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# Race and Gender in Public Relations: A qualitative analysis of the experiences of women and women of color in PR

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Race and Gender in Public Relations:

A qualitative analysis of the experiences of women and women of color in PR

A Capstone Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of the Renée Crown

University Honors Program at Syracuse University

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and Renée Crown University Honors December 2014

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this research project was to better understand the state of diversity in the PR industry by examining the unique experience of women and women of color working in PR. Using qualitative coding methods, five blogs by both women of color and White women were coded to determine emergent themes. While some themes were consistent among all authors, other trends emerged only among White women or women of color, respectively. From the personal and professional experiences of these women, these themes offered insights into the effects of both race and gender on the experience of female PR professionals.

## **Executive Summary**

The purpose of this research project was to better understand the state of diversity in the Public Relations (PR) industry by examining the unique experience of women and women of color working in PR. Through a textual analysis of blog posts by both women of color and White women in PR, this study aimed to determine the similarities and differences in the experience of these women regarding their careers. Lastly, this study aimed to suggest possible implications of these findings on the PR industry and the PR professional.

A review of prior literature determined the importance of blogs in the PR industry, as a platform for building a brand. Thus, this project analyzed personal/professional blogs as a means of understanding the experiences of female PR professionals. Five blogs, three authored by women of color and two authored by White women, were chosen based on a specific set of criteria. Two of the blogs chosen were managed by two authors, making for a total of seven bloggers.

Using grounded theory, a methodology that allows themes to emerge from the texts being analyzed, a codebook was developed cataloging the topics discussed among the authors. These topics were split into main themes: Defining the PR Profession and Maintaining a Work-Life Balance. Within these themes, subthemes emerged. Subthemes in Defining the PR Profession included personal branding, networking and physical appearance. Subthemes in Maintaining a Work-Life Balance included control and stress. In examining the data, some of these topics emerged throughout all five blogs, such as personal branding. Conversely, other trends were race-specific, only emerging among either the women of color or White women, such as physical appearance. However, due to this project's small sample size, future research will be needed to determine the validity of these trends.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

The media is modern society's main means of mass communication. 'The media' is used as a catchall term for the group of industries that make up this system of communication, namely newspapers, radio, television, and most recently, the Internet (Google, 2014). Media industries play a unique role in determining the public discourse, or "communicated issues of public culture that affect individuals and groups in a given civilization" (Biakolo, 2013). Essentially, the public discourse is what the world is talking about, the things that society merits as worth discussing. In examining the media's role in the public discourse, author and professor Ron Smith proposes that the media does not tell us what to think, but rather it tells us what to think about. Smith offered the following evidence to support this claim:

"Mass media have not been proven effective in determining how audiences will accept opinions and point of view in media reports. But mass media are effective in determining what audiences see as newsworthy. By the issues they cover, media can legitimize a story or marginalize either the entire story or certain aspects of it" (Smith, 2011).

Perhaps the clearest example of this concept is the news industry. Newspapers and news programs do not and cannot report on every event as it occurs. This is not only due to sheer volume of events, but is also due to journalists deciding which stories are and are not "newsworthy." In early 2014, about a week after Malaysia Airlines Flight MH370 inexplicably disappeared from the air, 24-hour news network CNN dedicated a startling majority of broadcast

minutes, 256 out of 271, to discussing the missing plane. As a result, reporters spent only a few remaining minutes discussing other relevant stories at the time, such as the conflict in Ukraine, or an explosion in East Harlem (Mirkinson, 2014). In consuming this content, a reasonable viewer would presume the story that took up more than 200 minutes of airtime must be more important, more worthy of discussion, than the story that was only discussed for two minutes. In this way, media industries define what we think about.

As the American population becomes more diverse, it becomes increasingly important for media professionals to understand the potential harm caused by the media's power over public discourse. This power can pose a conflict depending on who controls these media messages, and whether that control is evenly distributed or monopolized. The "power or dominance that one social group holds over others" is called a hegemony (Lull, 1995). Hegemonies are not permanent, and can be gained or lost (Lull, 1995).

Currently, multiple hegemonies exist in the media; that is to say, there are multiple examples of the one social group having dominance over others. As a few examples, White people are the dominant group over other races, men are dominant over women, and heterosexual people are dominant over homosexual people in terms of representation in media industries. Thus, the dominant majority, or the people in control of media messages, is largely white, male and heterosexual. With a homogenous group holding the power to determine the public discourse, those who do not identify with that group are often left underrepresented.

In the Public Relations (PR) industry specifically, it is important that professionals understand not only how to communicate with more diverse publics, but also how to represent entities that identify outside the dominant majority. Understanding these things requires that PR professionals embrace diversity. Diversity is defined as "difference in ethnicity, race, gender,



religious beliefs, sexual orientation, disability, veteran status, age, national origin, and cultural and personal perspectives” (Bhawuk & Tandis, 1996). Media professionals have the power to define the representation of these groups, accurately or not, in the public eye.

The purpose of this research project is to better understand the state of diversity in the PR industry by examining the unique experience of women and women of color working in PR. Through a textual analysis of blog posts by both women of color and White women in PR, this study aims to determine the similarities and differences in the experience of these women regarding their careers. Lastly, this study will suggest possible implications of these findings on the PR industry and the PR professional.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

#### What is PR?

PR professional turned educator Rex F. Harlow penned what is now one of the most widely accepted definitions of PR. The definition, which has many parts, reads as follows:

“Public relations is the distinctive management function which helps establish and maintain mutual lines of communication, understanding, acceptance, and cooperation between an organization and its publics. [Public relations] involves the management of problems or issues, helps management to keep informed on and responsive to public opinion, defines and emphasizes the responsibility of management to serve the public interest, helps management keep abreast of and effectively utilize change, serving as an early warning system to help anticipate trends, and uses research and sound and ethical communication as its principal tools.”

Harlow’s definition defines PR as a management function, and calls it distinctive, arguing that PR is an essential, separate entity that an organization needs in order to function (Russell, 2013). By defining PR as a management function, it is set apart from the day-to-day, more technical business functions. PR, like finance, sales or marketing, is a function that is vital to a business’ growth.

Other widely accepted definitions of PR include: “the management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the

publics on whom its success or failure depends” (Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 2000, p. 6), and “management of communication between an organization and its publics” (J. Grunig & Hunt, 1984, p. 6). The Public Relations society of America (PRSA), the largest professional organization in the PR industry, notes that PR is the function that “helps an organization and its publics adapt mutually to each other” (Russell, 2013). All of these definitions have two key points in common, that PR is a management function that helps organizations communicate with their audiences.

Further, these definitions all similarly describe the importance of PR as a function that allows organizations to not just communicate, but to build relationships with their publics. PR entails communication outward from the organization to the public, but it also emphasizes the importance of listening to and analyzing feedback from these publics. By communicating with the organizations’ publics, PR allows organizations to analyze the effectiveness of past actions, and plan for future actions.

In a broad sense, duties of a PR professional could include: on-going environment scanning for proactive issues management (i.e., identifying potential crises); segmenting key publics and cultivating quality relationships with them by means of effective communications; effective use of media such as public media (uncontrolled media), interactive media, controlled media, events/groups, and one-on-one relations (Russell, 2013). However, more specific tasks of a PR professional on a daily basis can be broken down into two categories: technical tasks and managerial tasks. Technical tasks could include: writing and editing information, such as speech writing or disseminating information to the media; production of publications, both web and print; event planning on behalf of an organization or client; and public speaking, as PR professionals in technical roles are sometimes given the role of press secretary.

The tasks of public relations professionals in managerial roles tend to fall into one of the following three categories: programming, research and evaluation, and relationship management. Programming includes all planning and implementing of programs that achieve goals for an organization. In research and evaluation, the objective is to gather information, both formal and informal, to gauge the effectiveness of an organization's programs. Lastly, relationship management helps an organization to reach its goals through building and maintaining relationships with strategic publics. Strategic publics vary depending on the organization, and can include: customers, potential customers, employees, the media, the board of directors, the local community and community leaders, competing organizations, government regulators, investment analysts, activist publics, and more (Russell, 2013).

Although the term 'public relations' dates back no farther than the 20th century, it is important to note that PR as a function has existed for as long as history can recall. For example, one could argue that the American Revolution was a very well executed PR campaign for independence from the British Empire. The Sons of Liberty and Committees of Correspondence were two organizations that used PR to reach their goals. They used symbolism (i.e. the Liberty Tree), slogans, such as 'no taxation without representation,' staged events (i.e. the Boston Tea Party), and even media pitches in writing about the Boston Massacre (Russell, 2013). Modern PR professionals still use all of these tactics today.

Public relations is often confused for other media fields with which it has characteristics in common. Specifically, it is often mistaken for marketing, advertising, or journalism, though PR has distinct differences from all three of these fields. The most important difference to consider in comparing PR and marketing is their publics. In marketing, the only key public is consumers, be they customers or potential customers for a business. As previously mentioned,

consumers are just one of many key publics with whom PR professionals build relationships. Advertising, also its own distinct industry, is a marketing tool. In other words, advertising is a means used to reach a marketing goal. An important distinction to note is that advertising communicates its messages via paid space and time in the media (e.g. buying ad space in a newspaper), while PR uses unpaid space and time.

