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PR Flacks and Media Hacks: Public Relations and the News Media

*Attitudes toward the public relations profession and its practitioners
held by news editors and public relations managers in Ontario.*

by
Brian Biggar, BA (Hons), BJ (Hons)
School of Journalism and Communication
Carleton University
Ottawa, Canada

A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Journalism.

31 August 1995

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***PR Flacks and Media Hacks:
Public Relations and the News Media***

**submitted by Brian Biggar, BA (Hons), BJ (Hons)
in partial fulfillment of requirements for
the degree of Master of Journalism.**

Thesis Supervisor

Director, School of Journalism and Communication

**Carleton University
22 September 1995**

Abstract

This study explores attitudes toward the public relations profession and its practitioners in Ontario. Analysing data from a survey of 58 daily newspaper, radio and television news editors, and 105 PR managers, the study finds a preponderance of negative views among editors toward public relations. Radio news editors, however, appear slightly less negative toward the field than their colleagues in TV or print media. Editors accord public relations low occupational status and perceive PR practitioners to have news values that are different from their own. PR practitioners in management uniformly hold their profession in high esteem, though there are differences in news value orientations, and in attitudes toward certain PR practices, among those working in either the non-profit, government, private or consulting sectors. Comparing this study with similar ones conducted in the US, Canadian editors agree with American journalists in their critical assessment of public relations, though evidence suggests that practitioners in Canada may face a moderately less hostile news media than their US counterparts. The study concludes that a natural and healthy tension lies at the heart of much that vexes the journalist-PR relationship.

*To my niece and nephew,
Madison and Daniel,
fourth in the generations
of women and men
whose spirits enliven my own.*

Acknowledgments

Research, a term which often invokes images of lonely individuals in isolated settings investigating odd subjects, is in fact a social activity. The best research, I believe, is collaborative in nature, involving many people, often from different disciplines, examining several factors affecting the subject matter. Successful research requires a collective effort, usually coordinated by a principal investigator, but executed through a team sharing thoughts, ideas and information. Researchers only complete their tasks with the help and support of others. The notion of researchers working in isolation is something of a myth.

The project at hand could not have been finished without the generous contributions of several people. I am deeply grateful for the insights, guidance and critical advice of Professor Peter Johansen, Director of Carleton University's School of Journalism and Communication. A thoughtful and inspiring thesis advisor, he helped make this research project a success. His assistant, Connie Laplante, was also very helpful throughout the course of completing this study — keeping Peter and I in touch, and steering me through the university's onerous administrative regulations.

Professor Catherine McKercher, also of the School of Journalism and Communication, offered excellent advice after reviewing my thesis proposal and agreeing to serve as second reader. Her remarks helped refine the direction of this project before the real labor began.

I am especially thankful to two other teachers and researchers: David Martinson at the School of Journalism and Mass Communication, Florida International University, in North Miami, and Craig Aronoff, Dinos Distinguished Chair in Private Enterprise at the Coles School of Business, Kennesaw State College, in Marietta, Georgia. Professor Martinson provided copies of the questionnaire which he and other colleagues sent out to journalists and public relations practitioners in Florida in 1984 and 1993. His questionnaire (which replicates the survey originally designed by Craig Aronoff at the University of Texas, Austin, in 1974) served as the model for the instrument used in the survey which forms the centrepiece of my own study. Professor Aronoff kindly provided unpublished data from his survey of journalists and PR practitioners in Texas for use in the present study.

I am grateful to the following research libraries, where the books, articles and other reference materials cited in this study were obtained: Maxwell MacOdrum Library, Carleton University; Morisset Library, University of Ottawa; Elmer Holmes Bobst Library, New York University; John Robarts Library, University of Toronto; the Metropolitan Toronto Research Library; and the National Library of Canada.

Without the research grant awarded to this project by the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, the survey of journalists and public relations practitioners in Ontario could not have been completed. Mary Moore in the Office of Research Services was particularly helpful in speeding along my budgetary request.

I owe a great deal of thanks to my employer, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (Communications Division). Allowing me access to its computers and other material resources, and giving me time off to complete this study, SSHRC made it possible for the work to be finished in a timely manner. A special note of

thanks goes to Robbyn Plumb, in the Council's Evaluation and Statistics Division. Her knowledge of the *SPSS* computer program used to tabulate and analyse the survey data made it possible for me to make sense of the numbers.

In drawing the sample of editors and PR practitioners to whom the survey was sent, I am grateful for the assistance of the Canadian Public Relations Society in Ottawa and the *Matthews Media Directory* in Toronto. Particularly helpful were Arbo Mattila, Executive Director of the CPRS, and Judy Webster, Marketing Manager for the *Matthews Directory*. Both were instrumental in assuring that the correct mailing labels were prepared for the survey.

The labor-intensive task of preparing the survey for mailing out was done with the kind help of Bianca Howell, her sister Shelagh and friend Amanda Woodley. Their happy spirits made the chore fun to do.

Finally, I pay tribute to the 58 news editors and 105 public relations practitioners in Ontario who completed the survey. Though they remain anonymous, as promised when the survey was sent out, I extend my deepest gratitude to every one of them. Taking time from very busy schedules to fill out the questionnaire, they have made an important contribution to research on a subject long-neglected by Canadian scholars.

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Preface

During 14 years of work in the fields of journalism and communication, I have been variously troubled, amused and perplexed by the relationship journalists have with people employed in public relations. One of the most striking features of this relationship is the antagonism — the negativity — that surrounds it. In their most pejorative references to one another, news reporters and editors disdainfully call PR practitioners “flacks,” while public relations people denounce their media colleagues as “hacks.”¹ Negative attitudes help make the PR-journalist relationship a fractious and adversarial one.

Since the rise of the public relations profession early this century, journalists and PR practitioners have been struggling to find workable boundaries for their relationship.² In the process, there have been misunderstandings and some unfriendly stereotyping has emerged. Dismissing public relations work as “flackery” intended to bamboozle the public, or the news as written by hacks interested only in the sensational and anomalous happenings of life, are common examples of the unfavorable opinions each side has of the other.

Nevertheless, the two occupational groups have maintained a symbiotic relationship. To the journalist, PR practitioners can be valuable sources of information, providing news materials and story ideas. To the public relations professional, the news media represent a vital communications link to the public. The two groups share an ambivalent, “love-hate” relationship, fraught with conflict, sustained by professional interdependence, and tempered through negotiation.

In Canada, as in other western democracies, the news media generally determine which issues will be discussed and, depending on the prominence they give to those issues, influence the public's perception of their relative importance. This process is commonly referred to as *agenda setting*. "A corollary to it is *agenda building*, which places the media in the role of audience or receiver in the agenda-setting process," as one group of scholars note.³ "Agenda building focuses on who sets the media's agenda."⁴

By providing the media with newsworthy stories and information, public relations practitioners take part in the agenda-building process. To be effective in that process, PR practitioners need to position themselves as credible news sources. Indeed, gaining the confidence of journalists is among the practitioner's most valuable assets. But their credibility is often treated by the news media with suspicion.

The PR practitioner's role as advocate of a particular cause or concern, and the newsperson's representation of the public's need to know, often places the two sides at odds. The news media are expected to shed light on situations and events in which private interests clash with the broader public interest. Promoting public understanding and support of an individual or organization may be the practitioner's concern, but it is not necessarily shared by the journalist.

So much binds yet separates the two groups. If they have a common goal, it is to ensure that information is communicated to the public accurately and in a timely manner. The dissemination process, whether a specific or mass audience is involved, binds them together. But an inherent conflict of interest also divides them. Each is a communicator with a different role.

