Women in PR

Research and opinions about the status, challenges and future of women working in PR/Communications

edited by
Ana Adi & Edna Ayme-Yahil

Quadriga University
of Applied Sciences

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Beyond Feminization: Women in PR Can Be the Key to a More diverse, Ethical and Inclusive PR

Foreword by Ana Adi and Edna Ayme-Yahil

No matter where in the world (if there is research to track it), women make up most of the workforce in PR/Comms. In Finland for instance, 89% of the workforce in PR/Comms is made of women (Melgin, 2014), while in the UK it is a little more than 60%.

While there is reason to celebrate the rise in popularity and demand for communication specialists — and with this access to PR education — the feminization of any workforce brings with it a variety of counter effects which, in today's day and age, require serious reflection and committed action. These include gendered perceptions about the profession and perpetuating bias which lead in turn to pay differences, discriminatory practices, career progression hurdles and a potential reduction of talent pool.

Too often, communications has been considered a woman's job because "women are good at communicating" yet, even now, when the workforce is made up by mostly women, leadership, top management and board positions are occupied by men (Melgin, 2014; Risi, 2016). What's more, research looking into the feminization of workforces (PR is there with nursing, education just to name a few) tends to ponder more on the precariousness of the male status and its relationship and definition to womanhood (see Jennifer Bosson's conversation with Shankar Vidantem on Hidden Brain) or consider softening feminist demands of equality and equity.

Too often as well, especially in pop culture and mass-media, PR women have been described as using their sex appeal to win clients and get promotions (Saltzmar, 2012) – Carrie Bradshaw from Sex and the City, does that ring any bells? – and equally too often the PR history books told the glorious stories of self-branded PR fathers like Ivy Lee and Eddy Bernays either forgetting women all in all or, when they included them, then referred to them either as villains (Bessie Tyler and her work for the KKK, troublemakers — the suffragettes) and activists or as objects and audiences of campaigns. Such exposure has long-term and devastating effects. For once, this perpetuates the image of PR women as being superficial, cute and intellectually inferior, and sustain the perpetuation of female professionals' depictions in terms of PR girls or PR bunnies (in German PR Mäuse, mice). Moreover, when serious allegations of sexual harassment emerge from the industry, such as Kristin Demetrious notes in her chapter *Surface effects: Public relations and the politics of gender (2013)*, it is the female practitioners that are blamed and shamed publicly. Now Demetrious' two Australian cases might have happened before the #metoo movement, but this is still indicative of the existence of sexual hierarchies (see also Butler, 2010 cited in Demetrious, 2013, p. 20).

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So how do we move on from here?

Considerable progress has been made in recent years, both in academia and in professional circles, with research about and for women increasing, and with professional bodies and associations paying more attention and seeking solutions to the discrepancies that gendered views of the profession and feminization produce. There's Larissa's Grunig work on the influence of gender on the public relations practice (together with Hon and Toth, 2013), there's Heather Yaxley's incursion into the history of public relations and the career experiences of women during the 1970s and 1980s (2013) and more recently Liz Yeomans' exploration of emotional labor in the context PR agencies (2019). The Chartered Institute of Public Relations in partnership with Women in PR (similar name, no relationship here) reviewed the gender pay gap in the UK (2017) while the Public Relations Society of America has been calling for more women in power since 2016 (Allen, 2016). More recently, IABC EMENA hosted at the beginning of the year (2020) an event aimed "creating a space to discuss how to build a meaningful career in communications". And yet, although progress has been made, both professionals and academics agree that there is so much more to be done: to bring insight into how the workforce is organized and how diversity and gender influence practice around the world, to identify strategies to avoid perpetuating bias, to find solutions to career progressions that are inclusive, to facilitate collaboration and support development.

At the time of the COVID-19 pandemic when women's research outputs dwindled (Fazackerley, 2020) and many practitioners' levels of pressure and stress increased due to a higher demand for communication services coinciding with the reduced access to support services including childcare, this reader aims to reflect on the progress made so far and contribute to keeping the discussion going.

Additionally, at a time of such confinement, this reader celebrates the diversity (of origin, practice, language, thinking) through the diversity of our contributors and the unity that technology provides. 16 chapters, 4 continents, more than 10 countries.

Moreover, the research presented here is as important as the personal experiences of our contributors, many of whom, you will find, having both studied and worked in the field.

Melike Aktas' chapter will provide you with a brief overview of PR research on women and about women. Jenifer Boughey's review of her master's thesis highlights the personal journeys and stories of female practitioners in or out of PR leadership, showing among others how important it is to give women a voice and give them a platform to be heard. Amelia Reigstad's article reflects on the findings of her doctoral work revealing that gender, stereotypes and ageism within public relations are significant factors within workplace communication. Liz Yeomans' article discusses feminism and its understanding and applications for PR by focusing on how senior PR women working in PR agencies in the UK discuss their career experiences and professional relationships, construct identities in relation to feminism and gender equality. Talia Beckett Davis discusses the different career paths

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that women and men have in public relations, reflecting on the influence on pay and confidence that career breaks taken to focus on caring for others family members have on women. The pay gap and glass ceiling are also discussed by Carolina Carbone and Luz Canella Tsuji using data from a preliminary study they carried out in Argentina. Begüm Ekmekçigil Türkmen's article provides an insight into her doctoral research exploring career experiences of female PR practitioners in Turkey. The importance of understanding context, culture and legislation are highlighted in Ramona Slusarczyk and Amal Dib analysis and reflection of PR practice in the Middle East with questions about the challenges these pose in particular to female practitioners being raised. Amanda Holdworth's contribution discusses burnout amongst female PR practitioners while Sia Papageorgiou provides a reflection on diversity both from her own experience as well as observations and analysis of how diversity and inclusion are addressed in Australia. Artificial intelligence is also discussed here: first Zora Artis looks at gender bias and how it can be defeated (providing in a sense a response if not a solution to the questions asked in previous articles) then by Kerry Sheehan and her passionate call for PR practitioners to actively engage in discussions about artificial intelligence and their application and impact. Sian Rees argues that "emotionally intelligent will help organizations to understand and challenge their role in society and offer ways for a variety of brand stakeholders to engage directly with an organization, and its employees, to challenge brand inauthenticity and direct brands towards actions which support the public good" (p. 114). In doing so, she provides a series of guiding principles for social oriented PR practice. Amanda Coleman provides some useful advice too on how empathy and humanity can be embedded in the communication practice and improve communication in crisis situations. Speaking of crises, Mike Klein reflects on how COVID-19 might change gender dynamics at work. Finally, Raffaela Gmeiner and Olga Kolokytha take a deeper incursion into the world of music PR where women are scarce and provide solutions to make them seen.

This reader also provides a series of solutions and guidelines to the problems communicators face: revisiting how and what we teach about PR, considering how we recruit and how we envisage career journeys and progression, bring ethics, diversity to the center of the conversation by challenging the status quo if it needs be.

Finally, this reader is your written companion and extension to the *Women in PR* podcast (https://soundcloud.com/user-654979149) launched in 2019 (and planning a second series for the end of 2020) and featuring interviews with practitioners and academics on topics ranging from missing voices in PR history to wellbeing of PR professionals and access to the C-suite. And very much like the podcast, this reader uses gender and feminization as a pretext to revisit our assumptions about the profession and its professionals, consider its past and present and imagine its future. In this sense, discussing about women in PR is an attempt to think of a profession puts ethics and diversity at the center.

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Ana Adi

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Women in Public Relations: Reflections from Academic Research

By Melike Aktaş

Women practitioners have been the majority of the workforce of the public relations industry since the 1980s. Following the influx of women entering the public relations practice which defined as the feminization of the field (Aldoory, 2015), academic studies focusing on gender issues blossomed. Mainly female public relations practitioners and their employment and workplace issues were at the center of this researches due to the concerns of the status of women working in the field. As studies flourished, the scope of the researches evolved but the main focus was hardly changed, and these studies criticized for being "too White and too first world" (Golombisky, 2015, p. 389).

The global public relations industry is thriving and along with a rise in women employment in the field, some inequalities between male and female practitioners still remain. Based on the findings of annual European Communications Monitor reports in the period between 2009 – 2015, Tench and Topic (2017) indicate that traditional inequalities in the field continue to exist, such as wage gap and glass ceiling, with new inequality dimensions such as job satisfaction and mentoring emerging. According to the authors, as one issue gets tackled new inequality issues arise (Tench and Topic, 2017). For instance, despite the growing number of women working in public relations, women still remain underrepresented in leadership and senior management roles (Place and Vardeman-Winter, 2018).

Therefore, it is important to examine public relations practice with a lens of gender and to investigate how female practitioners are addressed in recent literature. Public relations practitioners act as cultural intermediaries that produce and disseminate meanings (Bourdieu, 1984; Curtin and Gaither, 2005). Hence, literature on female practitioners can provide important insights to understand today's public relations practice, its structure and its impact on society. With this aim, issues of four leading international public relations academic journals, *Journal of Public Relations Research (JPRR), Public Relations Review (PRR), Public Relations Journal (PRJ) and Public Relations Inquiry (PRI)*, published between January 2010 – January 2020 were analyzed through a systematic literature review[1]. In the first stage of the analysis, articles on public relations practitioners and/or professionals were identified through reviewing all articles' key words, titles and abstracts. In this stage of the analysis a total of 110 articles was collected. In the second stage, these articles were categorized as a) articles directly focusing on female practitioners, b) articles focusing on female and male practitioners together, and in the final stage c) articles that offer insights about female practitioners.

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[1] The first issue of Public Relations Inquiry is published in January 2012 therefore issues between 2012-2020 are included in the research.

Findings

Research focusing on public relations practitioners is quite common in public relations literature. There are 110 articles published about practitioners in the field. However, studies focusing on female practitioners are very limited. More than half of the articles on practitioners, regard gender only as a demographic variable or data category, and do not provide any information about female practitioners (54,5%). Only 13 articles (11,8%) are solely devoted to female practitioners with an additional 11 articles (10%) offering insights into the female workforce in their findings. Thus, the total number of articles covered in this study is 24 (21,8%).

Journal	The number of articles about PR practitioners	The number of articles focusing on female practitioners	The number of articles offer insights about female practitioners	The number of articles regard gender as a category
JPRR	16	3	2	4
PRR	71	7	9	41
PRI	8	3	-	3
PRJ	15	-	-	12
Total	110 (100%)	13 (11,8%)	11 (10%)	30 (54,5%)
		24 (21,8%)		

Table 1: The distribution of the articles based on journals and focus

PR research is gender blind

Most articles included in this study that focus on public relations professionals are functionalist in approach and frame the discussions based on the organizational contexts and effectiveness, perhaps deliberately avoiding "deeper reflection and is loath to undercover problematic issues as gender" (Daymon and Demetrious, 2010, p. 3). Although it is acknowledged that public relations is a gendered industry, articles about public relations practitioners undermine the importance of gender in practice which limits the intelligence that might be drawn from research.

Additionally, most of the articles reviewed only mention gender as a demographic data and do not provide deeper knowledge. This 'gender neutral' representation might mask the hidden workings of gender on theoretical conclusions or outcomes, as Daymon and Demetrious (2014) point out. Even the articles that do provide insight about female practitioners, do not elaborate on the reasons behind such a gendered focus approach.

Experiences of female practitioners

Articles focusing on female practitioners are generally written from 'non-functional perspective'. In these articles, the work of public relations practitioners is discussed within social and organizational cultures in which their practice is embedded in (Edwards, 2012, p. 18). Besides, these articles take into account the meanings and experiences of female practitioners. For instance, Tsetsura's (2010a, 2010b) investigations of Moscow based female

practitioners' perceptions of their profession highlight the importance of understanding public relations as a socially constructed gendered profession. In doing so, Tsetsura (2010a) pointed out the relationship between perceptions of public relations as a service-oriented profession and the patriarchal tradition of the Russian society. Moreover, she discussed the priority and significance of establishing public relations as legitimate and real work in Russia, and not a woman's job specifically, something not regarded as an issue in other contexts (Tsetsura, 2010b). Place (2015) on the other hand, focused on the meaning making of female practitioners to uncover how they understand and define gender. According to Place (2015) female public relations professionals define gender as a "binary construct, a social construct, and a phenomenon linked to age, race, and ethnicity" (p. 61).

> *"exploring the construction of gender may help public relations professionals to more clearly understand how organizations are gendered, more ethically and sensitively communicate to publics, and combat workplace discrimination"* (Place, 2015, p. 65).

In another article Place (2012), analyzed how female practitioners understand different power styles focusing thus on the relationship between power and public relations, an aspect overlooked by gender-neutral studies. These non-functional articles mostly adopt a qualitative method. In doing so, they use in-depth interviews to reflect and give voice to the female practitioners thus facilitating the exploration and understanding of commonalities and differences in female practitioners' experiences. Place (2012) argues that lived experiences, successes and struggles of female professionals contribute to theoretical discussions "about how gender and power shape public relations practice" (p. 448).

Missing voices

It is also important to take into account the differences among female practitioners. Vardeman-Winter and Place, reviewed studies examining the status of female practitioners published between 2005–2016, and found out that, "women of color, LGBT practitioners, and practitioners with disabilities are underrepresented in the field, and data to generalize their experiences are extremely limited" (2017, p. 328). Since public relations practitioners produce and disseminate messages to engage with diverse publics, it is important to have diversity in public relations workforce, so that organizational messages resonate with the publics (Vardeman-Winter et al., 2013; 2017).

Female contributions were largely missing in public relations history studies. Starting from the end of the 1990's, literature started to develop and historical accounts of women working in public relations have become more evident. Searching for 'herstories' in public relations practice continues to attract attention. As a case in point, Yaxley (2013) presented the career experiences of female practitioners in Britain during the 1970s and 1980s, when female employment in the field ascended. The International History of Public Relations Conference 2016 held in Bournemouth (UK), organized with the 'Her-story' theme, brought several researchers together to discuss missing voices in

national public relations histories (see IHPRC, 2016) and guided historical studies focusing on female practitioners.

Additionally, while there are a number of country specific articles providing information about female practitioners published within the past ten years, the list is short compared to the number of countries where the profession is practiced and recognized[2] and usually limited to the outputs of few scholars. Especially professionals practicing in the USA and the members of Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) are the outmost represented group in the articles (Sha, 2011; Gallicano et al., 2012; Jiang and Shen, 2013, 2015; Jin et al., 2014; Lee et al., 2018). Needless to say, expanding both focus and breath of this kind of research inquiry is highly necessary.

Organizational focus

Most research has investigated practitioners in organizational contexts especially the roles that they subscribe to in their professional capacity. For instance, von den Driesch and van der Wurff (2016), explored role conceptualizations of public affairs professionals in the Netherlands and revealed that male practitioners were more in often associated with "expert" and "advocate" roles whereas females were more often relegated to the "mediator role". Earlier, in 2012, Mellado and Barria examined professional role conceptualizations of Chilean public relations practitioners, showing that female practitioners tend to assign more importance to long term strategic roles than males.

Other, and equally significant studies, explored the influences of organizational factors on practitioners. For instance, Li et al. (2010) examined contingent variables related to conflict management as perceived by Chinese public relations practitioners and identified that women and men differ in their perceptions. According to authors female practitioners "tend to indicate less variance or change according to who they are, whom they work for, and who they need to deal with" (Li et al., 2010, p. 254). Jin et al. (2014) explored coping behaviors in work-life conflict and found out that proactive approaches such as rational action and positive thinking were the most used coping strategies. Their findings also indicate that organizational factors have a key role in facilitating or preventing practitioners from proactive work-life conflict coping. This highlights the importance of organizational support. Similar findings are illustrated by Jiang and Shen's (2013) study: a family supportive work environment would minimize practitioners' work-life conflicts. Additionally, Jiang and Shen also found that female practitioners experience higher levels of strain-based work-life conflicts and suggest that organizations should invest more in the mental well-being of women public relations practitioners.

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2   See countries and authors: Russia (Tsetsura, 2010a, 2010b) Singapore (Lee and Kee, 2017), China (Li et al., 2010; 2012), Chile (Mellado and Hanusch, 2011; Mellado and Barria, 2012), Australia (Daymon and Surma, 2012) besides European countries (Moreno et al., 2010; Verhoeven et al, 2012) such as UK (Yaxley, 2012, 2013; Yeomans, 2019), The Netherlands (von den Driesch and van der Wurff, 2016) and the USA (Yaxley, 2012; Place, 2012, 2015)

Career development and empowerment

The articles reviewed also covered career development of female practitioners. For instance, Place and Vardeman-Winter (2018) based on an extensive literature review offer suggestions to improve the status of female practitioners in leadership positions. They argue that advocacy and mentorship issues should be improved within organizations enabling them thus to sustain long term success of women in leadership positions. It is also vital to improve awareness about gender leadership disparities in executive positions and policymaking. Additionally, researchers, organizations and industry should work together to drive policy and structural changes aimed at supporting and promoting women (Place and Vardeman-Winter, 2018). Authors also stated that female practitioners should take advantage of the progressive research published so far and focus on bringing together women, leadership and public relations. These study insights can be empowering and transformative. According to Place (2015) improving awareness of professionals about institutional and societal discourses that devaluate women as well as remain sensitive to these gendered discourses is critical.

Some studies also point out the importance of educational processes to improve the status of women in the industry. For instance, Sha (2011) indicates that although accredited practitioners hold higher job titles and have higher average incomes, women continue to be underrepresented among accredited practitioners. She suggests that professional associations and public relations educators should encourage female students and practitioners to pursue accreditation. In their study of millennial PR practitioners, Gallicano et al. (2012) uncover that

> *"men were more likely than women to believe that the organization treated their opinions as legitimate, that they exercised an adequate amount of control, and that their opinions were valued"* (p. 236).

Since several obstacles for female practitioners continue to be perpetuate, it can be empowering to raise awareness of these possible barriers during educational processes. And it can be also helpful to provide deeper knowledge about "how gender systems operate in public relations profession" (Place, 2015, p. 74). Thus, prospective practitioners can develop a critical understanding, improve their coping skills at the beginning of their careers and they can question and challenge the commonsense practices.

Conclusion

While the number of academic investigations on public relations practitioners is quite high within the last ten years, the number of studies producing information on female practitioners is surprisingly low. Moreover, despite the high number of women working in the field, women are positioned as silent subjects in most of the articles. Considering the acknowledgement of public relations as a gendered profession, this neglect in academic studies becomes even more remarkable. Do we think that the main issues related

to female practitioners are already being addressed? Unfortunately, we still have very limited knowledge about female practitioners around the world. Research on women working in public relations should be developed through engaging with practitioners from different countries, backgrounds, status, qualifications and lived experiences.

First of all, when the accumulation of knowledge on the subject is examined, it is seen that the studies mostly originate from countries where public relations practices are well developed. Hence, there is an information gap about female practitioners from countries that public relations is still developing. Although the problems encountered in workplace are similar in many aspects, studies indicate that there are important contextual differences as well as commonalities. It should be also noted that female practitioners are not a homogenous group; their experiences, aspirations, emotions and values differ (Daymon and Demetrious, 2014) and it is important to understand how these gendered experiences intersect with class, race, ethnicity and age.

Besides there is an urgent need to make women both more visible and better heard in academic studies; that means not only exploring challenges that female practitioners face in different regions but also reveal their accomplishments both from historical and today's perspective. This knowledge can be used as a part of public relations education and training, so that future and young professionals can grasp the real conditions of the practice in different contexts and may also be inspired, encouraged or motivated by other women's experiences. Additionally, through uncovering the inequalities and discrimination based on gender in the practice and integrating these experiences as a part of curriculum, public relations education may help to build more ethical and equitable practice.

In order to discuss the role of public relations in the society, it is important to identify public relations practitioners as cultural intermediaries and/or 'discourse technologists' (Motion and Leitch, 1996) and try to understand their life worlds in varied cultural and social contexts (Hodges, 2006) rather than only organizational setting. Considering the weight of the female workforce in the field, gaining insights about their experiences and meaning making styles, we can better understand, analyze and teach public relations practice. Through the empowerment of female practitioners, the contribution of public relations to society can also be strengthened and enhanced.

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Mind the Gap: Female Perceptions and Narratives of Women's Journeys in Communications/PR

By Jenifer Boughey

What's the Story?

"A woman's place is no longer in the home, but in the communication department"
Carolyn G. Cline, Elizabeth L. Toth

"There could be no more important moment to tell stories as a means to bear witness to our world and to change it for the better"
Barbara Ganley

The concept of the gendered nature of the PR profession and the entire Communications Management industry is well established. In most geographies, the gender switch has (long) taken place – more women than men work in Communications/PR, making up to two thirds of all PR professionals (Toth & Cline, 2007). My MBA thesis research set out to chart and document female journeys into (and out of) leadership in Communications/PR using Digital Storytelling (DST). This article provides a summary of its setup and findings.

In an industry where despite its feminisation (Hon et al., 1992; Fröhlich, 2003; Hassenstein, 2016) the most senior leadership positions are still predominantly filled by men and those women who are seen to have 'made it to the top', still earn less than their male counterparts (Wrigley, 2002; Creedon and Cramer, 2007; CIPR, 2017; Zerfass et al., 2017), this research addressed the lack of current female voices in a usually very 'vocal' industry. To fill this gap, it aimed to identify, capture and discuss women's own journeys into PR leadership. In doing so, the main research question asked was:

How do women in Communications/PR tell the story of their journeys – into and/or out of leadership – in the field?

The Story So Far. Theoretical Context and Scope of the Research

Focusing on role enactment of (female) practitioners, feminist theory of PR, in itself heavily based on gender studies, and on leadership and gender (Cline et al., 1986; Hon et al., 1992; O'Neil, 2003; Aldoory & Toth, 2002; Aldoory et al., 2008), the reviewed literature highlights issues around the role, status and influence of the Communications/PR practitioner; gender pay gap; "glass ceiling" (Wrigley, 2002) and leadership; hiring and education; and work-life balance. Although studies captured women's opinions, statements,

feedback and statistics – recommending future research should focus on and draw out women's STORIES (Toth & Grunig, 1993) – the 'original voices' of the participants were 'lost' during analysis.

What's Your Story? Methodology and Research Design

Two main, qualitative, methods were used for this research:

a.   **Lambert's digital storytelling (DST)** to co-create and capture in a three to four minute-long, first-person digital stories (Lambert's Center for Digital Storytelling (CDS), now StoryCenter[1], and the Digital Storytelling project run by BBC Cymru Wales[2] informed this approach), and

b.   **Storytelling, Narrative and Emplotment theory** (Kent, 2015) to interpret the stories thus collected. In doing so, the process of Reflection, Writing, Recording, Production and Celebration (Kershaw & Sanderson, 2017, p. 12f) and most of StoryCenter's "Seven Steps Of Digital Storytelling" (Lambert, 2013, pp. 145-188) were broadly followed. The Seven Steps are: 1. Owning Your Insights; 2. Owning Your Emotions; 3. Finding The Moment; 4. Seeing Your Story; 5. Hearing Your Story; 6. Assembling Your Story; and 7. Sharing Your Story.

This also included application of the methodology in a way that ensured the stories still comprised of the seven components StoryCenter defines for a digital story: (1) Self Revelatory; (2) Personal or First Voice; (3) Lived experience of author told as description of a moment in time; (4) Photos more than Moving Image; (5) Soundtrack; (6) Length and Design; and (7) Intention (Lambert, 2013, pp. 108-111).

Sample size and sampling method

Having aimed for a sample size of five to seven, originally eight research participants were recruited, using a mix of the snowball sampling and an open call for participants for an academic research project at the profession's biggest annual German industry event Kommunikationskongress 2017. Six women completed the entire scripting and production process for their digital stories, two dropped out just before or during the writing of their first draft. Despite the limited sample size there was still a focus on achieving some diversity in the sample on the criteria of age (or length of career respectively); hierarchical position; varied family/marital status and existence of children; and cultural background.

The recommended workshop and group approach (Adams, n.d.; Lambert, 2013; Kershaw & Sanderson, 2017), for which a virtual story circle was also considered, could not be realised as the research participants were geographically dispersed, lived in different time zones and some of them travelled extensively as part of their job. Instead, the – initially eight –

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1   See www.storycenter.org.

2   See http://www.bbc.co.uk/wales/audiovideo/sites/galleries/pages/digitalstorytelling.shtml

women received individual, in-depth face-to-face or telephone briefings that contained many elements of StoryCenter's (a) Introduction to Form & Aesthetics and their (b) Seven Steps. This was followed up by a detailed email reminding the participants of the DST elements discussed and of links to examples of the different facets that had been considered, such as pace, flow, recommended length and imagery used, on the basis of which the participants developed their storyboards.

Most drafts went through several iterations, with the researcher acting as a facilitator, providing feedback and mirroring what 'meaning she was hearing/getting from the story' when reading or listening to it and encouraging the participants to consider the imagery they would want to use to visualise their stories as it was important that the participants were starting not only to 'hear' but also 'see' their story.

Once a relatively final version of the text was ready, the participants recorded their story themselves and provided the audio file to the researcher. In most cases, once they had listened to their own recording, they found it easier to 'see' their own story in their mind's eye so they could find and provide images for it. These were either sent to the researcher/facilitator by email or uploaded by the storytellers into an individual Dropbox folder provided by the researcher, which was dedicated to the production of their digital story. They were also 'logged' into their script by aligning text and images, therefore becoming the storyboard for the editing process. The online video-editing platform WeVideo[3] was used for the production process.

As none of the storytellers had the time to receive a tutorial or formal training for use of the WeVideo tool to acquire the basic skills required to produce and edit their digital stories themselves, only one digital story was produced jointly by the researcher/facilitator and a participant working on the video edit together side by side, at the same time. The other five storytellers provided their audio files, image input and their storyboard using the template created by the researcher, which the researcher/facilitator used to create rough edits that were then reviewed online by the participants. In several iterations the edits were amended, additional images, music and in a few cases ambient sound selected and added. As the storyboarding was done by the women themselves and they had the chance to view the progress online, review the edits and suggest/request changes to the videos, this was still a very participatory and collaborative process.

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3   See www.wevideo.com.

That's Her Story! Research Findings, Analysis and Discusssion

The six digital stories created as part of this research are titled: *Finding the Best in Everyone*, *Freiheit* (Freedom), *Leader*, *Managing My Own World*, *Mistress of My Own Destiny*, and *The Bossy Girl*. Focusing on their own professional journeys, the women narrate and visualise how they became who they are, their professional selves, their identity as a (professional) person identifying facilitators, concerns, and deterrents they met along the way. The research findings suggest that aided by the DST methodology, where the creative storytelling process is as important as the product, the existing themes and issues of role enactment, (technician/manager – pragmatic/leader), "doing it all", leadership style, taking responsibility, success, work-life balance have been redefined and given a new meaning by a new type of heroine:

They want to do a good job and are pragmatic. The six storytellers express wanting to 'do', equating the way they are working and leading to something tangible such as "building something fantastic together", "action", "quality", "pioneer".

They redefine responsibility and leadership. Taking responsibility is what links this female propensity of pragmatic doing to leadership. For the six participants, leadership does not translate into power or influence, being given the top job, building empires and managing as many people as possible. The freedom to call the shots and take the decisions for their own professional and private lives by taking on the responsibility to lead is what they value and see as leadership.

They redefine success and they want to do something meaningful, worthwhile and real. When the pragmatic 'just doing it' attitude that does not shy away from taking responsibility and showing leadership qualities prevails, then success – or what the six storytellers considered success – is not far away. But these women seem to consider something a success only if it has meaning, is worthwhile, measurable, real – to them. And in many cases, this seemed to have had the positive side effect of it making them successful, getting them promoted and letting them advance professionally.

They seek, like and are enablers of change. The six women telling their stories for this research are very positive about change. Even more so, it seems that they are more likely than men to instigate and enable change, to adjust the model or set-up within their professional field – or they choose to change and opt out of the profession altogether.