Lastly, PR is often mistaken for journalism, and while the two industries are quite similar, the key difference is representation. In journalism, the journalist does not represent the organizations about which they write. This should be the case to ensure objectivity. However, in public relations, PR professionals write for the organizations that they represent. Historically, in-house PR professionals were considered “journalists-in-residence,” writing the organization’s stories and pitching them to the media (Russell, 2013).

### **Defining Diversity**

In discussing diversity, past researchers have found that the vagueness of the term, itself, makes debate even more difficult (Brunner & Hon, 2000). Diversity has become a “catchall phrase” for a complex set of issues. These issues include gender, racial, and other forms of discrimination; multiculturalism; and the social and legal responsibility the business community has to manage these issues proactively (Brunner & Hon, 2000). According to Bhawuk and Tantis, diversity is defined as “difference in ethnicity, race, gender, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, disability, veteran status, age, national origin, and cultural and personal perspectives” (Bhawuk and Tantis, 1996). Diversity is not only demographic variables, which are more objective variables, but also cultural behavior, attitudes, norms, and values, which are more subjective (Brunner & Hon, 2000).

Some scholars argue that diversity is a concept with multiple dimensions. According to Levine (1991), diversity has four underlying dimensions: representation, or increasing the

number of members of marginalized groups to better reflect the numbers in society; support, or sustaining these new members through programming like compensatory education or diversity counseling; integration, or the focus on incorporating these new members into the current organizational community; and multiculturalism, or creating a “shared community” where no group has to sacrifice its unique attributes in order to assimilate with the majority (Brunner & Hon, 2000). Researcher Katerina Tsetsura also argued that diversity is a multidimensional concept, saying that diversity must go “beyond ethnicity and national heritage.” She goes on to say that “we must consider other ways diversity can be manifested.” Tsetsura suggests that diversity should include other characteristics like social status, global awareness, past and present experiences, exposure to various cultures, and ability/desire to assimilate (Tsetsura, 2011).

Changing demographics in the US suggesting that the population is becoming more and more heterogeneous have led to increased interest in diversity issues (Brunner & Hon, 2000) in the past few decades. If current trends continue, it is projected that by the middle of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the majority of all people in the US will be people of color. European Americans are projected to be the statistical minority in this country by 2055 or 2060 (Brunner & Hon, 2000). These facts are extremely important to consider in the workplace, as changing demographics will in turn change the workforce.

The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) defines diversity management as “an organization’s culture and systems to ensure that all people are given the opportunity to contribute to the business goals of the company” (SHRM/CCH Survey, 1993, p.1). In recent years, diversity issues have become part of everyday language in most businesses and organizations (Brunner & Hon, 2000). As the diversity of the US work force is increasing, this

not only has implications for the workplace environment, but also for recruiting and hiring (Brunner & Hon, 2000). Most organizations, regardless of personal beliefs of management professionals, cannot afford to overlook women and people of color (Brunner & Hon, 2000). Organizations have begun to realize that they need to attract members of marginalized groups, or else they stand to lose a significant portion of workforce talent (Hilgert & Olin, 1995).

Another factor contributing to increased interest in diversity in the workplace is the globalization of business (Bhawuk & Tandis, 1996). When businesses expand internationally, cultural sensitivity becomes more important in order to effectively communicate with consumers. This leads to the desire for a diverse workforce as a strategy for expanding business overseas (Banks, 1995).

Scholars coined a name for another argument in favor of diversity, called the “diversity as strength” argument. This is the idea that diversity, for its own sake, helps to make an organization a better place. According to Brinkerhoff (1994), “The more different kinds of people that contribute to the team effort, the better. Different viewpoints, backgrounds and different approaches can lead to a better product” (Brinkerhoff, 1994). In this argument, diversity is seen as more than “moral high ground” or a strategy to “meet legal mandates.” Instead, diversity is valued for its unique influence on the success of the company (Brunner & Hon, 2000). James E. Preston, at the time the CEO of Avon Products, expressed this argument in saying, “Only the company that is culturally diverse inside, we finally understood, will best serve its customers (and in our case, our independent Avon representatives) outside” (Brunner & Hon, 2000). This argument is essentially calling for a diverse organizational culture. Organizational culture is the “values that bring employees together to accomplish a common mission.” This

argument asserts that more diverse values brought together will result in a mission completed more effectively (Dozier, L. A. Grunig & J. E. Grunig, 1995).

### **Diversity and PR**

Diversity relates to public relations in two key ways: internally, within an organization, and externally, concerning an organization's relationship with its publics. Internally, diversity plays a role in employee or workforce issues. Ideally, the more diverse the group of PR practitioners, the more perspectives will be contributed in PR planning. Externally, diversity influences the way PR practitioners communicate with the targets of PR programming. As audiences become more diverse, PR agencies must be equally diverse in order to communicate with these audiences (Brunner & Hon, 2000). Practitioners are "image agents" who play a role in the way people see themselves and others.

There are negative consequences when the majority of these image agents are, as one researcher said, "oblivious to the diversity of cultures in their audiences" (Kern-Foxworth, 1991). Practitioners need to understand that a fine line separates a successful PR campaign from a communications crisis. Diverse communication teams will be more in tune with needs of diverse audiences, which will help the team to avoid potential crises, and also to identify emerging markets. In other words, an organization or business is most effective when diversity internally mirrors diversity externally (Brunner & Hon, 2000).

Refusing to reach this level of diversity can lead to negative consequences for organizations. For example, the fuel company Texaco once ran into a dilemma that may have been avoided had the company had more diverse communication teams. Company officials were recorded making racist comments and the recording went public. This, not surprisingly, led to widespread disapproval among Texaco's publics. The company eventually had to pay a settlement of over \$170 million in a long-standing racial discrimination suit (Brunner & Hon,



2000). Presumably, having more diverse communication teams may have prevented such a conversation from ever occurring among employees. If not, diverse communication teams may have at least been able to breach the crisis in a more compassionate way than making a settlement.

Given this and similar examples, leaders in the PR industry are realizing that ignoring the importance of diversity is detrimental to business. According to Debra Miller, former PRSA president, “Organizations must realize that they can no longer implement a principle of ‘elective homogeneity,’ of consistently recruiting and promoting people who are similar in race, ethnic background, religious preference, or gender.” The consequences of this elective homogeneity can be fatal to a business. Miller notes that it can jeopardize employee morale, productivity, market share and reputation (Brunner & Hon, 2000).

To determine the current state of diversity in PR organizations, it is necessary to first examine past studies of the industry, and media industries in general. Media industries not only tell us what to think about, but also how to think about it. This concept is called framing. Framing is “the process by which we make sense of the events around us” (Lind, 2012). Essentially, framing provides a context in which to analyze and understand the messages we receive. For example, during the Obama administration’s push to pass the Affordable Care Act, a study found that acceptance of a new healthcare law depended on the way it was framed. News media, and eventually President Obama himself, often called the law by another name, “Obamacare.” A Gallup poll found that acceptance of the law when it was called “Obamacare” was lower than when it was called by its official name, which sounded much more legitimate (Gallup, 2013). Creating and promoting the use of the term ‘Obamacare’ was influential enough

to actually affect public opinion on the law. This is just one example of the media's power to determine the lens through which we view the world around us.

Past studies have found that media representation can affect self-esteem. Media representation is pivotal in defining our own social identities. The way we see our in-groups, or the social groups with which we self-identify, in the media influences our identities in real life. Nicole Martins, an Indiana University professor, led a study of 400 Black and White preadolescents in order to examine the affect of watching television on the self-esteem of four groups: White boys, White girls, Black boys and Black girls. According to an Indiana University press release, the study found that watching television led to lower self-esteem for all of the groups, except for White boys. They found that this result was due to the representation of each of these groups in the media (Indiana University, 2012).

For the White boys, Martins explained that representations are generally positive: "Regardless of what show you're watching... You tend to be in positions of power, you have prestigious occupations, high education, glamorous houses, a beautiful wife, with very little portrayals of how hard you worked to get there." Conversely, women's roles on television are much more limited, Martins said. "They're almost always one-dimensional and focused on the success they have because of how they look, not what they do or what they think or how they got there." Martins argued that this sexualization led to lowered self-esteem among girls (Indiana University, 2012).

In terms of race, Martins explained that Black boys and men are often represented as "thugs" or "gangsters" in the media. Martins argued that these representations lead Black boys to believe "that there is not lots of good things that you can aspire to." Interestingly, the press release did not include any unique findings for Black girls, despite the fact that their position at

the intersection of issues of gender and race sets them apart from the other three groups. These studies, and others like it, have built a framework for understanding the influence of media industries on the public, and, thus, the importance of diversity in representation among media professionals.

In the PR industry specifically, women make up about 64% of PR professionals, and earn 6% less on average than their male counterparts. Only 31% of the highest paid PR professionals are women. About 91% of PR managers are White (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010). Past studies of diversity in the PR industry have suggested that there are differences between the treatment of practitioners of color and non-minority practitioners. These differences include “monetary gain, job advancement opportunities, job functions and perceived roles” (Len-Rios, 1998).