Maintaining good media relations for a client or employer is an important part of public relations work. The practitioner has a responsibility to ensure that information about a client or employer is reported by the media with full and fair consideration of that client's point of view. To effectively manage a client's relations with the public — including employees, customers, suppliers, stockholders or any other group with which an individual or organization has regular dealings and vested interests — the PR expert must also skillfully manage that client's relations with the media.

Ensuring accurate and favorable publicity can be crucial to building positive public attitudes toward the practitioner's employer. Identifying the policies and procedures of an organization with the public interest is how the effective PR professional earns public understanding and acceptance for that organization.⁵

This study examines the relationship of journalists and public relations practitioners, focusing on attitudes toward public relations held by news editors and PR managers in Ontario. As “gatekeepers” determining which stories get reported in print or on air, news editors are a key audience for the public relations practitioner.

Chapter One reviews the anecdotal evidence supporting the thesis that journalists generally hold PR practitioners in low esteem. Examining a body of literature on the subject, it attempts to trace the historical path of this relationship over the past century. The chapter addresses these questions: Have journalists been consistent in their attitudes toward public relations? What, if anything, is different today from the attitudes of yesterday? How have the attitudes evolved? Do journalists appear less negative or more negative in what they've been saying about PR?

The chapter also examines what, historically, practitioners have said about their relations with the media. Have PR people been consistent in their attitudes toward journalists? What, if any, evolution has taken place?

Empirical research supports the anecdotal evidence that PR practitioners are held in low esteem by journalists. Chapter Two reviews scientific studies of the relationship over the past two decades, beginning with Craig Aronoff's 1975 study in Texas and concluding with the only major Canadian study (conducted in 1989 by researchers in Quebec). Reviewing the methodologies and conclusions of research done in the last 20 years, this chapter lays the foundation for the study-at-hand. Research-to-date highlights both the dimensions of conflict and cooperation governing the relationship of journalists and public relations professionals. The lack of research concerning the case in Canada becomes obvious.

The method used in this study is described in the third chapter. Chapter Four sets out the results of the opinion survey completed by news editors and public relations practitioners in Ontario. It answers the following key questions: How do editors and public relations practitioners in Ontario view one another? Do Canadian journalists have the same negative attitudes toward public relations that one finds in the United States? What are the similarities and/or differences? How do the Ontario survey results compare to the findings of the American studies?

Chapter Five reviews some of the explanations offered by researchers and commentators as to why there is so much antagonism between the two groups. It is suggested that the negative attitudes stem from the education and socialization process common to many journalists and/or from problems arising from within the public relations

profession itself. In the final analysis, it seems a natural and healthy tension lies at the centre of much that has vexed this century-old relationship.

Notes for Preface

1. "PR" is the abbreviated form of the term "public relations." It is used throughout this paper.
2. For an excellent overview of the history and evolution of modern public relations practice, see Marvin Olasky's *Corporate Public Relations: A New Historical Perspective* (Hillsdale: Lawrence Erlbaum Assoc., 1987). While the profession as we know it today emerged in the early part of the twentieth century, its historical roots are traced to the previous century. On another note, some may dispute whether PR may even be called a "profession." I would argue that it has indeed become a profession. Although it is not licensed like medicine or law, public relations is a calling or vocation that requires specialized knowledge and often involves intensive study or academic preparation to enter a career in the field. Moreover, a single, national organization offers accreditation in the field: the Canadian Public Relations Society in Canada, and the Public Relations Society of America in the United States. In North America, one may only earn the professional designation "APR" through programs of study offered by these exclusive bodies, which also set a Code of Ethics for those who work in the field. PR practitioners form a distinct occupational group engaged in a particular, highly specialized vocation in Canadian and American society.
3. J. David Pincus, Tony Rimmer, Robert E. Rayfield and Fritz Cropp, "Newspaper Editor's Perceptions of Public Relations: How Business, News, and Sports Editors Differ," *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 5:1 (1993), p. 30.
4. *Ibid.*
5. For an overview of the scope and function of public relations work in Canada, see Walter B. Herbert and John R.G. Jenkins, *Public Relations in Canada: Some Perspectives*. Markham, ON: Fitzhenry and Whiteside Ltd., 1984.

Chapter One

Hacks and Flacks on Attack: Attitudes through the Century

In the winter of 1914 a group of New York writers prepared to launch "a weekly of ideas" they would call *The New Republic*. That the new journal would become one of America's most influential publications (it remains in circulation) does not bear upon the interesting letter one of the founding editors wrote that winter. The esteemed American journalist Walter Lippmann wanted his friend and fellow author Van Wyck Brooks to contribute to the new enterprise. But Lippmann's handwritten letter also reveals his attitude toward Ivy Lee, who was then near the pinnacle of his career as a public relations counselor with elite clients like John D. Rockefeller and the Bethlehem Steel Company:

I wish you would do that article on the windier Americans. They irritate me enormously, so much that I can't treat them with the respect they undoubtedly deserve. They are so damned lazy. Rhetoric is so damned cheap. That man Lee has sold like a novel: he makes every self-righteous businessman feel like Julius Caesar and St. George rolled into one. Lee's theory is that businessmen will become that by assuming they are that. But I think Lee is a toady and a flatterer and a great deceiving fraud. I don't know why I should get into a temper about this to you. I guess it's because I've had such close contact this winter with people like Lee, and I'm raw on the subject . . . ¹

Unfortunately for Lippmann, his work as a journalist made it inevitable that he would spend a lifetime dealing with the likes of Ivy Lee.

Lippmann's irritation and frustration with Lee and his ilk are characteristic of the negative attitudes journalists generally have displayed toward public relations practitioners

throughout the century. But Lippmann's tirade omits even the grudging respect many journalists accord to people in public relations. Reporters do say some good things about their fellow communicators, though expressions of antipathy are still more commonly heard. Attitudes toward PR practitioners appear to have changed only slightly, if at all, over the years.

The animus that news people have for public relations may be traced to the appearance of the "press agent" in the 1800s, the precursor to the modern PR practitioner. P.T. Barnum became the prototype of the nineteenth-century press agent through his skill at creating headlines for the Ringling-Barnum Circus with "contrived and often underhanded stunts."² Other early trumpeters for the tented caravans were Major John Burke, Dexter Fellows and Henry Reichenbach. But the "common press agent, circus barker and ballyhoo stunter," who talked big, shook hands with everyone, and distributed free tickets to police, news reporters and civic officials, was destined to go the way of the traveling medicine man.³ Reporters and editors who complained about the unscrupulous character of the circus and theatrical publicist would have a new creature to reckon with — the public relations counsel.

Though Ivy Lee was the first of the new breed, Edward L. Bernays is generally regarded as the key figure in the founding of modern public relations practice. His seminal work, *Crystallizing Public Opinion*, published in 1923, outlined for the first time the scope and function of the public relations counsel.⁴ The PR professional, Bernays argued, was not a press agent, nor a promoter, nor an advertising representative. Though he performed many of the tasks they did, the PR expert did much more: he analysed public opinion and adjusted relations between the employing organization and the public it served. As a skilled observer of public opinion, and something of a social psychologist, the public relations counsel advised on how corporate policy could influence public attitudes to benefit a

company's business, and how policy may be adapted to better serve the needs of that company's clientele. The machinations of the press agent would be replaced by the "two-way" communication model of the modern public relations practitioner.⁵ With the new role, Bernays declared, came a new emphasis on ethical conduct.