They redefine empowerment. The results show that a positive and powerful new narrative of the empowered female Communications/PR leader has emerged. The women tell stories of empowerment, of taking the liberty to set their own standards, not to be judged by others and define themselves by what is important to them. Here, empowerment is not having more power or being seen to be more powerful, further up the hierarchy, part of the club, with a seat at the table. This new Communications/PR leader is not

letting herself be defined by the system. Instead, empowerment is the act of 'defining female leadership in Communications/PR and doing it my way'. She is redefining empowerment and effectively empowering herself.

Share Her Story! Implications and Outcomes for Theory and/or Practice

My thesis set out not only to chart and document female journeys into (and out of) leadership in Communications/PR using DST but also aimed to address the lack of current female voices in this typically very 'vocal' industry. By recognising and recording what current and former senior, female Communications/PR professionals see as 'leadership', 'success' and 'career' in their profession, when they give a first-person account of their journeys, tell their "me" stories, in their own voices – the research process gave them a voice and the findings close a gap.

Impact and Implications. Beyond examination and analysis of results, this thesis' practical impact is on three levels:

1. This research confirmed that **by giving women a voice and letting them uncover, connect to and tell their own stories, the process was as important as the product**. In unearthing the stories of successful and "missing" (Barber, 2016; Bridgen, 2016) female leaders in Communications/ PR, the Digital Storytelling process itself empowers the women who participate in the project – the storytellers (Lambert, 2013). This empowerment is facilitated by the process which informs the content and adds meaning to the storyteller's own experience. In the creative story process, the women told stories of how they became who they are, their professional selves, their identity as a (professional) person – they told identity stories (Lambert, 2013). These identity stories have positive, powerful and therefore empowering narratives. By focusing on sharing a "me" story that others can emotionally connect to, the storytellers have to embrace the hero's journey plot and portray themselves as the main character of their transformational journey.

2. **By consuming such empowerment stories of successful and missing female leaders in the field, other female (ex-)practitioners are inspired to tell their stories**. This has a two-fold effect: further empowerment stories would add to a collection of positive empowerment stories for the industry – creating role models which should be used for informing, educating and inspiring future generations of practitioners. The process of generating those new digital stories would then be an empowerment journey for every new storyteller who adds her story to the collection. A group-based storytelling process would also double as a form of networking event that creates a network of peers, as people who have shared the experience of a story circle are very likely to form lasting connections (Lambert, 2013).

3.   A repository of female empowerment stories would form the industry's very own lore and could be accessed by professional communicators – female and male – and academic researchers, thus enhancing education in the field. This research project could be expanded and turned into an initiative or themed story series like those available on www.storycenter.org. This would be moving academic or professional industry body research into to the realm of a "social activist" project. Sponsored, supported and hosted by professional industry associations and/or guided and facilitated by an academic research facility, further storytelling projects and the resulting stories have the potential to act as change agents or catalysts for the community of Communications/PR practitioners, as "not only can the DST process engender transformative experiences for members, the stories themselves have the ability to act as societal boundary-crossing artefacts, to reach community and external stakeholders up and downstream" (Copeland & de Moor, 2017, p. 2).

We Want Stories! Research Evaluation, Limitations and Recommendations

The research concludes that with their transformative power ideally suited for the Digital Age, digital empowerment stories have the potential to act as change agents and catalysts for the Communications/PR community of practitioners and could spark the gender switch at the top "as the millennial generation of women matures, the promise of the digital age to enhance women's leadership is within sight" (Aarons-Mele, 2010, p. 788).

Limitations. It was not possible to conduct a DST workshop so that the storytellers could benefit from the advantages of a shared experience and potentially create more powerful stories. Also noteworthy is that the researcher was not an experienced DST facilitator adding at times to the exploratory character of the project. To minimize bias and reduce influence, the researcher has focused her interaction with the participants on technical guidance rather than story scripting (Lambert (2013).

Future research. This research has produced six powerful stories, both for the participants and others. While it meets its promise to give a 'voice' to women, there is a need to expand the project to include more.

The key recommendation for future research is simple: produce more of these. There could be different approaches to making that happen: professional industry associations and scholars in the field could sponsor, support, host and facilitate Digital Storytelling workshops; this could go as far as including the development of Digital Storytelling capabilities and using the methodology in Communications/PR professional education.

Then there is the option of further developing and refining a Virtual Storytelling approach, building on the first tentative steps in this direction this research has taken. As this form of storytelling is already digital, it lends itself to be taken a step further. This would not only increase its reach and help it

spread more quickly, it would also deliver on the need for flexibility that women working in the industry are almost dependent on.

Research has proven that women in particular are feeling confident and comfortable using tools and applying ways of virtual working that the digital age offers. Moreover, for many women, their virtual, digital community/-ies 'feel/s like home'. Digital networks are called social networks for a reason: they are inclusive. New ways of working anytime, anywhere, and the convergence between home and work life all go a long way to addressing the constant juggling act working 'career' women – and especially mothers – have to perform (Aarons-Mele, 2010, p. 787).

"The Internet empowers women by allowing them to create important professional networks without actually working within positions of power" (Aarons-Mele, 2010, p. 788). Therefore, by virtualising the Digital Storytelling process for women's journeys in the industry, it is extremely likely that it would not only allow those to share in creating empowerment stories who would otherwise be excluded. There is also a particularly good chance that it would facilitate participation from the "missing female leaders" of the Communications/PR industry, i.e. those who have left the industry altogether who might have only minimal to no contact left with the industry but whose stories nevertheless really ought to be captured for their voices to be heard.

"Great leaders transform the world through stories that inspire hope, stability, trust, compassion and authenticity"
Deepak Chopra (cited in Sachs, 2012)

Jenifer Boughey

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Jenifer Boughey is a Corporate & Marketing Communications and Public Relations professional with over 20 years of experience, which she predominantly spent in the IT industry. In her time working for industry heavyweights such as Electronic Data Systems (EDS) and Fujitsu she held numerous Corporate & Marketing Communications as well as Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) leadership positions across different global, regional and legal entities.

A trained journalist, Jenifer holds a BA (Hons) in Media & Communications from the University of Central England, UK, an MA in German, Communication Studies/Journalism and English from the University of Bamberg, Germany, and a MBA in Communication & Leadership from Quadriga University in Berlin, Germany.

Her MBA thesis "Mind the Gap: Female Perceptions and Narratives of Women's Journeys in Communications/PR" questioned, charted and documented female journeys into - and out of - Communications Management and PR using Digital Storytelling. Having taken a break from corporate life to spend more time with her young family, Jenifer is currently considering where her own journey will be taking her. She is yet to tell her own story.

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1   Note that all referenced page numbers relate to viewing this iBook Edition on an iPhone

Gender, Stereotypes and Ageism in Public Relations

By Amelia Reigstad

The influence gender has on women within public relations is important and continues to be a part of global discussions pertaining to inequality, pay discrepancy and leadership positions within organizations. These are significant factors that are limiting women PR professionals from advancement and equality so as part of degree requirements for my Ph.D., I embarked on a study that focused on gender differences in communication styles and their influence on workplace communication and the practice of public relations.

With an overarching goal of bridging the gap between academia and industry, I sought to understand what factors influence how men and women communicate within the public relations industry and what is significant about the relationship between workplace communication and PR. By interviewing 40 public relations professionals in the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and Saint Paul, Minnesota, I was able to determine gender differences in communication styles certainly have the ability to impact workplace communication. Moreover, my research has shown when in action, these communication style differences bring considerable challenges to PR practitioners. Tannen (1990, 1994) pointed out the necessity to recognize the significant differences between how males and females communicate in the workplace as early as 1990, yet PR research has left this mainly unaddressed. My study addressed this gap and in doing so, it revealed that gender, stereotypes and ageism within public relations are significant factors within workplace communication.

Gender

Gender in public relations continues to take prominent space within academic literature, industry publications and global conversations. How ones' gender plays a role in communicating effectively in the workplace, misconceptions surrounding stereotypes and how advantages and disadvantages to being male or female are significant. Within my study[1], participants, both male and female articulated a sense of gender essentialism/biological determinism (Taylor et al., 2012) in their understanding of gender binaries instead of considering gender as a social construct. It is important to note that my study was limited to male and female genders in which the interview participants identified with and the majority of those interviewed spoke specifically about male and female characteristics recognizing gender is a spectrum. Participants expressed an understanding of their gender and associated gender to societal norms and personality traits, and this therefore aligned to

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1   The methodological approach for this study included conducting 40, semi-structured, in-depth interviews that took place over a three-month period from June to September 2017. Male and female PR professionals who were interviewed had varying levels of experience and were categorized into the following: junior (1–5 years) junior to mid-level (6–10 years), mid to senior (11–15 years) and senior level (15+ years). They were either employed within an agency or an internal public relations department.

how their gender was both positively and negatively viewed in the workplace. Practitioners relied on their interpretation of what it meant to be a man or a woman and assigned stereotypical or what they perceived as masculine and feminine personality traits to their gender. By acknowledging their understanding and interpretation of being a man or a woman, participants were able to share their gendered experiences within the workplace. The majority of female practitioners interviewed, perceived themselves as being better communicators than males and felt this was important in public relations because much of PR is about relationship building. There was a widely held belief that female practitioners were generally perceived as being more relatable and open with one another and understand the importance of emotional malleability in interacting with other people. For example, one participant explained,

> *"I learned at an early age as a female within my career to be an observer. I knew the differences between males and females, and it was always expected of me to have an emotional intelligence in engaging with other people," (Female, Junior-Mid Level, Internal).*

It was observed that practitioners have a strong sense of the advantages and disadvantages to being male and female and how this works in relation to how gender is perceived in the public relations industry. Because the industry within the United States is pre-dominantly female at approximately 70% and considered a feminized profession (Grunig et al., 2001), it was interesting that some women within my sample felt empowered in this setting because they were the majority, yet because of their gender, were faced with difficulties such as interacting with their male colleagues and being treated unfairly within the workplace as it pertains to hierarchy and attaining leadership positions. It was clear that my participants felt women and men had different communication styles within the workplace and they categorized styles and traits as stereotypical or having traditional male and female qualities. For example, one practitioner explained,

> *"both men and women have the empathy bone, but women nurture it more because they are rewarded for that. I am much a more emphathetic leader and listen a lot better than men" (Female, Mid to Senior Level, Agency)*

Most of the male participants interviewed felt there were many advantages to being male in an environment that was mostly comprised of women and was actually quite helpful because it meant men are an anomaly within the workplace and this was beneficial. One male participant stated,

> *"when I have been applying for jobs in the past in a department that was heavily weighted towards women, perhaps it is one of the few instances in which the guy gets a little extra consideration," (Male, Senior-Level, Internal).*

Stereotypes

Professionals articulated very clearly the stereotypical traits of both males and females from a communication and personality perspective and how stereotypical behavior causes conflict in the workplace. As stereotyping is a way of representing and judging other people in fixed, unyielding terms and diminishes social standing of those targeted, reducing them to a particular attribute or disposition (Pickering, 2015), it's interesting my interview participants used common words such as aggressive and dominating to stereotypically describe personality and traditional characteristics of males and words such as emotional and whiney to stereotypically describe females. All of these are relatively demeaning and attributes men and women to one disposition and these various stereotypes contribute to hegemonic notions (Connell, 1987) on gender roles, structures and employment practices that disadvantage female PR practitioners.

Interestingly, some of my participants stated that although stereotypes are considered a generalization, there is some objective truth to them because society allows us to be that way due to embedded structures. It was pointed out by one participant that she felt stereotypes are associated with power dynamics within leadership. For example, she articulated that her male superior takes on stereotypical traits such as being dominant and aggressive, yet she recognizes that not all males in leadership positions exuberate this type of management style. I offer the argument that stereotypes are a factor that should not be ignored if we want to understand relationships, identities and performativity at work. Situations or experiences pertaining to stereotypes may not be the same for each and every person nor all the time given different situations, but I postulate based on the conversations with my interview participants about these characteristics, that in some part, being male or being female does match how society validates stereotypical traits and behavior. Stereotypes may even align with the philosophical argument of nature vs. nurture[2] (Galton, 1874) in that both our genes, hereditary factors and environmental variables influence and impact who we are and our personality traits.

In certain cases, people adapt themselves to stereotypical characteristics in certain circumstances (Pickering, 2015) and within social constructions are justifying social relationships. For example, some professionals may be fearful of what will happen if a particular stereotype isn't internalized and conformed to the pressures of society. For example, if a woman spoke out of turn or expressed strong emotion in a meeting, this could be viewed negatively as her behavior isn't conforming to the stereotype of women being more passive and less aggressive. In other situations, and places of employment, different factors could be at play such as women working part-time or on fixed contracts, meaning that female practitioners might fear losing their job. However, in the case of some of my female participants, their struggle was against an oppressed work environment and thus conformed to the female

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2   Galton (1874) was the first scientist to define nature as consisting of "every influence from without that affects [a person] after his birth [including] food, clothing, education or tradition [and] all these and similar influences whether know or unknown," (Galton, 1874, p. 12). He described nurture to refer to the causes of traits that appear uninfluenced by experience (Moore, 2013).

stereotype of being more passive or reserved in certain situations. Needless to say, this contributes to the perpetuation of a particular stereotype for women of being less qualified than their male colleagues which has justified a glass ceiling, therefore presenting an impenetrable barrier in a woman's career (Morrison et. al., 1987).

Ageism and Life Stage

Within my study, I interviewed a wide variety of professionals within different career and life stages. As age is an axis that intersects and forms identities (Edmund and Turner, 2002), it was noted as a factor and shared as a highly individualized personal experience (Davidson, 2012) that my interviewees associated with workplace communication.

Many of the more senior-level practitioners within my sample, identified challenges when communicating with younger colleagues who were in a different life stage and articulated that face-to-face interaction was limited because they were more comfortable communicating via technology. Not that senior-level practitioners do not embrace technology and the use of social media but many interviewees within my sample expressed the need for there to be balance when communicating effectively in the workplace and the importance for those in a younger life stage to recognize when face-to-face communication would produce a better outcome. Although technology has the ability to influence generational divides within the workplace, those in a younger life stage may be more adept at recognizing the positive shift technology has brought to communication and the ability to work at a faster pace while still producing effective work.

One interviewee in particular defined himself as a baby boomer and explained how face-to-face communication through the use of verbal and non-verbal cues was critical to how he interacts on a daily basis. He stated,

> *"women will have more eye contact in certain situations whereas men will have direct eye contact where they're wanting to ensure you understand what they are saying. Men expect you to be listening but won't necessarily be looking at you," (Male, Senior-Level, Internal).*

Because of the differences in how generations communicate there is a potential for conflict and misunderstanding causing a generational communication gap (Venter, 2017). My assertion is that as long as colleagues regardless of what life stage they are in can recognize differences, are empathetic if technological challenges arise pertaining to communication and are adaptable in their choice of how to communicate, practitioners should have the ability to communicate effectively within the work environment.

Life stage of younger practitioners was also discussed in some of the interviews in regard to having a certain level of entitlement despite being early in their public relations careers. One senior-level practitioner explained that new, younger hires expressed entitlement with the attitude of 'what can the company do for me' instead of 'what can I do for the company' and this

was a direct correlation to not understanding how operations work within a business environment. This aligns with some of the examples provided by my interviewees of their colleagues in a younger life stage thinking that they are ready to be managers now, despite either just graduating from college or being fairly new in their career. Perhaps the younger cohorts recognize these struggles within organizations and have reasonable expectations but could take the opportunity to manage them as it pertains to promotion to management quickly and even prioritize career choices rather than focus on immediate rewards and advancement. It may also mean that younger employees who are early in their careers may need to recognize that they are being socialized into the norms of the PR profession (long hours, lower salaries, etc.) and the management culture within the United States public relations landscape. It could also be said that public relations is holding onto 21st century practices and hierarchical, vertical career progression as Adi and Stoeckle (2018) discuss in the popular PR Conversations blog (Yaxley, 2018).

Older respondents could possibly be acclimated to working within organizational cultures that don't necessarily place the same values on working conditions, benefits, etc. and are reacting negatively to any idealism for higher expectations from younger people entering the workforce. Employees are driving change and there is multigenerational divide when it comes to work/life balance and job satisfaction as there more generations in the workforce than ever before (Gilchrist, 2020). From a U.S. workplace culture perspective within my sample, there seemed to be a regional trend within the PR profession that involves practitioners who are early in their career needing to put in the time and work their way up within an organization.

Another issue pertaining to age that affected many of my female interviewees was sexism in the workplace and how men who were in a later life stage mansplained and spoke down to younger women. For example, one female participant explained,

> *"I've experienced sexism, particularly with older male clients and all male leadership teams. Inappropriate comments were made, and I was treated like the misfit in the room. I ended up quitting,"*
> *(Female, Junior to Mid-Level, Agency)*

One male participant agreed that older PR practitioners are challenged when communicating with younger, female practitioners and explained,

> *"It seems older men's perceptions of authority and egos get in the way of treating women fairly in all aspects of the organization,"*
> *(Male, Senior-Level, Internal)*

Women within my sample that experienced sexism within their place of employment were unfortunately victims of a particular management cycle that fosters a work culture where sexism is an appropriate form of behavior in the eyes of older males. These males became adults before the social revolutions of the 1960s and 1970s where it was acceptable to treat women as objects and act in misogynistic ways. With the feminization of the workforce

and gender roles, it certainly would be in the best interest of an organization to be aware of this type of behavior if it is occurring in the workplace and rectify the situation.

Reflecting on the industry as a whole, more women's conferences and employee resource groups are increasingly inviting men to attend in hopes of making gender equality and organizational diversity efforts more successful (Johnson and Smith, 2018). Referred to as tempered radicals – these men are catalysts for change. They challenge organizational structures that disadvantage women while remaining committed to the success of an organization (Meyerson and Tompkins, 2007). There certainly are male professionals who are committed to building relationships with women and pay attention to their own behavior so what if senior leaders and the organizations themselves recognized the importance of being allies to women? Perhaps the elimination of sexism within organizations is possible and healthier workplace cultures created.

In discussing gender stereotypes, it's also important to examine the impact of age stereotypes on women and their careers as it pertains to my study. Age stereotypes are beliefs and expectations about workers based on their age (Hamilton and Sherman, 1994) and for some of the women within my sample, they are disadvantaged for being both older and younger. For example, some of my younger female participants expressed frustration with how they were treated in their organizations by older men who spoke down to them, mansplained and treated them with disrespect. My assumption is that both gender and age stereotypes as well as personal bias may have played a role in this type of behavior as research suggests perceived personality traits of older people plays a key role (Davidson, 2012). Despite working successfully in the public relations industry for many years, having the respect of co-workers and leaders, some of my respondents still were not awarded with leadership positions. Given evidence based on discussions with my female interviewees, my assumption is family commitments and sexism have been barriers to leadership positions but perhaps their age was also a variable that eluded them from being placed in creative, middle level positions.

Information on the Study

Methodology, Sample and Limitations

This study used qualitative research methods of semi-structured, in-depth interviews and thematic analysis. Through this dependent and independent variable relationship, interviews were conducted with public relations practitioners to investigate the research questions and gather and interpret data on what extent gender differences in communication styles influences the relationship between workplace communication and the practice of public relations. Through a purposive, snowball sample, practitioners were contacted, and a request put forth for their involvement in the study.

There were some limitations within the study pertaining to the sample which consisted of 40 public relations professionals (30 women and 10 men) from internal PR departments and agencies within Minneapolis and Saint Paul, Minnesota. Granted I would have liked to have had a more balanced ratio

of professionals taking part in my study but given the feminized profession within the United States, I opted to utilize the participants that were willing to be involved.

As a former public relations practitioner, I was aware of potential bias and the manner in which I asked the interview questions and was also aware of my own gender potentially influencing results as a female researcher. Some of the themes within my results, specifically the observation that the majority of my female interviewees were very quick to articulate their frustrations with males in the workplace, made me question whether my female gender allowed the women within my sample the opportunity to not 'hold back'. Because of an associated women camaraderie, this allowed them the freedom to express their thoughts in a transparent manner given the presumed assumption that I would understand their shared experiences as I too identify as female. Regardless of slight limitations, there is significant value in the research that was conducted, and it brings up similar topics within existing public relations literature.

Reflection

Public relations is a dynamic and ever-changing industry and although my study took place in the United States, it is important, from a global perspective to pay attention to gender differences, stereotypes and ageism within the workplace and adapt as necessary. Within my study, those within the sample thought one's gender (male vs. female) as well as stereotypes were contributing factors to how men and women communicate within the public relations industry as there are distinct differences, perceived advantages and disadvantages of both genders as well as stereotypical traits that impact communication. Some of the men and women within my sample also thought age and gender was a factor when communicating with men and women in the public relations industry and that generational differences and power were key factors. In hopes of bridging the gap between academia and industry, I offer the following considerations and key take-away's:

a. Gender stereotypes have the ability to manifest themselves negatively in a work environment; they are demeaning and attributes men and women to one disposition which may cause conflict.

b. Being more aware and checking in with ones' own personal bias within the workplace may help with communication challenges.

c. By understanding gender and communication styles, it can lead to more productive teamwork resulting in the development of projects/campaigns.

d. Practitioners can look at the status quo in a different light and challenge themselves to communicate more effectively based on gender and life/career stage of their colleagues.

Amelia Reigstad

Amelia Reigstad is a university faculty member, researcher and professional speaker with nearly two decades of industry experience. She has spoken on a global scale and has taught a variety of PR and communications courses across the U.S., Canada, Europe and the U.K. She currently teaches strategic communication at the University of Minnesota and recently completed her Ph.D. at the University of Leicester. She has received local, regional and national media coverage about her Ph.D. study focusing on gender differences in communication styles and their influence on workplace communication and the practice of public relations. Reigstad has presented at numerous professional association conferences in Canada and the U.S. including the Canadian Public Relations Society, the International Association of Business Communicators and is listed in the Vistage Worldwide and YPO Speaker Directory. Through her engaging workshops and training programs, she educates business professionals on organizational effectiveness, diversity and inclusion, women empowerment and the importance of understanding gender differences and communication styles and how this influences workplace communication and increases productivity.

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The 'Acceptable Face of Feminism' in the UK Public Relations Industry: Senior Women's Discourse and Performativity Within the Neoliberal PR Firm[1]

By Liz Yeomans

The UK PR industry is characterized by gender inequalities. While women make up 64% of the those employed in PR, only 36% occupy board level positions and there is a 'gender pay gap' of £5,000–£6,000 which means that men earn more than women particularly at senior levels (CIPR, 2017). In recent years, tackling gender pay and 'unconscious bias' (a bias in favor of people similar to oneself) in hiring and promotion are policy priorities for two professional membership associations (CIPR, 2018; PRCA, 2018). Meanwhile, female PR leaders have spoken out on other gender-related topics such as sexual harassment, particularly in the wake of the #MeToo movement (Parker, 2017).

However, few academic studies have examined contemporary female discourse within the UK PR industry and beyond; in particular how women in leadership positions talk about gender inequalities. My paper, *Is a 'new feminist visibility' emerging in the UK PR industry? Senior women's discourse and performativity within the neoliberal PR firm*, published in *Public Relations Inquiry* in 2019 was among the first to employ an interdisciplinary perspective, drawing on gender sociology, cultural studies and feminist PR literature, to examine feminist discourse in PR. This body of literature, combined with original research data, enabled new avenues for researching feminism in PR. Here I present the main findings and interpretations to pose some questions about emerging feminism(s) in PR.

Historically, PR has been characterized as gender neutral: a 'sexless trade'. This quote is taken from research by Jacquie L'Etang whose interview participants worked in UK postwar PR during the 1950s and 1960s. Yet at the time, there was distinctive gender role segregation in the industry – for example women typically worked on beauty and fashion accounts (L'Etang, 2015). Yaxley, who interviewed women who had entered PR during the 1970s and 1980s, found an absence of 'feminist consciousness' among this group, which included an unwillingness to support younger generations (Yaxley, 2013).

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Unsurprising then, that when the pay discrepancy between men and women was highlighted in a PR Week/PRCA Census report in 2011, it drew two very different responses. One commentator, an agency managing director expressed concern that "there is some degree of disadvantage built in from the start" (referring to entry level positions in agencies) while another agency 'chairman' commented that while she was outraged by the pay discrepancy, she urged caution about the figures "as they could create a hormonal outcry".

But in recent years there seems to have been a shift in attitude. To borrow Rosalind Gill's phrase, a *new feminist visibility* is apparent in PR. This is evidenced by the higher profile of women's networking organizations (e.g. Women in PR https://womeninpr.org.uk, Global Women in PR https://globalwpr.com and others) as well as the gender pay and flexible working policies of the professional associations. However, the ability for individual women leaders to speak out against injustices has doubtless been facilitated by a more conducive media discourse on pay inequalities as well as coverage of the #MeToo movement and #TimesUp hashtag campaigns, drawing attention to sexual harassment across high profile industries, notably entertainment (Langone, 2018).

One could argue that women's networking organizations do not suggest an emerging feminist visibility at all. To begin with, networking associations related to PR in the UK only admit senior women to their ranks. And a cursory look at the websites' visual imagery might further suggest exclusive 'clubs' in that the women depicted tend to meet specific standards of beauty, ethnicity, class and demeanour (Elias, Gill and Scharff, 2017). Gill (2016, p. 617) argues that such examples of 'popular feminism' encourage women to "work on the self" rather than collectively tackle injustice.

Catherine Rottenberg (2014), who authored a paper on *The Rise of Neoliberal Feminism*, critiques Sheryl Sandberg's (Facebook COO) best-selling 'manifesto' *Lean In* (Sandberg, 2013) as particularly symbolic of a neoliberal, individuated feminism that replaces mainstream liberal feminist ideas of social inequality. But how far are these ideas present or absent in senior women's discourse in PR?

Study

My study was undertaken during 2016, before the #MeToo movement gained traction. Seven interviewees were white, senior PR women aged between 40 and 59. Four participants were involved in women's networking organizations. The women I interviewed either ran their own agencies or occupied board positions of larger agencies. I also undertook short periods of observation in three agencies and so was able to witness meetings and interactions first-hand. As part of a wider project on emotional labor/emotion management, participants were questioned on personal career experiences, everyday professional relationships, training and mentoring, and the meaning of their role, including being a woman leader.

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To analyze the interview transcripts, I used a discourse analytical approach drawn from social psychology. In this study *discursive repertoires* refers to patterns of talk and common tropes used when discussing gender in the workplace, as well as how participants talked about identity (Edley, 2001; Gill et al., 2017). The concepts I used to interpret my findings were *neoliberal feminism*[2] (Rottenberg, 2014) *postfeminist sensibility*[3] (Gill, Kelan and Scharff, 2017) and *performativity*[4] (Golombisky, 2015). These concepts were used as critical lenses for interrogating discourses, with the purpose of *understanding* phenomena, not generalizing findings.

My three research questions were:

1. How do senior women in PR agencies, when discussing their career experiences and professional relationships, construct identities in relation to feminism and gender equality?

2. Does the emerging feminist visibility in PR, discussed in relation to women's networking, signal potential for transformative change? (Golombisky, 2015).

3. *Or,* is PR characterized by an individuated 'neoliberal feminism' (Rottenberg, 2014) and postfeminist identity (Rodgers et al., 2016; Edwards, 2018) which limits strategies for change?

Findings

Balance

The discourse of 'balance' was distinctive across the interviews, with the most obvious association being that of balancing running a business with home life, usually interpreted as work-family conflict (Sørensen, 2017). Three participants constructed identities as women with parental responsibilities and the need to achieve a balance. Here, Participant 4 illustrates her dilemma as MD of her own successful PR firm as well as a parent and household manager.

> *"As a woman, being a mum I think has definitely altered my outlook on flexible working [...] At home I am still the primary carer and so I shoulder a lot more of the household responsibilities, despite my continual efforts to adjust that balance."*

The discourse of tension between work and home life also underpinned two 'crisis' meetings that I attended. These directors' meetings were called to discuss the sudden departure of a highly experienced woman board

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2   Rottenberg (2019) argues that neoliberal feminism is "a particular variant of feminism that has emerged and become dominant on the Anglo-American cultural landscape in the past decade. This feminism is a hyper-individualising feminism, which exhorts individual women to organize their life in order to achieve "a happy work-family balance." The neoliberal subject recognizes inequalities, argues Rottenberg, but "converts" structural inequalities to individual issues.