Women in PR sometimes find it difficult to break through the barriers in the traditionally male-dominated corporate management world. As previously stated, men have historically held positions of power and authority in the workplace. While men are welcomed in these roles, women struggle to break in (Cline & Toth, 1993). The above is why women in the corporate world receive lower salaries than their male counterparts (Moore, 2000). A 1999 PRWeek/Travaille survey found that the average salary for a man was \$105,000 while the average salary for a woman was \$62,000 (Moore, 2000). The same survey in 2013 showed similar results. The overall median salary for men was \$125,000 while the median for women was \$80,500. Although both salaries have risen since 1999, the gender gap still remains just as significant (Daniels, 2013).

A 2005 study by the BPRI Group surveyed 73 PR professionals. Not to be considered representative of the entire PR industry as a whole, this survey provides “a snap-shot of senior

managers current views and understandings of the level of employee diversity within their organizations or departments.” The survey found that 66% of employees at the BPRI Group are women, yet only 38% of senior management positions are held by women. This shows “a considerable underrepresentation based on the high proportion of women in the industry” (BPRI, 2005).

In the BPRI Group’s 2005 survey, results showed that 90% of all senior managers felt that the PR industry “needs improvement as it pertains to minorities at all levels.” 52% felt that it needs “a lot of improvement” (BPRI, 2005). The same study found that representation of minorities, similar to that of women, is much lower in senior management roles than in non-managerial roles. Minority practitioners hold 13% of non-managerial roles, but only 3.9% of senior management roles (BPRI, 2005). The survey also found that 79.5% of their respondents were White (BPRI, 2005). The area that most respondents felt needed improvement was Recruitment Practices (73% respondents). Another key finding was that several respondents wrote in a response to this question, commenting on the importance of increasing the “visibility of blacks and Latinos in significant PR roles” (BPRI, 2005).

Also in 2005, Rochelle Ford and Lynn Appelbaum conducted a survey for PRSA to “understand how Black, Asian and Hispanic/Latino PR practitioners feel about [PRSA’s] diversity initiatives.” The online survey had 132 participants, and also included pre- and post-survey discussion groups. Results indicated that participants were dissatisfied with the commitment to diversity in the PR industry, and were also concerned that minority PR practitioners are “consigned to a slow professional track” (Ford, 2005). 63% of participants felt that the PR industry was only “mildly committed” to actively promoting diversity. 61.6% of participants said that the PR industry was only “somewhat successful” in recruiting a more

diverse workforce. None of the participants felt that the industry had done very well in this endeavor.

The findings for this study were similar to those from BPRI's research. According to the results, the "top perceived barrier to recruiting a more diverse work force is the lack of a persuasive recruitment campaign to attract multicultural practitioners." One participant said, "Emerging markets of immigrants and people of color are the fastest-growing markets in the world. In the end, it's all about business, but the indirect benefit is a better society," suggesting that although diversity ought to be promoted in PR as a business strategy, it also has benefits for its own sake, similar to the 'diversity as strength' argument. 60.5% felt that minority practitioners are often put on a "slow-moving career track," forcing many of them to become disenchanted by or even leave the field. 56.3% felt that minority practitioners are given more menial tasks.

At the same time, participants still felt reluctant in discussing the above observations with their employers. Said one participant, "If there's no one else who looks like you, how can you recognize if you've been put on a slow-moving track [compared to a white practitioner]?" Participants felt it was important for PRSA and PRSSA (Public Relations Student Society of America) continue to educate PR professionals on the importance of diversity and how to achieve diversity in the workplace. Almost 68% of participants felt that race-neutral professional organizations like PRSA are either valuable or very valuable. However, 80% of participants felt that racial or ethnic affinity professional organizations are valuable or very valuable.

Also valuable were the suggestions that participants offered to improve these problems. Specific suggestions by participants included: have key people of color play a larger role in recruitment and get involved with committees; provide more speakers/topics pertaining to

diversity at Chapter meetings and events; and collaborate with organizations that cater to people of color (e.g., NAACP, Urban League) (Ford, 2005).

### **Significance of Studying Women, and Women of Color**

North American culture is White normative, meaning that the culture is based on the implicit assumption that being White is normal (Matlin, 1996). As opposed to ‘White’ being seen as a race qualifier like Black or Latina, White is seen as the absence of race, while all remaining races are ‘others.’ Author Margaret Matlin cites a few examples of White normative culture in context:

“For example, as a White woman, McIntosh can be certain that her children will be taught material that testifies to the existence of their ethnic group. In contrast, a child from any other ethnic background has no guarantee. A White woman can talk with her mouth full and not have people assume that this impolite behavior is characteristic of her ethnic group. She can use a check or a credit card and not arouse suspicion about its legitimacy” (Matlin, 1996).

Similarly, North American culture is male normative, meaning that being a man is seen as the default, and those outside of this group are ‘others.’ Another term for this is andro-centric (Matlin, 1996). This concept leads to a culture where women are less visible than men in many aspects. In a culture that is White and male normative, marginalized groups, such as women and people of color, have historically been excluded from the conversation.

In psychology, only very recently have scholars taken an interest in studying the unique experience of Black women as targets of double oppression, both racial and gender, in our culture. One scholar argues that there is a “void in studying the lives of Black women” (Thomas, 2004). She goes on to explain how Black women are often categorically erased:

“Despite Black women’s multiple identities, mainstream psychology over- looked critical aspects of Black womanhood in both its theoretical and empirical analyses. Oftentimes, discourse took place in a mutually exclusive fashion such that there was a submergence of gender when ethnicity or culture alone was examined; or, on the other hand, ethnicity was frequently ignored when gender was accepted as a factor” (Thomas, 2004)

In other words, psychological studies have tended to study race or gender alone, instead of allowing one to inform the other, essentially erasing Black women’s experiences. Fields like African-American studies and Women’s Studies were created expressly to study the lives of these groups whose stories have so often gone untold. This project aims to contribute to the body of work that already exists regarding the unique experiences of women, and women of color, in workplace environments.

Past research concerning gender, race, and the workplace has determined that women and people of color have different access to positions of power than White men. Researchers agree that this relates to large, systemic, societal barriers such as access to education, region, city size, and industry (Smith, 2002). In addition to these systemic barriers, women and people of color also face interpersonal barriers when it comes to accessing positions of power in the workplace.

In a survey to study access to power among different groups, researchers identified a similar behavior across all groups: most superiors, regardless of their race or sex, tend to fill power positions they oversee with “scriptively similar others,” or people who look like them. This behavior is called “homosocial reproduction” (Elliott & Smith, 2004). This concept is similar to the concept of elective homogeneity discussed previously. Although this study found that all races and sexes engage in homosocial reproduction, they found that the difference lies in opportunities to engage in this behavior (Elliott & Smith, 2004).

The study found that White men had more opportunities to engage in homosocial reproduction than any other group, because White men are traditionally in the power roles in U.S. workplaces. As such, White men are more likely to have self-similar superiors at work. White men are able to benefit from in-group favoritism from these superiors in ways that those outside of this group, such as women and people of color, cannot. When women and people of color do advance to power roles in the workplace, they often feel that they are perceived as an 'other' in an otherwise homogenous group. Research by McGuire (2002) found that Black and White women who had personal ties with the same upper-level employees as White men received less work-related help from those ties than their White male counterparts. McGuire suggests that this is because these high level employees are "less likely to invest" in women and minorities because of cultural beliefs that these groups are inferior. Conversely, the White men with these same personal ties were able to benefit from in-group favoritism, because White men have historically held the power in U.S. workplaces. The researchers in this study also found that homosocial reproduction relates to the importance of networking among different groups (Elliott & Smith, 2004).

Researchers were surprised to find that Black women were most likely to rely on network assistance, or networking, to attain positions of power. One reason for this is that networking might serve as "an important response, as well as cause, of direct discrimination" (Elliott and Smith, 2004). Essentially, the researchers are suggesting that Black women may use networking as a tool to combat racial barriers set against them in the workplace. Another reason is that people who face multiple oppressions, like Black women, might be especially conscious of network assistance when it occurs, because it is so much harder to come by. Due to this hyper-



awareness, Black women may be “more likely than other groups to report better information on network assistance in surveys” (Elliott & Smith, 2004).

In addition to studying how race and gender affect power in the workplace, past research has studied personal interactions between different groups in an office environment. Although overt discrimination based on race and gender in the workplace is now illegal, recent years have seen new research on the ‘modern’ forms of sexism and racism. This research focuses on “covert biases” possessed even by those who intentionally avoid discriminating based on race and gender. Researchers have recently taken an interest in “general inclivity,” or subtly rude behavior without explicit intent to harm. Inclivity is defined as “the exchange of seemingly inconsequential words and deeds that violate conventional norms of workplace conduct” (Fox & Lituchy, 2012). One of the most important characteristics of inclivity is the ambiguity of intent. While sometimes the goal is to intentionally degrade someone, other times the conduct could be due to ignorance, carelessness, fatigue or other personal factors (Fox & Lituchy, 2012).

Inclivity relates to discrimination based on race and gender in a phenomenon called ‘selective inclivity.’ Selective inclivity is rude behavior targeting certain groups, in this case, women and people of color. This concept suggests that it is often not the content of these rude behaviors, but the targets of these behaviors that indicate the ways inclivity can be a vehicle for modern discrimination.

