrimination in public relations. Results suggest that the

historically gendered roles of the public relations profession may be shifting as the industry becomes increasingly feminized. Practitioner responses such as, “It’s the females who are turning PR. Interesting to see how, in 10 years women will adapt and take on careers” demonstrate an evolution of the public relations industry’s perception of gender roles.

Choices and Self Realization – Women public relations practitioners link the concepts of gender and power through their career choices and self realization. These responses reflect a liberal feminist perspective of gender and public relations. The liberal feminist approach holds that a public relations “velvet ghetto” exists, that women must learn to “play the corporate game,” that women must develop a career plan, define standards for success, accept limitations in the workplace, and celebrate triumphs in the workplace (Cline, 1989, pp. 302-307 as cited in Grunig, Toth and Hon, 2001, p. 53). Results suggest that power, for some women, does not equate to the attainment of a particular title or commodity, but instead equates to women’s ability to find a career and lifestyle that best meet their personal values and work-life balance needs. Women practitioners, in particular, managed their career plans and developed their own standards for success by adjusting their career tracks to meet work-life balance needs and matching their work habits to their personality types and individual talents.

Dissertation participants identified that gender differences in public relations exist. However, practitioners engaged in “finding a way around” or “figuring out how [men] got what they got,” celebrated their own triumphs or justified these differences by stating, “And there are tons of stuff that we get that they don’t get.” These responses of justification signal, in a sense, women public relations practitioners’ acknowledgement,

acceptance of and complicity with gender differences in the workplace, but also reveal that women are working to combat these by “finding a way around.” Interestingly, however, participants focused heavily on their personal, *individual* decisions. This suggests that practitioners may not understand that systems of power and gender socialization in public relations existed in the first place that contributed to the decisions they made to leave the workplace or redefine their standards and values. Practitioners did not cite or realize ways in which the industry could change to better suit practitioners’ values or work-life balance needs.

Education – Women public relations practitioners argued that education rested at the nexus of gender and power. Specifically, participants explained that attempts must teach men how to accept and accommodate gender differences in the workplace. Responses signaled an understanding that gender and gender discrimination was socialized and subject to change or evolution. One participant said of gender discrimination and education, for example, “You’ve got to teach them. It’s learned behavior.” Thus, results suggest that increased gender and gender discrimination education may lead to increased practitioners power and offer a step toward elimination of gender discrimination in public relations.

Contributions to Theory

Gender Theory of Public Relations – This dissertation enriches our understanding of women practitioners’ meaning making of gender and contributes to gender theory of public relations. Results illustrated and confirmed what Rakow (1989) asserted: “Gender is not something we **are** but something we do and believe. Our gendered identities are taken up and sustained through our interactions with others; our sense of a stable identity, a gendered core that makes us feel male or female, is held together by accumulated

memories of our interactions and our culturally specific notions of gender” (p. 289, emphasis in original). Public relations practitioners did not make meaning of gender as “gender” per se, but made meaning of gender as a function of their experiences in the workplace, interactions with colleagues, superiors and subordinates, expectations and responsibilities placed upon them and perceptions of themselves and the PR industry.

Results supported previous research findings and confirmed that gender socialization plays a role in the identities and work experiences of women public relations practitioners. Although participants did not explicitly name gender socialization in their discussions, evidence across all gender-related themes suggested the presence of gender socialization. Aldoory and Toth (2002) found that individuals perceived that women are socialized to be less aggressive. Similarly, women in this study communicated that they were socialized to be less aggressive, perceived negatively by male colleagues for being aggressive or assertive, and often ignored by male colleagues in the workplace. Results also illustrated how socialization in the workplace affected women’s abilities to balance career and pregnancy or childcare responsibilities. For example, one participant explained how a male executive expected his female subordinate to have pregnancy experiences that mirrored his wife and did not allow for maternity leave or work-life balance flexibility. These findings complement those of Aldoory and Toth’s (2002) in which participants cited that men who had wives at home expected women colleagues to remain at home, too - and had less work expectations for them. The research also expands our knowledge of gender socialization by revealing how gender expectations and insufficient work-life balance opportunities result in women

practitioner's guilt, sense of being overwhelmed and lack of career advancement certainty.

Women practitioners in this study did not discuss dichotomized gender role socialization and women's relegation to the "technician" role (i.e. Aldoory & Toth, 2002; Broom & Dozier, 1995; Grunig, Toth & Hon, 2001). Instead, participants cited "gender-specific" traits that women possessed, which were ideal for their roles as public relations industry professionals. Practitioners in this study represented a variety of public relations roles and organization types: many practitioners were independent consultants or owners of their own firms. Thus, these responses suggest that dichotomized role prescriptions such as "manager" and "technician" might be decreasing or fading as the public relations work environment evolves and women practitioners create their own organizations and work roles. This finding reflects previous gender and feminist scholarship that has criticized the use of dichotomized and gendered role categorizations (i.e. Creedon, 1991; Moss & Green, 2001; Moss, Warnaby & Newman, 2002). This dissertation extends our understanding of gender, roles and socialization by revealing that women public relations practitioners a) may not utilize the manager-technician role descriptions to describe their practices and make meaning of gender and b) recognize that public relations exists as a diverse, heterogeneous industry.

Not only did practitioners leave dichotomized or gendered role prescriptions out of their meaning making of public relations, but also they did not discuss pay gap issues as a gender-related phenomenon. It is possible that practitioners did not mention lack of pay in comparison to male colleagues because pay differences are a *result* of gender-related phenomena at hand, such as discrimination, harassment or glass ceiling practices.

Furthermore, *PR Week's* 2010 salary survey reported that the dwindling economy may have lessened practitioners' aggressiveness in terms of fighting for salary increases and raises. Karen Bloom, principle at public relations firm BGA stated, "People don't always feel very strong negotiating for salary the longer a recession goes on. The reality of the situation settles in and people become a little more complacent" (p. 2).