Here's how one newspaper reviewed Bernays' work: "If, with the change of name, there is to be a change in the ethics and manners of the press agent, people will be delighted to call him a public relations counsel or sweet little buttercup or anything he wishes."⁶ *The New York World*, where Lippmann was editor-in-chief, also applauded Bernays' effort to place his own occupation on a "higher plane," but added that "Mr. Bernays might fare farther and faster if he did not seek so palpably to avoid or avert the ancient odium of the 'press agent'."⁷

Members of the fourth estate, however, remained skeptical of Bernays' emphasis on ethics. In 1926, H.L. Mencken dismissed "counsel on public relations" as a euphemism for press agent: "A press agent is now called a publicist, a press representative or a counsel on public relations, just as a 'realtor' and 'mortician' are euphemisms for 'real estate man' and 'undertaker'."⁸ *The Nation* assigned the book for review to Ernest Gruening, later to become the first Senator from Alaska. He described the counsel on public relations as a "super-diagnostician of the public mind," adding that this new vocation came to fill an obvious need.⁹ But in keeping with the prevalent skepticism, Gruening's review was titled "The Higher Hokum."

Members of the press mostly shared sociologist Abram Lipsky's view that the public relations counsel was merely a new Pied Piper, the press agent of old, dressed in new garb.¹⁰ For 20 years following the publication of Bernays' pioneering work, journalists remained largely unimpressed with public relations. Despite the ongoing efforts

of PR practitioners to gain credibility for their profession,¹¹ commentary by journalists about them continued to carry titles like "The Science of Ballyhoo," "The Art of Bamboozling," "The Ballyhoo Boys" and the "Space Grafters."¹²

The press not only called into question the ethics of PR, but complained that these new publicists, like the press agent before, were cashing in on free publicity at the expense of newspaper owners. An editorial in *Editor & Publisher (E&P)*, in typically alarmist and defensive posture, makes the point:

One of the most disgraceful documents ever published in any industry recently was issued by the American Newspaper Publishers' Association . . . The document lists 500 brand articles of merchandise, which are being press-agented in grafted space in newspapers. [Among the] names of many of the free publicity gentry engaged in promoting these 500 articles and enterprises in news space [is that of] Edward L. Bernays, the self-styled 'public relations counselor' who makes ethical pretensions but is not above hustling for Crisco, Ivory Soap, Lucky Strike, Edison Light and many other purely philanthropic enterprises.¹³

E&P, consistent in its attack on public relations through most of this century, tied its economic objections to a philosophic principle:

Though our readers may wary of the diet, we nevertheless yield to the temptation to pass along the latest hot buttercake from the griddle of Mr. Bernays, most audacious, blatant, ponderous, insistent of the self-styled public relations counsel 'profession' . . . We might go on, were it not so transparent to our readers that, no matter what virtuous men Mr. Bernays or Mr. Ivy Lee or other professional propagandists may be, the device they seek to establish in public life is dangerous because it is irresponsible and is calculated to break down advertising practice, which responds to checks and balances, evolved from experience and conscience during a century of study and trial.¹⁴

In short, *E&P* argued, the manufacture of public opinion by paid propagandists, working chiefly through the daily press, threatened not only the economic interests of the news business, but the greater public interest as well.

The daily press' claim that public relations was a menacing force in society, however, seemed incredulous to some. Writing for *The New Republic* in 1929, Silas Bent, the American journalist-turned-media-critic, argued that the daily press was to blame for the constant stream of publicity and propaganda rather than the PR industry:

When the United States was a participant in the World War (while Mr. Bernays was serving the Red Cross among other clients), the newspapers learned to accept with docility the restrictions of official 'information' dispensers. Having learned to accept war handouts without question, the daily press afterward made little apparent effort to change its habits. We need not be surprised that some publicity persons took advantage of the tacit invitation this extended.¹⁵

Press criticism of PR appeared to carry a double standard. "Where's the difference," apologists for public relations asked, between the press' use of propaganda in wartime and the effective use of propaganda by PR specialists in peacetime? Even the staunchest defender of the American newspaper industry, *E&P*, acknowledged the gulf between the press' lofty rhetoric and journalistic practice:

Perhaps someone can explain to us why it is that certain publishers who would instantly discharge a reporter for 'making news' will accept the synthetic creations of press agents, eagerly, if we can believe all that Edward L. Bernays says in his persistent propaganda in favor of the ballyhoo business.¹⁶

To some extent, journalists and PR practitioners have been dependent upon one another since the inception of modern public relations. The press have faithfully chronicled the events and circumstances created by people in public relations.

Walter Lippmann was among the first to acknowledge that while the publicist exploits the press, the exploitation is mutual:

[I]n respect of most of the big topics of the news, the facts are not simple, and not at all obvious, but subject to choice and opinion, it is natural that everyone should wish to make his own choice of facts for the newspaper to print. The publicity

man does that. And in doing it, he certainly saves the reporter much trouble, by presenting him a clear picture of a situation out of which he might not otherwise make neither head nor tail.¹⁷

News editors over the years have generally agreed that "there is a place for public relations people in the gathering of business and financial news by papers."¹⁸

But the good journalist, Lippmann pointed out, must always keep in mind the biases PR sources represent. The public relations person is "censor and propagandist" responsible only to the interests of his or her employer. Lippmann subscribed to the consensus that journalists must treat public relations practitioners with skepticism. There is, after all, an underlying conflict of interest between the two groups. The basic difference between the publicist's advancing of a particular cause and the newsperson's representation of the public point of view is crucial to understanding the adversarial nature of the relationship between the two professions. This fundamental conflict goes to the heart of much that divides them.

Healthy skepticism notwithstanding, journalists continued sounding the alarm. By the end of the 1920s, a new phenomenon raised their ire when schools of journalism began offering courses in publicity.¹⁹ In the fall of 1929, Stanley Walker of the *New York Herald-Tribune* attacked the Columbia School of Journalism's newly introduced course on publicity, asserting that it was nothing less than "a propaganda factory."²⁰

Journalistic objections, however strongly voiced, could not stop the juggernaut. Public relations grew exponentially: from less than 100 press agents in the United States at the turn of the century to some 19,000 PR practitioners and "publicity writers" by the end of the 1940s.²¹ In Canada, the number went from a few dozen practitioners in the years between the first and second world wars to more than 500 a decade later.²²

By the 1950s, journalists began to take a new look at the highly successful public relations business as a rising force in industry and politics. It seems attitudes toward the profession were beginning to soften if only slightly in some quarters.

Canadian journalist Scott Young was among the first to re-examine the art and effects of public relations. Writing for *Saturday Night* in 1951, he argued the "case for public relations" and heralded a "new era" of professionalism among its practitioners. To him, "the rapid mushrooming" of public relations was "a mark of an important advance in the thinking of men who are biggest in industry and politics . . . [who now believe] that it's a good idea to let the public know what makes government and industry tick."²³

Half-a-dozen years later in *Harper's Magazine*, American journalist Robert Heilbroner examined what "the invisible sell" was doing for better and for worse to American business and society. His conclusions were also optimistic:

Good Public Relations has become something very much like the corporate conscience — a commercial conscience, no doubt, but a conscience none the less. If the public relations professional can bolster this role, if it can become the corporate conscience openly, fearlessly, and wisely, speaking not *only for* business but *to* business, then it will have more than redeemed its name.²⁴

In the new journalistic assessment, PR had the potential to render an important public service.

Though still voicing unhappiness with public relations, even *E&P*, that staunch critic of PR, seemed to have given up its unfettered disavowal of the profession. By the late 1950s, it began issuing tips for practitioners to improve their relations with the press.²⁵ Eventually, *E&P* would deliver its "Editor's ten p.r. commandments" in the

hopes of "reducing or eliminating the frustrations and irritations faced by [editors] in reviewing each week's grist of publicity releases."²⁶

The new appreciation for PR was echoed in *The American Editor*, respected rival to *E&P* in the annals of journalism trade publications. Reviewing contemporary PR practice, journalist Edward J. Flynn made these observations in 1958:

[I]t is likely that the public relations man is here to stay. The breed is hardy; it shows evidence of improvement, and time will separate the sheep from the goats.