Cortina et al. (2011) surveyed the US Military to examine disparities in the experience of “uncivil behavior,” or inclivity. The sample (n=15,497) was large enough to split groups by gender and race. Results showed that Black women experienced inclivity more than White women, White men, and Black men. Smaller studies by the same researchers found that women generally experience more inclivity than men, and people of color generally experience more

inclivity than White people. These uncivil behaviors are especially dangerous in the workplace because they can easily go unnoticed and unchecked by managers due to subtlety. Examples include “being ignored, interrupted, or excluded from workplace camaraderie” (Fox & Lituchy, 2012).

At a multicultural town hall meeting organized by *Working Mother* magazine, about 140 professional women came together to discuss workplace issues such as these. Attendees came from a range of large corporations like Deloitte, Gap, HP, Oracle and others. The attendees were mostly Black, Asian, Latina or mixed race. Of these women, all the groups emphasized a need for companies to encourage and create networking and mentorship opportunities specifically for women of color. 53% of the attendees said in a survey that managers should be held accountable for the advancement of women of color. Additionally, many attendees left the conference planning to implement small-group sessions about race and gender issues in their workplaces (McAllister, 2004).

In addition to handling workplace obligations, women often also play important roles in their homes and families. Author Margaret Matlin discussed an interview with one woman, who said, “I don’t know any professional woman in her 40s who feels her life is balanced...we are all over committed.” The sentiment she is describing is called role strain. Role strain is the feeling that occurs from difficulty in trying to fulfill obligations for multiple roles at once. For employed women, role strain often occurs in trying to balance work responsibilities with family responsibilities. Currently, no conclusive research could be found on whether role strain is experienced differently among men and women.

While role strain would presumably lead to stress and anxiety among women, past research has found the opposite. Multiple studies have found that employed women are generally

happier and more well adjusted than unemployed women. Researchers believe this may be because multiple roles “produce a sense of excitement.” Women who are engaged at work, at home, and in their communities tend to reap benefits from this behavior.

### **The Importance of Blogs**

Scholars have researched blogging as a social action, to determine the significance of this form of communication in society (Miller & Shepard, 2005) (Schmidt, 2007) (Gurak & Antonijevik, 2008). Blogs can take different forms depending on their purpose. Blogs can be used for a company to post stories related to their work; news blogs focus on current events; and photo blogs can be used to post a portfolio. In the case of this project, the blogs analyzed would be considered personal/professional blogs.

Personal blogs essentially act as online diaries, where authors write down thoughts, recap their days, and document their lives. The use of diaries can be traced back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century, if not earlier. Carolyn R. Miller and Dawn Shepherd, two researchers, explained that diaries “are understood to be written in the present and about the present; to be written serially, in installments; and to refer to the actual experiences of the writer, whether external or intrinsic.” This model matches that of a personal blog, with chronological installments detailing the experiences of the author (Miller & Shepherd, 2005).

Miller and Shepherd go on to explain the relationship between blogging and identity. In the action of documenting experiences in this way, a blog author is engaging in self-disclosure, and they do so publicly. Miller and Shepard continue, saying that “combined with its focused and repeated effort, the blog’s public disclosure--its exhibitionism--yields an intensification of the self, a reflexive elaboration of identity” (Miller and Shepard, 2004). The personal blog is essentially a public reflection-of-self, like taking a series of chronological snapshots of oneself and sharing it with the world. These snapshots come together to support one cohesive identity

that is then made public. The exhibitionist aspect, that separates a personal blog from a private diary, allows readers of the blog to understand and share in the experiences of the author.

In addition to playing an important role in self-identification, blogs also can be used for brand identification, which is an essential part of PR. Corporations and organizations can create blogs for their companies that act as extensions of the company's mission and identity. In addition to supporting a company brand, blogs are also used to develop personal brands. In business circles, cultivating a personal brand is often called "doing your own PR." A 2013 *Forbes* article offers readers advice on how to promote themselves in the best light possible to their target audiences (Quast, 2013). Promoting an entity in the best light possible is often part of the job for PR professionals. In this way, developing a personal brand, and, as such, maintaining a blog, play an especially important role in PR. A PR professional's blog showcases her skills in public relations to potential employers. The rationale is that if a young professional can do her own PR, she is qualified to do someone else's. Professionals looking to cultivate a personal brand can do so by creating a blog to catalog their thoughts, opinions and experiences. Given the significance of blogs in PR both personally and professionally, this research study used blogs as a means of understanding the experiences of women in PR.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methods**

The purpose of this research project is to better understand the unique experiences of women and women of color working in PR. Through a textual analysis of blog posts by both women of color and White women in PR, this study aims to determine the similarities and differences in the experience of these women regarding their careers. Lastly, this study will suggest possible implications of these findings on the PR industry and the PR professional.

In selecting blogs for this research project, only blogs by women currently working in the PR industry were considered. To narrow down this category, it was determined that only authors who were new to the industry (i.e., five years or fewer in the industry), would be considered. This criterion was chosen based on personal experience with and knowledge of the PR industry. Current PR trends emphasize the importance of creating a blog as part of a personal brand. As previously mentioned, creating a personal brand is often called “doing your own PR.” For a PR professional, not only does creating a personal brand differentiate her in the job market, but it also sends employers in the field an important message: that if she can successfully execute PR for herself, she could translate those skills to working for an employer. For those new to the industry, it is especially important to position oneself in this way to potential employers. For this reason, it was expected that those new to the industry would be most active on their blogs, providing for the most content to be analyzed.

Additionally, blogs were only considered if their authors were currently posting. These blogs were chosen during the months of September-December 2013. Only bloggers who had posted content in those months were considered. Dormant blogs, whose authors had not posted in a number of months or years, did not qualify. All blogs analyzed in this project were found via search engine, by searching keywords such as “PR,” “Public Relations,” “blog,” and “woman,” in engines like Google, as well as in search engines on blogging websites like WordPress. The race of each blogger was determined via information available online, when possible. When racial information was unavailable, race was determined based on photos of the bloggers posted online.

This project used grounded theory to develop a working codebook. Grounded theory, popular in education and psychology research circles, is “an approach to qualitative data analysis using emergent methodologies, such as constant comparison, that permits a theory to develop from the data (from the ground up) without preconceived or inflexible ideas” (Suter, 2012). Emergent methodology is a method that allows the researcher to analyze qualitative data piece by piece. By comparing each piece of data to the next, the researcher can allow themes, patterns and ideas to emerge from the data itself, rather than from the researcher’s own notions about the data. In this way, by comparing each blog to the next, a set of themes and topics emerged that were then used to compare the blogs to each other.

Blogs were coded for both tone and subject to determine emergent topics. For example, one topic focuses on patience, which is more of a tone than a subject. Conversely, another topic focuses on personal branding, which is a subject. Tone and subject themes were considered equally important in determining the overall experience of these women.

For the purpose of organization, each blog post was also classified by whether it was written by the blog's main author, or by a guest author, such as interviews or aggregate information. Each post was also classified by type, or the purpose of the post. The types of posts were advice, personal stories, interviews, and opinion pieces. An advice post was any post offering suggestions or guidance specifically directed at the reader. Interview posts were those dedicated to a conversation between the blogger and an interviewee. An opinion post was a post where the blogger offered their stance on an issue, similar to an op-ed piece. Finally, personal posts were those that did not fit into any of the three previous categories. Personal posts were any posts dedicated to personal stories, experiences, or anecdotes, but that did not include any explicit advice or opinions. Posts that did not fit into any of these categories were classified as 'Other posts.'

Only blog posts from the year 2013 were analyzed for each blogger. Each blog post was read individually, and was broken down into topics and themes discussed within the blog post. This means that this project allowed for multiple topics to appear within one blog post, as opposed to each blog post being categorized as only one topic. Each time the blogger wrote at least one sentence on a certain topic, this was counted as one "mention." Thus, the uninterrupted discussion of one topic was considered one mention. When the author changed to a different topic, this was counted as a new mention. After reading all of the year's posts from one blogger, a final tally of mentions of each topic was taken. These values divided by the total number of mentions in the entire blog showed the frequency at which each blogger discussed a certain topic. The 5 blogs analyzed are introduced below.

**Women of Color**  
**The PR Woman**

*The PR Woman* is a blog authored by a Latina PR professional named Geraldine Estevez. Her age is unknown. The blog was founded in November 2012. The following statement of purpose was posted on the blog's 'About' page: "The PR Woman is a blog for you – the curious, undecided, enthusiastic, aspiring PR professional. Find out what it's like: the internships, events and more." Geraldine's blog combines personal and professional experiences. She writes in a casual voice to her readers, speaking to them much like one would a close friend. *The PR Woman* had 97 posts in the year 2013. Of these 97 posts, the largest category was personal posts. There were 32 posts in this category. The blog had 22 advice posts, 12 interview posts, and 5 opinion posts.

### **The Queen's English PR**

*The Queen's English PR* is a blog authored by a Black PR professional named Keema Bouyer. Her age is unknown. Since this blog has been shut down since the data collection period, the date it was founded is unknown. The blog served two purposes: the company blog for her self-run PR firm, and her personal blog. The firm's mission statement was posted on the blog as follows:

"The Queens English PR is a boutique firm with the express goal of helping you and your brand get the notice that you deserve. We are small and our small client base provides us the opportunity to build unique relationships with each our clients. With The Queens English PR you are not just a client you are a unique part of who we are. Your Vision. Your Brand. Your Product. Our Words. "

Despite the fact that her blog was also the website for her business, Keema wrote in a casual voice to her readers, even more so than Geraldine of *The PR Woman*. These casual posts were juxtaposed with press releases and press kits for her clients. *The Queen's English PR* had



30 posts in the year 2013. Of these 30 posts, the majority were interview posts. There were 9 posts in this category. The blog had 8 advice posts, 4 personal posts, and 4 opinion posts.