This study contributes to gender theory of public relations by illustrating that gender-based expectations, discrimination and lookism continue to exist in the public relations industry – and may be perpetuated by women's active participation in gendered expectations and stereotypes. Results confirm and mirror the discrimination research of Frölich and Peters (2007) and Weidman (2001). Whereas Frölich and Peters shared that common stereotypes such as "PR Bunny" lead to women practitioners' isolation and devaluation, research participants in this dissertation cited a "Barbie" syndrome and a need to work harder to be taken seriously. Complementing the findings of Weidman (2001), gender expectations described by participants centered on appearance: women cited expectations dictating women's clothing color and style, women's hair style, make-up or accessories, women's physical shape or size and how women could appear as "mature" as possible. Participants questioned why women practitioners must dress according to expectations, whereas male practitioners did not adhere to expectations and could often "get by" with jeans and a jacket or "business casual." It is possible that these expectations exist – and result in discrimination – because masculine standards or notions of an "ideal" public relations practitioner perpetuate in the workplace. As one practitioner explained, "I still think men have an unfair advantage in the workplace. Because a guy comes in and is not making a statement with his outfit and he's not making a statement in

the way he engages with people... Our colorful wardrobe – for a male dominated workforce can be mistaken for whimsy. So you are crashing through that barrier constantly to say that I am valid and real, too.” Women have entered a once male-dominated profession, yet standards have remained the same instead of evolving with the changing workforce. When discussing gender and power, participants cited ways in which they played upon dress, femininity, and gendered appearances to “get noticed” or “get a foot in the door.” Women practitioners’ adherence to dress standards and management of their appearances represent conflicting “survival” tactics. On one hand, women dress professionally and “mask” their femininity in order to fit in and demonstrate their “validity.” On the other hand, they flaunt their femininity in order to demonstrate gender difference – and thus receive negative and positive attention.

Results build upon gender theory of public relations by confirming that glass ceiling practices persist in the public relations industry. In some cases, participants explicitly cited the existence of a glass ceiling. For example, one practitioner used the term “glass ceiling” to illustrate how a male practitioner was replacing a female executive. Mirroring the findings of Wrigley’s (2002) study regarding the glass ceiling in public relations, many participants communicated phenomena representing a glass ceiling, but never labeled it as such. Evidence of a glass ceiling often arose when women discussed their experiences with gender socialization, expectations or discrimination. For example, participants described glass ceiling phenomena as a) depending on male management’s perceptions of power and gender, b) existing as a “handicap” that women held when seeking leadership positions, and as c) “what men are getting that you’re not getting.” Interestingly, women public relations practitioners may be perpetuating glass

ceiling-like practices when they refuse to mentor, assist or promote other women in the profession.

Complementing previous gender research by L.A. Grunig (2006) and Hon (1995), results confirm that women public relations practitioners engage in a “double” or “triple shift” to combat gendered workplace expectations, the glass ceiling or feelings of discrimination. Practitioner responses suggest that practitioners not only work a double or triple shift to balance work responsibilities and childcare or family responsibilities, but they also work extra hours to “prove” that they are equally capable as male colleagues, thus gaining credibility or power. For example, one practitioner stated, “When you are at home, you work 14 hour days as well. So, in order to prove myself, I’ve worked those long hours, too. If the guys can do it, I can do it, too. It’s not exactly the best scenario for work-life balance, but they see that I am willing to put the effort in and work just as hard as they are.” Statements such as “If the guys can do it, I can do it, too” add to our understanding of gender theory by illustrating how gendered expectations, particularly masculine-based workplace standards - influence women’s work and power.

This dissertation contributes to our understanding of gender theory and the “Queen Bee Syndrome” by providing evidence of its persistence and by highlighting participants’ theories regarding why it exists. Results suggest that the Queen Bee Syndrome refers to a) women practitioners’ refusal to mentor other women practitioners, b) women practitioners’ denial of other women leadership or advancement opportunities and c) women practitioners’ display of dictatorial or controlling management style. Evidence reveals that the Queen Bee Syndrome occurs *because* a) women practitioners compete not only with other women, but also with men for advancement and power, b)

women practitioners may lack security and self confidence and c) women practitioners enact, react to, and - in some cases contradict - socialized or expected gender traits. It demonstrates a coping mechanism women may employ for dealing with patriarchal workplace structures and standards in some public relations organizations or contexts. Women may be adopting traditionally masculine socialized practices and standards in which they compete and withhold or control resources in order to survive and succeed.

Practitioner responses regarding gender and public relations work complement work-life balance research (i.e. Serini, Toth, Wright & Emig, 1997; Aldoory, Jiang, Toth, & Sha, 2008) and add to gender theory of public relations. Like previous findings, participants touted work-life balance and flexibility as a draw and a benefit of the public relations industry. Mirroring findings by Aldoory, Jiang, Toth and Sha (2008), dissertation participants highlighted new communication technologies as a facilitator of work-life balance. Participants, however, also revealed that gender expectations, discrimination and family responsibilities complicated the attainment of proper work-life balance. This implies that work-life balance is a draw for public relations practitioners, yet does not fully or adequately assist all practitioners' needs, or in actuality, is difficult to attain.

Results contribute to gender theory of public relations by serving as a point of reference regarding how gender and the feminization of the public relations field still affect practitioner meaning making and practice. Participant responses suggest that the feminization of public relations and practitioner satisfaction result from the industry's perceived flexibility, work-life balance offerings and fitness for women practitioners' interests and capabilities. These results complement Serini, Toth, Wright and Emig's

(1997) study of women practitioners in which they found that new opportunities, changing environments and improving benefits resulted in public relations practitioner job satisfaction.

Evidence also illustrates how gendered expectations negatively affect job satisfaction. In this respect, findings complemented those of Aldoory and Toth (2004b), who found that practitioners experience feelings of loss of control; and Krider and Ross (1997), who found that practitioners experience feelings of burnout. Participants in this study not only cited feeling overwhelmed, but also they cited feeling “mommy guilt” when work responsibilities kept them from tending to family. Also mirroring findings of Aldoory and Toth (2004b), study participants framed childcare, childbirth and family responsibility as a women’s issue. One participant, for example, said, “Unfortunately, the way it works is we have puritanical ways of looking at things... women should stay at home and take care of kids.” From this dissertation research, we learn that women practitioners may lack satisfaction due to inadequate long-term support for women and families, gendered glass ceiling practices, and disheartening when perceptions or expectations of the industry do not match the long hours, low pay and challenges.

Results also reflect the negative implications that feminization places on the public relations industry. Practitioners illustrated how feminization could result in negative perceptions of the industry with statements of, “It’s almost a stereotype that somebody who is in public relations would be a woman” and “There’s a big picture issue that anytime the field becomes dominated, they call it the pink collar ghetto – there’s a lessening of the field.” Practitioner responses also suggested that feminization could result in a lack of gender diversity, and thus result in interpersonal conflict.