The metamorphosis can be stimulated by editors themselves to their own advantage. For while some editors may cherish doubts, the public relations man who knows his business makes the editorial connection a two-way street. He gives the editor something for what he gets in exchange, a service of value in these days of rising editorial costs and, often, limited personnel and facilities. Recognizing that the deal cuts both ways, many editors have learned to rely on those public relations men who, they feel, understand their trade. The editor's problem is to determine "who is who". This is not easy.²⁷

Flynn's piece is among the first by an American news editor to acknowledge general respect for the PR profession, while pointing to questionable practices by some individuals within the field as the real source of journalistic complaints.

A decade later, *Time* magazine declared public relations to be "a legitimate and essential trade, necessitated by the complexity of modern life and the workings of an open society."²⁸ In its assessment of "The Arts and Uses of Public Relations," *Time* favorably concluded:

[Public relations practitioners] have proved not only that they are necessary in the vast free market of ideas that is the US, but also that they are getting more responsible as their influence increases. That process of improvement can only be furthered if the rest of the US observes their work a little warily, but with understanding . . . p.r. can be an indispensable asset to US society in reconciling the profit motive with the public interest. To the extent that p.r. men respect the

intelligence of the public, the public will respect them, as helpers in the increasingly difficult struggle to unravel the complex situations and cryptic messages of modern life.²⁹

It is no mere coincidence that such positive reflections on public relations came at a time when some of America's most prestigious publications — *Time*, *Printer's Ink*, *The New Republic*, *The New York Times*, and others — were themselves hiring PR specialists to improve their own public image.³⁰

Yet while the proprietors of news enterprises availed themselves of the advice of public relations experts, editors and reporters generally remained critical of PR's role in the nation's news system. Despite journalistic reappraisals of the value of PR work, and the calls for a new understanding, relations between the two groups remained chilly for the most part. The old stereotype of the dissembling, obstructive and manipulative flack was alive and well in the minds of many journalists. Irwin Ross of *The New York Post* summed up the press' jaundiced appraisal of PR types this way:

Journalists tend to be suspicious both of the deft indirection of the sophisticated public relations man and the crude importuning of the old-fashioned press agent. The former they regard as 'manipulative' in some ill-defined way and the latter as a downright annoyance. The general disdain for the breed exists in all editorial shops, despite the fact that most journalists admire the proficiency — and even the integrity — of individual practitioners.³¹

Ross argued that some practitioners may be respected by individual editors or reporters, but the profession as a whole is held in low esteem.

In many ways, journalistic antipathy toward public relations appears as striking today as it was at the inception of the new profession early in this century. The wry view of the practitioner and his work held to this day is reflected in the Associated Press Managing Editors' (APME) manual:

A flack is a person who makes all or part of his income by obtaining space in newspapers without cost to himself or his clients. Usually a professional . . . they are known formally as public relations men. The flack is the modern equivalent of the cavalier highwayman of old . . . A flack is a flack. His job is to say things about his client. He will not lie very often, but much of the time he tells less than the whole story. You do not owe the P.R. man anything. The owner of the newspaper, not the flack, pays your salary. Your job is to serve the readers, not the man who would raid your columns.³²

The *APME Guidelines* raise all the old objections concerning ethics and economics, in language virtually identical to that used by journalists seven decades ago. Reading the APME manual, one might conclude that over the years nothing has changed regarding the attitudes of journalists toward public relations.

Indeed, the virulence with which the contemporary press sometimes attack the PR trade can be deadly. A memorandum sent by Meg Greenfield, editorial page editor of the *Washington Post*, to one the paper's senior editors, illustrates how grim it can be:

We don't want any of that damned [public relations] crowd around here [she wrote]. If people want to get to us . . . it's as easy as pie, so long as they don't come in (or send their manuscripts in or make a request) via a flack firm. The reason for saying no to these wolves is very plain and strong . . . Why should we be in their goddamn memo traffic as exploitable or exploited 'resources'?³³

The disdain journalists can have for PR was expressed again, though not with the same level of hostility voiced by Greenfield, several years later in Canada. Mocking public relations practitioners in a headline, the country's largest business magazine ran an article entitled "The Incredible Thinking PR Man." The story raised the age-old complaint (and terrible generalization) that PR people lack ethics and so are not very well respected or trusted. "It's somewhat ironic," reported Larry Gaudet, "that a profession dedicated to image-making has a lingering problem of its own."³⁴

Perhaps the most strident attack by a Canadian writer against public relations was published a year later. Joyce Nelson's *Sultans of Sleaze: Public Relations and the Media* condemned PR for promoting "misinformation" and "disinformation." The following passage typifies her take on the situation:

The power of the PR industry is demonstrated not only by its hegemonic maneuverings within and for every area of government and business, but also by its remarkable ability to function as a virtually invisible "grey eminence" behind the scenes, gliding in and out of troubled situations with the ease of a Cardinal Richelieu and the conscience of a mercenary.³⁵

Her words harken back to the criticisms of old and invoke Greenfield's image of PR practitioners as wolves. Whatever inroads the profession may have made in establishing credibility and respect over the years, they have not reached people like Nelson.

Critical of the public relations trade from the beginning, journalists have been relatively consistent in their complaints. Those most often voiced are summarized by Scott Cutlip and Allen Center, leading authorities on public relations, as follows:

1. Attempts by practitioners to color and check the free flow of legitimate news.
2. Space-grabbing for 'free advertising', with consequent loss of revenue to the media.
3. Attempted use of 'influence' and pressure to get into news columns; indirect and sometimes direct bribery of reporters.
4. Gross ignorance of the media's requirements; no conception of what news is or how it should be written.
5. Raiding news staffs for experienced men with the lure of higher salaries.³⁶

We have already heard much about the charge of "grabbing" free space (item 2). The other four points, however, need to be examined more closely.

The view of public relations practitioners as obstructionists disrupting the free flow of information pervades the journalistic culture. PR came under strong attack for

precisely this reason in the late 1950s, for example, from journalists who participated in a survey conducted by *Editor and Publisher*. As one news editor put it: "I dislike the practice of a few in obstructing or blocking direct talks with top officials, with the object of channeling everything through their own departments."³⁷ While the journalists confirmed their use of materials prepared by PR practitioners, the majority were suspicious about their credibility as news sources, saying, "Public relations people have too many axes to grind with obviously slanted copy."³⁸

Journalists complain that PR practitioners do not let out the "real" news, handing out "a lot of puffs" instead.³⁹ As Cutlip and Center describe it: "The irritation of the press is understandable . . . a journalist may encounter a tightly drawn news release curtain put up by an inept practitioner or by order of the boss."⁴⁰

Public relations people who exert pressure to carry or "kill" a particular story are another sore point for journalists. This involves the threat of withdrawing an advertising contract if a newspaper or broadcaster insists on publishing damaging information about an organization, or promising to take out a lucrative ad contract in exchange for favorable coverage. Wining and dining reporters, providing travel and accommodation gratis, and free tickets to special events, among other "bribes" intended to influence editorial content, have also drawn media criticism. PR give-aways are a long-standing source of controversy — and embarrassment to some journalists.⁴¹

Poor journalistic skills on the part of some PR practitioners is another long-standing complaint. The news media, it is said, are "all too often flooded with uninteresting, poorly written releases."⁴² As Cutlip and Center note: "The publicist may drown a few facts in a sea of words, in an effort to get more news space." One irritated editor put it this way: "You have to wade through three or four sentences to find out

what they're writing about."⁴³ Not knowing an organization's deadlines, sending information to the wrong editorial department, or being unfamiliar with the kind of audience a paper or broadcaster aims to reach, also leave unfavorable impressions among journalists.