### **Sherri Jones PR**

*Sherri Jones PR* is a blog co-authored by two Black PR professionals named Antoinette Boachie and Jessica Moore. Their ages are unknown. *Sherri Jones PR* is “a boutique public relations firm based in New Jersey where a multifaceted approach is used to get brands recognized by their target audience.” As of 2013, the firm has had a blog on its company website. Antoinette and Jessica, the firm’s two interns, created the content for the company blog. This blog, different from the previous two, was specifically professional. While maintaining professionalism, both authors wrote in a familiar tone with readers. The blog gives professional and career advice, as well as discusses industry trends. *Sherri Jones PR* had 16 posts in 2013. 10 of these were advice posts, 2 were opinion posts, and the remaining 4 posts were classified as ‘other.’

### **White Women Parties and Press Releases**

*Parties and Press Releases (Parties and PR)* is a blog co-authored by two White PR professionals named Emily Langford and Rebecca Potzner. Their ages are unknown. The blog was founded in February 2013. The following statement of purpose was posted on the blog’s ‘About’ page, describing the ‘*Parties and PR*’ brand: “A brand by two young professionals, for young professionals. Parties + Press Releases is a hub of PR, business, marketing, advertising + event planning information. Lessons learned, news in the industries and motivation remain the foundation underneath P+PR.”

This blog, while it is not a company blog, is similar to *Sherri Jones PR* in its professional focus. The authors speak conversationally to readers, and their content is geared toward other

young PR professionals like themselves. *Parties and PR* had 41 posts in the year 2013. Of these 41 posts, the blog had 14 advice posts, 7 personal posts, 4 opinion posts, and 16 interview posts. All of these interview posts were part of a series called ‘Work It Wednesday,’ where the authors would feature a young PR professional’s work attire for the day.

### **Olivia Adams PR**

*Olivia Adams PR* is a blog authored by a White PR professional named Olivia Adams. Her age is unknown. The blog was founded in 2013. She introduced herself on the website’s ‘About’ page:

“Hello! My name is Olivia Adams and I’m the writer behind the blog. This is a space where you can find everything you need to know about launching a career in public relations, finding the perfect internship, and becoming the master of your personal brand.”

Similar to *Parties and PR*, this blog focuses on professional experiences, but with more of a personal spin, including personal information about herself and her experiences in her posts. *Olivia Adams PR* had 10 posts in the year 2013. 4 posts were personal, 3 were advice, 2 were opinion, and 1 post was an interview.

**Table 1: Blog Name and Information**

<b>Blog Name</b>	<b>URL</b>	<b>Author(s)</b>	<b>Website Description</b>
<i>Women of Color</i>			
The PR Woman	<a href="http://www.thewritewoman.com/">http://www.thewritewoman.com/</a>	Geraldine	The PR Woman is a blog for you – the curious, undecided, enthusiastic, aspiring PR professional. Find out what it’s like: the internships, events and more.
The Queen's English PR	<a href="http://thequeensengpr.wordpress.com/tag/qepr-blog/">http://thequeensengpr.wordpress.com/tag/qepr-blog/</a>	Keema	The Queens English PR is a boutique firm with the express goal of helping you and your brand get the notice that you deserve. We are small and our small client base provides us the opportunity to build unique relationships with each our clients. With The Queens English PR you are not just a client you are a unique part of who we are. Your Vision. Your Brand. Your Product. Our Words. (no other description available)
Sherri Jones PR	<a href="http://sherrijonespr.com/blog/">http://sherrijonespr.com/blog/</a>	Antoinette, Jessica	A boutique public relations firm based in New Jersey where a multifaceted approach is used to get brands recognized by their target audience. (no other description available)
<i>White Women</i>			
Parties and PR	<a href="http://partiesandpressreleases.com/">http://partiesandpressreleases.com/</a>	Emily, Rebecca	A brand by two young professionals, for young professionals. Parties + Press Releases is a hub of PR, business, marketing, advertising + event planning information. Lessons learned, news in the industries and motivation remain the foundation underneath P+PR.
Olivia Adams PR	<a href="http://oliviadamspr.blogspot.com/">http://oliviadamspr.blogspot.com/</a>	Olivia	Hello! My name is Olivia Adams and I'm the writer behind the blog. This is a space where you can find everything you need to know about launching a career in public relations, finding the perfect internship, and becoming the master of your personal brand.

**Table 2: Blog Post Category Data**

<b>Blog Name</b>	<b>Total Posts</b>	<b>Advice Posts</b>	<b>Interview Posts</b>	<b>Opinion Posts</b>	<b>Personal Posts</b>	<b>Other Posts</b>
<i>Women of Color</i>						
The PR Woman	97	22	12	5	32	0
The Queen's English PR	30	8	9	4	4	7
Sherri Jones PR	16	10	0	2	0	4
<i>White Women</i>						
Parties and PR	41	14	16	4	7	0
Olivia Adams PR	10	3	1	2	4	0

## Chapter 4

### Findings

In examining the topics discussed throughout the five blogs, two main themes emerged: Defining the PR Profession and Maintaining a Work Life Balance. Specific subthemes emerged under each theme.

#### **Defining the PR Profession**

Throughout all five blogs, writers focused on describing the duties, activities and expectations that are associated with being in the Public Relations industry. These descriptions included both autobiographical anecdotes and explicit instructions to the reader. In providing these descriptions, the authors give their readers a full picture of life as a PR professional. The topics described included Networking, Perfectionism, Change, Physical Appearance and Personal Branding as they pertain to being a PR professional. Each of these subthemes is discussed below, in order of most popular to least popular among the five blogs.

**Personal branding:** Authors discussed personal branding among all five blogs. Among all seven authors, the ‘personal branding’ subtheme constituted an average of 13.29% of all mentions. Women of color discussed this subtheme for 20% of all mentions, while this subtheme made up 4.33% of total mentions by White women on average. According to an article from business magazine *Forbes*, a personal brand is “the total experience of someone having a relationship with who you are and what you represent as an individual” (Llopis, 2013). A personal brand, like

a brand for a company or organization, is the sum of all things that define that entity in the public eye.

For the purpose of this codebook, the ‘personal branding’ subtheme included mentions of developing and promoting a specific public image for oneself, both in person and online. This was a common topic among all bloggers, and it was discussed in two key ways. First, some authors discussed personal branding as a tactic to use for success in the industry. One author summarized well in saying that “Every PR girl must have a brand.” She goes on to explain the reason for this, saying, “Your brand is one of the best ways to connect with professionals in your field” (Olivia Adams PR, 2013). Classifying a specific identity called the ‘PR Girl,’ this author suggests that developing a personal brand is not an option, but a necessity for success in the PR industry.

Authors also discussed personal branding as a subset of a professional’s physical appearance; when reviewing candidates for a job, employers often see a professional’s personal brand before meeting the professional, herself. PR professionals who do not maintain a certain brand may distract employers and superiors from their experience and skills. Authors describe a personal brand as sometimes being equally important in the professional world as experience or skills.

On *Sherri Jones PR*, one author discusses the importance of maintaining a personal brand: “From the moment of your brand’s conception, its identity has already begun growing. It is now a part of your life. Every move you make, you must make it with your brand in mind.” (Sherri Jones PR, 2013). A personal brand is meant to be maintained on a daily basis. A PR professional must think about the consequences of their actions in the public eye, ensuring that they put their best foot forward for potential employers, superiors, or other professionals.

**Physical Appearance:** Related to a personal brand, a professional might also strive for a certain physical appearance in order to put their best foot forward. The importance of maintaining one's physical appearance as a PR professional varied among blog authors. In any professional career, employees are usually expected to maintain some level of professionalism in the way they dress and carry themselves. However, some authors discussed upkeep of a certain level of fashion savvy and professionalism as an integral part of the PR profession, specifically. Others did not mention this topic. Among all five authors, the 'physical appearance' subtheme constituted an average of 9.14% of all mentions. White women discussed this subtheme for 21.33% of all mentions, while this subtheme made up 0% of total mentions by women of color.

The 'physical appearance' subtheme is the discussion of the importance of attractiveness, respectability and appearing presentable in the workplace. Authors who mentioned this subtheme all discussed physical appearance as having a distinct importance for PR professionals. For example, one author said, "Before my internship, I was just a typical college student -- the sleep deprived, I don't care how I look college student. You'd think being a PR girl would help me be fashion forward...yep, not even close" (Olivia Adams PR). Here, the author suggests an intrinsic connection between working in PR and having good fashion sense. Again invoking the 'PR Girl,' the author suggests part of this identity is being fashion forward and presentable. The PR industry carries along with it the expectation of a certain appearance.

This subtheme was most frequently discussed on *Parties and PR*. In an advice column, one of the two authors offered the following advice: "Men, make sure any facial hair you have is trimmed and neat. Girls... all I can say is do not overdo the makeup. Who cares if your resume is A+ if all anyone can focus on is your clubbing makeup and ten-day-old beard?" (Parties and PR). This piece of advice strongly suggests that physical appearance is important in PR workplaces.