Most importantly, this dissertation contributes to gender theory of public relations by illustrating practitioners' meaning making of gender not as a stable concept, phenomena or identity, but as something that differs and depends upon individuals' perceptions of self and identity, race, age and even geography. Results indicate that practitioners who recognize gender as a socialized phenomenon do so because they have learned – via education or personal experiences - that gender exists as such. Those who recognize gender as simply a biological concept of male versus female may do so because physical indicators of gender, such as a male or female anatomy and physical appearance, are often the first means by which individuals differentiate “gender.” Just as gender can be described using a continuum (Fausto-Sterling, 2000; Rich, 1994) or a Möbius strip metaphor (Grosz, 1994; Fausto-Sterling, 1997), so too can we map the ways in which public relations practitioners make meaning of gender. This dissertation reveals that public relations practitioners make meaning of gender along a continuum, too, with definitions ranging from biological difference, to masculine/feminine traits, to gender as purely cultural and socialized. Results complement the works of Rakow (1989) and Wilson (2001) who explained that gender is a phenomenon shaped by interactions with individuals, cultural notions, organizational and individual discourses. Dissertation participants recognized and made meaning of gender by “doing” gender - when it affected, constrained, or played a role in how they worked as a public relations practitioner. Furthermore, evidence suggests that meaning making of gender is simultaneously complicated and enriched by practitioners' race, age, and geography.

From our understanding of gender in public relations, I propose that we apply the Grosz (1994, a cited in Fausto-Sterling, 2000) concept of a Möbius strip – an infinity sign

– to illustrate public relations practitioners’ meaning making of gender (see Figure 1). The Möbius strip illustrates gender as an infinite combination of biology, culture and socialization. It erases the idea that gender exists on a polarizing continuum in which one cannot simultaneously exhibit masculine and feminine traits. In reality, as one becomes more masculine, one does not necessarily become less feminine. The Möbius strip speaks to women public relations practitioners’ unique experiences and challenges with gender identities and expectations. It illustrates that individuals naturally display multiple masculine and feminine traits, which are not bounded strictly to the categories of male or female. As one practitioner explained,

“I think a lot of times, women are more comfortable with being perceived as being timid or not being powerful, because if you’re powerful you’re a bitch, or you’re a lesbian and that’s not necessarily the case. So, I don’t know. How would I define it? I go back and forth. I think having masculine tendencies and being a powerful person as a woman– they’ll think you’re masculine, but why can’t you be a powerful woman?”
(African American, age: thirties, Washington, D.C.).

The Möbius strip metaphor seeks to explain that yes, you can be a woman and display masculine, powerful traits.

Power-Control Theory and Public Relations Power – This dissertation contributes to power-control theory and our understanding of power in public relations. Power-control theory asserts that individuals within an organization make decisions by choice, rather than environmental influences (J.E. Grunig, 1992; Pfeffer, 1981) and that these

choices may be constrained by environmental factors (Dozier & Grunig, 1992, p. 413). This study uniquely added a gendered component to the examination of power-control theory and public relations. Results suggest that women public relations practitioners actively make decisions to gain power and are constrained by environmental factors. Specifically, women practitioners enact influence, strategically forge relationships and gain and control information to affect their power. Environmental constraints affecting practitioner power include management support of power, organizational culture and support for empowerment, freedom or autonomy, and gender expectations or discrimination.

Results suggest that power-control theory can be applied to public relations contexts outside an organization's dominant coalition. The public relations industry itself can serve as the "organization" in which people make decisions and wield power. In this study, women participants from a wide range of public relations roles and organization types shared that they created or joined informal and formal coalitions to generate influence and power across the public relations industry. Results also demonstrated, on a smaller scale, how public relations practitioners who are not members of an organization's dominant decision-making group actively wield power or influence by recruiting various employees or colleagues for a cause.

Power-control theory states that individuals wield power when they operate in closed systems and control resources (Dozier & Grunig, 1992). This dissertation found that women practitioners wield power by funneling information through a single or select group of individuals and by controlling information and individual's access to it. Pfeffer (1981) explained that groups of individuals possess power when they become or are

perceived as “irreplaceable.” Thus, operating in a closed system and controlling or monopolizing certain knowledge serve as tactics by which women public relations practitioners attempt to demonstrate their irreplaceability and power.

This dissertation contributes to our understanding of alpha and omega practices, which are components of power-control theory. Berger and Reber (2006) described alpha approaches as formal or traditional strategies of influence and omega practices as activist or non-traditional strategies of influence. Evidence illustrated that women public relations practitioners use alpha practices more often than omega practices to wield power and influence. Dissertation participants, like those of Berger and Reber’s (2006) study, conducted formal research reports, organized committees and task groups, built professional networks and relationships and engaged in subtle and assertive communication. Study participants rarely mentioned using omega practices. Omega practices practitioners stated they *did* incorporate include using aggressive communication and exiting the workforce to find more supportive, empowering work environments. Women practitioners explained that their aggressiveness was often met with negative feedback from male colleagues who interpreted aggressiveness as an inherently masculine form of communication. This suggests that gender expectations and socialization play a role in women practitioners’ power-control and use of alpha and omega practices. It is possible that women use alpha practices most often because a) they have been socialized to act less aggressively and b) they experience negative feedback when they employ omega strategies. Holtzhausen (2000) and Holtzhausen and Voto (2002) suggested that practitioners should become individual activists and work outside systems of domination or the dominant coalition. Perhaps practitioners could wield more

power if they disassociate themselves from gendered workplace expectations or constraints and form new coalitions of organizational activists. Assertiveness, aggressiveness and breaking free from gender discrimination may result in women public relations practitioner empowerment.

Results contribute to our understanding of coalition building for power. Berger and Reber (2005) and L.A. Grunig (1992) suggested that public relations practitioners can best wield power in groups or coalitions. Women public relations practitioners in this study cited that they rely on informal groups of women practitioners of similar backgrounds or experiences, create and join networks of likeminded practitioners across the industry and form intra-organizational task groups to wield influence and enculturate individuals. Interestingly, participants in this study often identified coalition building and bonding together in groups not as power, but as empowerment. This suggests that the reasons for coalition building may be different for women public relations practitioners. In addition to forming groups for power and influence, women practitioners may also form women-only groups for social support, to empathize about work-life balance issues and family care and to help each other find work opportunities. These reflect feminist notions of power (i.e. Darlington and Mulvaney, 2003; van Zoonen, 1994).