3   According to Gill et al (2017, p. 228) "There are a number of broadly agreed upon features of postfeminism as a distinctive sensibility: a focus upon empowerment, choice and individualism; the repudiation of sexism and thus of the need for feminism alongside a sense of 'fatigue' about gender; notions of make-over and self-reinvention/transformation; an emphasis upon embodiment and femininity as a bodily property; an emphasis on surveillance and discipline; a resurgence of ideas of sexual difference."

4   The concept of gender as performativity (as opposed to a cultural marker of biological difference), originates from the work of Rakow (1986, 1989) and Butler (1990). According to Golombisky (2015, p. 408) performativity "explains the way people are hailed to enact their multiple identifications, as visible and invisible": in other words, it is a communicative act.

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director. While no clear reasons for resignation had been given by the director herself, much speculation ensued at these meetings. The implicit issue was that balancing two high achieving careers – that of the director and her husband, together with the responsibility of parenthood – had proven too challenging. From this account, one is left to question whether such speculation would have taken place had the director been a man, suggesting persistent perceptions of gender roles. Reflecting on my own career experience, I found myself judging the departed director through the lens of liberal feminism: did she not take her career responsibilities seriously enough? A researcher adopting the neoliberal position might have supported the director's right to pursue her individual desires: perhaps choosing to be at home with her child, albeit from a possible position of privilege that may offer actual choice (Sørensen, 2017).

Networking

While networking was discussed in terms of mentoring and supporting others, it also reflected some participants' personal need for career support, echoing Catherine Rottenberg's critique of neoliberal feminism as being concerned with 'own particular development'. Networking is a neoliberal concept, which involves intentionally pursuing contacts for personal gain (Eagleton-Pierce, 2016, p. 127). Participant 2, at mid-career, discussed a women's networking organization in positive terms for what it could offer both her and her team.

> *"We found it so inspiring and so every year now, we send six to 10 girls on that, it's like a one day conference and there's like speed dating sessions and things like that."*

But networking was not discussed in an equally positive light. Participant 6, also at mid-career, could not see any benefit from a popular women's networking organization.

> *"not my cup of tea because it's just a load of women moaning about this glass ceiling and you just look around and think 'you all own your own companies. What are you complaining about?' But a lot of them have sold their agencies to big companies and then they're not allowed to join the board. So you just think 'well why did you sell it then?'"*

Here, the discourse is particularly individualized: "not my cup of tea" expressing a lack of common ground with women in similar positions. Her rejection of the need for collective support in tackling the glass ceiling: "just a load of women", aligns with the notion of *"gender fatigue"*, a postfeminist "common sense" that gender equality is no longer an issue (McRobbie, 2009). Nevertheless, the discourse presents a contradiction, which is indicative of what Gill describes as a postfeminist sensibility (Gill, 2016). The comment "they're not allowed to join the board" hints at the recognition of patriarchal structures.

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Sex discrimination and gender role expectations

Patriarchal attitudes and openly sexist cultures were discussed as prevalent across the PR industry among four participants. The elevated positions and remoteness of some male actors from the lives of women drew the most criticism as can be seen from the quote below which hints at class and wealth as well as sex discrimination, particularly within a specific sector of PR.

> "*there is a generation of men – the 'Boomasaurs' – more in the city/financial side of PR who need to go with the times. Until they do we won't see real change. They have a house in the city and country and no idea what it's like for women working in an environment that continues to operate under male norms and ideas of equality.*"

Connecting with other senior-level women through networks was a way of sharing common frustrations. The term "unconscious bias" was used in CIPR research conducted in 2017. This referred to the practices by some agencies that favored men in hiring and promotion, contributing to the gender imbalance at board level. Another participant remarked that a woman's marital status or age – irrespective of family commitments – could be the basis of "unconscious bias"; and beyond that, one can surmise, perhaps, their ethnicity and sexuality. And yet while there was some recognition of sex discrimination in PR among my participants, strategies for change were fairly low key and accepting of the status quo. For example, two participants, who occupied board positions in large agencies, spoke of consciously encouraging younger colleagues, particularly women, to speak up at meetings during which senior male voices were dominant. This suggested that their ability to influence company policies to eradicate "unconscious bias" was limited.

The intricate, conscious performativity presented below is part of a *repertoire of acceptance of the status quo*. For participant 5, despite her firm's espoused progressive ethos, client meetings still reflected the client's demands and expectations of gender roles: "I know it's not right, but it's my reality".

> "*I'm setting up a meeting now because I need a bloke in the room, so I'm taking my CEO [...] to be the bloke and the grey hair in the room.[...] I know it's not right, but it's my reality.* "

Denial of sexism

A further discursive repertoire was the *denial of sexism* all together (Gill et al., 2017), a common trope in postfeminist discourse. What is noticeable here, is that individual career experiences, such as sexism, are not only consigned to the past but continued structural discrimination is unrecognized.

> "*Maybe when I started in PR: in a way, that comment, 'go and become a secretary, dear' sort of summed it up, and I think it was a little bit more chauvinist then and there was definitely an expectation that you should be a little bit of a dolly and chat up everyone, but I don't think that's the case anymore at all.*"

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Entrepreneurial identities were strongly enacted in this study. While this is not surprising, in that all participants were senior leaders in the agency sector, it is worthwhile noting that entrepreneurship itself is gendered masculine or 'gender neutral' (Hamilton, 2013; Lewis, 2006). Organizational theorist Patricia Lewis (2006) found in her study of women entrepreneurs a gender-blindness, as well as a strong belief in merit and the neutrality of business. Two participants were slightly defensive when I asked whether being a woman managing director made a difference to their professional interactions.

> *Participant:* "*No. I don't think so. I think communications generally attract more women than men whereas marketing is more male.*"

> *Participant: (Pause). "I don't think it does, no, I don't think it does, I mean it's down to someone's personality and how they approach things rather than their gender.*"

Sex difference: women as the superior sex

Finally, the repertoire of *sex difference*, which positions women as the advantaged or superior sex, is a further postfeminist repertoire highlighted by Gill et al. (2017). One participant referred to her female employees as "better organized" than their male colleagues. One solution was to offer her male employees a book on how to improve their productivity (itself indicative of the neoliberal requirement to work on the self). Here, the stereotype of woman as "natural born communicator" (Fröhlich, 2004) is invoked. While women assert their superior skills above those of their male colleagues, in doing so they "essentialize" communication and other PR skills such as organization and time-management as inherent to female biology, thus potentially positioning themselves as limited in other ways.

Discussion and conclusion

In questioning whether there is a 'new feminist visibility' (Gill, 2016) in public relations, I employed an interdisciplinary perspective that draws on gender sociology, cultural studies and feminist PR literature in order to open up new avenues for researching neoliberalism and postfeminism in PR, hitherto underexplored. Although it could be argued that a 'new feminist visibility' is emerging in the UK PR industry, evidenced by the activities of women's networking organizations, together with gender pay and flexible working policies developed by professional associations, we must interrogate these apparently progressive moves. While it is plausible to suggest that PR is experiencing emerging feminism, missing from historical accounts in the UK, such an assessment may be optimistic in terms of feminist, transformative change proposed by Golombisky (2015) and others who see PR fulfilling a broader emancipatory role for women, including those who are the targets of PR campaigns.

The PR agency sector is deeply intertwined with neoliberal capitalism and promotional culture (Miller and Dinan, 2000; Cronin, 2018). Therefore, the modes of feminism enacted call upon women to provide for their

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own, individualized needs and aspirations: to achieve a balancing act that does not threaten the status quo either at work or at home, which Gill (2016, p. 618) refers to as the 'acceptable face of feminism'. Even though sexism within the PR agency sector was recognized by some participants in this study, inequalities in everyday agency practice were left unchallenged or tackled through relatively low-key individual actions, rather than influencing or setting board-level policies that could be used to challenge discrimination. Women's networking associations, currently focused on putting more senior women on boards through mentoring and social activities, appear to be successful in achieving their missions. But I argue that they could do more by adopting feminist advocacy approaches, such as inclusive membership schemes, and taking on a broader campaigning role to tackle social injustice for women in general.

The findings of this study are limited to a small, purposive sample of senior female agency practitioners in the UK. Further research should seek participation from a more diverse sample of women to open up conversations about PR's potential to address not just PR women's individual and collective career advancement but social justice issues for women globally, including those women who are the targets of PR campaigns (Vardeman-Winter et al., 2013; Golombisky, 2015).

Liz Yeomans

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Women and Men Have Different Career Patterns:
How This Affects the Public Relations Industry Gender Pay Gap

By Talia Beckett Davis

Despite the revolution in the numbers of working women, many are blocked in their attempts to gain access to higher public relations positions. Although more women are entering managerial roles with increasingly appropriate credentials for upward mobility, few of them reach high level positions and they encounter a glass ceiling (Women in PR North America, 2017).

In the public relations field, most roles are held by women; however, women's public relations careers remain very different from men in the field. Many women have nonlinear careers, some take time off, and have a difficult time maintaining continuous employment, which has traditionally been a condition for career success. The financial penalties for taking time off to manage life's other commitments, such as caring for young children, can be severe. When women are ready to re-enter the workforce, they find it challenging to get back on the career fast track. As a result, many women in public relations are leaving their career jobs to start their own agencies in order to create a flexible work schedule. Employers are then left with a limited talent pool to fill their positions. An outdated career model is leaving many women unable to break the glass ceiling and it's impacting their earnings over the course of their career.

The aim of this article is twofold. The first objective is to determine why women and men have different career patterns. Second, we are interested in understanding why some of these factors are influencing the pay gap that exists in the public relations field. Although the public relations field has strong, ambitious and talented women in key leadership positions, there are many aspiring leaders that are choosing part-time employment and divide their time between work and family obligations (Women in PR North America, 2016).

Women in Public Relations Career Patterns

Empirical research was conducted by the Organization of Canadian Women in Public Relations and American Women in Public Relations (Women in PR North America) on a sample of 100 female public relations practitioners (Women in PR North America, 2016). The women were contacted through email and asked to answer a questionnaire to determine if they have taken time-out from their careers. The survey consisted of 10 questions that the respondents had to answer online anonymously.

In order to gain a better insight into the challenges that women face in their careers, semi-structured interviews were conducted with five female public relations professionals from the main target group of the Women in PR North America survey (2016). Interviews were conducted in Vancouver, BC, Canada, and lasted approximately 15 minutes each. Answers were recorded by note-taking, and the interviews were filmed as part of a live event in Vancouver, BC, Canada.

The results support the hypothesis that women have more nonlinear careers than men, and that their upward mobility is influenced by their age, education and industry. There are too many women that leave their careers for a lifestyle change as a result of a lack of workplace flexibility. These women are ambitious and well-educated, but they have other lifestyle commitments. The old career model doesn't work for them, so they are creating their own career models.

The survey data demonstrated that, 72% took a voluntary time out from work for an average of 1–2 years. Most of these women were between the ages of 30–39 years old, with either a bachelor's degree or graduate degree. This is a key age in determining a woman's future career path.

60% of respondents took time off for childcare and 40% took time off to pursue further education. Another 40% of respondents said that they no longer found their work satisfying and pursued alternative career paths. 90% of respondents indicated that they would change career paths to find enjoyment from their line of work. This does not indicate that the respondents did not find a career in public relations fulfilling, but many wanted more flexibility in their careers, and this differed by industry sector. Typically, a public relations practitioner works outside of the 9 to 5 office environment and technology enhancements have increased the need for workers to always be available to clients or to respond to media requests.

The Public Relations Gender Pay Gap

Women in PR North America collaborated on an international *Gender Pay Gap and Work Life Balance* survey with sector group Global Women in PR, which revealed a gender pay gap of $21,174 CDN in the public relations industry (2016). A gender pay gap means the difference between the amount of money that women and men earn for doing the same work, and this research study was aimed specifically at the public relations industry in 12 countries from around the world.

The survey was sent to over 2,500 agencies and was facilitated by leading market research agency One Poll. The findings revealed that men (36%) are more than twice as likely as women (16%) to reach the boardroom; that women have real confidence issues about asking for a promotion or pay raise and that balancing child care and work commitments is challenging for both parents (73%), but especially women (78%).

A secondary survey sent to women in public relations in 12 countries revealed that although women represented two-thirds of the public relations industry,

78% of the CEOs in the top 30 PR agencies worldwide are men and they occupy 62% of seats at the PR boardroom table (Women in PR North America, 2017). The data collected in North America highlighted the fact that very few female public relations professionals make it to the top of the profession. Comparing like for like, the average salary for men in PR is US $61,284 (CDN $76,365) compared to women US $55,212 (CDN $68,799), revealing a gender pay gap of US $6,072 (CDN $7,566) in 2017.

By far the biggest gender pay gap is at the boardroom level. There is a staggering gap amongst the highest earners, with more than double the number of men (28%) earning over US $150,000 (CDN $186,915) compared to 12% of women. When asked if they think they will reach the top of the career ladder – 28% of men believe they will 'definitely' get there, whereas only 18% of women responded with the same level of certainty (Women in PR North America, 2017).

The wage gap will continue to persist until more women in public relations move into senior leadership positions. Ironically, many Americans are still more likely to say they would prefer a male boss (33%) to a female boss (20%) in a new job, according to a Gallup survey (Riffkin, 2014).

Many executives are involved in hiring and salary decisions and generally earn more money. However, the public relations workplace does not appear to be more gender equal as we get older – 36% of women believe the public relations industry is ageist, compared with 25% of men (Women in PR North America, 2017).

The reasons for the gender pay gap are complex; it is not new, and it is not unavoidable. We need to take action to implement solutions to ensure that women are not missing out and they are earning what they are worth, particularly in the public relations field.

Through my own conversations with women in public relations, some suggested that gender pay inequality still exists as women do not negotiate their starting salaries as much as men. This is important because the way that you negotiate your salary will have a long-term impact on your earning potential and future pay raises.

To help change this, Google reportedly bases its salaries on the market rate for a specific job, rather than an employee's previous salary (Block, 2016) and Reddit announced that it will no longer allow job candidates to negotiate salaries (Feintzeig & Silverman, 2015).

The Confidence Gap

One noticeable finding in the Women in PR North America study was the confidence gap. Twice as many women (26%) say they are 'not confident' asking for a promotion or pay rise, compared to 13% of men.

While men often feel 'supported' to speak up about their work, women fear rejection. However, in order to close the gender pay gap, we need women to speak up about the value of their work to an organization. Especially in

the public relations field, communicating your worth will give you greater visibility, which will help to drive confidence.

"Women dominate the mid-level PR ranks, doing much of the day-to-day heavy lifting, and women are more often in command at smaller-size agencies that they have founded," explains Wendy Marx in her article for Fast Company (2014).

While the public relations profession is heavily female and many women own smaller consultancies, women entrepreneurs are far less likely to hire people to help them. They are sending a message that they are fine with doing all the work by not delegating as a business owner. This is detrimental to their success as they are not showcasing their true talents by doing 'busy work' and not focusing on making more money.

To help combat the gender pay gap, both men and women need to be more transparent about what they earn in the public relations field. The government also needs to take action to address the gender pay gap. In Ontario, Canada, the government introduced Bill 2013, Pay Transparency Act, 2018 (Flynn, 2018).

The Bill creates certain requirements for employers regarding compensation information and its disclosure to employees and potential employees. For example, the Pay Transparency Act states that

"every employer with 100 or more employees and every prescribed employer shall collect the prescribed information for the purposes of preparing, no later than May 15 each year, a pay transparency report that complies with the requirements in the regulations and that contains the prescribed information relating to the employer, the employer's workforce composition and differences in compensation in the employer's workforce with respect to gender and other prescribed characteristics" (Flynn, 2018).

According to Fay Faraday (2018), labour and human rights lawyer in Toronto and co-chair of the Ontario Equal Pay Coalition,

"pay transparency laws require employers to disclose anonymized wage data by sex showing pay for each occupation, employment status, and distribution throughout the company hierarchy."

In the United States there are several laws that mandate equal pay for the same work. However, despite these laws, pay inequality still exists. Over the course of a woman's public relations career, women and their families are being shortchanged. According to the Wage Project (2018), it's costing the average woman between $700,000 and $2 million.

In addition, these assessments were reflected in a survey Maclean's and Insights West conducted to gauge public attitudes on the gender wage gap. According to the research, out of 875 working Canadians polled, "only 11% of women said they've tried negotiating a higher salary because of a perceived disparity with a male colleague (only 41 per cent of those who tried were successful)." Maclean's states that "more than half those polled

believe maternity leave plays a major role in exacerbating wage inequality in Canada" (McIntyre, 2018).

An Outdated Career Model: Why Companies Need to Be Flexible and Supportive

Companies that are taking the time to be truly inclusive will have a competitive advantage when it comes to attracting the best public relations talent. When we look at the typical woman's career pattern, women have a strong increase in their career success after the age of 35. This is typically after many women have taken a break to manage other commitments, such as to care for young children or elderly relatives.

My own journey as a woman working in the public relations field highlights some of the challenges described in this article. A few years ago, I looked like a rising success story, but my lifestyle was about to change as I entered motherhood. I worked as a communications executive at an international business firm, I was a highly accomplished with a master's degree level education and an impressive track record in the corporate environment. When I was pregnant, I knew that I had to pursue a flexible career path and I created Women in PR North America to connect with other career women. I was preparing to take a time out from my career to care for a young child and the rigid structure of the corporate environment no longer worked. It was not unusual for me to be at a work event until 10 p.m. and then back at the office the next day for a 7:30 a.m. meeting. Generally, those meetings were repetitive, and they could have been held remotely.

I remember the exact moment that made me decide to leave the corporate environment for good. After my son was born and he was in daycare, I was unable to get to the office before 8:00 a.m. as the daycare was not yet open and I had a long commute into the city. My boss – the CEO of the company – called a regular 7:30 a.m. meeting and he was not flexible in changing the meeting time. It was made clear that I was expected to be available at the office between the hours of 7:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m., which would leave very little time for my child. There was no option to work from home or work flexible hours. My boss had a very successful career, and a wife that stayed home to care for his own child. He did not understand the realities of being a working mother and I felt frustrated by his thoughtlessness.

I saw this as an opportunity to take the leap into full time self employment. I now had the time to pursue my public relations consulting and volunteer in my field. I no longer felt divided between my work and family commitments as I was able to manage my own schedule.

My personal story is not rare; there are countless women voluntarily leaving their corporate jobs. How can companies retain women in public relations with family commitments and how can they help these women re-enter the workforce? To start, companies need to offer support and flexibility to retain talented workers or they will go elsewhere. There are companies that are creating attractive offers to recruit and retain women leaders long-term.

For example, *HERE Technologies Women's Initiative Network (WIN)* connects female employees with mentors and sponsors. WIN also organizes an annual global tech event called WITness that provides a platform for women at HERE to share technical, business, career and personal knowledge and insights (Gibbs, 2018).

According to Deloitte, women who have a sponsor are 119% more likely to have their ideas developed. In fact, research indicates that women who have sponsors tend to soar – 37% are more likely to ask for a raise, and they are 200% more likely to see their ideas implemented due to the increased visibility a sponsor provides (Shaikh et al., 2019). If a young woman can see that a career in public relations is achievable, her own chances of success will increase. This can be as simple as offering flexibility and offering opportunities for growth regardless of family commitments.

Corporate management and company CEO's need to be aware that not all female executives have help at home to take care of family obligations. Amazon lets parents donate up to six weeks of their paid leave for fathers and 20 weeks for birth mothers to their partners if your partner doesn't have paid leave. Netflix offers a generous parental leave policy, where new parents can take up to 12 months of leave. Netflix also offers an allowance through Carrot to help new parents cover the costs of the family forming journey (Molla, 2018). Snap helps to cover the costs for family planning and will pay up to $40,000 for infertility treatment or egg-freezing and up to $80,000 toward surrogacy (Ro, 2019).

Levi Strauss takes it a step further and offers eight weeks of paid time off per year to help employees care for an immediate family member with a serious health condition.

> *"Some of the most important investments we make are in the well-being of our employees. We are introducing paid family leave to offer our employees the flexibility to care for ill family members without worrying about the stability of their job or finances," said Chip Bergh, president and chief executive officer of Levi Strauss & Co (Fish, 2020).*

In today's corporate environment, recruiters and employers still question an employment gap on your resume. In fact, it's extremely challenging to find a job when you aren't currently working. What doesn't make sense is how a time-out in your career can cancel out a successful career track record. To help professionals' step back on the career track, NBCUniversal created the Act Two career relaunch program. The program offers a 6-month paid, fixed-term role for experienced professionals returning to the workforce after taking time off for personal reasons such as caregiving. The program is open to women and men who have at least 5 years of professional experience and have been out of the paid workforce in a corporate environment for at least 2 years. (NBCUniversal, 2020).

Similarly, PayPal has a Recharge program, that encourages skilled workers who have taken a career break for personal or family reasons to feel equipped to return to the workforce. The program offers the opportunity to participate in a bootcamp and apply for a 16-week paid program geared

toward helping qualified employees make a smooth transition back into the workforce. (PayPal, 2020).

Although there are companies that are getting creative to retain women, the traditional career model still hasn't changed. Many high-level corporate job opportunities remain full-time and face-to-face. There is still the expectation for employees to be in the office or available for more than 40 hours per week and this is affecting the gender pay gap. As more companies start to adopt a remote working policy, this could have a positive influence on working mothers in the public relations industry and help to eliminate the glass ceiling.

Summary

▶ Many women in public relations are leaving their career jobs to start their own agencies in order to create a flexible work schedule.

▶ An outdated career model is leaving many women unable to break the glass ceiling, so they are creating their own career models, and this is impacting their earnings over the course of their career.

▶ The financial penalties for women taking time off to manage life's other commitments, such as caring for young children, can be severe.

▶ When women are ready to re-enter the workforce, they find it challenging to get back on the career fast track.

▶ The wage gap will continue to persist until more women in public relations move into senior leadership positions.

▶ Many executives are involved in hiring and salary decisions and generally earn more money.

▶ To help combat the gender pay gap, both men and women need to be more transparent about what they earn in the PR field.

▶ Companies that are taking the time to be truly inclusive will have a competitive advantage when it comes to attracting the best public relations talent.

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Burnout Amongst Female Public Relations Practitioners

By Amanda Holdsworth

I selected public relations for a career in the late-1990s because of the emphasis on writing and relationship-building, as well as the opportunity to have a flexible schedule where no two days would be the same.

Eventually, my PR-specific roles morphed into the all-encompassing "communications" position, meaning my office handled not just public relations activities but also marketing, website development, graphic design, internal communications, events, community relations, public affairs, and even, publications and advertising. Once social media came along, issues and crisis management activities rapidly increased, and we found ourselves dealing with more and more incidents after hours and on weekends. In fact, after too many work interruptions during vacations, I went several years without taking one because I did not want to waste my precious paid time-off (PTO) days working.

Compound that with the fact that, like many in the profession, I became a mom. Twice. I no longer had the desire to stay in the office past 5 p.m., partially because I wanted to get home to my family and partially because daycare closed at 6 p.m. and I could not be late. In fact, in the United States, where I now live, 71.4% of public relations managers are women (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019) and, in the U.K., 67% of all PR professionals are women (Public Relations and Communications Association, 2019); and although statistics on the number of working mothers in PR are unsubstantiated, we are looking at a large percentage of professionals trying to balance work and home.

My story

Despite the added stressors of becoming a working mom, I surprisingly found myself becoming more efficient and focused; I had things I needed to get done so I could get home and spend an hour or two with my children before bedtime. In fact, my performance accelerated so quickly that I was once promoted while on maternity leave, and at another organization, I was promoted at seven months pregnant.

But, as many workers have experienced, more success brought more responsibility. My supervisors knew that if anyone could get a project done, I could, and the work kept piling on. I was afraid to say, "no," because I felt I owed it to the organization for believing in me and not punishing me for leaving at 5 p.m.

After a particularly brutal six-month stretch of work where I was hired to re-build an entire department and develop a new communications strategy

for a large non-profit, I broke. I was working 60 or more hours each week, in the final year of my doctorate with a toddler at home who did not sleep more than a three-hour stretch at a time. The turning point came when my kindergartener was being honored with an award at a professional sporting event and our family had to leave because I got called back into the office at 7 p.m. to handle a crisis.

I was physically, mentally, and emotionally drained. My three days of crisis management work was not recognized, nor did I receive a day off to recharge; in fact, I did such a great job, I was "rewarded" with additional assignments.

At that point, I seriously considered leaving the profession, and I knew I wasn't alone, as I noticed that several of my female colleagues had left their communications roles. As I began to delve into the root cause as part of a research study I conducted, one term kept coming up in my one-on-one interviews: burnout.

What is burnout?

On May 25, 2019, the World Health Organization (WHO) added burnout as an official occupational phenomenon to its International Classification of Diseases handbook. Defined as, "...resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed," WHO noted that burnout is characterized by three dimensions:

1.   Feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion;

2.   Increased mental distance from one's job, or feelings of negativism or cynicism related to one's job; and

3.   Reduced professional efficacy (World Health Organization, 2019).

Burnout typically occurs when you feel overwhelmed, emotionally and mentally depleted, and unable to keep up with ongoing demands at work (Capritto, 2019). As stress continues to mount, you may feel hopeless, disinterested, and resentful when it comes to your work life.

Why are PR practitioners prone to burnout?

Picture this: the year is 1999. I just wrapped up my PR internship and picked up a letter of recommendation from my supervisor. Among the standard niceties, such as, "hard working," "excellent writing skills," and, "team player," was a standout comment: "...and Amanda even used her own personal internet resources to conduct research for our company."

When was the last time someone thanked you for using your own personal resources to do your job (and without extra compensation)?

Now, keep in mind that this was more than 20 years ago. We still sent press releases via fax. Cell phones were only used for talking on. Social media did not exist, and your home internet service was limited to a certain number of hours online each month. The fact that I used a portion of my 10 hours

of personal, monthly internet access for a job was a big deal at the time.

Compare that to today's world where the pressure for practitioners to be connected 24 hours a day, seven days a week is only increasing due to the rapid advances in technology and societal habits.

In addition, research conducted by the Public Relations and Communications Association (PRCA) indicated that "many of the characteristics of PR—24-hour news cycle, the pressing deadlines, the immediacy of social media, and the 'always on' culture—directly contribute" to burnout amongst PR professionals (Camgoz, 2020). Moreover, the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) 2019 State of the Profession report noted:

> *"The results point to a profession which is not only stressful to work in but fails to provide support to those living with a mental health condition. The data also suggests public relations plays an active role in damaging the mental health of practitioners"* (p. 32).

Exploring the issue further, a recent study conducted by the PRCA and PRWeek found that 59% of public relations respondents cited a heavy or unmanageable workload as being a cause of stress (Harrington, 2019). This statistic was echoed by the one-on-one interviews with female communicators I conducted in 2019 where I heard, in each conversation, that common causes of their burnout included the fact that practitioners were expected to be both "reactive and proactive" and they did not "have enough people on staff."

Why are female practitioners especially prone to burnout?

The women I interviewed also all noted that they wish they had received early career guidance on how to set boundaries, stand up for themselves, and how to say "no." It is dangerous to make assumptions based on a small sample size of five individuals, but these initial indicators warrant future research that compares the signals and guidance male and female practitioners receive throughout their careers.

Additionally, as sociologist Caitlyn Collins found after she spent five years studying parenthood in four wealthy western countries, working mothers are often up against social, societal, and cultural structural challenges that they alone cannot shift (Escalante, 2019). For example, Collins noted that although Sweden is frequently highlighted as a country with a strong support for families, the "ideal of motherhood" adds additional pressure to Swedish women (2019). Contrast that with the United States, of which, Collins stated, "is an outlier among Western Industrialized countries for its lack of support for working mothers" (2019).