Here, the author suggests that appearance could be just as influential in the hiring process as experience, affecting a candidate's chances of getting a job. Refusing to maintain this level of style and professionalism may distract employers from the candidate's skills and qualities.

*Parties and PR* also featured a column called 'Work It Wednesday.' Each week, the authors highlighted a different PR professional and showed the outfit that he or she wore to work that day. The description of the column read as follows:

"We would like to introduce you to our newest content addition for Parties + Press Releases, Work It Wednesday. We have chosen four very dapper gentlemen working in PR to represent each Wednesday every month. Every Wednesday we will upload one of their photos, a brief description of what they're wearing, and a bonus photo of what we (Emily or Becca) happen to be wearing that day. At the end of the month, we will recap each look and you all will have the opportunity to vote on your favorite" (*Parties and PR*, 2013).

This blog was the only one of the five that featured such a column. It is important to note that this blog, according to information available on the website, is not specifically a Fashion PR blog. Fashion Public Relations is a popular field for many professionals who want to use their communications skills in the fashion industry. On such a blog, featuring a weekly column dedicated to work attire would not be very surprising. However, it is interesting to consider whether including this column on a blog that is meant to reach an audience of all PR professionals indicates a belief that all professionals in the PR industry need to concern themselves with fashion as part of the job.

**Networking:** All authors discussed networking, or connecting with similar individuals for the purpose of meeting business goals. Among all seven authors, the 'networking' subtheme



constituted an average of 7.14% of all mentions. This subtheme constituted an average of 7.00% of all mentions by women of color, and 8.67% of all mentions by White women. Networking activities can sometimes be formal, organized events, such as career or internship fairs. However, the term 'networking' is used more broadly to describe any activity that builds and maintains professional relationships. Such activities might include informational interviews, personal conversations or email correspondence.

In this codebook, the 'networking' subtheme is defined as an emphasis on 'who you know' in addition to 'what you know' in order to achieve career success. Bloggers describe networking as an essential part of succeeding in PR, emphasizing the importance of building relationships in the industry. Bloggers engaged in networking activities for two main purposes: to find a job in the PR industry, and to succeed while working in the PR industry.

For example, in giving career advice, one author said: "'Network! Do some research. Don't be afraid to reach out to your former PR professors regarding upcoming events. Attend seminars, workshops, and everything else. You may end up meeting someone who will connect you to an opportunity or you may find out about and apply to a great job" (The PR Woman, 2013). In this quote, the author makes a direct connection between succeeding in one's career and developing networking skills. The act of attending workshops or reaching out to professors may result in an opportunity that may have been otherwise missed. Other authors discussed networking in the same way, as a means of accessing opportunities that cannot be obtained through other means.

In addition to networking as a strategy for getting a job, authors discussed networking as a strategy for succeeding once in that position. In PR, professionals often are given the duty of creating publicity for organizations, business or individuals. To do this, PR professionals must

interact with other media professionals. Multiple authors mentioned the importance of establishing relationships with members of the media in order to make the most of these interactions. If PR professionals constantly maintain good relationships with members of the media, they will have more success when reaching out to those people for media coverage. One author states this cause and effect explicitly, saying, “They [sic] key to the success of any brand is the development of solid relationships” (Sherri Jones PR, 2013). Developing relationships will provide PR professionals with a wealth of connections to call on. On the *Queen’s English PR*, the author gives more specific advice on this subject. “Build a personal contact file. Keep at it until you have a list of at least 100 media contacts who know you personally and take your call when you have a story you want to publicize” (QEPR). This author suggests that readers use a contact list as a tactic for achieving the larger objective of developing relationships with media professionals.

**Perfectionism:** Almost all authors mentioned perfectionism throughout their blogs. Among all authors, the ‘perfectionism’ subtheme constituted an average of 3.71% of all mentions. This subtheme constituted an average of 4.5% of all mentions by women of color, and 2.67% of all mentions by White women. Anxieties regarding perfectionism are not out of the ordinary in any career, but blog posts mentioning this topic tended to focus on perfectionism as it relates specifically to PR. Additionally, some blogs discussed how coworker pressure adds to these anxieties.

The ‘perfectionism’ subtheme included not only comments discussing perfection, but also comments discussing its opposite, failure. Discussion of avoiding mistakes, and the consequences that come with making mistakes, falls into this subtheme. Some authors discussed

perfectionism as part of broad advice for both work and home life, while others offered more specific comments pertaining to the PR industry.

For example, one writer offered this specific advice on her blog: "Make sure you take notes about everything, to ensure you won't miss a deadline and can have something to refer back to if you have a question" (Olivia Adams PR, 2013). This advice offers some insight into the daily life of a PR practitioner. The author describes PR as a fast-paced and demanding profession that requires both organization and quick thinking. In this example, striving for perfection is seen as a positive thing, something that will help a PR professional to stay on the right track to success. However, this striving for perfection can also have negative effects.

Other authors discussed perfectionism in a different way, as a potentially harmful quality for which to strive. On *Sherri Jones PR*, both authors discussed how failure can affect the way that not only PR professionals, but working women in general make decisions. "Why are we our own worst critics?" (Sherri Jones PR, 2014), one author asks rhetorically. Delving further into this subject, she says:

"As we get older, we are introduced to failure, disappointments and rejection. We are afraid to try new things because we do not believe that we deserve it,. When a great opportunity comes up, we talk ourselves right out of it. I call this paralysis by analysis; thinking so much that you become paralyzed and consumed with the fear of what may happen versus focusing on the blessings the opportunities may reveal." (Sherri Jones PR, 2013)

This author describes the negative side of perfectionism: the fear of failure. Fear of failure is a potential threat, a force that can hold one back from taking risks and reaping the benefits.

Focusing too much time and energy on ensuring perfection for fear of failing can lead to missed opportunities.

**Change:** Another subtheme discussed among the blogs was ‘change.’ Among all authors, the ‘change’ subtheme constituted an average of 3.57% of all mentions. This subtheme constituted an average of 2.25% of all mentions by women of color, and 5.33% of all mentions by White women. Change is common for young adults who have recently entered the workforce, as is the case for the authors of all five blogs. At the early stages of a professional career, these authors are in many cases just finishing a degree or recently coming from another job or internship. These changes often pose a challenge as professionals must adapt their work and home lives to accommodate new things. In general, this subtheme includes discussion of the outcomes of adversity and new experiences.

More specifically, the ‘change’ subtheme is defined as discussion of adversity as a tool for learning, or overcoming a challenging new experience. This subtheme was discussed in relatively the same way among all authors who mentioned it. Change, while authors acknowledge that it can pose difficulties for PR professionals, should generally be regarded as beneficial. Mentions of change were often framed in a positive light, emphasizing the benefits of change instead of its potential dangers.

For example, one writer described a new job, saying: "Not only did this experience teach me all of the tools I need to succeed in public relations, but it also showed me that taking a semester off from school can definitely be a difficult transition back into the real world..." (Olivia Adams PR, 2013). While this author acknowledges the disadvantages of this instance of change in her life, she draws the readers’ attention to the advantages that she received instead, going on to discuss the lessons she learned from this difficult transition.

Similarly, on *Sherri Jones PR*, one author shared her own philosophy in regard to change: “Never fear change, but instead embrace it. After all, Einstein defined insanity as doing the same thing over and over again while expecting new results...not going to happen” (Sherri Jones PR, 2013). Again, the author emphasizes the benefits of change to her readers, encouraging them not to fear new experiences. She goes even further in citing the famous Einstein quote, suggesting that by not changing, we do ourselves a disservice.

### **Maintaining a Work-Life Balance**

Throughout all five blogs, writers also focused on discussing the intersections between work and home life, and maintaining a balance between the two. The topics discussed included: Passions, Patience, Stress, and Control. Each of these subthemes is discussed below, in order of most popular to least popular among the five blogs.

**Control:** One topic frequently discussed across multiple blogs was control. Authors discussed situations in which they felt they were not in control of the situation’s outcome, versus situations when they felt they controlled their own fate. The two different kinds of situations were examined separately as ‘control (low)’ and ‘control (high),’ respectively. Among all authors, the ‘control (low)’ subtheme constituted an average of 2.57% of all mentions. This subtheme constituted an average of 4.5% of all mentions by women of color, and 0% of all mentions by White women. The ‘control (high)’ subtheme was much more frequently discussed, making up 9.14% on average of mentions by all five women. This subtheme constituted an average of 14% of all mentions by women of color, and 2.67% of all mentions by White women.

The ‘control (low)’ subtheme included situations when the author had no jurisdiction over the outcome. These were situations where some other force, be it fate, luck or even another person determined the end result. For example, one author described such a situation:

"How much can we really plan? There are aspects of human behavior I can't quite wrap my head around. Why do we make plans when it's evident we have little control over what happens? In reality, the only thing we can control (and even that seems hard at times) is our attitude" (The PR Woman, 2013).