This dissertation extends our understanding of power as influence. Results reflect findings of Berger and Reber (2005), Reber and Cameron (2003) and Sriramesh, Grunig and Dozier (1996). Participants in this study, like Berger and Reber's (2005) participants, defined influence as shaping final decisions or outcomes in an organization. Evidence suggests that women practitioners best shape decisions by using persuasion, pointing to past examples, involving employees in strategic decisions, working together in groups,

and disseminating key messages. Likewise, practitioners, similar to Reber and Cameron's (2003) participants, defined influence also as dialogue. Women practitioners influenced through dialogue by using nonconfrontational communication, assertiveness, bossiness, nagging, and aggressiveness. Complementing the findings of Edwards (2009), practitioners influenced using discursive tools such as emails, presentations, meetings and speeches to organizational members.

Sriramesh, Grunig and Dozier (1996) found that individuals can influence most easily by changing the nature of internal communication rather than trying to manage cultural change" (p. 257). A dissertation participant provided a vivid example supporting this concept when she described a time when she was unsuccessful in changing her organization's culture and influencing them to not take an action. Instead, to influence, the practitioner adjusted internal communication among decision makers and subordinates and pointed to past mistakes. It was not within her influence or power to change the organization's overall culture or "way of doing things." Thus, we can theorize that small, calculated, interpersonal methods of influence work best in public relations environments.

Contributing to our understanding of power, results of this dissertation suggest that power and influence overlap and perhaps function in concert with one another. Practitioner responses tended to illustrate that power is a system or a capacity, yet influence is often the act in which practitioners use discourse and action to function within, maintain or control this capacity. One participant's story detailing how she crafted a message, created a video with these messages and submitted it to her intended audience details how action and discourse work as influence with powerful effects. The recipients

of the video repeated the message to others “like your little bees pollinating with your message” and produced the desired outcome. From this, we can theorize that power, therefore, exists when individuals whom you influence produce a desired outcome. This concept mirrors Foucault’s (1980) meaning making of power as “The individual, that is, is not the vis-à-vis of power, and at the same time, or precisely to the extent to which it is that effect, it is the element of its articulation. The individual which power has constituted is at the same time its vehicle” (p. 98).

Contributing to the work of Berger (2005), this dissertation research demonstrated women practitioners’ use of the “power with” form of power. Participants cited women’s use of relationship building, support of freedom and creative thinking, collaboration and serving as an individual’s “cheerleader.” Because the nature of public relations involves high levels of communication and building of relationships with clients, colleagues or employees, “power with” forms of power seem especially appropriate for the industry. “Power with” forms of power tended to best match the way women described how they acted and perceived power in the industry.

This dissertation illustrated the myriad identities and functions of power. Practitioners make meaning of power not simply as a capacity or commodity, but also as a function of discourse, action and perception. Because practitioners offered many definitions of power, from this evidence, we can most accurately describe power in public relations using Foucault’s (1980) notion of power as a system. Barrett (2002) explained Foucault’s system concept of power:

“In Foucault’s epistemology, everything seems to be happening at once. Power suppresses an activity, then encourages it. Power is the cause of something that happens, but also its effect. Power opposes knowledge while simultaneously nourishing it. Power is ever on the move, generating coalitions and then disrupting them, settling momentarily on individuals and then flitting through institutions, leaving both individual and institution ravished or enriched in the process. Power is both positive and negative, intentional and unintentional. In Foucault’s famous expression, power is always-already there” (p. 36).

Just as the definition dictates, evidence from this dissertation suggests that women public relations practitioners both encourage and suppress activity, both nourish and control knowledge, create coalitions for various reasons and wield power across the industry, within organizations and within interpersonal networks. From the evidence, I have created a model which may map the ways in which power exists as a system of various components in public relations (see Figure 2).