To the charges of "bamboozling" the public, "grabbing" free space in newspapers, bribing journalists, and ignoring the media's requirements, journalists added another complaint early in their relationship: The PR industry was invading the newsroom itself to recruit some of journalism's best and most promising talent. The lure of large salaries, more than newspapers could afford, complicated the effects of PR on journalism and the attitude of editors and publishers especially toward public relations. The depletion of labor has been one of the most enduring grievances of the news media. As one writer in 1960 put it: "The editors are not looking for any new names to fling at the (public relations) vocation; they are really only sour because it is raiding theirs staffs, depleting the best material in the journalism schools and because its bait is big money."⁴⁴

Despite the disdain of journalists toward PR, many have left the news business to work in public relations. A 1986 study conducted in Central Florida, reflecting the findings of others before it, found that poor salaries and bad hours contributed to the decision to leave journalism. Moreover, it found that poor management was an equally significant factor in the decision to move to another occupation:

In almost every case, the journalists' reasons for leaving the profession can be traced to bad management and bad policies. Many respondents talked at length about the 'callousness' and 'incompetency' of the news media's management, which is clearly reflected in the statistics.⁴⁵

Better working conditions and higher salaries in public relations made many who left the news media "happier" in their new jobs.

That PR, like journalism, has to do with communication is another factor in the cross-over phenomenon. Before going into public relations, people like Ivy Lee and Edward L. Bernays were journalists. Both men insisted that the best candidates for recruitment into public relations were news reporters. Their skills as writers and their intimate understanding of the workings of the press would serve them well in their new role as propagandists. Indeed, it has often been said that public relations evolved out of journalism.⁴⁶

In Canada, too, the PR business from the 1930s onward drew many recruits from the ranks of journalism. Jack Donoghue, considered a dean of Canadian public relations, noted this phenomenon in his recent memoirs. He claimed that working as a journalist for the British United Press (a wire service) during the late 1930s and early 1940s provided an excellent training ground for what would become a decades-long career in PR:

I was learning something about popular opinion and journalism. I was also learning how reporters worked, how they approached news, and why they did the things they did, knowledge that was fundamental for a PR individual and that would serve me well in the years to come. After [World War II], when the function of public relations rapidly expanded, journalists were the main segment of the population from which PR people were drawn.⁴⁷

Donoghue saw many of his former colleagues, including a few prominent journalists like Dave Rogers, Grant Dexter, and Dick Malone, leave the newsroom to work in PR beginning in the mid-1940s.

The steady stream of news people entering public relations, however, seems not to have had much effect in changing journalists' negative perceptions of the trade. In fact, the phenomenon gave rise to further grounds for complaint, as we have seen.

But the complaints do not come only from one side. Added to the above is a list of the countercharges public relations practitioners have leveled against the news media:

1. The media are not doing a thorough job; they have failed to increase news staff to keep up with the ever-expanding list of activities demanding news coverage (in the fields of government, business, science, education, medicine, etc.)
2. The news media are too sensational, always over-emphasizing conflict and minimizing the more constructive events taking place in society.
3. The attacks on practitioners as "space grabbers" conveniently hide the media's hunger for money.
4. The media fail to distinguish between honest, helpful practitioners and those who are unethical or incompetent; this leads to a failure to treat news as news regardless of the source.
5. Despite their frequent condemnations of public relations, reporters are becoming increasingly dependent on PR sources to fill news space.⁴⁸

Aside from this list of grievances catalogued by Cutlip and Center, however, one finds precious few examples in the historical literature of PR practitioners criticizing the press.

PR apologists, from Bernays on, focused their efforts on promoting acceptance and better understanding of the art of public relations management. Perhaps many felt attacking shortcomings in the media would not be helpful to the preferred goal of establishing credibility and respect for the public relations profession. It may also have been thought impolitic to openly criticize people so important to one's stock and trade. Nevertheless, one bold practitioner decided to enter the fray. And if balance and fairness are values truly held by the media, *Editor and Publisher* showed it was not above giving a hearing to the frustrations and irritations of PR practitioners when it ran a piece in 1969 by the president of a PR firm.

Bernard Ury's article in *E&P* posed this question to editors: "What are you doing to PR?"⁴⁹ Noting that while "much has been said about the things done (or not done) by

public relations people to antagonize editors, very little is ever said about what editors do to irritate PR people," Ury proceeded to catalogue 12 complaints that "PR men make to one another but seldom voice to editors."⁵⁰ Ranging from misquoting sources, violating a confidence, and getting the facts wrong, to playing favorites and not making good on promises, the list suggests a lack of ethics and professionalism in the ranks of journalism. It is "surprising," wrote Ury,

how even on some of the most respected magazines and newspapers you run into editors and reporters who deal haphazardly, in a cavalier manner, or even boorishly with capable PR people. There are still "Front Page" types — even young ones — in positions of power whose attitude toward PR is reflected in their use of terms such as "flack" and in plain surly bad manners whenever a PR person calls or visits.⁵¹

Nevertheless, Ury concluded the article on a positive note with the observation that "by and large, the working press is open-minded, fair, and courteous in its dealings with PR representatives."⁵² One wonders what sort of urgency journalists may have had in addressing the problems identified by Ury following his upbeat conclusion. Not much it would seem. Twenty years later, his list of grievances was essentially repeated by another practitioner, this time in *Public Relations Quarterly*.⁵³

Turning the table on journalists yet again, another public relations man looked at his and other professions' attitudes toward the media a decade after Ury.⁵⁴ In a survey of PR practitioners, corporate executives, academics and politicians, Frank Wylie reported some "conspicuous weaknesses" in the way the media was doing its job. Lack of fairness in reporting, misquoting sources, and inaccuracies in reporting topped the list. Generally, however, the survey respondents had a favorable opinion of the media, believing they "do a fair to good job of reporting the news."⁵⁵

By the late 1970s, improved relations between the media and PR practitioners were being hailed by other PR sources. In its fifth annual opinion survey of America's leading business and financial editors, Hill and Knowlton, one of the world's largest public relations firms, probed journalists' views of their relations with the PR community. They found that "One out of three of the close to 100 editors surveyed specifically listed public relations people or news releases as reliable sources of business information."⁵⁶ But the picture was not entirely rosy:

Editors who did [identify] sources they considered unreliable listed public relations people and their products most frequently . . . Most pointed out, however, that they were referring only to a handful of individuals within the public relations field. Unfortunately, a few had nothing good to say about public relations practitioners.⁵⁷

So while editors were making use of the services PR professionals provide, they still harbored antipathy.

Though conflict persisted, by the end of the 1980s the industry's preeminent trade publication, *Public Relations Journal (PRJ)*, was reporting "greater cooperation" between the two groups.⁵⁸ Reporting the results of a series of informal interviews with 20 professionals from each group (conducted by a senior undergraduate PR student at New York University), *PRJ* noted "real improvement in recent years in both respect and ease of communication" between journalists and practitioners.⁵⁹ According to one business reporter, the practice of public relations had become "more ethical" in recent years. Another news writer affirmed "the respect now accorded top-flight public relations practitioners."⁶⁰

But again, things were not all positive. It seems both sides continued "to voice complaints and negative stereotypes about each other." Reporters and editors interviewed

argued "that practitioners try to manipulate the media, push too hard when pitching stories and put too much emphasis on getting stories placed."⁶¹ On the other side, practitioners complained "that reporters write only negative stories and don't effectively utilize or fully appreciate the information provided by public relations firms."⁶² The old grievances were still being voiced, despite the reported "thaw" in relations between the two sides. Negative attitudes, therefore, have sliced both ways during the course of this century-old relationship.