Collins further posits that there is a cultural conflict for American women between being a devoted worker and one with a strong devotion to her children:

"Women who are committed to their careers but take too much time away for their family are thought to violate the work devotion schema, while those who avoid or delegate their familial commitments violate the family devotion schema. The cultural ideal of motherhood is an all-absorbing devotion to her children as the source of her life's meaning, creativity, and fulfillment"
(Collins, 2019, p. 14).

Although it is recognized that not all female PR practitioners are mothers or caregivers, research on working mothers and/or caregivers should be considered when further exploring causes of burnout and mental health issues.

The importance of recognizing symptoms of burnout

Stressors can arise from many aspects of our lives, both personally and professionally. It is inevitable that at one time or another, we are juggling multiple, demanding priorities with little to no relief or end in sight.

It is increasingly important for senior practitioners to recognize the symptoms of burnout in both themselves and their reports for the following reasons:

1. **We should care enough about our teams and ourselves to understand when it might be time to slow down or step back.** In the 2019 CIPR State of the Profession survey, 23% of (n=1,503) respondents who discussed concerns about their mental health with a manager said that nothing happened as a result of those conversations. How do we expect to retain talent if we do not create a culture of caring, empathy, and trust?

2. **Early intervention can help mitigate potential mental health triggers and additional stressors.** The CIPR survey also found that 23% of PR practitioners said they've taken sickness absence from work on the grounds of stress, anxiety, or depression, while 21% stated they had a diagnosed mental health condition (2019).

How to help prevent burnout as an individual

Susan David, founder of the Harvard/McLean Institute of Coaching and author of Emotional Agility (2016), told the Harvard Business Review,

"Think about the [behaviors] you're modeling. If you're running from meeting to meeting and don't have enough time in the day to breathe, what message does that send? Set a good example by making downtime a priority. Show your team that you don't always operate in full-throttle mode at the office"
(Knight, 2019).

In addition to practicing what you preach, incorporate other small, but purposeful practices into your leadership routine, such as:

► **Encouraging your employees to take lunch breaks away from their desks as much as possible.** According to a 2017 survey of 1,600 working adults by Tork as part of the Take Back the Lunch Break program, 90% of North American employees stated that taking lunch breaks helps them feel refreshed and ready to get back to work (Kohll, 2018).

► **If they are looking stressed or frustrated, suggest they get up and take a walk.** Even short breaks increase both creativity and innovation (NPR, 2015).

► **Refraining from emailing, messaging, texting, or calling your employees on the weekend or during their vacations unless it is an emergency.** Emails can be scheduled in Gmail or via extensions such as Boomerang and regular meetings with your team members can help to keep communication fluid and current. Just being expected to be available via cell phone or email increases strain for both the employee and their partners even if they do not engage in actual work (Becker et al., 2018; Knight, 2019).

► **Showing your appreciation in small, but meaningful ways** such as giving employees a handwritten thank you card when they have gone above and beyond; acknowledging their work publicly during a meeting; bringing in a treat on their birthday; or simply asking how you can help them. Former employees have told me how they kept cards and notes I gave them with one female staffer stating, "You really seem to 'get it' and I thank you for that."

► **Not micromanaging your employees.** You hired them for a reason, and it is up to you and your organization to ensure they receive the proper knowledge, organizational, and motivational support and resources they need to do their jobs (Holdsworth, 2017).

► **Not overworking your top employees.** We tend to "reward" top performers with more work or we assign them to tackle other issues within the company; challenges they might not be motivated to solve (Holdsworth, 2017).

► **Considering flexible and/or work-from-home policies.** I can personally attest to how a flexible work schedule and the opportunity to work-from-home have dramatically improved my quality of life and that of my family. I am no longer rushing out the door at 7 a.m. only to return at 6 p.m. or later. I now get up, check my email while I have my morning coffee, spend time with my daughters before seeing them off to school, and am back in my home office at 9 a.m. If either child is sick, I do not have to scramble to find back-up care because they can stay home with me while I work. The money we save by not having to pay for after-school care or my commuting expenses goes into our family's savings account, and the stress I had from sitting in gridlock traffic has been replaced with energy and happiness.

How to help prevent burnout as an organization or association

Ketchum UK has taken matters of mental health and wellbeing into its own hands by introducing an organiszation-wide Mental Health Wellbeing Program.

After a human resources team member participated in a mental health first aider training in 2018, she proposed starting the program which includes numerous initiatives to support the mental health of the company's staff. There are now 14 staff members from across all levels of the business trained in mental health first aid, which enables them to assist staff experiencing mental health issues.

In addition to peer support, Ketchum UK has initiated the additional support activities, including:

► **Wellness Wednesdays**, which offer mood-enhancing physical health activities; provides access to regular health screenings and onsite massages; yoga, football, and netball teams; wellbeing workshops; and guest speakers who address topics such as nutrition and sleep in an effort to provide information on effective preventative measures.

► **Benefits awareness promotions** to address concerns staff may have about being able to "afford" to be ill and to make it easier for everyone to access the contact details and websites of organizations and charities that can provide additional advice and support.

► **Monthly wellbeing calendars** that are distributed to all employees.

► Future seminars that will examine **preventative approaches** such as resilience and stress management.

Kirsty Sachrajda, Head of HR, Europe for Ketchum UK, believes other agencies and organizations should consider implementing similar programs:

"It is fair to say that many businesses will declare that, 'our people come first,' and while this may be a sincerely held and expressed belief, without action, it is nothing more than a wish, or seen as a nice-to-have. Whereas, we believe in action. We have a comprehensive flexible working policy open to every level of the business, and sector-leading family leave policies. We demonstrate our understanding that our people are more than their work; that they have passions and ambitions for themselves and their families. We encourage them to bring their whole, authentic selves to work and support them as much as they need"
(Sachrajda, 2020).

This is a sentiment echoed by the Public Relations Communications Association (PRCA) which represents more than 35,000 PR professionals in 66 countries: "Organisations and brands love to talk about mental health and all they do to help employees thrive," said PRCA's Head of Communications and Marketing Koray Camgoz.

"But too often, businesses don't practice what they preach. Mental health can often be a corporate flag that is picked up and waved during a particular awareness week. However, our ambition, at the PRCA, is to change that and shift the industry's culture when it comes to mental health. We need to foster truly open and inclusive working environments where employees feel able to raise their concerns and equally, we need to help line managers and employers spot signs that they can act on" (Camgoz, 2020).

Its PRCA Mental Health Toolkit, available to both members and non-members, has been viewed more than 15,000 times since it was launched on World Mental Health Day 2017. The purpose is to raise awareness about mental health and to give PR and communications practitioners the tools to manage their mental health. The toolkit also aims to help line managers and agency heads address issues surrounding mental health in their workplace. and organizations of all sectors and sizes make use of it (PRCA, 2020).

In April 2020, the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR), together with its charitable benevolent fund, iprovision, unveiled the iprovision Mental Health Hotline. The hotline, available 24/7, 365 days a year, is run by Health Assured, the UK and Ireland's largest independent employee assistance program (EAP) provider and give CIPR members instant access to British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) trained and accredited counsellors, as well as support for those with personal, legal, and financial difficulties (Gerlis, 2020).

"There's been a genuine effort to raise awareness of the human and financial cost of poor mental health on our profession," stated CIPR President, Jenni Field Chart.PR, FCIPR.

"This new service now moves us to a position of being able to offer real, practical support to our members. It will help any member who needs it to work through issues that might be affecting their mental health and emotional wellbeing with the support of a trained and accredited advisor" (Gerlis, 2020).

Meanwhile, in North America, a conversation between two K-12 school public relations professionals in 2018 led to the creation of #k12prWell, a member- and volunteer-driven initiative that quickly amassed hundreds of followers from the school PR niche in both Canada and the United States. Co-founders Kristin Magette, APR and Shawn McKillop, APR noted that although they are not mental health professionals, they recognized the need for support and resources for other practitioners and see their roles as,

*"normalizing the conversation about the risk factors of working in the
high-performance world of school PR and the protective factors
that help us monitor and care for our wellbeing so
that we can stay well and stay in the game"*
(Magette & McKillop, 2020).

Their efforts have spawned multiple presentations across Canada and the
U.S., a regular e-newsletter, Twitter chats, and the attention of corporate
and industry sponsors.

Conclusion

It is evident that more research is needed to better understand the true
figures and causes of burnout amongst women in the field. Women make
up at least two-thirds of the world's PR practitioners, yet there are few
resources dedicated to understanding, preventing, and treating the causes
of burnout. If our industry wants to keep top talent while nurturing the
growth of the next generation, we need to seriously look at what can be
done to support this population.

The positive news, though, is that associations such as the PRCA and CIPR
and agencies like Ketchum UK are taking mental health issues seriously,
while grassroots movements such as #k12prWell are quickly gaining notoriety
for the resources and support they provide. These are steps in the right
direction toward tackling the issue of PR burnout, and my hope is that this
type of support will continue to increase across the globe.

Amanda Holdsworth

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She earned both a Master of Arts in Strategic Public Relations and a Doctor of Education in Organizational Change and Leadership from the University of Southern California. A former assistant professor, her post-doc research led to the creation of the CultureComm Model which links employee engagement, organizational culture, branding, and talent attraction and retention, and she has presented her findings at conferences around the world.

Amanda has appeared in CNN Money, Fast Company, Forbes, Inc., and Parents Magazine, and to date, has earned 24 industry awards for her work in branding, PR, and marketing. She is also the founder of The Comms Mom, a blog and online community with more than 15,000 global participants, designed to support the career ambitions and lives of mothers working in communications roles.

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Public Relations Professionals and the Glass Ceiling in Argentina

By Carolina A. Carbone and Luz Canella Tsuji

The glass ceiling has been defined as an artificial barrier based on organizational attitude bias that prevents qualified people from advancing to management level positions within an organization (Wrigley, 2012). In the case of women Public Relations professionals in Argentina, this would seem to be confirmed in the three segments of professional development: Consultant, Communication Directors and Academics, where the hierarchical positions occupied by women represent 42%, 19% and 31% respectively, according to a study specially prepared for the Professional Council of Public Relations of the Argentine Republic (Mosto, 2012).

The proposal is to investigate what happens in Argentina in the professional market of Public Relations with respect to the glass ceiling and gender bias influencing it. As there is no evidence of academic research on Public Relations and gender in Argentina, we aim to address this gap by finding causes and explanations, and by generating possible proposals to narrow the gender gap in these segments.

Our research aimed explore the situation of professional women in the field of Public Relations in Argentina. To do so, we carried out a preliminary survey using a structure questionnaire with 8 senior executives, 4 men and 4 women in Public Relations in Argentina, 6 in the field of consultancy and 2 communication directors from recognized companies. We asked the following 4 questions:

1. Regarding your previous experiences, did you perceive a gender bias in any job selection process in the field of Public Relations?

2. Do women in PR and communications management perceive a glass ceiling in their workplace?

3. Which of these factors do you think helps create or maintain a glass ceiling for women in PR and communications? (The 5 Wrigley factors were provided and it was given the option to add "others")

4. In your field (business or consultancy) how is the PR sector composed with respect to the relationship between men and women?

Some of the questions asked allowed for justification of the response and other questions allowed for the addition of another response option in addition to those provided. A random or incidental sampling was done among the members of the Public Relations Professional Council on the condition that they had a high level of responsibility in their organization.

We identified that in the training instance, women constitute the majority (almost 72% of the enrolment is female) compared to their male colleagues in the classrooms of the Public Relations career in Argentine universities (Sadi, 2017).

How does the world of work receive these graduates and what is their possible development in the field of the profession? No statistical data was found on the total composition of the current professional market for Public Relations according to gender, a task that remains to be done in order to make progress on these analyses, but according to the answers obtained in this survey the composition of the market ranges from 50 to 80% female quota. When analysing this information and the data provided by the Professional Council of Public Relations study, it is clear that the possibility of growth towards decision-making positions is significantly limited (Mosto, 2012). As in other areas of professional development, in Public Relations it seems pertinent to link this situation to the concept of the "Glass Ceiling". Even researchers such as Grunig, Hon and Toth (2001) have mentioned the possibility of the acquisition of a more masculine role by women who have accessed these positions. Another problem is the lower salary women receive compared to men in similar positions. In this sense, the report of the *Instituto de Estudios Sociales en Contextos de Desigualdades de la Universidad Nacional de José C. Paz (*Institute of Social Studies in Contexts of Inequalities of the National University of José C. Paz), commented at the beginning of this year in the newspaper Página 12 that the wage gap between women and men in Argentina is around 27% (Carbajal, 2020). Since there is no specific data on the subject in Public Relations and Communication, it is expected that the results of our research can provide information to see what the situation of women is in this field.

A research conducted in 2009 in the United States by J. Susanne Horsley (2009), showed that in 1960 only 10% of the Public Relations workforce was composed of women. By 1980 that figure had risen to 50%. By 2012, it was estimated that over 70% of the workforce was female (Rawlins et al., 2012). This is what researchers call "feminization of the workforce". Speaking of the feminization of public relations, the EUPRERA's (European Association for Public Relations Research and Education) report Women in Public Relations - A Literature Review (1982-2019) makes a comparative analysis of gender and public relations in literature. It is striking that the literature of the 1980s had discrimination at work as one of its main themes. Already in those years the glass ceiling was a topic of heightened discussion. Thirty-seven years later, the literature on the subject continues to mention discrimination at work, books published from 2010 to 2019 referring to the topic in relation to pay gap, access to management and leadership positions (glass ceiling), the differentiation between managerial and technical positions and bias against women (Topic et al., 2019).

Glass Ceiling

The term "glass ceiling" was coined around the 1950s referring to an invisible barrier blocking women's access to the highest positions in an organization.

> *"Unless you work in a consulting firm or open your own agency, the road to (corporate) public relations is short" (PR: The Velvet Ghetto of Affirmative Action, 1978 cited in Grunig et al., 2001, p. 253).*

Reflecting on the short career progression paths corporate communicators have Elizabeth Toth suggested that

> *"Women themselves are responsible for a part of this softening (in the profession). Women are more likely than men to accept downgraded positions and less money, partly for lack of skills in negotiating salary and position, partly because of the tendency of women to undervalue themselves professionally"* (Mall, 1986).

It is these harsh observations that partly influenced the U.S. Department of Labor to issue a report on the Glass Ceiling Initiative in 1991 defining it as artificial barriers based on attitudinal or organizational biases/prejudices that prevent qualified individuals from moving up in organizations to the management level (Martin, 1991).

However, although defined, the phenomenon continued to persist, Purcell and Baldwin (2003 cited in Moreno, 2018) listing gender role socialization and staff recruitment practices among the factors enabling its perpetuation. Inspired by this long history and arguably limited development, our research seeks to identify the factors hindering women's access to higher positions within existing PR/communications hierarchies in Argentina.

What is the situation in Argentina?

There are two key moments in every professional's career: their hiring, and their development and growth opportunities within an organization.

Although limitations that may occur at the time of hiring are not called "glass ceiling", we decided it was important to ask participants if they perceived any differentiation by gender in their employment history (Q1). Only one of the people surveyed admitted to having perceived some feature of gender bias at the time of applying for a job, many more either rejecting or diminishing the existence of a glass ceiling. Respondent 1 said: "There are no ceilings, the ceiling is oneself", while respondent 2 said: "There are no more limitations, it depends on one's capabilities!", are just some of the responses displaying a sense of empowerment shared by female respondents. However, this sense of empowerment and confidence in one's own competences can be in itself a way of coping, something that Wrigley also pointed out in 2002.

When asked if they perceived the existence of a glass ceiling in their workplace, only one respondent openly acknowledged that it existed. Three said that there might be some kind of limitation for women, while the other four stated that there is no glass ceiling in Argentina. It should be noted that the women themselves say that they do not perceive a glass ceiling.

We believe this to be similar to what Wrigley (2002) called negotiated resignation as a means to explain the psychological process by which women adapt to the glass ceiling. That means, strategies women use to get along with other collaborators in order to fit in, including working harder than their male colleagues and building consensus among colleagues.

"These conciliatory strategies do not address the broader question of whether the structure is at fault or not; they smooth out the waters of the workplace enough to allow individuals to adapt to their workplace environment and continue to function without altering the status quo. To fuel this approach, there is a fear of job loss and a fear of disapproval or labelling as a troublemaker, agitator, feminist" (Wrigley, 2002, p. 49).

Wrigley (2002) identified five factors (or beliefs) that contribute to the glass ceiling: 1) denial, 2) socialization of gender roles, 3) historical precedent, 4) women turning against other women and 5) corporate culture. We replicated Wrigley's factors (Q3) in our survey and found out that:

► 25% believe gender socialization contributes to the glass ceiling;

► 25% believe it is embedded in corporate culture, and

► 12.5% considers that it is a sum of all the five factors mentioned by Wrigley.

By giving them the ability to add another answer option, the comments added by the respondents were

► 25% list personal barriers, indicating that the ceiling is within oneself (internal factor, not exogenous).

► 12.5% do not believe there is a glass ceiling.

The answers obtained in our survey add to Wrigley's (2002) general idea that one of the problems in studying the phenomenon is the usual denial of the existence of the glass ceiling and the lack of willingness to face it. Similar challenges also emerge from the study carried out by the Association of Communication Directors in Spain (Wrigley, 2002; Moreno et al., 2018).

In our study, it can be seen that although in the question regarding their perception of the existence of a glass ceiling in the profession, 62.5% of those surveyed said that they did not perceive the glass ceiling. But when asked about the factors that could lead to it, 62.5% were able to identify at least 3 of them. This would show the consistency of the problem observed by Wrigley (2002): there is a contradiction between the lack of perception of the existence of a glass ceiling for promotion to higher hierarchical positions and a clear identification of the factors that explain it. We infer from these answers that from the hierarchical positions there is no recognition of structural barriers linked to gender for the growth of women in the profession (they do not perceive that there is a "glass ceiling") but at the same time most of the respondents do identify corporate culture, gender socialization and the sum of all the factors proposed earlier by Wrigley as obstacles for the advancement of women in decision-making spaces.

As mentioned earlier, this survey has been conducted among leading men and women, owners and CEOs of PR and communications consultancies and communications directors of leading companies. Their answers seem to suggest that the perception of the existence of the glass ceiling disappears once the target or rank is reached. If so, it is worth asking who is it that gets to be promoted? How? How many of them are women? Further exploration of this question would lead us in future work to probe middle and/or junior managers.

When asked how the sector is shaped in terms of gender (Q4), respondents acknowledged that there is a majority of women in their organizations or half of the staff is male and half female. The percentages in the different organisations vary between 50% and 80% women. Yet a higher percentage of women in the organization does not guarantee their management representation. The study carried out by Miquel-Segarra et al. (2017) study points to a similar direction:

> "Specifically, and although there are fewer male workers than female workers, they hold the top positions, earn more and have more power in the organisations, so that there are more women does not mean that they have the highest hierarchies either" (p. 280).

On the other hand, it seems that there are certain areas of Public Relations work that would be more conducive to women than to men.

> "It is fine to hire women, but for certain types of jobs in certain areas such as communication, women will work harder than men, and because women want to work harder, they will be given more and more work" (Wrigley, 2002, p. 41).

This is confirmed by some of the respondents. For example, respondent 1 from the corporate level said that: "within Public Relations, women in the area of communications have a greater chance of growth than in the area of Public Affairs". On the other hand, respondent 2 commented: "There are no women in Lobbying", while respondent 3 said in this sense: "I think within PR, the communications area has the most opportunities for development. out there in terms of public affairs management has some limitations". The owner of a PR consultancy (respondent 4) said: "I think that in an intangible but real way, the positions of Communications Directors are more men than women, taking into account that there are more female than male graduates, this is striking and there is clearly a pattern that works in that sense".

According to the latest figures on university enrolment in Argentina, in 2015 there were 8516 PR students distributed among the 20 public (2) and private (18) universities in the country that offer the degree. Of these, 71.6% were women, while the remaining 28.3% were men (Sadi, 2017). Based on the responses obtained, this disproportionality is repeated in the number of professionals who enter the labour market but the relationship between genders is strikingly reversed as it climbs up the hierarchical pyramid. It should be clarified that the hierarchical positions in the segments of Consultancy, Communication Directors and Academics are disproportionately occupied by men (58%, 81% and 69% respectively) who in turn are graduates of other careers that are not Public Relations (Mosto, 2012). We consider in this point that it is not the inexistence of professionals in the area of Public Relations: for example, in the case of Consultancy firms 40% of the professionals and 65% of the students belong to Public Relations (regardless of gender), but this is not reflected in the composition of the decision-making positions. We are then witnessing a process where, as we move towards the top of power, men and those who are not public relations professionals are gaining ground, to the clear detriment of women and Public Relations professionals.

Women also experience more conflict in balancing their professional development and family life. The distribution between men and women of the responsibilities associated with unpaid reproductive work, understood, according Picchio (2001 cited in Delfino et al., 2018), as "care for the maintenance of domestic spaces and goods, as well as care for bodies, education, training, maintenance of social relations and psychological support for family members" (p. 170), is still very unequal.

In the case of Argentina, there is a strong

> *"female predominance both in terms of participation and intensity. (...) female participation in this type of activity exceeds male participation by more than 30 percentage points; in the same direction, women spend an average of three hours a day more than men in these activities. It follows that if we consider the maximum legal working day of 8 hours a day established by labour regulations in Argentina, women work practically (in the week) one day more than men" (Delfino, et al., 2018, p. 175).*

Likewise, if we consider the age distribution, the biggest gaps are found in the productive ages (18-29 years old followed by the 30-59 years old age group). In practice, this means that while men have time to train and grow professionally, most women have to reconcile these objectives with the tasks demanded by the unpaid reproductive work that sustains that productive system.

In this sense, we find that in the particular case of professional women in Public Relations, their personal characteristics could even deepen this unequal situation:

> *"Women in this field also experience the conflict between work and family life, perhaps especially because people attracted to public relations work, Toth said, tend to make other people's priorities more important than their own" (Mall, 1986).*

According to one of the interviewees, this reality was raised as another obstacle to be analysed when thinking about the possibilities of growth of women in organizations in the case of Argentina:

> *"In some cases the opportunities for development within an organization, especially multinationals, could have limitations because of issues related to women in their family environment".*

Although in this preliminary survey, this aspect of the problem was not investigated, it is presented as a new question on which to work in future investigations.

In conclusion

In Argentina, there are no academic studies focused on gender issues in the field of Public Relations. This preliminary survey is one of the first stages of

a more in-depth research on Women and Public Relations being carried out by a group of female academics from the Universidad Nacional de Lomas de Zamora (National University of Lomas de Zamora). This line of research is part of the research programme "Transdisciplinary approaches to gender issues in the social sciences". As already mentioned by Spanish colleagues in their bibliometric study on gender:

> *"There are still no academics or institutions specialized in the analysis of the public relations profession and the corporate communications professional with a gender perspective, although a considerable number of scientists in various parts of the world have paid attention to the subject at some point. It has been women who have been mostly interested in the analysis of these issues, so that there is not only a feminization of public relations (Chen 431; Simorangkir 26) but also a feminization of research on this feminization"* (Miquel - Segarra et al., 2016, p. 279).

This first approach to the subject in Argentina has allowed some preliminary conclusions to be reached, such as that gender stereotypes exist in the field of Public Relations. According to Place (2011 cited in Moreno et al., 2018, p. 48), it is myths and stereotypes that hinder women's access to these higher positions and cause continued discrimination, while also contributing to the devaluation of women as professionals.

From the results obtained in the interviews, it is evident in the case of Argentina, the same problem that is observed both in the fields of professional development of Public Relations that have been studied throughout the world. The results of the Gendercom report regarding gender gaps and opportunities in the communication management profession in Spain are similar to the realities perceived by the interviewees:

> *"The glass ceiling remains. Despite the fact that women outnumber men, it can be seen how their presence diminishes in the highest positions and predominates in the lower ones in the hierarchy. There are more than twice as many women (22.9%) as men (10.8%) in team members or consultants, while in management positions 71.3% are men and 56.1% women. That is: seven out of ten men working in communication hold management positions"* (Moreno et al., 2018).

However, in the case of Argentina we also seem to witness the phenomenon of negotiated resignation, where the same women interviewed denied perceiving a gender-based glass ceiling for growth in the profession. This lack of identification of the problem as such, we understand that it also constitutes an obstacle to address it from within the workplaces, and therefore, blocks the possibility of changing this situation. However, those interviewed were able to identify the factors that would contribute to the reproduction of this state of disparity in access to hierarchical positions between men and women. It will perhaps be part of the contributions of this study (and its future developments), to show the complete picture of the situation where the sum of these factors ultimately determines a "glass ceiling" and structural "glass walls" for the growth of women in Public Relations in Argentina.

Understanding Public Relations as a profession that has the capacity to empower an organization through its relationships, the question would be what happens to women and their possibility of empowerment in this profession? Beyond how women are perceived and if there is indeed a glass ceiling or not, we should reflect on the contradiction that we understand this would represent.

How can women be successful professionals who contribute to the growth and empowerment of organizations if there are structural barriers within the profession to their own growth and empowerment? We venture then to propose the need for structural change in the profession. From our university academic space, we have two ways to make contributions in this sense:

1. through research and production work such as this, which allows us to investigate and analyse these situations that have become "naturalized" in our society and consequently, denaturalize them in order to transform them; and

2. from our role in university education, where we have the obligation not only to share knowledge, but also to train professionals committed to critical thinking, who can question and break the barriers of the system. Ultimately, we must work for a cultural change, and the ways to do this involve making this reality visible, problematizing it and questioning it.

Carolina A. Carbone

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Career Experiences of Turkish Female Practitioners in Public Relations Firms: Influence of Women on Practice of Public Relations

By Begüm Ekmekçigil Türkmen

The 1960s marked the beginnings of public relations in Turkey, both as an academic and business field. Marked by the characteristics of modernism and progress, the development of public relations in Turkey was heavily influenced by the "collaborative policy" of the 1961 constitution (Yamanoğlu et al., 2014). Since then, and even before in 1950s, women had important roles and influence on the establishment and the development of public relations as field in Turkey. Since the 1950s, several female academics, women working at private and public sector have shaped the field with their knowledge, skills, and practices. It was women who established Turkey's first PR agency, and who also managed Turkey's first in-house PR departments both in public and private sector. When the Public Relations Association of Turkey was established in 1972, the president of the association and several board members were women. Moreover, the influence of women on the field of public relations go beyond practice and into academia. Here too it was women who shaped PR education and some of the first PR texts (Yamanoğlu et al, 2014). Out of 27 members of Communication Consultancies Association of Turkey (İDA), there are 19 women and 8 men agency owners (IDA, 2020). Moreover, the Turkish Public Relations Association has in total 218 members and 153 of them are women (TÜHİD, 2020).

Since the institutionalization of public relations in the 1960s, there have been plenty of examples of PR use both in the public and the private sectors. Since then, women and men have brought significant contributions to the profession and the field. Between the 1980s and 2000s, with the effects of neoliberal politics, rise of competition and emerging markets, Turkey's entrance to global market and 1980 military coup, public relations bias changed, and public relations gained a new understanding (Yamanoğlu et al., 2014). Especially this new understanding of public relations in private sector attracts women to join the workforce and this need raises the number of women in the sector rapidly. Thus, in Turkey the feminization of public relations can date back to 1990's, however the problems those women are facing similar: salary gaps, glass ceiling and velvet ghetto.

Even though the development of public relations might be different in Turkey than from other countries, this has not influenced the fabric of its workforce. On the contrary, as is the case with other countries, in Turkey too there are more women working in PR than men. In its first years, the occupation was usually defined as part of organization and media relations, with most of the owners of agencies being women. This has led PR being considered a "woman's occupation" mainly due to existing gendered perceptions of women as "good at communication".

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Women played a significant role in the establishment of the public relations sector in Turkey and they continue to dominate and play important roles in its development, both professionally and academically.