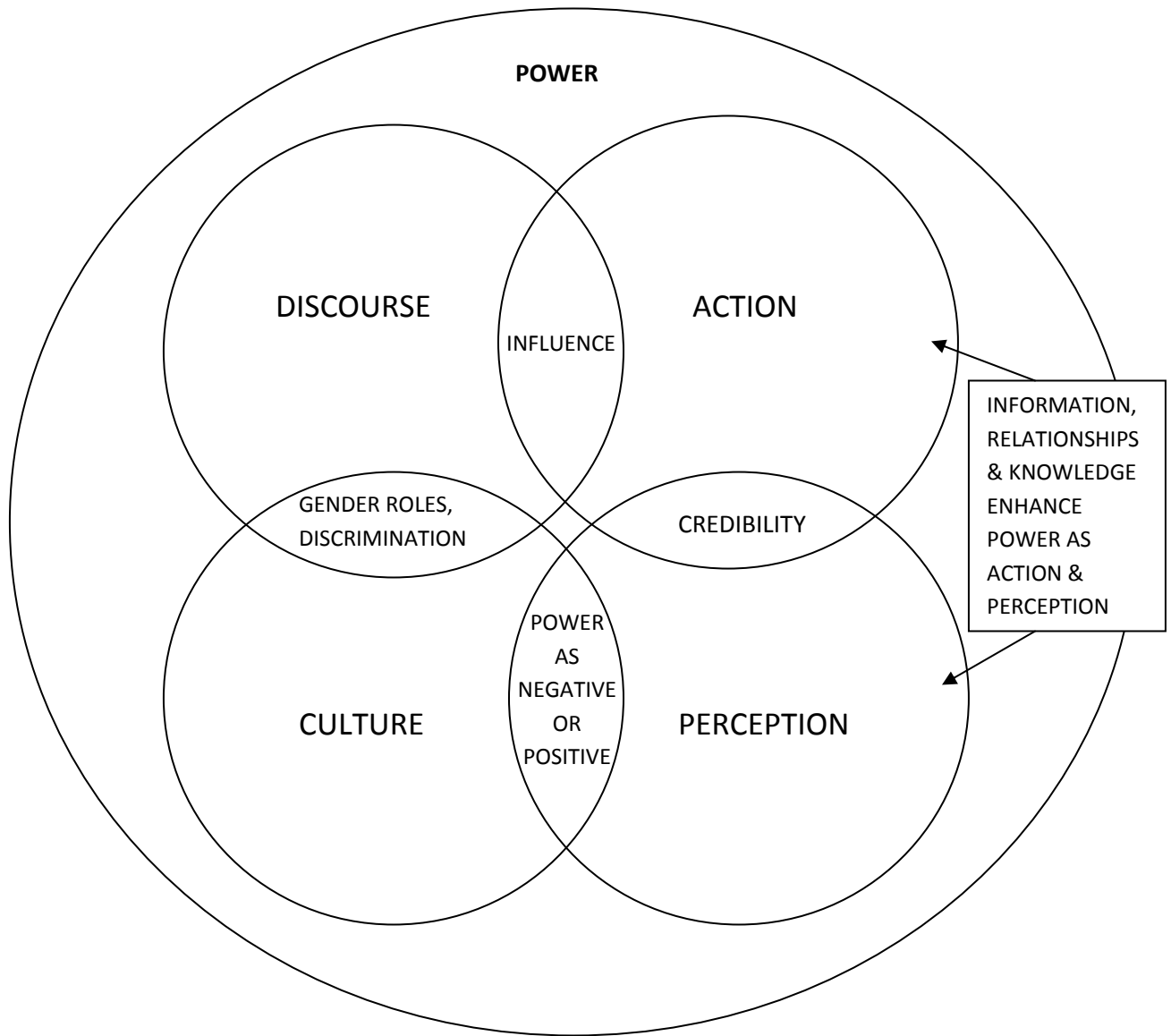


Figure 2 - Model of Power in Public

Interestingly, practitioner responses categorizing power as either negative or positive contribute to our theorizing of power in public relations. It is possible that practitioners make meaning of power as negative not because they are explicitly experiencing “negative power,” but because they are experiencing or witnessing the negative application or effects of power. When one influences or wields power for negative reasons – such as to “scratch your way to the top” – it is categorized negatively.

When one makes meaning of power positively, they may be experiencing or witnessing positive or empowering applications of power. Thus, when one influences or wields power for positive reasons – such as to support, promote freedom or mentor and advance others – it is categorized positively. Evidence suggests that women practitioners hold a series of expectations as what power is and how it works – almost expecting power to be positive. Our theorizing about power in public relations can benefit from scholarship that theorizes power and empowerment and negative and positive forms of power simultaneously in concert. Cheater (1999) explained this stating, “Conceptualizing power as postmodern, warm-fuzzy, expansible not only conceals its hard edges; this cloak of opacity also discourages nasty questions of who benefits and how, and runs the danger of collapsing objectives, processes and outcomes alike into an undifferentiated rhetorical empowerment” (p. 7).

Our theoretical understanding of power as empowerment in public relations is also extended by this research. From practitioners’ meaning making of power as a positive entity arose the interpretation of power as empowerment. This notion of power reflects a feminist critique of power, a reconstruction of the notion of power, and an alternative to the power-control theory of public relations. Dissertation evidence mirrors and contributes to previous research regarding empowerment and public relations. As Aldoory (2009) and Eaton (2001) utilized the term “ability” in their empowerment research, so too did participants of this study. Women public relations practitioners built upon the ability concept and defined empowerment using vocabulary such as: positive energy, freedom to think, autonomy, opportunity, support and mentoring. Results also support J.E. Grunig’s (1992) definition of empowerment as the symmetrical concept of

power as collaborative and benefitting of all individuals in an organization. Whereas power-control theory features the controlling of resources, functioning in closed work systems and making decisions that secure the power of dominant groups of individuals, empowerment represents the opposite. Empowerment, instead, was voiced as the sharing of resources, functioning within an open or symmetrical system of communication, and making decisions that support and assist all individuals. Thus, the theorizing of power in public relations must include a new theoretical model of empowerment or develop a new empowerment component for power-control theory of public relations. As Cheater (1999) explained, empowerment envisioned as a postmodern “expansible, vocal power” assumes a democratic transfer of power without resistance or access. Theorizing of power in public relations as both power and empowerment, as both power control and power sharing may best illustrate and flesh out the diverse ways in which power exists in the public relations industry.

Nexus of Power and Gender - Results suggest that gender and power do mutually construct one another and reinforce one another in the personal and work lives of women public relations practitioners. Gender, for public relations practitioners in this study, existed as a function of physical appearance and socialization, gendered responsibilities of professional and family caretaker, and as a reflection of gendered expectations, stereotypes and discrimination. Gender was not only how women public relations practitioners perceived themselves, but how others perceived or identified with them. Because gender represented a constant, core element of practitioners’ identities, it inherently affected their meaning making of power, too. For participants in this study, power and gender intersected most saliently through women’s use of their gendered

appearances to gain attention or power, through management styles, bonding together for power, women's lack of support for each other, leadership, choices and self realization and education. Power and gender are linked when women public relations practitioners communicated how gender identities influenced or benefitted their power – and also when gender identities or expectations resulted in a perceived loss of power. This suggests that gender and power exist in a push-pull or ever-changing relationship or system. Gender can both empower and oppress women practitioners. Women's utilization of femininity, gendered appearances and sexuality best represented this simultaneous empowerment and oppression of women practitioners. Whereas women received initial attention and power by charming clients or colleagues with their femininity and sexuality, they in turn played to existing gender stereotypes, expectations and discrimination, which could ultimately result in their loss of power.

Based on this dissertation's findings, I argue that Queen Bee Syndrome is best situated at the nexus of gender and power. Queen Bee Syndrome is a uniquely gendered stereotype of power control in which women selectively prevent other women from achieving success, decision making opportunity or support. Gender discrimination and "lookism" (Hon, 1995; Grunig, Toth & Hon, 2001) can be practiced or experienced by all individuals. Queen Bee Syndrome, however, is specific form of gender discrimination enacted and experienced by women. Effects of the Queen Bee Syndrome hold gender and power implications. When women in the workplace prevent each other from succeeding, it may result in women's lack of career experience and knowledge, a lessening of confidence and self image and ultimately, women's lack of credibility and power in the public relations workplace. Furthermore, Queen Bee Syndrome discourse furthers

negative stereotypes about women and represents one way in which women in public relations are expected by other women to display stereotypically feminine forms of communication and practice.