That journalists especially have always been critical of public relations begs the question: Is what journalists say about PR accurate? The answer, perhaps, lies in what social science research reveals about the perception public relations people have of their own role. As the next chapter shows, PR flacks agree with media hacks that of the two professions, relative to the "public interest," journalism is the more valuable, although only marginally so.

Summary

Journalists throughout the century have generally held public relations practitioners in low regard. Their complaints about the PR industry have been fairly consistent. They accuse PR practitioners of unethical practices aimed at manipulating public opinion and characterize the function of public relations management in a unidimensional way — intent only on winning favorable (and free) publicity to advance a client's cause. The public relations business also comes under attack for “invading” not only the newsroom but also schools of journalism to recruit some of the news industry's best and most promising talent. Ignorance of journalistic requirements add to the list of grievances the news media express.

Public relations manuals and textbooks, from Bernays' seminal work in 1923 to Cutlip and Center's widely used instructional text — emphasizing honesty and high standards of professionalism — have expounded ideals opposite to how many journalists view PR. But journalists continue to view PR people with suspicion. Journalistic reappraisals of the public relations function and calls for a new understanding in the 1950s and 60s may have advanced the cause of PR in some quarters of the fourth estate, but news reporters and editors generally held to their critical assessments.

Still, things are not all negative between the two groups. Despite their apparent antipathy, the news production process binds them together. On one side, journalists use practitioners to gain access to news sources and to provide information for news stories. On the other side, practitioners rely on the news media to publicize and promote clients. But a fundamental conflict of interest divides them and is the root of much of their tension.

Notes for Chapter One

1. "Letter to Van Wyck Brooks (5 February 1914)," in John Morton Blum, ed., *Public Philosopher: Selected Letters of Walter Lippmann*. New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1985, p. 17.
2. Ray Eldon Hiebert, *Courtier to the Crowd*. Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1966, p. 8.
3. Edward L. Bernays, *Biography of an Idea*. New York: Simon & Shuster, 1965, p. 202.
4. Cf. Edward L. Bernays, *Crystallizing Public Opinion*. New York: Liveright, 1923.
5. Cf. Eric F. Goldman, *Two-Way Street: The Emergence of the Public Relations Counsel*. Boston: Bellman, 1948.
6. Herman J. Mankiewicz, "The Virtuous Press Agent," *The New York Times*, 6 April 1924, p. 3.
7. Anon., "Book Review," *The New York World*, 16 March 1924, p. 7E.
8. H.L. Mencken, "Training for Press Agents," *The American Mercury*, 2:5 (May 1924), p. 123. It should be noted that 20 years later Mencken recognized the validity of the term "public relations counsel" in his *American Language Supplement* (Fourth Edition), New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1947, p. 288.
9. Ernest Gruening, "The Higher Hokum," *The Nation*, 118:3067 (16 April 1924), p. 450.
10. Cf. Abram Lipsky, *Man, the Puppet: The Art of Controlling Minds*. New York: Frank-Maurice Inc., 1925.
11. Efforts to promote the new trade and advance its standards included the establishment of the first professional public relations society in 1922, called the Social Work Publicity Council, which later became the National Public Relations Council. Regional organizations also started to grow in the years following, beginning with the Florida Public Relations Association in 1938. By 1947, the Public Relations Society of America was founded. The Canadian Public Relations Society was established one year later. By the mid-1960s, both organizations instituted professional accreditation programs leading to the designation "APR". Official licensing for the profession, despite concerted efforts beginning with Edward L. Bernays in the 1920s, has remained an elusive goal in both countries. (Sources: Patrick Jackson, "Milestones Toward Professionalism," *Public Relations Journal*, 44:10 [October 1988], p. 28; and

Financial Post Staff, "The Public Relations Man: His Role and His Spectres," *Financial Post*, 14 June 1958, p. 31.)

12. See John T. Flynn, "Edward L. Bernays: The Science of Ballyhoo," *The Atlantic Monthly*, 149 (May 1932), pp. 562-571; John Chamberlain, "The Art of Bamboozling," *The Saturday Review of Literature*, 9:40 (22 April 1933), p. 547; Frank Norris, "The Ballyhoo Boys," '48: *The Magazine of the Year*, 2:6 (June 1948), pp. 27-35; and Joseph B. Cowan, "Beware of the Space Grafters! They're Apt to Take Your Shirt if You Give Them a Chance," *The Quill*, 26:9 (October 1938), pp. 6-7, 17.
13. Anon., "500 Grafters," *Editor & Publisher*, 62:30 (14 December 1929), p. 36.
14. Anon., "The Propaganda Game," *Editor & Publisher*, 61:17 (15 September 1928), p. 32.
15. Silas Bent, "Ivy Lee — Minnesinger to Millionaires," *The New Yorker*, 60:781 (20 November 1929), p. 372.
16. Anon., "Where's the Difference?" *Editor & Publisher*, 62:10 (27 July 1929), p. 32.
17. Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion*. New York: Macmillan, 1922, p. 345.
18. Victor J. Danilov, "Business Editors List PR Likes and Dislikes," *Editor and Publisher*, 90:17 (14 September 1957), p. 62.
19. Schools of journalism and mass communication have since become the most popular gateway to a career in the field. Today, close to two-thirds of public relations students are enrolled in journalism and mass communication studies, with the balance enrolled in business programs. In 1993, public relations accounted for 18.1 per cent of the projected bachelor's degrees ($n = 22,725$) granted by the 430 journalism and mass communication programs in the US. (Sources: Gerald M. Kosicki and Lee B. Becker, "Undergrad Enrollments Decline; Programs Feel Budget Squeeze," *Journalism Educator*, 49:3 [Autumn 1994], pp. 4-14; and Janet Dyer, "Public Relations Education: Two Surveys," *Public Relations Journal*, 38:2 [February 1982], pp. 19 and 33.
20. Stanley Walker, "School Runs Propaganda Factories," *The New York Herald-Tribune*, 19 October 1929, p. 4.
21. Statistics from US Census Bureau, cited in Scott Cutlip and Allen Center, *Effective Public Relations* (revised 5th edition). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1982, p. 19.
22. Statistics cited in Financial Post Staff, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

23. Scott Young, "New Era: Case for Public Relations," *Saturday Night*, 66:49 (11 September 1951), pp. 45-46.
24. Robert L. Heilbroner, "Public Relations: The Invisible Sell," *Harper's Magazine*, 214:1285 (June 1957), p. 31. (Heilbroner is now an historian of economic thought, teaching at the New School for Social Research in New York.)
25. See Victor Danilov, *op. cit.*, pp. 62-63.
26. Robert U. Brown, "Shop Talk at Thirty: Editor's ten p.r. commandments," *Editor and Publisher*, 100th Anniversary Edition, 1967, p. 316.
27. Edward J. Flynn, "Equipment for Public Relations," *The American Editor*, 2:2 (July 1958), pp. 33-39.
28. Anon., "Essay: The Arts and Uses of Public Relations," *Time*, 7 July 1967, p. 40-41.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 41.
30. For an interesting review of some recent instances when major news organizations felt compelled to engage the services of PR professionals to help secure a fair hearing of their side of a public controversy in which they became embroiled, see Bruce Porter, "The Scanlon Spin," *Columbia Journalism Review*, September-October, 1989, pp. 49-54.
31. Irwin Ross, *The Image Merchants*. Garden City: Doubleday, 1959.
32. *Associated Press Managing Editors Guidelines*, a loose-leaf manual prepared by the Associated Press, New York, NY, undated, p. 44 — cited in Scott Cutlip and Allen Centre, *op. cit.*, p. 383.
33. Anon., "Flack Attack: The *Post* spurns p.r. wolves," *Time*, May 10, 1982, p. 101.
34. Larry Gaudet, "The Incredible Thinking PR Man," *Canadian Business*, 65:5 (May 1988), p. 117.
35. Joyce Nelson, *The Sultans of Sleaze: Public Relations and the Media*. Toronto: Between the Lines, 1989, p. 19.
36. Scott Cutlip and Allen Center, *op. cit.*, p. 383.
37. Victor Danilov, *op. cit.*, p. 62.
38. *Ibid.*