There is limited research on the status of women in public relations and none of it focuses on the reputation and status problem of public relations from the women public relations professionals' perspective. Öksüz's (2014) *Woman's Place in the Field of Public Relations in Turkey: Perspectives of Academics, Practitioners, and Representatives of Professional Organizations on it* seeks the perspectives of three groups and the results show that respondents do not agree that public relations is only for women and also women can easily take roles in manager positions. Tanyıldızı's (2011) *Women in Public Relations* discusses the status of women practitioners in Turkey in terms of salary, career and job satisfaction. Tuncer's (2011) *Professional Standards in Public Relations: A Survey on Practitioners* discusses the occupational standards of public relations and concluded there is not discrimination against women in the sector. Ciner (2003) does research on *Gender Based Discrimination in the Field of Public Relations* their master's dissertation stating that women face discriminatory behaviours, but the perception of such issues is low.

Female public relations professionals faced challenges throughout their experiences caused by public relations definition as "female work", lack of comprehensive understanding about the occupation and cultural and social stereotypes. These issues caused reputation and status problems for public relations. In the frame of women's public relations experiences, questions about the role women play in the establishment and development of public relations and their efforts to increase PR's reputation and emphasize its value emerged.

The aim of this study is to define the reputation problem of public relations and professionals' struggle based on their experiences. In this respect, feminization of the field and name public relations profession as "female work"; lack of comprehensive understanding about the occupation and mistranslation of PR; and cultural and social stereotypes.

Methodology

In-depth one-on-one interviews were used to answer to answer the questions formed under four headings:

▶ How do women start their careers?

▶ What are their career experiences?

▶ What is their evaluation about the profession?

▶ What are their career goals?

Twenty-three professionals from ten leading public relations agencies in Istanbul were interviewed with an average of one hour per interview. Among the respondents are agency owners, general managers, deputy general mangers and group directors. Data was used fully transcribed and thematic analysis after technique to group the repetitive themes.

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Findings

Feminization of Public Relations and Public Relations as "Female Work"

Due to the increasing number of women entering the practice, the feminization of the field, practitioners and researchers state the problems of decline in status and salaries (Broom et al., 1982; Toth, 1988; Creedon, 1991; Grunig and Dozier, 1994; Toth and Grunig 1993).

> *"Underlying this position is the belief that the new female majority in the practice of public relations will soften the image of the field and cause it not to be seen as a 'heavy-hitting top management function'" (Lesly, 1988, p.5).*

When women succeeded in a particular practice, it is thought that it is a way of coping with discrimination against women. However, the truth of the matter is that *feminization* of a practice brings new problems and a new way of discrimination. The profession started to described as *"female work"* and this brings out status and pay gap problem (Elmasoğlu, 2014). Toth (1986; 1988; 1989) states that the number of women in public relations is out of proportion and this brings out some issues; salaries are dropping, men are leaving the profession for better jobs and the status of profession.

Women professionals state that naming a profession as "female work" and feminization create reputation and status problems for public relations. Practitioners are stating that women played a role of both in the institutionalization and development of profession. In its first years, the occupation was usually defined as part of organization and media relations, with most of the owners of agencies being women. This has led PR being considered a "woman's occupation" mainly due to existing gendered perceptions of women as "good at communication". Practitioners define the impacts of feminization on public relations practice.

> *"Actually, most of the agency owners are women so somehow women load the dice against other women in the sector, that is, being jealous and intolerant. I always prefer working with men because men listen, it is hard to change a woman's mind and mount an argument, but men are open to new ideas"*
> *(G-Practitioner, Deputy General Manager).*

> *"It is sometimes hard to be woman in a sector mostly dominated by women practitioners. I don't like to use this idiom, but we can use 'homo homini lupus' (a man is a wold to other men) to describe when the women ruin solidarity"*
> *(D3).*

Practitioners also faced with the problems when are working with other women because they said that women have large egos and they think, *"who are you and you give me advice"* (L-Practitioner, Deputy General Manager).

Thus, even women professionals pay no attention to their colleagues, so it is hard to expect others to pay attention to what you are saying and respect for the profession and professionals.

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Women professionals use some empowerment strategies for the reputation problem of public relations. One-practitioner states:

> *"during crisis moments I thought it is better to be with a man because they will listen that man rather than you. However, in these moments I have the advantage of being an academician" (D-Agency Owner, Academician).*

Another practitioner gives an example of a corporate communication executive of a reputed company in Turkey:

> *"The company values the executive's ideas because she was a journalist in the past". Moreover, the same practitioner also states own experience when dealing with the media relations, "besides being a public relations professional I started to talk as a journalist because you are trying to tell something in a male dominated world as a public relations professional" (K-Practitioner, General Manager).*

As public relations is named "female work" and is limited to only making organizations and being presentable, harms the status and reputation of the practice. Thus, female public relations practitioners create some empowerment strategies in order to cope with the bias against the women and profession being described as "female work".

Lack of Comprehensive Understanding about the Occupation

Public relations' reputation challenges in Turkey are partly historically inherited: they stem from how the field was initially institutionalized and from how the relationship between agency owners and journalists has evolved. Additionally, as most entrepreneurs in the field are women, one of the required qualifications was 'being presentable'. This perpetuated an image of a presentable business, focused on form rather than value and impact. The other reason is a computation problem, as public relations create abstract values. Moreover, the translation of public relations into Turkish *"halkla ilişkiler"* is mostly understood as relations with citizens or general category of publics. Thus, both the lack of comprehensive understanding of public relations and understanding of the profession as "female work" induced reputation and status problems of public relations. One practitioner states that:

> *"When I started to work in the agency, I saw that PR is not limited with only organization. But, the perception of PR from outside is like that. Most people define PR as working in restaurants who welcome people, or people who deal with the arrangements of an actor. No one thinks that PR is based on institutional relations and PR practitioners are the ones who deal with the reputation management of the companies. If we make a survey among the people who do not have any idea about PR, for them the image of PR is the first one not the second one" (L-Practitioner, Deputy General Manager).*

The Public relations profession and its capabilities cannot be totally understood, companies think that they only need public relations in time of crisis. The companies cannot get the idea that strategic communication is a process,

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and takes a long time to reap the benefit of this process. Practitioners define these in the following way:

> *"Agencies should know the company and accompany you from the beginning not only in time of crisis" (K-Practitioner, General Manager).*

> *"Generally, advertisement agencies set up the communication strategy and PR agencies make organizations according to the strategy, manage the media relations. However, in crisis communication PR agencies are number one"* *(I-Practitioner, Agency Owner).*

All in all, lack of comprehensive understanding of practice and cultural values of patriarchal societies such as being against listening women's thoughts create disadvantages for female public relations practitioners and for the status of profession.

Conclusion

This paper aims to state the experiences of women public relations professionals in terms of the struggle that they gave for the status and reputation of the profession. With the feminization of the field, the profession was often described as "women's work". On one side, this situation provides a work for women but on the other hand, harms the status of the profession, men leave the profession and the real value of public relations for companies is underestimated.

Moreover, the experiences of women public relations present the reputational problems of profession including lack of comprehensive understanding of the occupation, misunderstanding of the value and the duties of profession and association with technical work and communication skills. These have negative impacts on the experiences of women professionals and on the profession itself.

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Begüm Ekmekçigil Türkmen

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Diversity is Personal

By Sia Papageorgiou

"Strength lies in differences, not in similarities"
Stephen Covey (1932–2012), educator, author and businessman (USA)

Diversity enriches our work environment. It's an immutable fact, and to me diversity (and importantly, belonging) means opportunity – for individuals, teams and organisations. Diversity and belonging mean strength, innovation, and they help us to communicate more effectively, more broadly and more deeply. The more diverse perspectives found in an organisation, the richer the discussions we can generate, and the more creative and salient our communication becomes. There are many forms of diversity – geographic, socio-economic, cultural, political, gender, sexual, religious, educational status and level of ability or disability. In this article, I'm going to explore ethnic diversity, which is both personal and professional for me.

I grew up in Melbourne, Australia's second largest city, with a population of 4.3 million. I am the middle daughter of immigrant parents. They spoke English with heavy accents. Both my mother and father arrived in Australia from Greece as young adults, my father in 1960 and my mother in 1961. They arrived towards the end of the second wave of European migration to Australia, following the Second World War. My parents met and married in Melbourne, my father was an engineer and an educator, my mother worked in the public service. They settled and made their home in the city, raising three daughters. Although my parents were unfamiliar with the English language and customs of their adopted country, they were determined to forge a new and better life for themselves in Australia, and ultimately for their family. And they did.

My upbringing and ethnicity have had an undeniable impact on me, and the way I conduct my business as a communication professional. When I was eight I was walking home from school and an older and much taller boy from my school marched up to me and said: "Are you Greek?". I looked up at him and told him that I was. The next thing I remember I was gasping for air because he had punched me in the stomach. At school, I would cringe during morning roll call, as mine was the only name that was different. And I longed for my mother to give me Vegemite sandwiches for lunch so I could be just like everyone else. In the professional context I have missed out on opportunities because I didn't fit the stereotype for a woman (white Anglo-Saxon) in my profession in Australia.

As someone who has lived experience of cultural difference, I am able to bring a particular blend of empathy, cultural awareness and emotional intelligence to the communication problems that I solve for my employers and clients. I do this in more subtle ways as well, by looking for the person who might feel left out of the conversation and finding ways to foster their participation, taking care to find out how to pronounce and spell people's names correctly, or asking people how they want to be addressed or described. This helps me to build lasting, trusted relationships as people are comfortable working with me, and in sharing

their unique perspectives which makes for a richer conversation.

As President of the International Association of Business Communicators in Victoria (2019–20), I was proud to be part of an initiative designed to draw more diverse members to our chapter with sponsorship and specially designed benefits for individuals who have a disability, are from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds or identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (Australia's First Nations People). These are recognised obstacles to entering and progressing a career in communication. I sourced two sponsors for the initiative that provides membership and professional coaching to the recipients. I feel encouraged by signs such as this, but we still have a long way to go.

According to Inclusive Australia, a social movement rooted in behaviour-change science, the values of respect and fairness are at the heart of Australia's culture. The idea of a fair go is ingrained in the Australian psyche. But it's not the experience of all Australians. One in five experiences major discrimination based on their age, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, ability or origin. As a country, we scored 62 of 100 points in the *Inclusive Australia Community Index* (Faulkner et al., 2019). I am not alone in wanting to turn things around, yet there are so many economic and social justice challenges clamouring for attention in Australia at present, with most States and Territories ravaged by bushfires over the summer of 2019–20, following by flooding rains in some parts of the country, and now the impact of COVID-19 which is costing lives and livelihoods. As an individual, I can't make a difference to everyone, but I can make a difference to someone. So, as I continue to foster my perspectives and expertise, I use my voice to speak up and add my diverse experiences to discussions in my professional and personal life.

The relationship between diversity and performance

Diversity matters because we increasingly live in a global world that has become deeply interconnected. It should come as no surprise that more diverse companies and institutions are achieving better performance (Hunt and Prince, 2015). Belonging matters too – because if we attract people of diverse experiences and perspectives to our organisations and they are unable to experience a feeling of shared purpose, acceptance and belonging, they will soon become disengaged and leave.

According to Accenture's latest research report *Getting to Equal 2020* (Sweet and Shook, 2020), when leaders prioritise equality, organisations grow twice as quickly. The research also found that while leaders think increasing workforce diversity and building a more inclusive workplace is important, most of them aren't prioritising it – with only 34% identifying diversity and only 21% identifying culture as top priorities.

If leaders prioritise a culture of equality now, they will create an environment that is more likely to produce the financial results they want and need, not to mention the reputation and employee value proposition that will see them through good times and bad. If people feel a sense of belonging and

are valued by their employers for their unique contributions, perspectives and circumstances, they are empowered to contribute more broadly and deeply than simply their day-to-day role. I think Kim Philpott (2017), former President of Staebler Insurance in Canada, says it best:

> *"When building an executive team, the goal is to engage participants with differences. I'm fond of saying: 'We're not paying five salaries for one opinion.'"*

The case for diversity is highlighted by McKinsey's 2015 research *Diversity Matters* (Hunt et al. 2015), which found that companies in the top quartile for racial and ethnic diversity are 35% more likely to have financial returns higher than their respective national industry medians. And in 2018, the firm's follow-up research, *Delivering Through Diversity* (Hunt et al., 2016) reported similar findings; that when it comes to ethnic diversity, companies in the top quartile (specifically among executive positions) were 33% more likely to see above-average profitability than those with the least ethnic diversity among executives.

A number of trends in the countries and industries that McKinsey reviewed suggested that the relationship between diversity and performance is likely to grow in importance. For example, in Europe talent acquisition has been identified as a significant management challenge for the next five years. The ethnic composition of the UK labour force is now about 10% non-white, up from 6% in 1991. However, little more than 20% of UK companies attain 10% ethnic diversity on their top management teams.

Visibility of diversity in the top echelons of organisations matters, because employees take important cues from those on the Board and in the C-suite as to what is needed to be successful in their workplace. There is truth in the maxim, if you can't see it you can't be it. Change towards greater diversity and belonging needs to be championed from the top.

Research conducted by the Diversity Council of Australia found that most people believe the CEO is primarily responsible for inclusion and diversity accountability, and three-quarters (76%) regard gender as the main focus of inclusion and diversity strategies in their organisations. Although achieving greater representation of women in senior public and private appointments, and pay equity, remain important and ongoing challenges, with such a narrow perception of diversity it is little wonder that significant gaps continue to exist.

Words matter

Fear and misunderstanding of others, based on the way they look, what they believe or how they live their lives, leads to discrimination and the exclusion of members of our society. The words we use affect how we think, feel and act. If I had a dollar for every time I've heard an opinion prefaced by, "I'm not being racist, but...", or been asked, "Why do Greek women wear so much black?", or my personal favourite, "What is it with "wogs" and cash?" – I'd be a very wealthy woman. And for the non-Australians reading this

who may be unfamiliar with how the term is used, "wog" is a racial slur, a pejorative term and a derogatory expression used in Australia to identify a foreigner or immigrant, especially one from southern Europe. As someone who has been on the receiving end of this word, I can attest that it is hurtful, ostracising and damaging.

Being aware of the power of our language is therefore about respect. Words that deny someone dignity and respect can isolate and threaten an individual's sense of belonging. Alternatively, phrases used with care can enable a very different sense of participation (Chapman, 2013).

In her fact sheet, *The Evolving Language of Diversity*, Kathy Castania (2003), consultant and retired Senior Extension Associate at Cornell University in New York, shares her insights on the power that words have to shape our thoughts, beliefs and attitudes. The fact sheet explores the challenges that come with creating a common language around diversity that is both affirming and empowering, and provides a historical overview that can help us to contextualise the evolution of language around diversity. She also identifies common pitfalls and misused terms across multiple dimensions of diversity – including the language of race, ethnicity and origin. Ms Castania (2003) writes that:

> *"Because all of us are influenced by the prevailing attitudes of the society and the power of the message, we need to recognise that even within our groups we have internalised the same misinformation and negative stereotypes about members of our groups. The dynamics of internalised oppression create people who choose to use words that continue the perpetuation of misinformation and disparaging attitudes about members of their own group." (p. 5)*

This creates a powerful opportunity for communication professionals tasked with creating understanding and more diverse environments within organisations. Communication professionals have the opportunity to share stories and experiences among their target audiences, increasing awareness and building connection between people from different walks of life and thereby helping to break down barriers and prejudices.

Actions matter

Sally Rugg (2019), Executive Director of Change.org, writes that,

> *"Making sure we're all part of our collective conversations is the right thing to do ethically [and it's] smart. Flourishing societies benefit from diverse voices."*

Diversity without belonging is unlikely to succeed. Inclusive Australia identified a sense of belonging and wellbeing to be an important indicator of social inclusion, which is the foundation for a more cohesive and connected society where all members can flourish. The other indicators include prejudicial attitudes and experiences of discrimination, the amount and quality of contact with people from minority groups, willingness to volunteer in inclusion activities and willingness to advocate for social inclusion.

St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne, part of St Vincent's Health Australia, is a case in point. The organisation's publicly stated mission is to serve those who are poor and vulnerable. Its creed contains a commitment to justice and compassionate care for all. And the organisation's strategy commits it to serving five particular groups including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders who have poorer outcomes than other Australians including child mortality and life expectancy. It has also committed to providing person-centred care that is "respectful, compassionate, culturally safe and competent" (St Vincent's Health Australia). These aspirations are important because St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne is the largest provider of health services for adult Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Victoria. The health service wants to improve care for this patient group via a number of strategies, including employment and retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This is based on the belief that by increasing employment from this group, the health service will be better placed to deliver on its commitments. Recently St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne indicated it had 50 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees. At the end of 2018–19, St Vincent's Health Australia employed 229 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees across its facilities – just short of its target of 250 but above the Victorian Government's 1% Aboriginal procurement target. Their target for 30 June 2020 is 350.

This is ambitious given the common barriers and obstacles to employment and retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment including:

► Lack of suitably qualified applicants for the majority of available positions;

► Lack of suitable positions for identified Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander applicants, and

► Misconceptions and/or lack of cultural awareness.

St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne has several strategies and tactics in place to enhance a feeling of cultural safety, a sense of welcome and a feeling of belonging among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees. Generally they require close collaboration between the relevant departments including human resources, communication and the hospital's dedicated Aboriginal health unit. Examples include:

► Acknowledgement of country at the beginning of each formal meeting

► Events and symbolism e.g. internal NAIDOC Week celebrations (an annual celebration of the history, culture and achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples including a formal Welcome to Country and smoking ceremony. NAIDOC stands for National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee)

► Employees are encouraged to attend the annual Victorian NAIDOC Week march from the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service past Parliament House to Federation Square

► Orientation e.g. face-to-face presentation from a member of the Aboriginal Health Unit

▶ Training – all employees complete Aboriginal Cultural Awareness Training (one-hour online module plus a test) annually

▶ A reconciliation action plan signed with Aboriginal communities

▶ An annual forum attended by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees.

Be part of the solution

As communication professionals, we inherently believe that strategic communication can assist in advancing or solving issues in organisations throughout the world.

So what role then, should we play in advocating for greater diversity and inclusion in the communication profession and within the organisations we serve? How can we as strategic communication professionals use the tools we have available and advise our organisations on the best way to communicate within an ethical, sustainable context? How can what we know as communication professionals contribute to building a stronger, better dialogue on these issues and build capacity and sustainability for our organisations? And how can we position ourselves and our profession to meet these challenges?

Listen to your employees – constantly. Are you equipped to listen to what your people have to say in an authentic and meaningful way? Who is excluded from the conversation, and what do we need to change to ensure they have the opportunity to participate? Organisations need a multi-channel approach to truly hear vulnerable, marginalised and alternative voices.

Develop, curate and tell stories. And encourage senior leaders in your organisation to share their personal stories of commitment. When developed and used purposefully, storytelling can contribute to inclusion and connection and bring about change. In Australia, racial discrimination cost the Australian economy an estimated $44.9 billion, or 3.6% of GDP, each year in the decade from 2001-11 (Elias, 2019). Most people with racial prejudices and biases don't personally know any of the people they hold strong views against. That's why sharing stories and building connections can help break down these barriers.

Inclusive Australia has created a national Instagram campaign that encourages everyone to diversify their Instagram feeds, by following _somebodydifferent. The aim is that by following _somebodydifferent people will start to look outside of their social bubbles and gain an insight into different Australian lives.

And most of us would be familiar with the project 'Humans of New York', and the beautiful book of the same title. What initially began as a photography project in 2010 to showcase the city's inhabitants now provides over 20 million followers on social media with stories about the lives of strangers on the streets of New York City. Over the past five years, it has expanded to feature stories from over 20 different countries, including my hometown, Melbourne.

And speaking of photographs, challenge stereotypes conveyed through imagery. One of the first things my colleague did when she joined our state's roads authority many years ago, was to change the proposed photo for the cover of the organisation's new customer charter brochure. Shot in a registration and licensing office, the image showed a dark skinned young woman serving a middle-aged white man. She had it reshot using talent of various ethnic backgrounds playing different roles in the customer service scenario, to better reflect the diversity of our population.

Diversity and inclusion is a constant work-in-progress, not a tick-the-box exercise. Every single communication activity presents an opportunity to create an authentic and emotional connection with your representative audience. I encourage you to continue to discuss and debate these questions and find meaningful ways to address diversity within your organisations. Because as Inclusive Australia says, "difference is human" and as communication professionals, we are uniquely placed to help create human connections, act as agents of change and advocate for understanding.

Sia Papageorgiou

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"You Must Obey the King"

In a country boasting the biggest shopping mall in the world, career opportunities for female PR practitioners can come with hefty price tags

By Ramona Slusarczyk and Amal Dib

It is hard to reconcile the words of top female execs in PR Week's "International Women's Day in the Middle East" feature (Bell, 2020), hailing the UAE for its progress in work equality, with the fact that the 2019 Gender Balance Index awards were won entirely by men.

"If you're a female in a higher position and you've been in the UAE for a while, it's fine and you'll probably make headlines at some point," says Ana, a former expatriate and a PR manager, who asked to use a pseudonym[1]. "But it's essentially to manufacture consent."

The common practice of "massaging the message" could explain why the local media, following the suit of the government-owned Emirates New Agency (WAM), applauded the country's 23 places jump in the *2019 United Nations Development Programme Gender Inequality Index*, coming first in the region and 26th globally (UNDP, 2019a).

This message, featured across various platforms and in interviews with top female execs from different industries (Thompson, 2020), ignores the very first point on the very first page of the report:

> *"It is misleading to compare values and rankings with those of previously published reports, because of revisions and updates of the underlying data."*

Combined with the aforementioned PR Week feature (Bell, 2020), with claims that "being a woman working in PR [in the UAE] is one of the most exciting experiences" as the country "champions and cherishes women in leadership," this picture stands in stark contrast with the *World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index 2020* report (World Economic Forum, 2019), which placed the UAE in the 120th position out of 153 countries assessed.

Both reports benchmark national gender gaps on similar aspects: the UNDP report examines reproductive health, empowerment, and participation in the labour market while the WEF paper sub-indexes include health, economic participation, education, and political empowerment.

The biggest difference in the metrics pertains to health: the WEF report looks into life expectancy and sex ratio, but the UN paper focuses on: maternal mortality ratio and adolescent child births.

While there are 6 deaths per 100,000 live births on average in the UAE (9 in the UK), the adolescent birth rate stands at 6.5 births per 1,000 women aged 15–19; it's at 13.4 in the UK, but the report points out that one of its key limitations stems from its international context, which

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[1]   Known in personal capacity to the authors, Ana is a former UAE expatriate from Europe who used to work in a Dubai-based PR agency in a managerial position. Her identity has been anonymised upon request and serves to protect her from psychological and social harm as well as civil liability. Her contributions are not part of a wider study.

doesn't allow for data interpretation on a local level.

In case of the UAE, one can only speculate if the low rate reflects young women's awareness about contraception and high-quality sex education or whether it's affected by the law as, under the UAE Penal Code, pre-marital sex is a criminal offence and women with unmarried children face imprisonment for "crimes of honour."

Security price

For Ana, the moment of truth came in a team meeting, shortly after she started working in a British PR agency.

> *"I was explaining to my boss why paying for boosts on Facebook wasn't going to work unless we do proper targeting when my Jordanian colleague started talking about algorithms on Twitter.*

> *"I raised my hand in his direction and said: "'Hold on, Ahmad, let me just finish with Facebook first.'"*

A seemingly innocuous meeting situation to which Ana didn't give a second thought filled her with dread the moment she returned to her desk and opened her email.

The first message, from Ahmad, was written in capitals and read:

> *"IF YOU EVER AGAIN TELL ME IN A MEETING TO SHUT UP, I'LL DO SOMETHING YOU'RE NOT GOING TO LIKE."*

"I was flabbergasted," she says. "I replied by saying that there must've been some misunderstanding and I never intended any offence, but he responded with more threats."

When Ana showed the messages to her boss, he swept it aside with a smile, saying that Ahmad "would never hurt a fly" and scolded her for not confronting her colleague in person.

In the UAE, foreign employees do not have the right to form unions and any associations that would protect them are banned (Freedom House, 2019). It means that if newcomers land a job with an unethical organisation, there are no avenues for help and those who resign before their contract ends – probationary period included – may be liable for monetary compensation to their employers.

Job market research perils

Like most professionals wishing to move to the reportedly best, shiniest and glitziest expatriate destination in the world, Ana carried out rudimentary research on the country and her employer before she relocated: she looked up Glassdoor, read media coverage, reached out to her LinkedIn connections and their peers.

The problem is that it often doesn't work as Glassdoor, a job listing site featuring company reviews, salary reports and CEO approval ratings among others, is not a commonly used recruitment site in the UAE and even well-known consultancies may only have a handful of reviews.

While more popular recruiting sites, e.g. bayt.com, are present in the region, the country's highly restrictive 2012 cybercrime law helps protect bad employers as criticising them on social media can result in a hefty fine and a jail sentence (BBC, 2015). This can lead to self-censorship, preventing employees from speaking openly about their negative experiences via any digital media channels, LinkedIn included.

Similarly, under the 1980 Press and Publications Law, the authorities can punish media outlets if they criticise domestic affairs, the economy, the ruling elite, religion or the country's international relations. Thus, UAE-based journalists are often viewed as propaganda agents by international human rights advocacies.

According to David Haigh, a human rights lawyer, while the country portrays itself as liberal and progressive,

> *"the reality sees the UAE jailing its owns citizens, expats and tourists for even a tweet of 140 characters of criticism, or for taking a picture of a flooded road, or a fire" (Detained in Dubai, 2018).*

Consequently, the strict legal measures combined with lack of employment security force PR practitioners to negotiate self-censorship as a means of survival with ethical principles of the profession.

Power price

The second metric in the UN report, empowerment, is measured by the proportion of parliamentary seats occupied by females and the proportion of females and males aged 25 years and above with at least secondary education.

The last election saw Emirati females reaching 50% of the Federal National Council (FNC) by a presidential resolution (UAE National Elections Committee, 2019); thus, the Council comprises of 20 men and 20 women selected by an electoral college system in each of the seven emirates. The role of the FNC is to advise the unelected Federal Supreme Council, the country's highest legislative authority made up of seven sheikhs.

Between the FNC and the Supreme Council sits the Council of Ministers, the executive authority of the country. This Cabinet, accounting for 21 males and 9 females manages domestic and international policies, supervises courts [sic], as well as initiates drafts and federal laws that are passed onto the FNC for review.

Remarkably, while the UAE's Constitution "empowers the FNC to discuss any general subject pertaining to the affairs of the Federation" the Cabinet can "inform the Federal National Council that such discussion is contrary

to the highest interests of the Federation" (The United Arab Emirates Government Portal, 2020a). Also, while 78 women ran as candidates in the 2015 Cabinet elections, only one female was elected, and another eight were appointed by the government (Freedom House, 2019).

Foreign females, on the other hand, have no opportunity to organise independently and advocate their interests through the political system.

Education-wise, the state figures claim that women make up 70-75% of the student body in government-run universities while in private institutions the gender ratio is approximately 50:50, but this varies from institution to institution (Embassy of the United Arab Emirates in Washington DC, 2020).

Altogether, there are three public and 24 private universities offering media and communication degrees in the UAE (Commission for Academic Accreditation, 2020), and the gender ratio of students differs across them.

"In two of the three private universities I lectured in, females made up more than 70% of students in my classrooms," says Amal, one of the co-authors of this article who taught public relations in the UAE.

"In one of them, though, where all my students were locals, my PR class of 14 students was all males except for one female."

Regardless of the institution-specific policies, such as gender-segregated campuses, it is unreservedly commendable that women are given the opportunity to pursue their educational goals – and those are tuition free for Emiratis. Note that, however, that for many females, attending high school or university is one of the few places where they can spend time unsupervised by their families.

Once they've left education, however, their liberties may become restricted dramatically, and this can affect married female expatriates, too.

By law, a sponsor is needed to grant a work permit in the UAE. Typically, the hiring company is the sponsor. Once an employee is sponsored, they have the right to sponsor their family members: spouse and children. As a spouse, for example, a woman needs a "no objection certificate" (NOC) from her sponsor (usually her husband) in order to take on any part-time or full-time job (The United Arab Emirates Government Portal, 2020b).