Additionally, I argue that women public relations practitioners' self-realization and choices exist at and result from the intersection of gender and power. Women public relations practitioners communicated that gender affected many of their choices, such as work-life balance and tenure in the public relations industry. Women's meaning making of gender and power was diverse; therefore, their choices regarding gender and power – and their senses of self will also be diverse. Gender socialization and expectations as well as organizational cultures and systems of power however, may dictate and explain why some women choose to conform to narrow expectations of how public relations practitioners should manage their identities and appearances, balance work and family responsibilities or judge what constitutes a work day. For some practitioners, a work day constituted more than 14 hours of public relations work on top of managing a family and personal life. Dissertation participants revealed that making decisions that best suited their individual identities, work-life balance needs and career goals resulted in a sense of satisfaction and empowerment. Practitioners experienced power or empowerment when they aligned their choices with their personal values, morals and sense of self.

Ultimately, from this dissertation, we learn that the concepts of gender and power are socialized phenomena. Individuals' meaning making of power and gender result from discourses they encounter and reproduce, experiences they have and their perceptions of themselves, others around them and the public relations industry itself. Whereas practitioners made meaning of gender and power through their personal experiences,

results do suggest that power and gender socialization depends on the culture and structure of the organizations in which they work. For example, practitioner statements such as, “and organizations that don’t value creative and new ideas that PR people can bring to the table” suggests that power and gender overlap and exist through individual *and* organizational cultures, interactions and processes.

Contributions to Practice

This dissertation contributes to public relations practice. Results reveal that the concept of gender is difficult for public relations practitioners define and understand. Practitioners offered diverse, conflicting definitions of gender, yet were quite consistent in offering evidence of gender socialization, gendered expectations or gender stereotypes and discrimination. Results suggest that the public relations industry can benefit from a) research that continues to examine practitioner meaning making of gender and b) consistent gender training in public relations classrooms and work places. Educating practitioners that gender is not a “black and white” binary concept of biology, but encompasses how we communicate, act and interact with others may begin to contradict and dispel long perpetuated gender-based expectations, misunderstandings or discrimination. In order to promote the values of all gender identities and a feminized public relations industry, we must continue to promote and model feminine values (i.e. Grunig, Toth & Hon, 2000) in the public relations classroom. Sha (2001) called for the discussion of the contributions of women in public relations without excluding those of men in the field (p. 172) whereas Grunig, Toth and Hon (2000) asserted that modeling of feminist and feminine values, such as collaboration and respect “would benefit all students and may be an

important step toward realization of our aspirations for a practice that is truly professional, truly ethical, and truly effective” (p. 63).

Second, results suggest that women public relations practitioners make meaning of power differently, yet depict power as functions of communication, action, perceptions and industry culture. This dissertation assists practitioners to understand that power is not simply linked to one’s title or rank; it is linked to influence, knowledge and information, relationship building and maintenance and access to people and information. Public relations practitioners may seek to enhance their influence by acquiring knowledge and information, fostering professional workplace relationships, and joining professional, informal, or online networks for increased access to members of the public relations community and beyond. Applied use of alpha and omega practices, components of power-control theory, can also enable practitioners to gain, maintain or enact power. Power is not inherently good, bad or used for control: when practitioners reconstruct power as empowerment, it serves as a function of support, freedom, mentoring and autonomy. Empowerment practices may best foster a public relations workplace that is respectful of others’ ideas and supports learning and growth.

Third, results signal to practitioners that gender and power do intersect and affect the public relations workplace. Study participants recognized the effects of gender and power as the use of gendered appearances to influence or gain attention, women’s creation of gender-specific networks and bonds for power, managers’ displaying of a mix of traits, the effects of Queen Bee Syndrome, leadership, self-realization and choices that best accommodate practitioner needs, and education. Women public relations practitioners may best navigate the challenges of the public relations industry by a)

seeking out a mentor, b) acquiring knowledge, c) taking on a leadership position, d) displaying both traditionally feminine and masculine management traits, e) not flaunting gender or sexuality to achieve power, f) actively fighting gender stereotypes and traits, g) making choices that best suit their career goals, values and needs, but also criticizing organizational policy and practices that do not offer adequate work-life balance options and h) informing themselves about gender and educating others about gender and gender discrimination.

Most importantly, results highlight the need for increased work-life balance support for all public relations practitioners. Providing child-care assistance, promoting reasonable work hours, offering maternity leave plans for both men and women, providing career advancement support, offering formal mentoring programs, providing education and training options can all contribute to practitioner well-being and enable them to better balance the demands of the workplace and family-related responsibilities at home. Flexible workplace hours, telecommuting opportunities and new communication technology availability can also enable practitioners to succeed.

Theoretical Propositions

Based on the results and implications of this dissertation, I propose the following theoretical statements regarding gender, power and its overlap.

1. Gender, for public relations practitioners is a complex concept existing as an infinity sign or Möbius strip (Grosz, 1994, as cited in Fausto-Sterling, 2000) incorporating biological difference, culture and socialization.

- a. Meaning making of gender differs among women public relations practitioners. It is affected by one's race, age, geography, pregnancy and childbirth, family-related responsibilities, as well as expectations, stereotypes and discrimination.
2. Power, for public relations practitioners is a system of discourse, action, culture and perception. Influence can be described as the "act" of wielding power. Commodities, such as relationships, information and knowledge bolster influence and power.
 - a. Power is perceived negatively when it results in one's loss of opportunity or influence.
 - b. Power is perceived positively as empowerment when it results in one's opportunity, freedom and influence.
3. Empowerment exists as an alternative to power-control theory of public relations. Whereas power-control depends on deliberate choices intended to promote only select individuals in a decision-making group, operation within closed systems and the controlling of information and resources, empowerment exists as intended sharing of opportunity, decision-making ability, information and resources to all members of an organization.
 - a. Empowerment functions as positive energy, freedom to think or do, support and opportunities and mentoring.

- b. Empowerment can be redefined as opportunity or freedom that can be “taken” by individuals for themselves.
4. Gender and power intersect in the meaning making of women public relations practitioners.
- a. Women public relations practitioners navigate, use and exploit gendered appearances and expectations for power.
 - b. Gender and power interact to empower when practitioners form gender-specific groups, attain leadership positions and educate others.
 - c. Gender and power interact to disempower when practitioners take part in Queen Bee Syndrome practices and utilize sexuality, femininity and gendered appearances to gain attention.
 - d. Gender and power interact through self-realization and deliberate choices intended to enrich and verify the lives of women practitioners.
5. Eradication of gender discrimination and the empowerment of women public relations practitioners depends on the valuing of both traditionally masculine and feminine management styles, attainment of leadership positions, education of students and employees about gender and gender discrimination, and women’s self-realization and confidence in the choices they make.