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40. *Ibid.*, pp. 382.
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42. Scott Cutlip and Allen Center, *op. cit.*, p. 382.
43. Victor Danilov, *op. cit.*, p. 62.
44. Anon., "A Press Agent By Any Other Name," *The American Editor*, 3:4 (January 1960), p. 69.
45. Fred Fedler, Tom Buhr and Diane Taylor, "Journalists Who Leave the News Media Seem Happier, Find Better Jobs," *Newspaper Research Journal*, 9:2 (Winter 1988), p. 23.
46. Cf. Scott Cutlip and Allen Center, *op. cit.*; and Walter B. Herbert and John R.G. Jenkins, *Public Relations in Canada: Some Perspectives*. Markham, ON: Fitzhenry and Whiteside Ltd., 1984.
47. Jack Donoghue, *PR: Fifty Years in the Field*. Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1993, p.6.
48. Scott Cutlip and Allen Center, *op. cit.*, p. 384.
49. Bernard E. Ury, "A question for editors: What are you doing to PR?," *Editor and Publisher*, 102:4 (1 February 1969), pp. 18, 22.
50. *Ibid.*, p. 18.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
52. *Ibid.*
53. See Joel Pomerantz, "The Media and Public Relations: Pride and Prejudice," *Public Relations Quarterly*, 34:4 (Winter 1989/90), pp. 13-15.

54. Frank W. Wylie, "Attitudes Toward the Media," *Public Relations Journal*, 31:1 (January 1975), pp. 6-7.
55. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
56. Lucien Toney File, "How Business Editors View Public Relations," *Public Relations Journal*, 34:3 (February 1978), p. 8.
57. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
58. Anon. "Practitioners, business press report 'thaw' in relationship," *Public Relations Journal*, 45:5 (May 1989), pp. 6-8.
59. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
60. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
61. *Ibid.*
62. *Ibid.*

Chapter Two

Contemporary Media Relations: 20 Years of Research on a Love-Hate Relationship

Social science research for the past two decades confirms what a reading of the anecdotal literature makes abundantly clear: journalists and PR practitioners carry on a kind of "love-hate" relationship.¹ From the earliest to most recent studies, scientific investigation of this uneasy relationship records some very negative feelings among members of the fourth estate toward the public relations business and the people who work in it. But alongside their suspicions and mistrust, journalists do acknowledge a certain appreciation for the information and access to news sources which public relations practitioners provide. The public relations professional offers a convenient service in the high-pressure world of news reporting.

Three general topics are covered in the research literature on this subject: ethical issues (such as fairness, candor, professional integrity, and PR give-aways to journalists), communication skills (such as news judgment and writing), and the influence of public relations on news making.² But studies of the latter do not pertain to the attitudinal issues which vex the journalist-PR relationship and are the focus of the study at hand.³

Craig Aronoff's 1975 study of journalists and PR practitioners in Texas was among the first to test such attitudes in a systematic way.⁴ Assuming that positive perceptions contribute to favorable behavior toward individuals, groups or organizations, and *vice versa*, Aronoff examined various attitudes influencing the ways in which journalists

respond to public relations practitioners. His research focused on the credibility of public relations as a news source for journalists.

An important factor in successful communication, Aronoff noted, credibility is affected by the degree to which individuals perceive themselves to be similar to the source of communication (homophily) or dissimilar (heterophily) in normative orientation and social standing. Journalists, he argued, are more likely to trust information from sources they perceive as holding a normative orientation similar to their own, just as they are more likely to assign credibility to sources they consider to be equivalent in social or occupational status or who hold similar values concerning news and news writing. Aronoff selected three indicators of public relations credibility for measurement: "journalists' general attitudes toward public relations and its practitioners, journalists' perceptions of similarity in news values between themselves and public relations practitioners, and journalists' perceptions of similarity in occupational status between themselves and public relations practitioners."⁵ Aronoff developed a questionnaire to measure these three "indicators."

The questionnaire was presented to 70 reporters and editors employed at the *American Statesman* daily newspaper in Austin, Texas, 48 of whom filled it out. At the same time, it was mailed to 75 public relations practitioners in Texas, 26 of whom responded. Thus, a total of 74 journalists and PR practitioners completed the survey.

To measure attitudes toward PR, 25 "positive and negative statements were distilled from the literature of public relations and journalism."⁶ Study participants were asked to indicate the strength of their agreement or disagreement with each statement on a seven-point scale. "To ascertain status homophily, subjects were simply asked to rank order 16 occupations."⁷ They included: architect, artist, banker, carpenter, clergyman,

corporate executive, engineer, farmer, high school teacher, journalist, lawyer, physician, policeman, politician, public relations practitioner, and university professor. Ranking occupations to determine how one group may perceive the status of another has been a widely used technique for several decades.

Finally, to measure and compare news value orientation homophily, the research instrument included a section that asked participants to rank-order six news values. "As part of their education and socialization," Aronoff observed, "journalists learn a fairly specific set of values concerning news and news writing."⁸ High among these are the need for accuracy, completeness and prompt publication of information, as well as potential reader interest and the information's potential usefulness to the reader. In addition to those, Aronoff included a sixth value commonly ascribed to public relations practitioners: "a concern that the subject of the information, presumably their clients, be depicted in a favorable light."

Aronoff found that while news people see public relations as "an important part of the process of getting news to the public, they continue to associate the public relations profession with unacceptable practices."⁹ Journalists sometimes appreciate the skills of PR people, but have a dim view of their ethics. Although public relations practitioners are an important news source for journalists, they rate rather low in terms of source credibility. To the majority of editors and reporters who participated in Aronoff's study, the PR professional is "a suspicious manipulator of the press."¹⁰

His ground-breaking research identified several other "negative attitudes" journalists have toward public relations. These include perceptions of PR people as obstructionists in the news gathering process who clutter the channels of communication with information about trivial, uneventful happenings, and disguise publicity as news.

Among the practitioners, "sizeable minorities" agreed with those charges, even though a majority rejected them.

As a measure of professional status he found that journalists ranked themselves first and public relations practitioners last among 16 occupations. PR practitioners, on the other hand, ranked themselves more or less equal in status, placing journalists third and themselves fourth in order of respect.

The editors and reporters also perceived practitioners to be following an opposite set of news values. Journalists thought PR people would choose "Depicting subject in a favorable light" as their highest news value. However, like the journalists, the practitioners felt that "accuracy" was the most important of the six news values each group rated. Though Aronoff did not suggest it, was it possible, despite what the practitioners said, that the journalists accurately perceived "positive spin" as the top PR news value? After all, even when practitioners must release "bad" news, they do so with as little damage as possible.

It may have been the case that some of the PR respondents were simply downplaying their role in promoting the good image of clients. Perhaps ensuring positive depictions of a subject is a goal, and background constraint, so much assumed by practitioners that it did not consciously enter their minds as important. The difference between what people say they do and what they actually do can be great (and unintentional). In any event, that the journalists were not far off in their perception of the high importance public relations people place on favorable images remains a possibility.