In a situation of low control, the author takes a passive outlook on life, viewing herself as something of a pawn in a larger scheme. In another blog post by the same author, Geraldine displays this same outlook: "Timing is an interesting thing. Recent experiences have led me to embrace how unpredictable life is... I'm done fighting the things I can't control – life being one of them" (The PR Woman, 2013). Again, this outlook assumes that one has no say over the outcomes of their actions, but rather that the world works in its own way that we all must follow.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, the 'control (high)' subtheme included situations when the author felt they, alone, determined the outcomes of their actions. This subtheme represented the opposite outlook on life. Rather than viewing the individual as helpless in controlling her own destiny, this outlook assumes that an individual can achieve any goal so long as she puts her mind to it. Olivia Adams displays this outlook in the following comment:

"No matter where you are in your career, if you want something, you must go after it! No matter how big or how small the dream is, you have to make it happen for yourself. My dad always told me, ever since I was a little girl, 'if there's a will, there's a way.' And by golly, my dad was right! I don't think it's luck or the odds working in my favor -- it's having the will power to do whatever it takes to make dreams come true!" (Olivia Adams PR, 2013).

This outlook can be summarized in the context of the well-known American adage "pull yourself up by the bootstraps." Comments in the high control subtheme assume the belief that an

individual can take it upon herself to achieve a goal, no matter the circumstances. Other authors displayed this same belief: “Why wait for something to fall into your lap when you can go get it? Just like Abraham Lincoln said, ‘Things may come to those who wait but only things left by those who hustle’” (Sherri Jones PR, 2013). Unlike the more passive outlook on life among comments of low control, these comments take a very active approach to life. High control comments assert that success is not awarded to passive people, but is a reward for those who take initiative.

**Passions:** All authors used space on their blogs to discuss their passions and goals. Among all seven authors, the ‘passions’ subtheme constituted an average of 4.86% of all mentions. This subtheme constituted an average of 5.25% of all mentions by women of color, and 4.33% of all mentions by White women. These discussions could include passion for their jobs, or passion for something outside of work, such as a hobby. Similarly, authors discussed goals both in and outside of the office. These passions and goals give the authors purpose in their daily lives.

The ‘passions’ subtheme included any discussion of finding a purpose for which to live and work. Some authors discussed setting and meeting goals as a way to give their lives purpose. Other authors emphasized the importance of having a passion for the career one chooses in order to provide a purpose.

These two topics, passions and goals, were often related in the way they were discussed; passion for the work is necessary for motivating oneself toward goals. For example, one author said:

"The key to choosing the right career for you is to discover your passion/s...What do I like to do? (This doesn't have to be anything academic – “watching TV” may be one of your responses.) What have I always enjoyed doing? (Be specific. Go back to your

childhood, and think of something that made you happy then and continues to make you happy now. Don't overthink this. Sometimes it's something as simple as reading.

Figuring this out will make it easier for you to narrow down your career options" (The PR Woman, 2013).

This author encourages readers to consider passion when choosing a career, to ensure that they choose a career that makes them happy. It is this passion for the job that will motivate professionals to do their work every day, and to meet their goals.

Other authors also expressed this idea, that PR professionals should aim to find a career path that excites them. On *Sherri Jones PR*, both authors dedicated one blog post to introducing themselves to their readers. One author, Antoinette, spoke in her introduction about her reason for choosing a career in PR, as she had originally planned to pursue a career as a lawyer:

"Antoinette soon left behind her aspirations of the law and began on a new path that would allow her to achieve her PR dreams. During the time she spent interning, she realized her talent was truly her passion" (Sherri Jones PR, 2013). Going against her original plan, Antoinette realized that her first priority in choosing a career should be her own enjoyment in that position. Passion provides the necessary motivation to succeed on the job.

**Patience:** The concept of patience and perseverance appeared throughout almost all blogs.

Among all authors, the 'patience' subtheme constituted an average of 2% of all mentions. This subtheme constituted an average of 3% of all mentions by women of color, and .67% of all mentions by White women. Somewhat similar to the 'change' subtheme, patience is often a necessary quality for young adults entering the workforce, no matter in which field they start their career. For example, the job search process often requires new professionals to wait a certain amount of time before hearing results.



This subtheme is very much related to the ‘change’ subtheme, in that ‘patience’ can be viewed as one method of coping with change, challenge or adversity. In this codebook, the ‘patience’ subtheme describes instances of overcoming obstacles by refusing to give up, despite uncomfortable or unpleasant situations. The key element that separates this subtheme from ‘change’ is this emphasis on refusing to give up as a method of resolving problems in work and in life.

Some authors cited specific examples of situations that required great patience. For example, one author describes such a situation:

"On the show, myself along with the other hosts, talked about subjects such as the renovations on Ferris' campus, new additions to campus, celebrity pop culture, and even a segment on fashion do's and don'ts. Going into it, I was a little nervous, but once I sat down and got comfortable in front of the camera everything felt completely natural!"

(Olivia Adams PR).

In this example, the author offers patience as a solution to her problem: pre-show nervousness. By persevering through an uncomfortable situation, she was able to reap the benefits.

Other authors discussed patience more broadly, as a positive quality that allows for a better outlook on life. On *The PR Woman*, author Geraldine offered multiple pieces of advice concerning patience, encouraging their readers to adopt this quality in all aspects of their lives. Speaking of her own experience in situations that required some perseverance, she says, “I will not take shortcuts. Whether I choose something that takes two years to complete or four, time will pass” (The PR Woman, 2013). She goes on to say, “Be patient and consistent. The rest will follow” (The PR Woman, 2013). Like Olivia Adams, this author views patience as a positive quality. Again, patience is described as a means of overcoming an obstacle or solving a problem.

**Stress:** Multiple authors discussed situations when they felt stressed or anxious both in their work and home lives. Stress is defined as “a state of mental tension and worry cause by problems in your life, work, etc.” (Merriam Webster, 2014). As this definition suggests, stress is often caused by balancing multiple commitments or demands. Among the blog authors, many were balancing commitments at school, at a job/internship, at home and in other aspects of life. Among all seven authors, the ‘stress’ subtheme constituted an average of 1.86% of all mentions. This subtheme constituted an average of 2.5% of all mentions by women of color, and 1% of all mentions by White women.

In this codebook, the ‘stress’ subtheme describes instances of difficulty balancing commitments in a way that leads to feelings of strain, both emotional and physical. Throughout all of the blogs, most of the discussion about stress came in the form of advice, the authors offering their readers insights. However, some authors also discussed stress in their own lives. For example, one author created a detailed list of all of the commitments she had to balance at once during a certain point in pursuing her degree: "I've been organized from the beginning of the semester, but the amount of work has been hard to handle with my schedule. I'm taking five classes and interning twenty-four hours a week. On top of that, I've been dealing with some personal issues" (The PR Woman, 2013). This quote offers a uniquely clear picture of the many dueling obligations in the lives of young professionals. For many, juggling a part-time job or an internship while trying to complete a degree is commonplace, leaving little time to cope with the anxiety that stress may cause.

Most discussion around stress came in the form of advice, meant to instruct readers on how to cope with stress. Authors encouraged their readers to be aware of stress and its negative effects. One sentiment repeated among the bloggers was that professionals often think that

ignoring stress will make it go away: “Often times we don’t all talk about [stress] and don’t have the best ways of dealing with it. Some of us just decide not to deal with it at all and that may not be the healthiest method of relieving yourself of the agony that is stress” (Sherri Jones PR, 2013). This quote acknowledges an unfortunate truth, that many professionals simply do not know how to cope with their stress in a healthy way. In some cases, this is due to a lack of knowledge of the effects of stress on the body. However, this could also be due to Western workplace culture. Western workplace culture often champions those who value success more than their own health, leading one author to pose the following question: “We worry about careers, finances, and other things, but how often do we stop to question our own happiness?” (The PR Woman, 2013). In this culture, while it is considered normal to worry about an upcoming project or client meeting, worrying about one’s own stress could be considered a sign of weakness or lack of professionalism.

With this in mind, some authors also discussed the importance of maintaining their well-being and mental health when dealing with stress. For example, one author offered this advice: “Don’t lose hope. If praying helps, do so. If visiting a therapist seems like a good option, don’t hesitate to do so. But whatever you do – don’t lose hope that things will get better” (The PR Woman, 2013). Other bloggers offered similar suggestions to help professionals maintain a sound mind despite the stressful nature of their jobs. These suggestions all tended to express the same idea, the idea that in order to do one’s best at work, it is important to take personal time dedicated to staying mentally healthy.

**Table 3: Blog Post Topic Data (% of total mentions)**

<b>Blog Name</b>	Networking	Perfectionism	Change	Appearance	Branding	Passions	Patience	Stress	Control (low)	Control (high)
<b>Average % of all mentions</b>	7.14	3.71	3.57	9.14	13.29	4.86	2.00	1.86	2.57	9.14
<i>Women of Color</i>										
The PR Woman	2%	6%	7%	0%	2%	7%	1%	2%	9%	12%
The Queen's English PR	5%	0%	2%	0%	30%	5%	5%	2%	3%	11%
Sherri Jones PR (Jessica/Antoinette)	6/15%	9/3%	0/0%	0/0%	12/36%	9/0%	0/6%	6/0%	0/6%	24/9%
<b>Average % of mentions by women of color</b>	7.00	4.50	2.25	0.00	20.00	5.25	3.00	2.50	4.50	14.00
<i>White Women</i>										
Parties and PR (Emliy/Rebecca)	5/11%	3/0%	0/8%	32/25%	5/3%	0/3%	0/0%	0/0%	0/0%	0/3%
Olivia Adams PR	10%	5%	8%	7%	5%	10%	2%	3%	0%	5%
<b>Average % of mentions by White women</b>	8.67	2.67	5.33	21.33	4.33	4.33	.67	1.00	0.00	2.67

**Caution: small sample size! These percentages, due to small sample size, are not statistically significant. This project focuses on qualitative analysis of themes and topics, not quantitative data. However, this table was included as a point of reference.**

## Chapter 5

### Discussion

The findings from this research offer a small representation of the lives of women in PR through the individual experiences of seven women. An analysis of their blog posts revealed some trends that applied to all seven women, and some trends that were race-specific, only present among either the White women or the women of color. In this way, these findings aim to determine the unique effects of both race and gender on the experiences of PR professionals.