Directions for Future Research

Based on the dissertation findings, I propose several directions for the continued research of gender and power in public relations. Results suggest that gender is a

complex concept that public relations practitioners struggle to define. Some practitioners defined gender as binary, biological, male/female difference. Viewing gender as such may prevent women practitioners from fully understanding how gender socialization, expectations and stereotypes affect the public relations industry and their actions. Thus, future research must understand more fully a) how public relations practitioners define gender, b) why some practitioners define gender not as socialized, but as biological sex, and c) how practitioner's opposing gender perspectives affect the manner in which they perceive gender issues in the public relations industry. Additionally, future research must address how both male and female practitioners make meaning of gender in public relations. Research must ask why practitioners' meaning making of gender differs and what implications these meanings hold for the practice. How are gendered stereotypes, perceptions or expectations being endorsed and/or practiced in the workplace intentionally and/or subconsciously?

Because gender discrimination and work and family responsibilities constrain some practitioners' abilities to effectively practice public relations, future research regarding gender and public relations must incorporate an integrative approach (Tetreault, 1985). L. A. Grunig (2006) proposed an integrative analysis of women's public relations work lives that examines their "commitments not only to the employer and to the profession, but to their partners, their children, their parents (and their partners' parents), and to their neighbors" (p. 124). Integrative research may uncover the issues, business rationales, policies, and moral responsibilities related to treating employees as "worthwhile individuals rather than merely means to an organizational goal" (p. 124). Furthermore, integrative research can be key to understanding work-life balance issues

and constraints that public relations practitioners face and how they may be tied to gendered roles and socialization.

Participant responses suggested that women public relations practitioners were prohibited from serving on specific client accounts, particularly those of international clients. Future gender research must examine meaning making of gender, gender roles, and gender discrimination on an international level. How can public relations firms educate employees, prepare for and address differing understandings of gender among international clients?

Future research must address how power exists as a complex, fluid system involving all public relations professionals of varying levels of rank or expertise. Past research regarding public relations and power has often focused on executives or dominant coalition members and utilized management-based, power-control theory, and gender-neutral approaches. Future studies must integrate systems, rhetorical, sociological and philosophical approaches to analyses of power. Foucault's definition of power, explained by Barrett (2002) as an ever-present system and complex micro-level relationship among individuals may prove especially useful for our continued mapping of power in public relations. Gender also affects how public relations practitioners perceive their industry and perform both personal and professional roles. Future studies must continue to explore the myriad intersections of gender and power in public relations and complicate the relationship between these two phenomena.

Practitioner responses contrasted greatly regarding power and relationships. Future research should examine power, relationships – and perhaps conduct and ethical

analysis of practitioners' underlying intents for relationships. Researchers may ask why some practitioners forge relationships for manipulative or strategic reasons, whereas other practitioners forge relationships to foster trust and community? Do practitioners build relationships for these reasons simultaneously? Do different types of relationships affect power differently? Are relationships "power" in themselves or are the means by which power and influence exist?

Participants in this study did not identify themselves as organizational activists; however, many practitioners shared how they left traditional agency or organizational environments to become independent practitioners or adjusted work schedule to best fit their needs. Future research must build upon the postmodern research of Holtzhausen (2000) and Holtzhausen and Voto (2002) to analyze why public relations professionals engage in activism in order to reject organizational abuses of power or disassociate themselves from organizational dominant coalitions (or leave the organizations altogether) in search of professional empowerment.

This dissertation serves as a springboard for future research regarding the nexus of gender and power in public relations. Whereas this dissertation highlighted intersections of gender and power through practitioners' use of gendered appearances, coalition building, support techniques, mentoring and education, future research must examine if other intersections do exist.

Lastly, this dissertation was delimited to women in order to illustrate the rich, diverse experiences and meaning making of women public relations practitioners. This research did not address how practitioner sexuality affected one's meaning making of

gender and power. Future research regarding gender and power must examine the meaning making of both men and women practitioners of diverse race, age, geography, sexuality, economic status, as well as other forms of individual identities. Adding a component of sexuality will enrich our understanding of how public relations practitioners make meaning of gender and navigate gender and sexuality-based stereotypes, perceptions, roles and socialization.

Strengths and Limitations

Whereas this dissertation's strength was its use of a qualitative method to explain in-depth the experiences of public relations practitioners through their own voices, its limitations include a homogeneous sample, interview constraints and personal bias. Lack of funding, difficulty finding contacts outside of my geographic region and a limited data collection timeline prevented me from collecting a sample as diverse as I had intended. Specifically, my sample is skewed toward independent or agency Caucasian women public relations practitioners from the Washington, D.C. and Baltimore, M.D. regions. In particular, it is possible that a sample of public relations practitioners who practice public relations in other geographic locations and diverse industries, such as technology and the sciences, may have produced richer or contrasting statements.

In order to attain a more diverse sample, I conducted telephone interviews with public relations practitioners in California, Florida and Tennessee. Because telephone interviews do not allow for face-to-face interaction, these interviews, I felt, were shorter and lacked the same level of detail and intimacy as the in-person interviews. Additionally, some face-to-face interviews were conducted at or near practitioners' place of work. The less private location may have prevented my participants from fully

disclosing their workplace experiences or voicing their interpretations of gender and power. During both telephone and face-to-face interviews, I tried to account for these limitations by explaining that I was there to learn from their experiences and that I would protect their confidentiality to the fullest extent. I also sought to elicit detailed practitioner responses by asking detailed follow-up and probe questions.

The dissertation's unit of analysis presents constraints and limitations on the research. The unit of analysis focused on and was delimited to individuals: on public relations practitioners and their meaning making. My interview questions and analysis concentrated heavily on individual, personal levels of meaning making and interpretation of gender and power, rather than ways in which gender and power may be experienced, communicated, analyzed and interpreted at organizational or societal levels. Thus, results and interpretations are limited in how they describe and illustrate the function of gender and power in public relations. Future studies must incorporate questioning and methods of analysis that address the myriad levels and ways in which power and gender exist as more socialized, organizational and cultural systems or phenomena.