"I had to ask my husband for a NOC to be able to work and I even needed one to open a bank account and apply for a driving license," says Amal.

While this might be considered a mere formality, for many women it hinders their career pursuits as those might not be approved by their sponsors, be that their fathers, mothers or a spouse.

Monetary price

A closer look at the labour market participation rates – a metric used in both the UNDP and WEF reports – paints a different picture to that of education.

Let's start with the country's intrinsic gender disparity – that is, the make-up of the UAE's entire population, currently estimated at 9.9 million, with the highest gender imbalance in the world of 274 men per 100 women (Smirnova, 2015).

According to the 2020 WEF's report, women make up 20% of the country's labour force of 6.9 million (World Bank, 2020), which amounts to 1.38 million women.

This, however, is not representative of the local female workforce. Emiratis reportedly comprise roughly 11.5% of the country's population, which equates to 1.13 million locals. The lack of an available recent official population census means that presenting an accurate figure of the number of Emirati females is mere guesswork.

Unfortunately, there isn't any data about the PR industry present either. MEPRA's attempt last year to run its first state of the profession report proved unsuccessful due to insufficient engagement from the industry (Summers, 2020); thus, there are no figures representing the gender pay gap in PR available.

There are, however, some legal provisions intended to address the gender pay gap in the country.

Following the UAE Cabinet's approval of the equal gender pay law in 2018, Reem Al Falasi (Duncan, 2018), Secretary-General of the Supreme Council for Motherhood and Childhood [sic] and a member of the Gender Balance Council, said:

> *"It is not unusual or unprecedented in the UAE because from the start women in the UAE enjoyed equal rights. There isn't a single job opportunity that Emirati women have been denied from. Today they are ministers, astronauts, fighter pilots and in every field."*

Seeing the law as a minor addition to an already just system, she said: "You can describe it as the cherry on top."

It could be that Her Excellency was referring to female Emiratis only as the *2019 Women in Work Index – Insights from Middle East and North Africa* report from PwC (PwC Middle East, 2019) reveals a different reality, showing that a mere 30% of women and 37% of men in the UAE strongly agreed with the statement: "My employer treats females equally when it comes to promoting from within."

The report concludes that while the gender equality agenda is advancing in the region and the participation of women in the labour market of the UAE has increased significantly over the past three decades, the

challenges stemming from the "lack of support after a career break, deep-seated social norms, and gender stereotypes and bias" prevail.

'You must obey the king'

In 2012, Johanna McDowell (2012), the then president of the IPRA published a set of 'golden rules' for PR practitioners new to the Middle East. Referring to the use of Arabic, her key piece of advice read: 'You must obey the king.' This tip, however, takes a different dimension when considering the impact of the UAE's societal variables on corporate culture and communication.

While culture is difficult to measure due to its intrinsically abstract nature, its impact on organisational environments is profound (Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 2010; Sriramesh and Vercic, 2009). Put simply, culture determines how companies communicate with their external and internal staff and who holds the decision-making power.

The UAE scores 90 out of 100 points in Hofstede Insights (n.d.) power distance index (it's 35 for the UK), defined as "the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organisations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally."

This societal power imbalance translates directly into an organisational culture where power is commonly centralised, subordinates have little independence, are often micro-managed, and the emotional distance between the management and employees is vast.

Additionally, the UAE's social hierarchy is mirrored by its economic social stratification resulting in ethnicity-determined wage discrepancies between Emiratis, Western expatriates, and migrant workers of colour, with the last group in the lowest bracket of society (Maintner and DeCoster, 2015). There are no recent studies exploring ethnicity, pay discrepancies or gender equality issues within the context of PR in the UAE specifically, but the view of Western female professionals being "treated firstly as women and then as professionals" until "their competence is proven" (Harrison & Michailova, 2012, p.637) suggests that a gender-related hierarchy exists.

This intrinsic inequity with associated human rights controversies often lead to ethical tensions UAE expatriates experience.

A qualitative case study research carried out among international employees at an Emirati college revealed that educators have to negotiate their ethics with the country's hierarchical structure (Saudelli, 2012). Coping strategies ranged from deliberate indifference, since "there are zero human rights in this country for some people, and I can't do anything," to denial or partial acceptance: "I do what I can when I can, but I also forgive myself when I can do nothing—this is not hypocritical. It is reality."

On the organisation level, employees may be expected to accept a hierarchical organisational order, know their place, and not to question it.

This means that they may feel highly dependent on their bosses, which is how Ana saw the power imbalance in her workplace.

> "*When my boss had a temperamental day, we'd scurry around and try to be exceptionally nice to him,*" she says.

> "*He'd berate either a single colleague in front of everyone, or the entire team, or he would prohibit us from leaving the office during our unpaid lunch break, which was against the law.*"

There is no statutory grievance procedure under the UAE's Labour Law, and, in cases of resignation, employees depend on their bosses to cancel their working visa and issue them with a letter of no objection should they wish to switch to employment elsewhere.

The lack of legal provisions and working visa complications mean that employees, particularly newcomers in junior positions, are more likely to succumb to the behaviour they would not tolerate in their home countries.

This power imbalance, combined with the intrinsic gender inequality on a population level, brings another cultural aspect into play: the perception of the role of women in PR.

In another, male-dominant meeting, a disagreement between Ana and her boss arose. The discussion focused on a client strategy, but her boss silenced her arguments on a personal note, saying:

> "*Why are you not being nice today? You're not even smiling.*"

Emotional labour

The expectation of female consultants to behave and present themselves in a particular manner equates to emotional labour where employees are under pressure to manage "their own emotions and displays of feelings to elicit a desired emotional response in other people" (Yeomans, 2016, p.34). This ingrained perception of women in PR being kind and charming in the workplace, is also perpetuated by the actions of female industry leaders, who claim that women are naturally born communicators and possess some exclusively female qualities, necessary to facilitate a successful career.

In an interview discussing her success in PR, Zeina Akkaoui, a founder of a Dubai-based PR agency, hailed by the national radio broadcaster as the "Queen of the dot coms," said that PR is a woman's job, as a "woman has a natural tendency to be more articulate and sensitive, she knows how to speak, how to dress, and how to multitask" (Mosleh, 2016).

Akkaoui perpetuates the inequality between men and women, claiming that it's women who "also have families to take care of, so they have to balance work and family life."

Commenting on sexual harassment in the workplace, Akkaoui blames women, asserting that some "pave the way for men," while it's "natural

that men will try to harass" and thus it's women's responsibility to "set the right boundaries."

A similar sentiment has been voiced by Her Excellency Mona Al Marri, Director General of the Government of Dubai Media Office and Vice President of the UAE Gender Balance Council during her keynote speech the MENA Chapter of the 'Global Women in PR' 2018 speaker series (UAE Government News; New Delhi, 2018).

While Her Excellency said that

> *"women can enrich the practice of strategic communication and public relations with their innate leadership skills and perspectives," it is their "natural empathy, openness, ability to listen and social adeptness make them both excellent communicators and astute leaders."*

It is perhaps not surprising, therefore, that the ministerial seat of the Ministry of Happiness and Tolerance established in 2016 with the mission of "creating social good and satisfaction" was given to a female (Moore, 2016). If women are naturally born family carers, who else would be best posited to be responsible for the entire nation's happiness?

Time will tell?

To conclude, while the UAE has been pushing for gender diversity over the past few decades — leading to an increasing number of females in leadership positions and parliamentary seats — there's no denying that the country scored low in *WEF Global Gender Gap Index* (2020) as socio-political factors restricting women in the workplace linger across the region.

The WEF report predicts that it will take 150 years to close the gender gap in the Middle East. For now,

> *"many women face limitations of basic rights, including for divorce, inheritance, asset ownership, access to justice and freedom of movement"*
> *(WEF Global Gender Gap Index, 2020, p. 23).*

Given the law changes, and the drive of the UAE to enhance its international reputation and attract foreign workforce and investment, it's expected that gender equality measures will be progressively implemented in practice. Researching any potential employers in depth is therefore of paramount importance for any female consultants considering a relocation to the UAE, particularly in terms of their staff gender ratio, the presence of females in the managerial positions, and business ethical conduct. If chosen wisely, newcomers may see their careers flourish and find themselves making a significant contribution to the UAE's developing PR industry and female leadership in the country's workforce.

And who knows, maybe in less than 150 years' time, we will witness a female receiving the UAE's *Gender Balance Index* award.

Amal Dib

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Female Public Relations Practitioners as Organizational Ethical Guardians

By Sian Rees

According to Forbes, Apple is the world's most valuable brand with a brand valuation of $205.5 billion (Badenhausen, 2019). As a long time public relations and branding practitioner, and now an academic researcher, the question for me is how do successful brands such as these gain trust and legitimization from their brand users, and how do we ensure that the significant power of branding is put to good societal use – particularly brands whose net worth is larger than many small countries? The nature of brands, the products they represent, communications policies, and overall reputation management seem to be important components, but how do these all fit together? My research into authentic branding and management considers whether public relations practitioners have taken on a pivotal role in corporate brand reputation management because of their stakeholder focus and their ability to understand that 21st century brands have to dynamically respond to their social environments. In particular, I was keen to understand if women were better placed to be the ethical guardians of today's organizations.

My research challenges existing ideas about corporate identity and corporate brand management arguing that a *digital turn* in communications has realigned public relations as an important discipline in delivering organizational brand narratives. Branding may not be seen as traditionally mainstream to public relations activity, but as the behavior of umbrella organizations becomes more important to consumers, so the link between corporate branding and reputation becomes more aligned. In an age where individuals have been empowered by digital media, and where corporate social responsibility and environmental concerns have come to the forefront of corporate reputation issues, the ability to be sensitive to public opinion and to put societal concerns above profit, seems to be emerging as increasingly important (Tench in Tench and Yeomans, 2017). And this seems to be something that female professionals are very good at. I have recently undertaken an analysis of fifteen face-to-face or telephone interviews which I conducted in 2014 with senior public relations and marketing industry executives. The job roles of the female participants included a network manager for the Chartered Institute of Public Relations, several managing directors of public relations agencies, account directors of public relations agencies and the Head of PR and Digital for a university. My aim was to discover their ideas about brand authenticity and the management of corporate reputation in the digital age. The analysis reveals consistent views about the nature of authentic branding and how to manage brand reputation in the long term. In particular, as I considered practitioners views of the impact of new digital media on brand management practices, it emerged that the characteristics of digital media have changed our approach to reputation management.

The first idea emerging from the analysis was the concept of *atunement*

(Rees, 2020), which encompasses the way brands must actively monitor the environment to enable them to understand changing customer values, and adapt to those values over time. If brands fail to do this they run the risk of brand failure and a loss of authenticity. This seems similar to the concept of boundary spanning in which public relations practitioners scan the environment in order to identify and respond to the attitudes of stakeholders (Gregory in Theaker, 2004). An analogous concept also exists in brand marketing where environmental analysis is undertaken in order to identify market gaps and opportunities to ascertain profitable product niches for development and exploitation (Palmer, 2004). But the practitioners seem to identify and explore a more interactive process than market research, in which it is important not just to know what brand users think, but to be *in-tune* with them and to be actively involved:

> *"It's about listening, the ability to tune in to what people care about. It's vital. It's a massive component of how a brand is seen"* (Managing Director, Public Relations Agency).

A strong aspect of this emerging concept of atunement is the ability of the brands to adapt and change. This is not about market research to develop a more compelling messaging strategy, but about actually changing the brand in response to consumer interaction. Such changes are not seen by female practitioners as necessarily dramatic. Good brands have *adaptive resilience*, making small changes, whilst staying true to their core values, such as the John Lewis partnership which engaged with online shopping and delivery early alongside a variety of responsible sourcing and environmental initiatives such as introducing re-usable and customer-owned packaging in its Waitrose food stores. Such brands keep stakeholders interested and engaged and demonstrate their sensitivity to emerging public opinion:

> *"As a consumer seeing something new is important, otherwise you get bored. Brands have to keep it fresh"* (Managing Director, Public Relations Agency).

Another theme which emerged from the interviews with female practitioners was the strong link between behavior, action and the need for consistent communications. It is clear that a good reputation is an important aspect of brand authenticity, and that brand reputations need to be actively nurtured and protected. Added value can also help support the construction of a strong reputation:

> *"We expect so much from brands, so any extra value they can add to the brand is important to make me as the user feel valued"* (Managing Director, Public Relations Agency).

Many of the female practitioners also talked of the importance of integrity and honesty to brand authenticity. Integrity is characterized by the need for brands to be open and honest, particularly as the digital media environment provides no hiding place for dishonest brands or those that fail to live up to their promises. Authentic brands are those that "are what they say they are" (Managing Director, Public Relations Agency).

According to the respondents, successful brands in the digital age are benefiting from a real-time interaction between brand and user, which helps develop, nurture and support the notion of brand authenticity. Female practitioners identify that success in the digital environment requires a new approach, and that getting it right can have powerful, positive results for brands. This means creating organizational content and narratives which ring true with stakeholders: "Tone is important – having their own language on line" (Account Director, Public Relations Agency). The nature of corporate action and content is also important, and the majority of my interviewees acknowledged that Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has become more important for brands today than 25 years ago. It is essential, however, that CSR is embedded in the brand DNA, not bolted on as a communications strategy or project: "the sustainability agenda is new and that puts pressure on organizations" (Head of Public Relations and Digital, Swansea University).

The final theme which emerged from the research was the way in which brand users have increasing power in a 24 hour interactive media environment. Authentic brands understand this and respond accordingly. Consumer power is seen to have increased with digital media particularly because brand users are not afraid to exit from brands they find in-authentic or disappointing. One of the outcomes of this is the increasingly important role of good customer service strategies within the brand mix. This is partly to do with the nature of the medium and partly to do with a new type of brand user:

> "It's generational; a mixture of the big media and the digital media environment. If you're aged up to 26, you're going to fight your own battles"
> (Account Director, Public Relations Agency).

Enabling brands to be truly stakeholder-focused and customer-driven requires a re-imagining of public relations practitioners as facilitators working within a networked community of internal and external brand creators, rather than a controller of brand communications. When stakeholders have power over brands, authenticity has personal meaning for them (Beverland, 2009). When this happens, authenticity is *given* to a brand or organisation by consumers and other stakeholders, based on criteria such as self-identification, creativity, sincerity and satisfaction and this leads to a lack of cognitive dissonance because customers are happy that brand promises are met. Users of authentic brands feel they have the power to ensure that customer promises are delivered, and even to help direct what those promises should be and they therefore wield significant power over the brand. This is exemplified by Apple which regularly uses a range of customer engagement and research techniques to empower user-involvement with brand and product development such as the Mac World Expo, the network of user-generated Mac-themed websites and blogs and User Group events (Van Bellingham, 2012). The theme of customer power emerged spontaneously from the female practitioner interviews and there was a strong consensus about the high level of influence that customers have over brands today, specifically enabled by digital media developments:

"The illusion of control has been shattered and transformed by the fact that everyone with a phone is a publisher or TV company" (Head of Public Relations, National Advertising Agency)

Customer power is important because it gives brand users influence and control.

These senior female professionals all highlighted a number of identifiable factors that they believe make brands authentic to users. It is clear that the vision and values of the brand need to be clearly articulated, and that they need to underpin all these other behaviors. Key areas of focus appear to be:

▶ Being in tune with public opinion;

▶ Real-time interaction through digital media;

▶ Giving customers power to influence and interact with the brand;

▶ Integrity and honesty;

▶ Corporate social responsibility;

▶ Product delivery against brand values.

Authenticity, however, cannot just be a badge depicting good reputation management. The public relations practitioners I interviewed highlighted the need for consistency, sensitivity and believability. Believable communications, it emerges, tend to be those that refer to brand promises that can be fulfilled, but also to other aspects of messaging and dialogue that make sense for the brand and its stakeholders. The narrative provides the fixed nature of branding against which stakeholders co-create their own meanings in a way which means something to them personally. The interviewed practitioners articulate this well:

"Authentic brands 'are what they say they are'. They are real people dealing with real situations. That's authentic. They are trying to position themselves in a real way, cutting through the jargon, using authentic language" (Managing Director, UK Public Relations Agency).

Critical Findings – Brand Authenticity

Authentic brands consist of three core structures:

1. **A clear identified vision and set of values**. These make sense for the brand, and remain relevant over time, either because they are linked to the brand provenance and heritage, or because they align closely with the product, service or lifestyle on offer from the brand.

2. **Authentic Brand Qualities**. For authentic 21st century brands it is imperative that corporate social responsibility is embedded at their core. Authentic brands take integrity and honesty seriously and they ensure that values, CSR and integrity are translated into all the behaviours of the organisation.

3. **Interactivity**. This is a new area of focus for brand authenticity. Authentic brands accept and embrace the power of consumers, they empower them to comment and engage, they listen to them and they respond to them, gradually adjusting the brand offer and communications so that it remains perfectly in tune with its priority stakeholder groups.

These three aspects (core values, embedded qualities and aspects of interactivity) form the core structures of authentic brands (Rees, 2020). This builds on existing ideas about brand equity with a particular point of difference being the interactive qualities of those brands perceived by users to be authentic in a modern digital media world. These aspects could then be used by public relations practitioners to guide discussions about the development of brands and to encourage an interactive approach to branding. If public relations professionals and brand managers within organisations are allowing this kind of interactive branding, then what kind of brand authenticity are we talking about here? A term such as 'weak' authenticity might be useful if existing ideas about authenticity are historical and fixed, then this new authenticity is malleable and dynamic whilst still retaining a solid core. This builds upon Kevin Moloney's (2006) idea of public relations as weak propaganda, because it uses some of the characteristics and techniques of propaganda, but does not completely control media and messaging environments in the way that true propaganda might. Instead it allows for interactive argument and debate. If the original meaning of authenticity is that something is true to its original version – something we might relate to core brand values – then weak authenticity is a concept which allows for a dynamic quality to that original. This involves letting go of control. Authentic brands embrace weak authenticity because they let customers and other stakeholders influence their direction, but they do not lose sight of their core brand values.

Ethics and Brand Guardianship

The interviews with female brand practitioners reveal that those working in public relations see themselves intrinsically connected to protecting and projecting reputation. What this perspective fails to address, however, is the problematic association of ethics and CSR, and the connection to what constitutes authenticity (Watson, 2010). It seems to me that a key question is whether corporate social responsibility is linked to higher social goals in which an organisation is fully focused on the public good and influencing the world for the better. This theme of the research came very much from my female interviews and it was they who highlighted that public relations practitioners must face the reality that in many organisational contexts authentic behaviour is corporately oriented and may not be specifically in the broader interests of the public good. And yet CSR could potentially offer many opportunities for organisations to display society-oriented behaviour.

A dominant theme of much existing CSR research is the non-critical acceptance of CSR as an asset and a practical communications strategy. Carroll's four basic categories of CSR (economic, legal, ethical and discretionary/philanthropic),

for example have been used as a basis for a variety of research projects for over 25 years (Caroll and Shabana, 2010). However, Carroll then provides another dimension for these categories by suggesting that the economic and legal responsibilities are required, ethical ones are expected, and that the discretionary/philanthropic category is desired. Carroll is thereby suggesting that a hierarchy of CSR criteria might apply. The phenomenon is not new as corporations such as AT&T, General Electric and General Motors used communications to convince the public that they had good intentions and humane values in the early 1900s (Arvidsson, 2006). There is evidence of companies from the beginning of the 20th century joining together to present unified messages which promoted social progress as connected to free enterprise (Edwards, 2006) and creating social welfare structures within organizations to avoid regulation (Ewen, 1996).

A variety of studies have sought to establish best practice in the area of CSR communications and findings often reveal benefits of CSR activities such as competitive advantage and enhanced reputational assets (Grigore et al., 2010). Disclosure of CSR activities which exceed normal expectations can positively build corporate legitimacy, even when the persuasive intent of the communications is understood (Bachmann and Ingenhoff, 2016) and there is plenty of evidence of CSR being used to bolster image and reputation alongside the achievement of organizational goals (Grigore et al., 2015). The public relations academic community, however, is increasingly questioning the nature of organizational social actions and related communications programs. Logan (2014) and Bourne (2016) highlight that CSR is institutionally bound to processes which support corporate voices and perspectives. Many organizations try to be reflective, questioning their own roles and identities and exhibiting responsible behaviors, and yet they remain 19th century capitalists in essence (Bentele and Wehmeier, 2007). British Petroleum exemplifies this phenomena. Its re-imagining as 'Beyond Petroleum' was exposed as a half-truth when BP workers died in the Gulf of Mexico as a result of low security standards. Lin-Hi and Blumberg's (2018) distinction between CSR which is aimed at Doing Good and programs which are about Avoiding Bad is a helpful way of trying to identify the real underlying motives of CSR. By Doing Good organizations voluntary provide some of their resources to help drive positive social change, whilst Avoiding Bad requires corporations to ensure that basic employment, social, safety and environmental standards are met in such a way that harm is avoided, thus avoiding the violation of basic principles of fairness and justice in society. From the interview respondents I felt that there was a general focus on ensuring consistency between CSR narratives, brand values and delivery, rather than a deep-seated public good objective. Nevertheless, the female practitioners interviewed focused on the need for sensitivity to internal and external stakeholders and have a strong vision for the social meaning and purpose of organizations. They highlighted the idea that the emotionally intelligent practitioner will help organizations to understand and challenge their roles in society and offer ways for a variety of brand stakeholders to engage directly with an organization, and its employees, to challenge brand inauthenticity and direct brands towards actions which support the public good.

I found that in my own work as a senior public relations practitioner and brand manager in the publishing industry I was able to bring a particular level of emotional sensitivity to external issues and stakeholder perspectives which enabled me to influence top level discussions about business strategy in relation to organizational goals. Such soft skills are not the unique preserve of female practitioners and all communications, public relations and branding practitioners are uniquely placed in an age of increasing concern over the environment, the treatment of communities and now health and welfare to push a more socially-oriented view and to use public relations in a way which really does serve the public good. Based on the recommendations from the interviews and my own practical and academic perspective, this set of principles may be useful as a guiding framework for framing such authentic public relations activity:

Guiding Principles for Socially Oriented Public Relations Practice

1. PR practitioners need to be evangelists for socially-oriented CSR activity and outcomes.

2. Brand communication needs to focus on both internal and external stakeholders to embed qualities of compassion and customer-orientation.

3. The PR practitioner needs to be an ethical guardian, steering the organisation with both emotional and rational intelligence.

4. Female practitioners should bring their soft skills to bear on PR practice to assist organizations in being sensitive and in-tune with their stakeholders and social environments.

5. Corporate brand narratives need a human quality in order to resonate effectively with stakeholders.

Sian Rees

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Now is the Time for Reflection, We Need Change.

Unlocking the power of numbers to address gender bias?

By Zora Artis

Over the past few months, our world has been turned upside down, with many of us sharing common experiences as we adapt to life in a pandemic. The role of communication in business and society is significant to the success of how well we come out of this situation – as businesses, as communities, and as people.

We've seen incredible change at a pace that has not been seen before borne from the necessity of the COVID-19 crisis, forcing us to think quickly and creatively to adapt, to work in different ways, and to accept change. We know that what each of us does can have an impact, and we realize how interconnected we are. It has also been a time to reflect and re-assess. What works and what does not? What are we grateful for and what could we create if we have the opportunity and the will?

Like many others, I have had time to reflect and reimagine what I do in my business, but also what we as communication professionals could do as we step into the recovery phase and next normal. Sure, there is urge to return to pre COVID-19 normal life, but I wonder if we should? Applying a gender bias lens, let us take a look at what is "normal".

"Normal" and numbers

Numbers. What do the numbers 53, 30, 21, 99.5 and 532 represent? The first four relate to bias and are the current reality for women in the workplace. Let me come back to 532.

Did you know that women in the UK are 53% more stressed than men at work? That's one data set explored in Invisible Women (Criado Perez, 2019), amongst many other gender data inequalities in our organizations and society. In a world where more than half the population are women and women account for 70% of global consumption demand (International Labour Organization, 2016) the data shows that we're less visible than men. Why? We live in societies and work in organizations that have been designed around men, usually white, able-bodied men. She exposes the biases that exist, be they structural or unconscious. When women are underrepresented in the data then it impacts how decisions are made and the impact of these can range from inconvenience to being deadly for women. With the proliferation of big data, biased computer algorithms and the rise of AI the problem could get worse. To prevent the self-perpetuation of old biases Criado Perez advocates increase the representation of diverse women in business, politics and academia. Bolstering the numbers opens the opportunity to identify design flaws and data gaps that male-dominated leaders or teams miss.

You have probably heard of the **30 percent** club. This number represents the tipping point of female representation needed at senior leader and management levels to have significant impact upon an organization's bottom line. A global study (Blumberg, 2018) found that with at least 30% women at C-suite a profitable organization had a 15% boost in profitability. It showed that in addition to improved profitability Fortune 500 companies with gender diverse senior leadership teams were also more innovative and respected. Another study (International Labour Organization, 2019) expanded these findings to show that gender-balanced leadership teams (40–60% of either gender) also found it easier to attract and retain talent, had more open ways of working and found it easier to gauge customer sentiment. Male dominant or all male boards are less likely to achieve gender equity in middle management or address structural bias, whilst organizations with female board chairs are more likely to have gender balance in middle management.

Over the past decade there has been a marked effort to increase the number of women in senior leadership and board roles. For example, in Australia, the Australian Institute of Company Directors (AICD) achieved its 30% target for women directors at ASX200 companies at the end of 2019 (AICD, 2020) up from just 8% a decade ago. This is a positive result that has taken a concerted focus from AICD, Chief Executive Women, Women Gender Equity Australia and the Male Champions of Change. Nevertheless, despite this achievement there is much more to do with the numbers of women in board and executive roles declining outside the ASX200. Whilst in the public sector, there appears to be a more purposeful focus on gender equity, as well as broader diversity and inclusion, with implementation of 50/50 gender targets for all senior leadership and board roles in the Victorian state government. Both examples show commitment at the executive level to affect change in organizational leadership and mindset and to alter the discourse about equity and culture in the workplace. The 40:60 ratio for a gender balanced board or leadership team is switching to 40:40:20, representing female, male and other – the other reflecting gender fluidity and other diversity.

Despite the efforts to change the inequities in leadership many organizations are still falling short. The recent McKinsey Women in the Workplace study (Huang et al., 2019) shows that 21% of US companies have women in the C-suite, and only one in 25 is a woman of color. The inequity is a result of biases (International Labour Organization, 2019) such as:

► the prevalence of old stereotypes, patriarchal cultures and practices,

► the "glass wall" where women are in less strategic roles that could lead to executive leadership,

► the "broken rung" where women are less likely to be hired and promoted, thus impacting the number of women stepping up the management ladder.

Each year the World Economic Forum publishes the *Global Gender Gap Report* (World Economic Forum, 2019) which looks at the current position of gender parity in 153 countries and project trends to map out how long it will take to achieve gender parity. The numbers are not great and show

that **at the current rate of change the gender gap will take 99.5 years to close**. The fix is not all about numbers, but they do play a significant part.

A global survey of 12,000 people found that both sexes felt the world would be "a better place if more women were in positions of power" (Havas Group, 2017).

Increased representation of women in leadership, politics and business is good for society and is good for people irrespective of gender. But it is not just about progress at the top, but also at entry-levels and middle management. This is where gender bias become even more apparent.

Bias and perception barriers

Reflecting over my career in creative, marketing and communications, I have regularly dealt with gender bias in the workplace. In many cases it was overt and accepted as a normal part of working in a dynamic and pressured agency environment. Dare I say, both men and women were perpetuating the bias, either as protagonists or as bystanders.

As I became more confident in my own capability, I confronted overt bias as it happened.