Across all five blogs, the three most frequently discussed topics were personal branding, control (high), and physical appearance. Personal branding is a popular topic among PR circles, from educators to students to professionals working in the field. As previously mentioned, personal branding is sometimes called ‘doing your own PR.’ Personal branding is emphasized as necessary and valuable both in finding a job and keeping a job in the PR industry. Logically, then, this would be a popular topic among blogs focused on the experience of working in this industry. The fact that this topic was the most frequently discussed shows that the authors chose to dedicate more time to discussing career advice and professional experience than to discussing their lives outside of work. This may support the same concept discussed by some of the authors, that in PR, it is important to appear professional both online and in person.

However, it is also important to note that this topic was more frequently discussed among women of color than White women, on average. This may be related to research by Elliot and Smith concerning ‘homosocial reproduction.’ These researchers determined that White men have

the most opportunities to benefit from homosocial reproduction as a means of career advancement, leaving other groups to find different means for success. Personal branding may be one of the means used by women of color to set themselves apart in the workplace, as these brands provide superiors or future employers with an image of these women as professionals.

The topic of networking was discussed throughout all five blogs. However, it is interesting to note that networking was discussed virtually equally among both White women and women of color. This goes against research by Elliot and Smith, who found that Black women were the most reliant on network assistance in attaining positions of power. The researchers anticipated that White men would be the most reliant group, due to their findings on homosocial reproduction among White men in positions of power. However, the researchers realized that perhaps Black women use networking as a defense, or even a counter-offense, to this phenomenon. All of the authors discussed the importance of networking; this may suggest that all women use networking in this way, as a method to fight back against discrimination, in this case, based on gender. However, without data from blogs by men in PR, such a comparison cannot be made from this data.

The topic of control was reminiscent of Matlin's concept of role strain (Matlin, 1996). In fact, the larger theme "Maintaining a Work-Life Balance" in itself essentially describes struggling with role strain, or balancing the obligations of multiple roles at once. Both 'control' subthemes might suggest evidence of role strain. These women feel in control in some of their roles, while in other roles they feel they have no control. It is important to note, however, that discussions of high control situations were much more frequent than those of low control across all blogs. These situations communicated sentiments like 'if there's a will there's a way,' and they showed the championing of 'hustle' to achieve goals.

These sentiments suggest a ‘pull yourself up by your bootstraps’ type mentality, which is very pervasive in American culture as part of the ‘American dream.’ It is possible that this mentality is so pervasive that there would be no difference in discussion of the topic between men and women, or it could be possible that women feel more need pull themselves up by the bootstraps in order to catch up to the dominant majority. If this were true, it might also relate to findings on the topic of change, where situations of adversity were often framed as necessary and positive in order to reach goals.

Additionally, the data showed that the concept of control was overall mentioned more on blogs by women of color. This may relate to Black women’s position in society as victims of double oppression. This double-outsider status may lead women of color to remain more vigilant in any environment. However, such a conclusion cannot be made based on such a small sample size.

On average, physical appearance was the third most frequent topic discussed among the blogs, but examining the data by race shows that the three women of color hardly mentioned this topic. The noticeable difference in mentions of physical appearance as an aspect of the PR profession between women of color and White women in PR may suggest a larger pattern, though the sample size was too small to draw conclusions. On one of the White women’s blogs, *Parties and PR*, a post about fashion and appearance was featured every week, and sometimes this was the only post for the entire week. This perhaps suggests the validity of these topics in PR circles. No past research was found concerning this subject specifically, but further research using a larger sample size could determine whether this finding is indicative of a larger pattern about the perceived connection between PR, fashion and appearance.

Before beginning data collection, it was expected that the authors of these blogs would include some discussion of the effect of their race and/or gender on their career. However, data collection found that there was nearly no mention of topics pertaining to diversity. None of the authors shared any personal experiences regarding racism or sexism in their professional or personal lives. The authors also did not choose to discuss these phenomena in the PR industry, though industry trends were discussed on some blogs.

The avoidance of topics of diversity among all five blogs may suggest a pattern similar to Elliot and Smith's findings concerning homosocial reproduction and being perceived as an 'other' (Elliot & Smith, 2004). It is possible that discussing issues of diversity in such a public forum, like a blog, would be seen as calling additional or unnecessary attention to one's 'other' status. Avoiding these topics could be a mechanism to fit in to the dominant culture in workplace environments.



## **Chapter 6**

### **Limitations and Future Research**

In future research, a more advanced tool for selecting blogs would be used to allow for more significant results. While many women in PR may maintain their own blogs, it is difficult to find them all, or even most of them, simply using Google and similar search engines. More advanced tools would not only help to narrow blogs down by criteria, but would also allow for more blogs to be selected for analysis.

In analyzing the blogs, future research would use a different method of coding that would allow for easier manipulation of the data. The method used for this research project, color-coding, was beneficial visually in that it could easily provide a general idea of the frequency of topics discussed. However, this method did not allow for the data to be easily classified into categories, or compared by these categories. Mentions in each category needed to be counted by hand, which made engaging with the data a challenge.

This project was also limited by its sample size. Future research would analyze many more than five blogs, so that results could be statistically significant. Future research could also introduce a comparison of women's experiences in PR to those of their male counterparts. This would develop a clearer picture of the differences in experience caused by gender, in addition to race.

Future research would also incorporate data collection beyond the coding of blog content. Surveys could be created and sent to PR professionals to test concepts like role strain, control, and the importance of networking among a large sample size. These surveys could also include demographic information about each respondent, so that the data could be broken down by categories further than race and sex, such as age, region, level of education and field of expertise.

## **Chapter 7**

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this research project is to better understand the state of diversity in the PR industry by examining the unique experience of women and women of color working in PR. Through a textual analysis of blog posts by both women of color and White women in PR, this study aims to determine the similarities and differences in the experience of these women regarding their careers. Lastly, this study will suggest possible implications of these findings on the PR industry and the PR professional.

Findings from this research project revealed some aspects about life in PR that applied to all seven women, like networking and personal branding. The prevalence of these two topics is suggestive of the importance of these topics in the PR industry. Other topics that were less frequently discussed, such as stress, may also be representative of larger trends, though further research is needed to determine this. This research also offered some race-specific insights, such as those concerning personal branding or physical appearance, into life as a female PR professional of color which may reveal some unique characteristics of the experience of women of color in PR.

Although the blogs used in this project focused on the PR profession, many of the writers mentioned topics that had a broader application than just to PR women, and instead applied to all professional women. Many of the items related to defining the professional woman focused

on personal responses to the environment, which often entailed emotional coping strategies. In years to come, the findings in this project can not only be used as representative of life in the PR industry, but it can also be used as a lens for examining professional womanhood in all industries in future research studies.

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### **Summary of Capstone Project**

The purpose of this research project was to better understand the state of diversity in the Public Relations (PR) industry by examining the unique experience of women and women of color working in PR. Through a textual analysis of blog posts by both women of color and White women in PR, this study aimed to determine the similarities and differences in the experience of these women regarding their careers. Lastly, this study aimed to suggest possible implications of these findings on the PR industry and the PR professional.

A review of prior literature determined the importance of blogs in the PR industry, as a platform for building a brand. With this in mind, it was determined that this project would analyze personal/professional blogs as a means of understanding the experiences of female PR professionals. Five blogs, three authored by women of color and two authored by White women, were chosen based on a specific set of criteria. Using grounded theory, a methodology that allows themes to emerge from the texts being analyzed, a codebook was developed cataloging the topics discussed among the authors. These topics were split into main themes: Defining the PR Profession and Maintaining a Work-Life Balance. Subthemes underneath these categories were personal branding, physical appearance, networking, change, perfectionism, control, passions, patience and stress.

In examining the data, some trends emerged throughout all five blogs, while other trends were race-specific, only emerging among either the women of color or White women. Throughout all blogs, the topics of personal branding and networking were two of the most frequently discussed, indicating the importance of maintaining professionalism both in person and online in order to be successful in the PR industry. However, personal branding was mentioned much more frequently among women of color than White women. This may indicate

that personal branding is used as a mechanism to cope with disadvantages that come with being a minority in workplace environments. Physical appearance was one of the topics discussed more frequently among White women than women of color. This could suggest an implicit connection between PR, fashion and appearance among White PR professionals. Future research is needed to determine whether these trends, and others that emerged from the data, are actually representative of a larger population.