Personal bias and background present an additional limitation. As a former public relations practitioner who experienced gender and power-related phenomena, it is possible that my experiences influenced the manner in which I interviewed practitioners and coded, analyzed and presented my research findings. To counteract my personal bias, I grounded my research questions, interview protocol and data analysis in the public relations, power and gender literature and theory.

My growth as a gender scholar has affected this dissertation research and this dissertation research has, in turn, affected me. This effort was an exploratory study in which I sought to better understand and examine the ways in which gender and power were at play in the meaning making of public relations practitioners. It enabled me to understand the myriad ways in which gender and power shape the lives of public relations practitioners and, in a sense, oppress them. Socialized gender and power systems are in place which affect how both men and women communicate and practice. Change may come from simultaneously seeking equality in the workplace, helping women create career plans and standards for success, yet also producing research and policy that seeks to change the way we understand gender and serves empower individuals to change their workplaces, organizations and communities, enabling them to be more accepting of all individuals and identities.

Conclusion

This exploratory dissertation sought to examine how women practitioners made meaning of gender, power and the nexus of gender and power in public relations. It was delimited to women public relations practitioners in order to bring forth their voices regarding gender and power and to demonstrate and examine the myriad ways in which women make meaning of and experience gender and power.

Results contribute to our understandings of gender theory of public relations, power-control theory of public relations. This study was one of only a few which examined the nexus of power and gender – and one of the first which examined power in public relations from a gendered standpoint. Findings suggest that gender and power inherently affect women public relations practitioners’ meaning making of public

relations and that future research must continue to examine the concepts of gender, power, empowerment and the intersections of these in the industry. Empowerment of women public relations practitioners rests on mentorship and education, making possible the attainment of leadership and work-life balance opportunities, and providing education regarding gender and gender discrimination.

Ultimately, it is my hope that this dissertation illustrated the rich meaning making and experiences of women public relations practitioners. Through this glimpse of their lives, accomplishments and struggles as women public relations practitioners, we can better understand the ways in which gender and power exist in practice and continue to understand the evolution and rich culture of the public relations industry.

Appendix A: Recruitment Letter

Dear _____:

My name is Katie Place and I am a doctorate student at the University of Maryland.

This summer, I am conducting my dissertation research on the experiences of women public relations practitioners. My research will examine how women make meaning of their unique positions, opportunities and challenges in the public relations field.

I understand the demands on your time as a professional; however, I would like to speak with you in person regarding your experiences. Your identity will remain confidential and your responses will never be connected to your name or your workplace. You may decline to discuss a specific question or end your participation in the interview at any time you feel necessary. Furthermore, I will not ask any questions that may compromise your position with your employers or your job as a public relations professional.

I welcome any questions you may have regarding my research or my identity as a graduate student at University of Maryland before you respond. Please feel free to contact my dissertation advisor, Dr. Elizabeth Toth, at eltoth@umd.edu or 301-405-8077; or myself at kplace@umd.edu or 703-268-6147.

Your participation can make a significant contribution to this research study and to our understanding of the public relations profession. Thank you for your consideration and please consider sharing your experiences as a professional in this exciting career field.

Sincerely,

Katie Place
Doctoral Candidate
Department of Communication
University of Maryland, College Park
kplace@umd.edu
<http://www.comm.umd.edu/gradstudents.html#Place>

Appendix B – Interview Protocol

Greeting and Introduction:

Hello! Thank you for meeting with me today to discuss your experiences as a public relations professional. The purpose of this interview is to understand your experiences as a woman in the public relations industry.

Before we begin, I'd like to review the confidentiality agreement before you. This agreement explains the purpose of my study and states that our interview will remain completely confidential. In order to capture our entire interview, I'd like to ask your permission to audiotape our conversation. Audiotaping our conversation will allow me to transcribe our interview and return to it later for analysis. Feel free to take a minute to go over the agreement and sign it.

Begin interview. Turn on audio recorder and start with question #1.

1. Tell me about your current role as a public relations professional. (opener)
 - a. What is your job title, length in role?
 - b. Who do you work with?
2. Who are some of your role models in public relations? Why? (opener)
 - a. What traits do they display that make them good role models?
3. What are some benefits and/or challenges of being a public relations practitioner? (opener)
4. All individuals possess a “gender” and gender is a prominent area of study regarding the public relations profession. How do you define “gender”? (RQ 1)
5. What are some gender-related work issues that you think public relations practitioners face? (RQ 1)
6. How does gender affect the way you practice public relations? (RQ 1)
7. Some people have said that women prefer working for women – others prefer working for men. Why do you think they have these preferences? (RQ 1)

Transition: Now I would like to ask you a few questions about your organization and your role as a public relations practitioner there.

8. How would you describe the work culture at your organization? (RQ 2)
9. What do you think makes a **good** public relations work culture? (RQ 2)

10. Are you part of a decision making group in your organization? Yes/No? Why? (RQ 2)
11. How would you describe your relationship with your boss? (If this does not apply, as some women are self-employed or executives, move to selections below). (RQ 2)
 - a. “ “ coworkers
 - b. “ “ subordinates
12. How do you define power? (RQ 2)
13. What are ways that you able to give others your input or influence? (RQ 2)
14. How might you describe your personal approach to getting things accomplished? (RQ 2)
15. Can you give me an example of a time you were able to accomplish something in your organization? How did you do it? (RQ 2)
16. Some people use the term “empowerment.” How would you define it? Is it something that exists in your organization or in public relations? (RQ 2, RQ 3)
17. What are some ways that gender and empowerment connect or work together? (RQ 3)
18. Is there an example of how you or a colleague empowered yourself/herself? Was it influenced by gender? (RQ 3)
19. If you could give any advice to a women practitioner who is just starting out in the profession, what would you tell her? (Closer)

Conclusion:

We’ve arrived at the end of our interview. Are there any additional comments that you would like to add? (If so, continue with interview and record comments. If not, continue.)

Thank you for your participation in this research project. Would it be possible for me to contact you at a later date if I should have any additional questions or need clarification on something we discussed today? (I will get e-mail and/or phone number from research participant in order to contact them.)

Again, thank you for your participation!

(Turn tape recorder off).

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