I recall working on an internal communication campaign with a multinational corporate client as the strategic lead. I oversaw a video shoot with the company's country head to deliver the campaign narrative. As he arrived, he greeted each of us at the shoot, including his senior marketers, my account director, and my production team, with one exception my female design director. I thought this was rather odd, noted it to myself and worked with him to deliver the narrative to camera. Once he was finished, he expressed how much he liked the narrative, thanked everyone and shook hands with the men at the shoot. It made me and the design director uncomfortable so, I stopped him to let him know that I was pleased that he liked the narrative and creative work that the two women present developed and shook his hand. Aside from his overt bias, I was particularly disappointed by the bystander apathy of my male colleagues and clients. I let them know how we felt and that it was imperative they act when they see sexism. Calling out poor behaviour and sharing these stories are steps to changing the norms (Ferguson & Fox, 2018).

For decades, we have focused on improving bias by introducing numerous diversity initiatives and opportunities for women to advance in organizations. Diversity programs have become part of the problem by increasing resistance to reducing bias and patronizing women. We've been telling women to change, and to fit with expected gender norms to advance and succeed (Ferguson & Fox, 2018).

The numbers show this approach is not working. Fixing women is not the answer. Criado Perez demonstrated that our world has not been designed with women in mind. The problem is niether women nor men but workplaces. This realization has been made and substantiated over and over (Ferguson & Fox, 2018; Morley, 2020; King, The Fix, 2020). Michelle King's work in this

space has been particularly illuminating revealing that many organizations carry the notion of the ideal employee, the "Don Draper success prototype". Living up to this notion means that we're expected to engage stereotypical masculine behaviors and we're free to commit all our time and energy to the workplace. A notion that is clearly challenged in the current pandemic environment for many of us which is a good thing.

The barriers can be visible and invisible, conscious and unconscious, structural and cultural. Becoming aware of the barriers, in particular biases, is the first step to appreciating the challenges for men and women, and what employees and leaders can do so that workplaces work for everyone. In her book *The Fix*, King (King, The Fix, 2020) shares the story of a woman in a multinational corporation who did everything right to be promoted to a leadership role and year after year she failed. Eventually, she got the job when the male decision-maker thought her promotion would make their diversity numbers look good. It reflected his bias and privilege at work.

King makes the point that both men and women in dominant positions have privilege. Men, often, "choose to enable women to have a seat at the table" and "how much legitimacy that role will have". There is a tendency to view women's experiences with a unified lens, but they are not – just think race, age, religion, culture, ability, sexual orientation and it can differ. As men and women, she recommends that we commit to "spending our privilege" as a daily practice. She gives the example of a former LinkedIn leader who engaged employees in discussions to identify where and how they experienced the organization's culture differently. How did men and women interact in meetings? Were women given a voice or were they interrupted? This encouraged other leaders to follow suit with their teams, and employees shared their stories of marginalization at work. These experiences were then used to create ways to make diversity and inclusion a part of their work life, as simple actions that everyone could take to proactively demonstrate acts of inclusion (King, The Fix, 2020). Leaders became the champions of change and helped to amplify the messages and work of supporters (Morley, 2020).

Defeating bias

Despite US President Obama being a vocal supporter of women, in his first term men outnumbered women in senior roles in his administration. These women realized they had fewer opportunities than their male colleagues to contribute in meetings. So, the women decided to proactively support each other's ideas in meetings by repeating them and crediting the woman whose idea it was. They amplified their voice and ensured they were heard. It was a strategic move to use their numbers and lift each other up. In the second term, the gender split in the senior team was more equitable and women were regularly asked for input (Ferguson & Fox, 2018). This amplification effect is now commonly used by both men and women to address gender bias against women in meetings.

Balancing the best of both genders, by both genders, leads to a more inclusive culture. Removing gender attributions from behaviour qualities shows

how leadership and culture can be inclusive to drive benefits of diversity in an organization (Morley, 2020). There has been extensive research on masculine and feminine related traits in leadership (Appelbaum et al., 2013) and debate over which style is more effective (Lewis, 2020; Henley & Ainge Roy, 2020). The success of the national women leaders in New Zealand, Germany, Taiwan, Iceland and Norway in their response to COVID-19 has given rise to various articles proclaiming women are better leaders in a crisis (King, CNN Business, 2020). The traits amongst these women leaders are combination of both masculine and feminine traits, and it could be argued that they are a success due to their leadership rather than attributing it to their gender.

As has been shown in organizations where the CEO is a Male Champion of Change (Male Champions of Change, 2019) compelling, inclusive behaviors and measurable diversity and inclusion initiatives need to be aligned with corporate strategy and purpose. They share their stories of compassion, learning and vulnerability to highlight what people are doing and achieving, and that they value difference. They share these within their organizations and externally. It becomes part of what they do, the brand and their DNA (Morley, 2020).

Outside of the organization, how are brands performing to address bias? A recent Kantar report showed that an average 82% of marketers believed they created "gender-balanced content" and avoided stereotypes, yet 74% of consumers felt the way they were portrayed was "completely out of touch" (Fridlund, 2019). This is a huge discrepancy and an opportunity to rethink our approach to brand communications and marketing.

There are examples of brands that have made an impact such as P&G's "Always #LikeAGirl" project , or Nike's "Dream Further" campaign for the Women's Football World Cup. Diageo, one of the world's largest producers of alcohol beverages, recognized it was missing an opportunity by focusing on men in their brand communications. This was despite 80% of purchasing decisions were made by women. They researched the status quo to inform what needed to change and then developed a gender portrayal framework to guide consumer facing communication and advertising. Diageo acknowledged that we all have some level of unconscious bias and that affects our response to communication and advertising. Their framework guides the way they tell real and diverse stories. They conducted workshops with internal teams, all spokespeople, and their agency partners. The company also rolled out HR policies which reflect the framework and ensure a unified set of brand communications committed to positive gender portrayal. The change in their approach resulted in a 70% uplift in return on investment (Chan, 2019).

Where do we go next?

At the beginning 2017, Dr Kirstin Ferguson became an accidental activist
when she had a bold idea whilst walking along an Australian beach. She
did not realize it would be the year of one of the more significant women's
rights movements for decades. Women were (and still are) regularly the
targets of trolls who denigrated them on social media. Kirsten felt she
could no longer be a bystander and had a simple idea to focus on the
positive stories of women. That day she wrote four basic questions *(How
would you describe what it is you do, without using a position title;
What did you hope to do when you were at school; How would you
describe your life to date in three words; Who do you hope to inspire
and why)*, rang her mum and asked her to answer the questions and
send some personal photos. Kirsten posted the answers and photos on
Twitter and Facebook. She called on women – any women – to answer
the four questions about their life and send her four photos. It was the
beginning of the #CelebratingWomen campaign that attracted thousands
of followers and a diverse community of women eager to share their
stories and support each other. These were women from all walks of life,
some celebrities, some politicians, and everyday women. All had a positive
story to tell. It showed how women's networks succeed through the
amplifier effect with 757 women from 37 countries participating over the
year. The campaign attracted the attention of Twitter's Jack Dorsey, received
numerous awards, and has spurned many women and men to challenge the
status quo and drive change (Ferguson & Fox, 2018).

I am proud to share my #CelebratingWomen number – #532 (Ferguson &
Fox, 2018).

Zora Artis

Zora Artis, GAICD SCMP FAMI CPM is the CEO of Artis Advisory in Melbourne, Australia. She has almost three decades of experience in both client and agency side, working with government, private and non-profit sectors in business strategy, communications, marketing, brand, and organizational alignment. Her strength lies in her ability to uncover insight, identify opportunities where others see problems and connect the dots holistically to find ways to deliver tangible value.

Zora is the only person in Australia to hold professional certifications in strategic communication, marketing, and board directorship. She's the current Regional Chair in Asia Pacific of the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) and past director on the IABC global board. She's researched and authored thought-leading content on strategic alignment, internal communication, and leadership. She's the winner of multiple awards for communication excellence and the recipient of the 2015 IABC Chairman's Award and 2020 IABC Region Leader of the Year.

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Artificial Intelligence and Public Relations – The new Imperative for Communicators and Why Women Communicators Must Accelerate Into AI.

By Kerry Sheehan

There's no doubt that Artificial Intelligence (AI) is fuelling innovation across industries, but just what impact is it having on the communications sector? What does the future hold for communicators and the businesses, organisations and brands they support?

AI is a massive force impacting the motion of businesses, organisations and brands across every industry and it is, without a doubt, driving the next big shift in influence and storytelling. From image recognition to data-driven news articles, AI is changing the way we 'do' communications (WE Communications, 2019).

The upside of AI is already apparent, from voice assistants that change channels to being our personal assistants. But AI is only as good as the data it is fed, and early development and deployment have exposed a soft underbelly vulnerable to bias and bad actors.

Big data, used for AI on the face of it, promises fairness. With enough information about individuals and populations, we can design algorithms that will identify the best possible answer to a given question, apparently free of human bias (O'Neill, 2016).

Algorithms can dictate whether you get a mortgage, how much you pay for insurance, whether you get a university place or can progress in an interview for a job role. But sometimes they're wrong – and sometimes they are designed to deceive. Lots of algorithms go bad unintendedly (O'Neill, 2016).

As AI becomes more prevalent, it raises big questions of ethics, power, influence and potential, with major implications for business and society. It demands greater scrutiny and a more elevated role for the communications industry, which must continue its ethical practice of causing no deliberate harm and no to mislead third parties (European Code of Conduct in Public Relations).

Innovation will be going through many phases to come, on top of what we have already and are seeing. Professional communicators have an essential part to play in how emerging technologies and new advances, like AI, are used and applied in both our own work and the work of businesses, organisations, brands and clients we advise, whether they be internal or external.

Not since the internet has the communications industry faced an opportunity

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of such magnitude: one that will enable us to shape perception in radically new ways and influence the impact of new technologies on the lives of people around the world. To do both, we'll need a solid understanding of the technology, processes and platforms. This must include the people behind it, those building and deploying, the algorithms at play, the integrity of the data, and potential uses and misuses.

AI has existed for decades but mainstream use and adoption are still, largely, in the early stages (WE Communications, 2019). We can say this is a perfect time for our industry to elevate to new heights as advocates and the conscience for ethical and smart use of AI. However, this could be misleading for some and delay communicators' moves to really understand the processes and landscapes. The early stages of use and adoption of AI, or any innovation encroaching on society and business, should be considered by communicators as the absolute time to upskill.

Communication professionals are already using some form of AI in content aggregators, media monitoring tools and chat bots within the function and plan to adopt content generation tools, virtual reality, data collection tools, as well as tools to help them measure success (Sams, 2020). We are also seeing more sophisticated AI tools being used by communicators to help thwart crisis and turn them into opportunities (Paine Publishing).

However, it needs to go further to ensure communications functions are at the forefront of driving AI-powered businesses, organisations and brands forward.

The notion for the requirement for communicators to upskill into data, AI and machine learning is endorsed by industry-wide research revealing the impact of technology, and specifically AI, on public relations practice. It predicts the impact on skills in the profession in the next five years (Valin, 2018).

The Humans Still Needed pioneering research, led by Jean Valin, Stephen Waddington and Professor Anne Gregory, as part of the global Artificial Intelligence in Public Relations Panel, is the first comprehensive assessment of the impact of AI on public relations skills. The research benchmarked around 350 tools being used in the communications industry against the 11 competencies (communication, organizational and professional) that Global Body of Knowledge (GBOK) framework suggests that all good communicators should have (Global Alliance).

The discussion paper uses a simplified version of the GBOK framework, which describes more than 50 capabilities and competencies in public relations, to visually represent the skills that AI is most likely to replace. Tools were benchmarked against the GBOK framework by an international group of practitioners (Global Alliance).

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Characterising the impact of tech and AI on PR skills now and in the future

The *Humans Still Needed* report found that 12% of a public relations practitioner's total skills (out of 52 skills) could be complemented or replaced by AI today, with a prediction that this could climb to 38% within five years (five years in 2018).

Whilst areas of the legal skills are benefitting from automation and AI, there are other areas such as strategy, ethical and personal skills which may not benefit from AI in the coming years. However, the reports says that other areas such as community identification, risk analysis and behavioural analysis will.

Fundamental human traits such as empathy, trust, humour and relationship building can't be automated, hence *Humans Still Needed*.

Technology is impacting practice in other areas of communication practice including the simplification of tasks; listening and monitoring; and automation. Therefore, another 27% of the practitioner's skill set benefits from the support of some technology to assist indecision making or deep analysis.

In three years or less, there may be more assistance from AI tools, which will contribute more directly to the application of skills in this category but on balance human intervention is dominant.

That is one of the lessons of this exercise: We need to emphasise education, experiential learning and continuous development of these very human traits that are valued in the communication profession.

The *Humans Still Needed* industry-leading research (Valin, 2018), published in 2018, is clear that although, currently, there is a higher level of automation being used in the role of the communicator, AI is encroaching on some of the areas of our roles, particularly those areas which are process driven.

The number of PR skills currently being supported by AI technology should increase threefold in the next few years, says the report that also promises many PR skills should "remain the domain of humans".

Network analysis and natural language processing enables us to understand communities and identify areas of white space in conversations. The research shows that in now years' time, AI is likely to have a stronger grip on PR functions (Valin, 2018).

Communicators are sleepwalking into AI

However, conversation around the topic of AI being used in the role of communicators as well as that in the organisations, businesses, brands they advise is typically polarised between denial and techno-panic, with many communicators still not upskilling into data and AI (Valin, 2018).

Further exclusive research on AI in the Professions, led by Professor Anne Gregory and academic Swati Virmani (2020) in collaboration the AIinPR global

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panel and supported by the Alan Turing Institute, the Confederation of British Industry and the Chartered Institute of Marketing, informed communicators across the globe "PR is sleepwalking into AI".

The *Effects of AI on the Professions: A Literature Repository* (Gregory and Virmani, 2020) benchmarked PR against other professions, including accountancy, law, and HR. The research provides a comprehensive overview on the impact AI has and will have on professions.

The report draws significant conclusions around the potential challenges the PR industry will face as a result of AI, including lack of discussion around ethical issues. Several tasks, such as content creation and media monitoring, are now being automated, so there is a set of professional skills that are already being replaced by AI (Gregory and Virmani, 2020). The report also shows that other professions, such as HR and management consultancy, are more progressive in planning around AI and are already putting measures in place to handle the transition (Gregory and Virmani, 2020).

After having touched on general themes, including AI's impact on specific sectors and professions, the most and least affected group of workers, and the related technologies, the report urges PR professionals to undertake a systematic review of how AI is used in communications.

Looking to the future, the #AIinPR report (Valin, 2018) suggests particularly focusing on the workforce, such as transition issues for the existing employees, the ethical implications of AI and providing a review of the training courses that will equip professionals in the coming year.

So, whilst the professionals in these other professions are actively upskilling themselves into data and AI, the PR profession doesn't seem to be doing so and it is notably trailing behind other professions in preparations for the high-tech future (Valin, 2018; Adi, 2019). This, unfortunately, has been the same throughout history – PR has a very poor track record of adopting any tech innovation, let alone at scale.

> *"Unsurprisingly, this review finds AI will undoubtedly change the nature of work, and specifically impact those offering professional services. It also suggests AI will disproportionately impact specific groups - particularly women, ethnic minorities, those without qualifications and entrants to the profession. This report doesn't advise how to navigate the use of AI but is designed to enable direct access to a suite of resources for readers to inform themselves,"* says Dr Anne Gregory, former chair of the Global Alliance and co-author of the report (CIPR Newsroom, 2020)."

Although PR is less at risk of job losses compared to other professions, it will still be significantly affected by automation. PR has a vital societal and organisational role to play in the debate on AI but it needs to better prepare itself with practitioners upskilling to work smarter, faster in their roles but also becoming equipped to advise on AI adoption and deployment within organisations and business and to its stakeholders and society. It is our role, debate is no longer about being in our own swim lanes, we must help drive business and organisations forward.

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This is further endorsed by suggestions that AI is progressing at a tremendous rate and it is being implemented faster than we humans can comprehend. The public relations problem is not only one of reputation and public confidence. As more companies become involved in AI and PR professionals are expected to use AI data, advise on its use, develop policy around it, advise the CEO and clients on it, and comment publicly on it, we should examine AI's implications and ethics (Bowen, 2018).

Additionally, research by Cropley Communications, Australia[1] for its Annual AI Playbook (2019) shows that well over 50% of communicators (of a sample of 170 respondents from 24 countries) feel that communication professionals are not ready and able to lead organisational AI communication.

Moreover, the 2019 European Communications Monitor also shows that artificial intelligence is believed to change the communications profession as a whole according to three quarters of respondents (77%). The same study reports that 56% of respondents state that it is difficult to secure competencies of communication practitioners needed for introducing AI (Zerfass et al., 2019).

Furthermore, it is believed there will be major impacts of automation and AI on the professional workforce, and these must be the subject of advanced consideration by several professions (Institute of Public Relations).

So, whilst this paints a stark picture for the PR profession as a whole on data and AI and that more communicators should be upskilling into data and AI – how can we begin to advise and guide if we don't know the ins and outs of these areas and the tough ethical questions to ask as reputations, and possibly careers, will be on the line – there is the opportunity for all communicators to upskill.

The backdrop of PR is sleepwalking into AI does, however, present a unique opportunity for women communicators if they take up the challenge to upskill into data, AI and machine learning, as I have, and the challenge is a huge one.

AI is and will massively change our lives. The public relations profession needs to keep up. We need more experience with these tools and more critical reviews to learn how best to use them and their limitations.

Regardless of the tasks and skills that can be automated or benefit from AI, human intervention, editing, sensitivity, emotional intelligence, applying good judgement and ethics will always be needed.

Ultimately, communication leaders must understand how human nature is adapting to technology and work to align that technology with human nature without exploiting people.

We are the agents of translation and transformation, and we operate at the core of our respective organisations. From this unique perspective, we can see and champion the inclusion of all our stakeholders and their needs. Technology itself is neither the problem nor the solution: It merely amplifies existing human forces. So, we should focus on how these tools might make

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1   Cropley Communications, led by Adrian Cropley oversees the Global Centre for Strategic Excellence and is a CIPR AIinPR panel member.

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things better—or worse—in how we interact with each other (Valin, 2018).

But that comes with a caveat, **AI will have harmful effects on the world if more women do not lead in the field** (Cropley, 2019). Women communicators with good knowledge of data and AI must step up and help demand an end to discriminatory algorithms being deployed at the businesses, organisations and brands they work with and advise, internally and externally.

Reputation matters and any communicator or communications function not involved at the very start of AI building and deployment must question themselves ethically as if we are allowing organisations, businesses and brands to code inequality, exclusion and chauvinism into AI, we have not only failed ethically – we have failed the communications profession and, ultimately, ourselves.

It is time for more women communicators to step it up to where data and AI are concerned: if ungoverned, unaccountable and unchecked, we won't see the amazing benefits of AI and the role of the communicator here is huge.

In short, more women communicators need to take up lead positions in AI and machine learning, an industry well-known to be dominated by men but still too few communicators and that is more so the case for women communicators.

This is an area of concern, as in many sectors there are more women than men working in communications, although men still seem to dominate the top roles, particularly at director level. This is particularly the case for public service communications and the health sectors, for example (IPRA).

The argument is clear, if the people working on artificial intelligence tools, products and services don't resemble the society their inventions are supposed to transform, then that is not good AI. Ethical communicators must be guiding businesses, organisations and brands on ethical builds and deployment of AI, asking those tough ethical questions on data (origin and collection), data bias and, importantly data cleansing, at the start to ensure those deploying AI are not causing deliberate or unintended harm.

AI poses one of the biggest reputation risks to those, as communicators, we advise and guide and as we best place and promote the benefits of *AI4Good* to support the public to uptake AI to realise its true benefits.

If communicators cannot ask those tough ethical questions, or are not allowed/empowered to ask, at the start of all AI builds and deployments, whether being developed in-house or by companies externally, then we shouldn't have it.

If these AI systems can decide who can be hired, receive a loan or having a disease diagnosed, then bias can destroy one's life (O'Neill, 2016). No communicator should welcome that toll on their shoulders or of those they advise, and certainly no ethical communicator would. It is our role to build trust in AI, to society, and for the individual tools, products and platforms businesses and organisations are utilising and looking to develop. Communicators must be guardians of the truth, the ethical advisors holding those we always advise to account on AI. This is within our gift and is the area of our roles we must urgently get to grips with.

We do know AI isn't going away and is the way forward for many businesses, brands and organisations. The mandate is now innovation and ever more so in changing economic times as AI, ultimately, aids us to work smarter faster in our own communications roles. It also helps those we advise to provide faster decisions, better results and insights and can make it easier and faster for people to interact with businesses, organisations and brands.

So, it is without question, communicators must know data and AI inside out and more women communicators fully versed in data and AI are required.

Women communicators need to step up on AI to ensure algorithm bias is mitigated against

As well as encouraging more women communicators to upskill into data and AI, there is also the area of communicators holding those we advise to account on increasing diversity in AI. That requires communicators to themselves move from just talk to doing something about it – and this is not just about coding, it is also about the boardrooms where the decisions on AI are being made.

You can start to see the role of the communications professional in the area of data and AI is big responsibility and it is one which will continue to grow as more functions begin to adopt true AI and as more executive leads at organisations, business and brands adopt innovation mindsets, with the aim of remaining in business and also to ensure profitability in the longer term.

There are many reasons there isn't proper representation of women communicators upskilling into data and AI, just the same as there has traditionally been under representation of women in the STEM subjects. The main reason for the small number of women in data, AI and technology is due to the lack of role-models for women within the sector and this is mainly down to the gender stereotype of 'boys being better at science and maths'. Although in recent years there has been an increase in women entering high levels in technology roles, women are still in the minority compared to the number of male role models in the sector. According to females working in Silicon Valley, America, where three-quarters of the workforce is male, women are discouraged from perusing jobs in technology because of the 'brogrammer' tech culture which is bought in from college campuses (Women in Tech).

Another reason for there being so little women in technology is due to the lack of a talent pool. Figures show that fewer women are studying technology-based subjects at school and university meaning employers have fewer women to choose from when recruiting. The reason for this can also boil down to the lack of female role models in the tech industry for young girls to follow in their footsteps and study these subjects (Women in Tech).

We do know the lack of women communicators in AI, just like in tech, and in AI, is not biological but cultural. Less than 20% of the researchers applying to prestigious AI conferences are women, and that only a quarter

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of undergraduates studying AI at Stanford and the University of California at Berkeley are female (AI Now Institute).

The global AIinPR panel will go as far as stating, we demand all communicators and particularly women, due to the already under representation, become data scientists and well versed in AI. Women communicators can support the drive to move from 15% to at least 30% of women working in data science by 2025 (Hosein, 2019).

In the UK, women represent 47% of the work force, yet they hold less than 17% of all available tech jobs (Office of National Statistics, 2017). Although there are no official statistics on the percentage of women in data science or AI roles, there is growing evidence that the gender imbalance that affects the tech sector extends to data science and AI, as well. Many researchers have underlined the benefits of gender equality in the workplace (Bridgewater, 2019). The presence of women increases a group's problem-solving abilities (Woolley et al.,2010) and drives innovation (Sastre, 2014). Gender diversity is also associated with higher sales revenues, larger numbers of customers, as well as greater relative profits (Herring, 2009).

Women communicators, and indeed all communicators, can support businesses and organisations to introduce an assurance process at the places they work and advise to demonstrate they have followed due process in their deployment of AI including:

▶ Recruiting a diverse team;

▶ Introduce a ban of all men panel at tech events, and all events, ensuring panels are representative of the sector/communities being served and diversity is at the forefront;

▶ Support audits of company practices with regards to hiring, retaining, sexism and whistleblowing procedures;

▶ The requirement for diversity in teams to be mandatory in due process;

▶ Audit frameworks and put in place business-wide codes of ethical conduct for all AI deployment, including privacy in the age of predictive analytics and algorithms, in the absence of regulation governing AI.

Artificial intelligence is everywhere and it can do some great things. But we are also waking up to the downsides: gendered virtual personal assistants, automated recruitment software turning down ideal candidates if they are female, sex robots that legitimise violence against women and AI-driven digital advertising that fuels populism and extremism – there is a lot that needs talking about, as a society (Bartoletti, 2019).

For example, gendered virtual personal assistants is a powerful socialisation tool that teaches about the role of women, girls and people who are gendered female to respond on demand (Bartoletti, 2019).

We can go further and say AI's 'gender problem' as 'one of the top two ethical issues in AI' (the other being wealth inequality) and AI should not be built or shared to deceive (Winfield, 2010).

Alan Winfield, co-founder of the Bristol Robotics Laboratory at the University of the West of England, Bristol, regards AI's "gender problem" as "one of

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the top two ethical issues in AI" (the other being wealth inequality). Winfield states that "AI should not be built or shared to deceive".

This falls under the remit of communicators supporting the businesses and organisations to 'do the right thing' and to ensure ethics is at the forefront of everything in relation to AI (Manilevitch, 2019).

Communicators must become Guardians of the Truth, building trust in AI

Ultimately, it is within the communicator's gift to build trust in ethical AI and to avoid the pitfalls of some of the communication put out, which is lacking understanding of AI at best (see Women in Data Science).

Therefore, the general public and, worryingly some of those who work in communications, believe the AI hype we have been witnessing. AI has become a catch all term to describe technology that engages with people or displays human characteristics. It's unhelpful and is contributing to hype and uncertainty around the topic and ultimately, thwarting the good, ethical AI those we advise are devising and deploying and impacting on society's use and realisation of the benefits (Leverhulme Institute).

Communicators are in a very responsible and powerful position in regard to AI. AI is our intelligent assistant; it will augment what we do. It frees up from the more mundane to allow us to focus on the areas of leadership, strategy and ethics. But ethics are key and cannot be overlooked, side stepped or ill-judged at any time (Ethics for Artificial Intelligence). The AIinPR panel is writing an AI Ethics Guide for Communicators, set to be supported by the Alan Turing Ethics Test for AI and incorporates the Open Data Institute Data Ethics Canvas, is due for publication in 2020.

And it is these areas, communicators and particularly women communicators due to the lack of female representation in AI, must upskill into, must step up into, must accelerate or risk getting overtaken by those who do.

It's a critical moment for communication leaders to step up, and particularly women communicators. Technology, especially AI is reshaping our relationships with business, government, customers, clients and citizens.

Increasingly, machines are leveraging the data that we each generate every second of our lives. That data will help us understand ourselves and spark change, differently.

We need to be the ones to help make the right decisions around the development, adoption, and deployment of the technologies that will make the most sense of this data (CIPR, 2018). We also need to tell the right stories that continue to inspire us around the values that matter most to us.

Ever since humans learned to communicate, we have told stories to each other to sort through the chaos of the natural world. It has enabled us to connect and to create together, to organise and exercise power. There have been many revolutions throughout the ages, where humans have had

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to learn to use new skills and innovate themselves. The Fourth Industrial Revolution is no different.

Today, we live in a time of acceleration. We must contend with vast information flows, inundating us in every waking moment and transforming our worldview. Yet human nature hasn't changed quite as quickly. So even as we adopt more intelligent technology, we must also safeguard our humanity. It's a necessary synchronicity between how we calibrate all this knowledge and how we relate trustfully with each other.

If you're not already considering the impact of artificial intelligence on you and your team's strategy, now's the time. Those quick to adapt to the shift will gain competitive advantage.

It's time to ask ourselves some very tough questions about our capabilities, our position as strategic advisors and how we are adopting AI tools within the communication function. The AIinPR panel and the Alan Turing Institute can be helpful resources.

But one thing is clear, communicators must be fully educated in data and AI to be au fait with communicating about AI so communication professionals can truly lead their organisations in supporting to develop AI tools, products and services being deployed internally and externally but also so they can devise the solutions to the concerns surrounding AI, and utilising true AI in their own roles (Valin, 2018).

AI is changing the nature of workforce, the future is a combination of being digital but also very human, as also recognised by the World Economic Forum's call for a global reskilling revolution global reskilling revolution (See World Economic Forum); and the AI in PR's *Human's Still Needed* research.

Communicators must start their upskilling into data and AI by gaining a full understanding and education of data and artificial intelligence, learning from the data scientists, technology developers, ethics leaders and other communicators who have upskilled into these areas, including the members of the AIinPanel; and who are confident at advising organisations and businesses on AI builds and deployment, supporting them to become AI powered as well as ensuring the AI being communicated is fully based on ethical principles.

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Artificial Intelligence and
Public Relations – The
new Imperative for
Communicators and Why
Women Communicators
Must Accelerate Into AI.

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Leading with Humanity and Empathy in a Crisis

By Amanda Coleman

Crises come in many forms and when they do, they put the public relations (PR) professional leading the response under immense pressure: they must manage the pressure that they are under and be able to make decisions that will ensure effective communication. The starting point must be the existence of plans, procedures, and policies. Effective crisis communication requires these to be in place but there is one element that is more important than all those things - people.

Every crisis has people at its very heart. It may be the people who are affected by it, their families and loved ones or those who are responding to the crisis. In two decades working within law enforcement communication in the UK I have experienced a significant change in the way that crises are handled. In the late 1990s the focus from agencies was on tackling the issue, saving lives or property, and returning things to normal at the earliest opportunity. Planning for such events was focused on doing what had to be done and at the end of the conveyor belt was communication that was there merely to manage any media interest.

There was no real consideration of the impact of the events on individuals that were caught up in it or the consequences of the actions and decisions that were taken by public bodies. It has taken some time and difficult incidents for people to recognise the importance of putting people at the heart of the crisis communication response. Plans, policies, and procedures must be developed but they must focus foremost on keeping people at the heart of what takes place. In some businesses and organisations this is easier to achieve. But what role does the senior PR officer play and is there a gender differential in how crisis communication is approached and delivered?

Foundation of new crisis communication approach

The two elements that are most critical to successful crisis communication, I believe, are humanity and empathy and this is something I saw proved to be the right approach during my work dealing with the Manchester Arena terrorist attack in May 2017.

On 22 May 2017, 22 people were murdered and hundreds more injured by a suicide bomber at an Ariana Grande concert at the Manchester Arena in the UK. This was a criminal act that would be investigated and taken through the criminal justice process but at the centre of this were the people and the human impact of what had happened. It was the human impact that people and the media were interested in ahead of what was being done as part of the investigative process.

When the attack happened, I was Head of Corporate Communications for Greater Manchester Police and was responsible for leading the communication

response. Dealing with the response to the attack left me suffering significant psychological issues, and these continued in the months and years that followed.

There had been extensive planning to deal with a possible terrorist attack which had increased following terrorist incidents in Europe and then London. I had led on the communication work in this area working across the region and liaising with national teams. The plans were important but lacked one vital element and that was to focus on those who would be affected.

The plans had to be rewritten while responding to what had happened. In the aftermath of the Manchester Arena terrorist attack the families of those who died and those who were injured were always at the forefront of media statements and communication. Instead of appealing for information in the traditional way the police do with any incident, each media briefing and statement started with recognition of the horrific impact on those affected. This started with the initial statements and was continued throughout the crisis and through into developing the recovery plan.

Putting the people first was an appeal to people's humanity. It demonstrated compassion and care to those who were affected and an empathy. The empathy was shown through understanding and sharing the feelings and concerns that people had. It started from the very first communication that was issued which ensured there was an authenticity to what was shared. The response to the incident was incredible with £21.6m raised through a charity established in the aftermath of the attack (BBC, 2019). Almost 300,000 bouquets of flowers were left in St Anne's Square in Manchester in the days following the attack (ITV News Granada, 2017). People across the world and the UK specifically had quickly demonstrated their humanity and empathy in the way they responded. Any organisation that failed to recognise the importance of both humanity and empathy would have been a jarring voice within the communication that took place.

In developing the communication strategy and the words that will become the narrative of the crisis these two elements of humanity and empathy must be threaded through everything. However, these are two elements that are often lacking when leaders step out to communicate the response to a crisis. Examples of those who do manage to combine the two are rare, but it can be seen in the crisis approach of the New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern.

In short, the key to crisis communication is to have a people first approach that will draw you to demonstrate humanity and empathy in the face of the situation.

The question remains whether taking this approach is impacted upon by the gender of those leading the response?

Showing you care

New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern has been seen to step up to take this "people first" approach on two occasions. First in 2019 following a

terrorist attack on mosques which left 50 worshippers dead and secondly with the 2020 COVID-19 outbreak. Following the attack on the mosques she was quickly visible making a statement that was both compassionate and strong in its message. The statement said:

> *"Our thoughts and our prayers are with those who have been impacted today. Christchurch was the home of these victims. For many, this may not have been the place they were born. In fact, for many, New Zealand was their choice. The place they came to and committed themselves to. The place they were raising their families, where they were part of communities who they loved and who loved them. It was a place that many came to for its safety. A place where they were free to practice their culture and their religion"(Britton, 2019).*

The words were powerful and created a strong sense of those who had been affected even before they had been identified. It linked her personally, her government and people across the country to those who were affected and their families. Her words were supported by her actions. She consoled victims and their families, appeared at events to mourn, and wore a hijab as well as offered to pay for the funerals. Ardern also refused to speak the name of the person responsible to deny the publicity that had been craved. Humanity and empathy were evident throughout the communication including that she became visibly upset when speaking.

During the COVID-19 pandemic she was seen at home after putting her child to bed and went online to carry out a question and answers session (The Guardian, 2020). The approach created unity as she was demonstrating that she was in the same position as everyone else and faced the same challenges and pressures. This personal approach and style appear to be something that women in leadership positions are more comfortable with from my personal experience

Contrast the above examples with that of BP CEO Tony Hayward who was speaking to the media following the Deepwater Horizon disaster in 2010. Even when he was attempting to show humanity and empathy it failed. On 30 May 2010 he told a reporter: "We're sorry for the massive disruption it's caused to their lives. There's no one who wants this thing over more than I do, I'd like my life back." (Jacques, 2015) The words, even if they may have been 'off the cuff', were seen to demonstrate a selfish approach to what had happened. The concern was not with those who had been affected and who may have lost their livelihoods but with his own circumstances. It failed to show both humanity and any empathy.

One of the issues behind this may be that men who are in leadership roles can be heavily focused on the policies, plans and procedures for any business. They are concerned with the bottom line on the financial situation and stability, and these are the words and the language that they speak daily from my experience. It is challenging then to switch to a new way of leading and communicating during a time of crisis and allow in the personal and the human aspects. In many cases they may fail to change and lack the humanity and empathy or may lack the authenticity in the words that they are saying.

Demonstrating compassion

Whoever is acting as the face or voice of the business at a time of crisis will face the pressure of being human in their approach. In my experience women are more likely to step up and show empathy although there have been occasions when men have achieved this. For example, the CEO of Alton Towers Nick Varney managed to focus on the people who had been injured in the accident on the Smiler ride in 2015 (Harrington, 2015) .

There are four aspects that leaders developing crisis communication need to consider.

1. **Preparation** There needs to be time spent in working through strategies, plans and policies to ensure the business is in a state of readiness. However, the most important element of this is to build the humanity and empathy within the response. This means putting people first in the approach that is taken. It also means exploring the diversity of the communities that you are attempting to connect with. Too often we attempt to communicate with people as one amorphous group when they are all individuals. This can be seen with the COVID-19 pandemic. The UK Government messages have been claimed by some to have failed to reach Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) people (Nannar, 2020). The communication messaging was provided through traditional media and social media channels but was seen as not reaching the BAME communities.

2. **Focus on people** There is nothing more important than people and this should be at the forefront when dealing with crisis communication. Whether it is the employees of the organisation that is responding or those that are affected by what has happened, they must remain at the centre of our decision making. Forgetting about them and focusing on processes will bring communication that lacks both humanity and empathy. Be aware of your communication becoming a tick box exercise as you will be heading towards process above people.

3. **Wellbeing** A crisis can have a devastating impact on people's health and wellbeing both physically and psychologically. In the worst cases it can lead to post traumatic stress disorder but support to all those affected by the crisis should be considered. In the planning phase know what help is available and can be accessed by people affected and employees. Alongside this it is critical to recognise the impact on the communication team and the person leading the team. Communicators will be aware of a significant amount of detail about the incident or issue which can place an additional strain at a time when they are extremely busy.

4. **Speak your truth** If you continue to tread the same path that you have followed for a long time, then you will get the same results. It is essential that alternative viewpoints on the approach to crisis communication are put forward. Whether it is from women, BAME communities or those in deprived communities, their voices should be heard. They can highlight and explain the impact on groups and individuals, and to push for

the plans to reflect the importance of managing this. Speak up and ensure the business is considering the people who are affected and different voices.

Managing the consequences

As you consider the impact of the crisis on people, do remember that people are individuals and not an amorphous group. This makes managing the consequences of a crisis more challenging because the communication must reflect the diversity of the community. Intersectionality is vital when considering ongoing crisis communication and this means understanding customers, clients and stakeholders before any issue emerges. A whole range of communication methods and channels will need to be considered both to get vital messages out in the early stages and to develop the long term communication throughout the crisis. If required bring in an expert who can assist in devising and targeting the communication activity, including revising the wording if necessary and identifying key channels. The Pepsi advert in 2017 that created a reputational crisis could have potentially been avoided if there had been some consideration of the diversity within society (Victor, 2017).

If humanity and empathy are the two central elements to crisis communication, then it will lead to an understanding of the importance of recognising diversity. Bringing this into the approach to manage the consequences is critical to any business. Communication is one aspect of the consequence management required. It must be supported by experts from frontline staff, those managing the response, possibly a legal expert and others may be required depending on the nature of the crisis. A crisis is like a pebble hitting water. At the centre is the impact and then there are waves felt which are strong close to the impact and lessen the further away you get. This can be seen in managing the consequences there will be a whole range of people close to the impact and further away that must be considered by the communication response.

In my two decades managing crisis communication within law enforcement this has become an essential feature of the response. With the proliferation and diverse nature of the media and social media, it is a way to ensure key information, messages and the overall narrative are being distributed as broadly as possible and to identified key groups. This important work often was overlooked by those focused on plans that did not connect with humanity and empathy of the response. For women leading a crisis communication response they should speak up and encourage others to focus on the people and the consequences both crisis and of the actions taken in response to it.

Preparing for a crisis

There are five key lessons that I have discovered are important for leading the crisis communication response. They are equally applicable to men as well as women who are responsible for managing a crisis.

1. **Develop a support network** Everyone needs to have a network of people, whether friends, family, or colleagues, around them who can help when they are struggling. It may be just having someone that you can confide in about how you are feeling, or someone who can take your mind off the pressure of the situation you are in. This is the real valuable networking. For those leading the communication response to a crisis this network will become invaluable helping you through and being a place to go for support.

2. **Discuss your plans** When you are developing and producing your crisis communication plan ensure that people across the business understand what it means and what their role will be in delivering it. This will allow the difficult conversations to be had ahead of time, which will iron out any disagreements or issues about the response.

3. **Involve communities** Wherever possible try to allow time to discuss your crisis communication response with the people you will be attempting to communicate with. This means understanding your audience, clients, customers, or stakeholders so that you can highlight the approach particularly reassuring about the attempt to keep people at the heart of the decision making and communication. This is also an important time to listen and gather feedback so that you are building an effective communication plan.

4. **Test, test, and test again** The world is a busy place and putting valuable time aside to test crisis communication plans is not at the forefront of people's minds. However, this is essential as it will iron out any problems or issues in the delivery of the plan. It will also assist in raising awareness so that the business understands the approach and requirements. This is an opportunity to promote the humanity and empathy as the foundations to the crisis communication response.

5. **It's ok to not be ok** It is important that people feel supported, comfortable, and able to speak about the personal impact the crisis has had on them. This has helped me personally to manage the impact and in speaking publicly it helps to eradicate any stigma. It is important to recognise that this will have an impact on you and to ask for help or seek counselling after dealing with a traumatic issue or incident. The World Health Organisation has estimated that worldwide one person dies every 40 seconds due to suicide (WHO, 2019). If you are responding to a crisis with humanity and empathy it will take you closer to the incident and that means you are more like to come face-to-face with the difficult circumstances. This means you need to take advantage of opportunities to debrief and seek help.

The Future

In 2020 it is the time to ensure there is humanity and empathy within crisis communication. No longer should the focus be on having a plan and testing that plan. Instead, we should be assessing whether our plans and processes are centred around putting people first. Supporting those who are affected is where reputations will be won or lost. When I started in emergency service communication two decades ago it was enough to be able to respond operationally and people had few expectations about how they would be supported through the crisis. Now they rightly expect more from those who are dealing with a crisis.

Anyone responsible for developing or owning a crisis communication plan should review it and ensure that the focus is not on having the right processes but on putting people at the heart of the response. Look at those documents and see if humanity and empathy can be found or supported when the time comes for them to be used.

Amanda Coleman

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Amanda Coleman has more than 20 years' experience in communicating in a crisis working with public bodies. Her experience includes working with emergency services, central government, local authorities and health providers. Now she runs her own crisis communication consultancy.

In 2017, Amanda led the law enforcement communication response to dealing with the Manchester Arena terrorist attack. She has also been responsible for leading communication during riots, the murder of police officers, and the death in service of a Chief Constable.

She is the author of *Crisis Communication Strategies* published by Kogan Page in May 2020. It brings together advice for preparing for a crisis, dealing with it and moving effectively into the recovery phase.

Amanda has worked as a journalist and is a Chartered PR Practitioner as well as a Fellow of both the Chartered Institute of Public Relations and the Public Relations and Communication Association. She is an international speaker on crisis communication. Her blog can be found here https://amandacomms1.wordpress.com/

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How Could the COVID-19 Pandemic Change the Gender Dynamics of PR and Communication?
Some Questions to Examine.

By Mike Klein

With much of the world months into lockdown, it is clear that the PR and Communication industry, like the rest of the economy, will operate in a changed environment. But what shifts will the industry face – and what if any will be the changes in the gender dynamic?

Predicting the full range of changes is difficult this early in a crisis that is unlikely to be complete until a COVID-19 vaccine takes hold (WeForum, 2020).

Given that, two major drivers of change remain clear:

▶ That until a vaccine takes hold, COVID-19 will remain infectious and require continued social distancing;

▶ The Global economy will face intense pressures, including recessions in developed and developing economies alike.

From a gender perspective, these two drivers raise a number of questions about the gender dynamics of PR and Communication.

In looking at the gender dynamics question, it's important to note that the vast majority of PR professionals in the West are women. In the UK, the total is 64% (PRCA, 2016), while in Finland it has been 89% (Melgin, 2014). However, senior positions, particularly on the agency side, are male-dominated (Risi, 2016).

If one considers the gap between a largely female workforce with a largely male senior management as the major gender dynamic issue facing Public Relations and Communication, then the current COVID-19 crises presents some genuine opening for change.

Will remote working do to the demographic balance

For many years, PR agencies and Corporate Communication departments have increasingly relied heavily on junior staff - developing them with what one agency described in 2009 as "elbow-to-elbow support." (The Council of Public Relations Firms, 2009).

But the loss of the ability to continuously monitor and nurture junior talent through formal training and informal in-person guidance will likely mean that mid-career candidates will find greater favor in the market. Mid-career practitioners, likely to be largely female, will in turn have different business interactions and develop on different trajectories than junior practitioners.

Some will opt for freelance status, but others will join/rejoin firms or companies on a full-time basis and expect to have access to career opportunities and mobility. Indeed, in a study conducted for Ultimate Software (2019), which produces tools for managing remote workers, 57% of participating remote women employees reported a promotion in the previous year, compared to 35% of participating on-site women staff[1].

Over time, a higher presence of female mid-career talent could build an increasingly female senior management pipeline.

What will remote working do to the gender balance?

The current economic instability, when combined with social distancing and continued remote working, indicates that few organizations will see out the pandemic with their current workforces intact.

The hiring of new, remote-based replacements will likely create a new tribal dynamic, where the employees who had been on-board pre-pandemic would have a far richer set of relationships and much deeper and wider knowledge of how the organization works. New hires might in turn have stronger technical or implementation skills.

Length of service, more than gender or other demographic determiners of status, looks likely to become a differentiating "diversity" issue. This may bode well for women with strong records of experience in a particular organization, but less well for a new senior hire who has more limited opportunities to quickly build diverse and informal relationships.

Does the addition of personal space defuse personal workplace friction?

One additional benefit of social distancing is that it, quite literally, increases the space in which personal interactions are conducted. With remote working, those interactions take place in each participant's own location.

While it would likely be presumptuous to promote remote working as a cure for uncomfortable workplace interactions, the technology enabling the remote workplace allows for more control of the environment than has a subordinate in a superior's office. Such control allows for the ability to open or close video connections or audio connections, whitelist content for email boxes and activity feeds, and to monitor incoming conversations.

In closing

As seen above, most of the anticipated changes in PR and Comms gender dynamics are indicative of likely larger trends. In anticipating these changes,

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1   The total sample for the survey included 500 remote workers and 500 on-site workers, however the gender split of the sample is unclear.

individual practitioners can make better-educated choices about managing their careers, interacting with clients and colleagues, and building their own personal brands within their increasingly virtual organizations.

Mike Klein

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Who Runs the (PR) World? Underrepresentation of Women in Music PR

By Raffaela Gmeiner and
Olga Kolokytha

There is a range of research on women in the music industry that focuses on artists and the artistic perspectives of the sector. However, other perspectives of female representation remain unexplored, despite the fact that they are doing paramount work to support artists and their music - and the PR sector is one of them. In Austria, data from FEMPOP (http://fempop.sra.at) reveals that only 10% of all Austrian pop musicians are female and female underrepresentation also includes producers, bookers, promoters and music journalists. How are then women positioned in the music PR sector in Austria? Which dynamics and parameters influence the underrepresentation of women in the music PR business and how can the status quo be challenged?

These are the questions that inspired this contribution, which is not a research paper but rather an opinion piece, fueled by our years of professional experience in, and observation of, the music sector. We chose to focus on the music industry rather than discussing the cultural sector in general, because of the particularities of the music industry both in comparison to other cultural sectors, and with reference to female representation in the non-artistic professional spheres. From our professional experience, we have also identified that particularly in the music business, women are even less represented than in other cultural domains. Our article first provides a brief overview of the music industry and then addresses the underrepresentation of women; it continues to address women in the music PR sector, and in the last section it offers possible solutions to challenge underrepresentation of women such as the creation of female networks, feminist labels, quotas and counter-public spheres.

Developments in the music industry

The music industry nowadays comprises of many different components, online and offline: radio stations, streaming channels, major and independent record labels, promoters, festival and touring companies, sponsorship partners and entertainment is now the main object of the industry, rather than purely music (Lieb, 2018). As a result, the concepts of what is selling and what is a hit have significantly changed since the decline of the CD and sales numbers only do not really determine success (Lieb, 2018).

Especially the recorded music industry market has significantly changed within the last decades. Whereas in 2000, physical media and in particular the CD generated the largest part of global revenues for the recorded music industry, the situation changed due to digitization. Nowadays more than half of all revenues can be attributed to streaming and digital consumption and 37% of all revenues are generated with audio streams (IFPI, 2019).

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In contrast to the recorded music industry market, the live music sector did not suffer from digital music piracy and loss of physical revenues, but increased significantly within the last two decades (Naveed et al., 2017). According to Naveed et al. (2017), revenues from the live music industry and digital streaming services increased significantly since the advent of the streaming technology, with income from physical revenues decreasing. For music self-entrepreneurs this means a shift to live performances rather than a preference for recordings, as performing in live shows is currently a better option than selling CDs or vinyls.

At the same time, it is important to make one's own music accessible via online download and streaming services, not just because it could serve as an income source but also because being available on online platforms creates more possibilities for raising awareness and promoting one's music, which, in turn, can lead to a bigger audience and more successful concerts. The historically maintained perception in the music industry that artists should just be making art, and they will be discovered by people who will then take care of all the aspects of their success has been challenged with the development of digital technology and the changes it brought forward to the music industry, which has forced artists to become self-entrepreneurs and look after their success themselves (Williams, 2009).

Underrepresentation of women in the music industry

According to Strong and Raine (2018), the rise of creative industries as important players in the economy in many countries has on one hand increased their importance and worth, but on the other, comes together with an economic view of culture that prioritizes the individual and impacts on how workers within them deal with inequality. The authors identify an oxymoron with regards to the creative industries and their gender dimensions as, despite their perception as tolerant and liberal, they do not seem to be as inclusive (Strong and Raine, 2018).

Gender inequality in the music industry has both been viewed through the prism of changes in working conditions and the change in the creative industries discourse, and has also been associated with the precarious working conditions inherent in the music industry and the gig economy, which is becoming popular in the sector (Strong and Raine, 2018). Several studies prove that women are severely underrepresented in the music industry and in terms of "paid employment within the record industry, women disproportionally occupy positions of lower pay, status, and power, at the bottom of the word" (Bayton, 2003, p. 2). According to the statistics of fempop (http://fempop.sra.at), a project by the SRA (the archive of Austrian popular music in Vienna), only 10% of all pop-musicians in Austria are women.

Technology has not impacted on the music industry only as a medium that changes the way people experience music per se, but also as a factor that influences the position of professionals in the field. Technological developments have led to a substantial change in the music industry intermediaries – those

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actors that intervene to and influence what audiences listen to and connect audiences with artists.

On one hand, there has been a disintermediation as many traditional intermediaries disappeared as a result of digitalization. But on the other hand, different cultural intermediaries have appeared, and have grown to include social media influencers, journalists and bloggers, among others (Lieb, 2018), who now act as gatekeepers. Although these new gatekeepers may be trendsetters, more cutting-edge and avant-garde, the traditional stakeholders such as the big labels, music journalists and radio stations still have a lot of power. In the music industry it is mostly men who act as gatekeepers: owning labels, clubs, music press, record companies, promo and booking agencies but also working as DJs, intermediaries and journalists. While men are accepted as being the norm in this field, women are marginalized and their agency is limited. These male-dominated networks run in informal ways and are therefore hard to track or criticize (Gmeiner, 2017).

It is very often also that men book male artists, resulting in female musicians not being visible enough and often being overlooked by festival event and booking managers because they are underrepresented. And although there are sometimes efforts by event managers to book a certain quota of female acts, the vicious circle perpetuates. A usual argument as to why more male acts are booked is that there were not enough female musicians available, which is not always true, but, as they are underrepresented, it requires a lot more effort to find them. It is for this reason that female actors join forces and build networks in order to create a counter public sphere (Gmeiner, 2017).

PR and women in the music sector

PR activities in the music industry have a lot of similarities with mainstream PR activities. In the first place it is not about selling a product, but about creating and maintaining a brand; songs or compositions are therefore not the center of interest, but the musician as a person, the band/ensemble or orchestra is. The musician becomes an "art figure". The glutted market asks for uniqueness, originality, quality before quantity, so a brand counts.

The music PR sector in Austria is marked by three characteristics: first by additional competences than the ones needed in traditional PR, as it requires a thorough knowledge of music and the particularities of the arts and culture sector; second, by self-entrepreneurship and DIY practices – which are also triggered by digitization, new media practices and new ways of accessing music – since artists need to do their own public relations rather than hire professionals to work on their profiles and career; and third, by a dominant presence of men.

As labels and promotion agencies usually only take artists who have already created a brand and already have a certain fan-base because they are a safer option, most musicians have to take care of their own promotion at the beginning of their career. This means developing a creative identity, creating a personal website and social media channels, organizing press texts and photo shootings, recording promo tracks, developing a portfolio,

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networking with people from the business, applying for grants and trying to get good contracts with agencies. The trend of musicians promoting themselves is becoming more and more popular and especially in Austria, where the bureaucratic barriers of establishing a label under someone's own name are rather few, many musicians have their own label to promote their music themselves.

Acknowledging this trend, music universities and conservatoires offer entrepreneurial classes and media and communication training to prepare their students for the new working environment and conditions. The career center of the University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna, for example, offers workshops on public relations, self-marketing and strategic communication with cultural institutions (MDW, 2020). The curriculum of the Master's program of the Vienna Jam Music Lab private University also refers to the acquisition of competences in media relations by graduates that would enable them to also work in music management and agencies (Jam Music Lab University, 2020).

Women constitute more than half of all PR professionals in Austria: 64% in 2000 (Zowack, 2000 in Rothen 2016) and 56% in 2016 (Rothen, 2016). However, only a quarter have leading positions (Rothen, 2016). Women working in the PR sector are also usually under 40 years old, whereas men are often older, over 50 years old (Zowack, 2000 in Rothen 2016). Despite this female presence in the general PR sector in Austria (see also Rothen, 2016), in music PR women are significantly underrepresented, with only 15% of the registered agencies/ promoters with Music Austria to be women (music austria, 2020).

Although Bayton (2003) argues that the most common position for a woman working in the music industry is in the media or PR section, still in the music industry women are underrepresented and are the exception rather than the norm. This feeds a vicious circle: as underrepresented, women are not visible as musicians or business professionals; and as male actors are predominantly featured, it is hard for women to find role models in the field as well as connect to male-dominated networks. This underrepresentation of women also leads to less opportunities for the artists they represent, which, in turn, impacts on artistic and audience diversity.

Ways to challenge the status quo

In art and music, the added value of symbolic and emotional meaning is crucially important; it is socially constructed, limited by time, by geographical regions and its sociocultural context. What we perceive as good music and valuable art is the result of aesthetic judgements and discourses, power relations and negotiation processes (Zembylas, 1997). In music, social hierarchies and patriarchal structures affect the process of value creation, which results in underrepresentation of women but also affects individuals belonging to other intersectional categories, e.g. race, social class, or ethnic and religious background.

There are several ways for women to challenge the status quo. One of them

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is **building a counter public sphere** by founding and participating in female or/ and feminist labels, agencies and networks in order to avoid androcentric hierarchies. A counter public sphere challenges hegemonic structures, delivers counter and alternative media content, broadens the agency and scope of a minority and highlights the downsides of the capitalistic system (Negt and Kluge, 1972). Building counter public spheres within the music industry can be a successful strategy for female PR professionals and self-entrepreneurs to gain attention beyond the mainstream. In Vienna for example, the queer-feminist label *unrecords* and the female label *silvertreerecords* are both led by women and sign contracts with female artists.

Creating visibility spaces is also a way of showcasing women in the industry. In order to give female DJs more visibility in the public sphere and show the amount of female acts, the Austrian DJ Electric Indigo founded the database *female:pressure*. There are thousands of female DJs all around the world listed in the database, of which about 100 come from Austria (female:pressure, 2020). This makes it easier for club owners, booking agencies and event managers to get female acts on stage – if they are willing to do so or if they know of and use the database.

Another way of promoting female professionals would be to **establish a quota** of women receiving public subsidies, winning prizes and establish and strengthen their presence on stage or on radio. Quota systems have become subject to concerns as to a compromise of quality, men discrimination and the "quota woman" arguments (DIW, 2015), in this case that female artists could be seen as hired for their gender rather than for their artistic merit and value.

There is no obligatory quota for radio stations or festivals to feature more female artists or employ more female staff in Austria, but a successful example of an informal quota mechanism is the "Popfest Wien", a festival taking place in the center of Vienna. Established ten years ago in 2010, the festival has become an institution; playing at the Popfest often means a career jump for newcomer bands as well as a lot of media attention. The festival is each year curated by two established professionals of the Austrian music scene, who book local musicians and bands. It has become common practice to elect one or even two female curators for the festival each year, which has led to at least 50% of all booked performances having female artists on stage (popfest, 2020). Implementing a quota scheme would enable more women to access the music industry and could lead to a restructure of the male dominated networks in the long term.

Gender equality leads to a higher GDP (Löfström, 2009), to more profit for businesses (Turan, 2015) and has a long lasting effect on power structures (DIW, 2015). Although gender inequality is among the oldest and more primitive forms of inequality (Turan, 2015), there are other forms such as income, age and years of professional activity, educational background, family status and care responsibilities that need consideration and acting upon. One thing is certain though: that a balanced proportion of women in music and creative industries' PR and curation sectors could lead to both more awareness of gender equality within the industry and to a better proportion of female artists represented in the public sphere.

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Women in PR

Research and opinions about the status, challenges and future of women working in PR/Communications

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