In sum, Aronoff's findings indicated, "journalists have negative attitudes toward public relations practitioners and perceive heterophilous news value orientations and occupational status as compared to public relations."¹¹

Building on Aronoff's work, similar conclusions have been reached by other researchers. In 1976 Dennis Jeffers examined the attitudes and expectations of a sample of 96 news reporters and public relations practitioners in five Ohio cities.¹² His study (based on a mail survey) found that news reporters generally believed they were more ethical and skilled than PR people. While both groups viewed journalists as "watchdogs of society," the reporters often characterized practitioners "as obstructions in the newsman's path to the 'truth' . . . presenting only the 'good side' of the story."¹³ Jeffers concluded that news reporters tend to hold practitioners in low esteem.

Despite the negative attitudes generally held by reporters, however, Jeffers also found that many journalists considered practitioners whom they knew and worked with to be status equals. Those with whom the journalists had little acquaintance were thought to be unequal in status.¹⁴ Expressing some sense of inferiority, or modesty as the case may be, practitioners considered themselves "status equals with the specific newsmen with whom they regularly work[ed] but assign[ed] slightly higher status to newsmen in general than to persons in their own occupational category."¹⁵

Diverging somewhat from Aronoff's findings, the Jeffers study noted that both journalists and practitioners consider their relationship a cooperative one. The practitioners, however, appeared to believe this more than the journalists. Jeffers linked cooperativeness between the two groups to perceptions of status equality and competitiveness to perceptions of inequality. He also found that both news and PR people place higher expectations of skills and ethics on journalists. "Even newsmen who see the

newsman/public relations practitioner relationship as being a cooperative one, believe that newsmen as a whole are more skilled and ethical than practitioners."¹⁶ Practitioners, too, had higher expectations of journalists in both areas than they did of their own occupational group.

In contrast to Aronoff and Jeffers, E.W. Brody in 1984 observed that "instead of being enshrouded in an aura of antipathy, the journalist/practitioner relationship is characterized by a fairly high level of mutual respect and cooperation."¹⁷ Surveying both newspaper and broadcast editors in Memphis, as well as PR practitioners, Brody's study explored two subject areas: ethical considerations and quality of product. He found that journalists (specifically, news editors) and practitioners "tend to respect the quality of the opposite group's products more than its adherence to ethics and candor."¹⁸ Although the two groups differed significantly on four of eight ethical factors, failing to agree on what constitutes fairness and public interest, they agreed substantially on the qualities of a good news story (i.e. accuracy, quality of writing, timeliness, and completeness).

Curiously, Brody's findings suggest that the disagreement over ethics didn't get in the way of cooperation between the two groups. Nor, it seems, did it hurt the "high level of mutual respect" Brody found between them. How this was found is not clear. One would have thought that the failure to agree on certain fundamental ethical issues would negatively impact upon levels of respect and cooperation. Still, Brody came to a positive assessment of journalist-practitioner relations in his home state of Tennessee.

Brody's results sharply contrast with the findings of almost every other study. Subsequent research tends to confirm that the negative views of journalists are an impediment to harmonious relations between the two groups.¹⁹ In their 1984 study of 47 newspaper editors and 57 PR practitioners in Florida, for example, Kopenhaver,

Martinson and Ryan found a wide gap between the perceptions of journalists and public relations practitioners in several areas — occupational status, news values, source credibility, and professional integrity.²⁰

The editors generally registered negative views of public relations, as measured in their responses to the same 25 positive and negative statements about the profession and its practitioners first posed by Aronoff. The PR group was consistently positive in their responses to their own occupation, though, interestingly, they were neutral on the statement which suggested they “too frequently insist on promoting products, services and other activities which do not legitimately deserve promotion.” Rating the 16 occupations also used in the Texas study to measure occupational status, the Florida journalists ranked themselves number one in order of respect and consigned practitioners to the bottom of the list.

To determine how precisely the editors and practitioners assessed each other's news values, Kopenhaver *et al.* used the “coorientation model” for measuring correlation in “person perception” developed by Jack MacLeod and Steven Chaffee. Three variables were considered in the coorientation analysis: *agreement*, i.e., the similarity of the two groups' rankings; *congruency*, i.e., the similarity between the perception of how the other group ranked the news values; and *accuracy*, i.e., the degree to which each group correctly perceived the other's rankings.²¹

News value orientations were 'heterophilously' perceived by the journalists in Florida, just as they were in Texas. In their ranking of eight news values, first for themselves and then for the other group, practitioners accurately predicted the responses of journalists, while the editors did not do well at all in predicting the responses of

practitioners.²² The two groups may adhere to similar news values, but journalists continue to see practitioners as people with an incongruous orientation.

Similar results were reported in a 1986 study by Stegall and Sanders.²³ They found that educational PR officers in Missouri predicted journalists' views of the role of public relations more accurately than journalists predicted the views of practitioners. They also noted that both groups accord higher occupational status to those who work in journalism. "It is clear from the Florida and Missouri studies," observed the two researchers, "that PR as a profession is still seen by many journalists as a bastard child in terms of status."²⁴

Habermann, Kopenhaver and Martinson redeployed the instrument used in the Texas and Florida studies to explore how educators in journalism and public relations view PR. The group conducted a national survey in 1988 of faculty at American universities and colleges belonging to the Association of Schools of Journalism and Mass Communication. Journalism educators, they found, share the views of working journalists.¹⁸ The gap in perceptions concerning news values and professionalism "found between practicing journalists and public relations practitioners . . . is also operative in schools and departments of journalism and mass communication."²⁵

If attitudes were bad in the workplace, they appeared not much better in the institutes of higher learning. In American universities, the researchers concluded, "news-editorial faculty have attitudes that are more negative toward public relations than their colleagues in public relations sequences [and] do not think that public relations enjoys much professional status."²⁶

At the University of Iowa in 1989, Andrew Beltz, Albert Talbott and Kenneth Starck published the results of their study of the cross-perceptions of journalists and practitioners.²⁷ Their survey of a systematic sample of 14 print and broadcast editors, and 15 PR practitioners "who carry out the specific task of media relations," in eastern and central Iowa found "mildly negative" views on the part of journalists toward public relations. Both groups agreed on the role of a journalist — adhering to standards of accuracy fairness, objectivity, balance and informativeness. But they differed "sharply over their perceptions of the public relations role."²⁸

Once again, ethics came into play. To the journalists, PR involved advocacy, persuasion, withholding of information, and aggressiveness. In contrast to the two groups' consensus regarding the journalistic role, journalists "indicated a negative perception of public relations." Disagreeing with their counterparts in journalism, as one might expect, the PR practitioners believed themselves to be accurate, able to construct clear messages that were forthright, honest, and informative. "They disagreed," according to the researchers, "that public relations involves ethical compromises or hidden agendas."²⁹ Such dissonance is a long-standing feature of the two group's relationship. But so too is the respect journalists can have for the communication skills of practitioners.

In the Iowa study, "journalists did give credit to public relations people for having strong abilities to construct interesting and 'digestible' messages."³⁰ But that is small consolation for public relations people whom journalists stated do little to protect the public interest or to be "independent and resistant to favor seekers."³¹ The opinions expressed by the journalists — that practitioners are involved in ethical compromises, hidden agendas, and withholding information — harkens back to earlier press criticisms of public relations. Ethical issues always have been a major source of conflict between the two groups.

Data gathered for the most recently published study tended to "reinforce the long-established notion that the traditional adversarial relationship between journalists and public relations professionals still exists."³² Opinions on the professionalism and integrity of public relations were solicited from business, sports and news editors at daily newspapers in California. To probe the editors' views, Pincus, Rimmer, Rayfield and Cropp included most of the attitude statements from Aronoff's study, which were also replicated by Kopenhaver *et al.* in Florida. But they also factored in a range of other variables, including circulation size and whether an editor had any work experience or education in public relations, to see if these would make any difference in attitudes. They found "that editors who had completed a college course in public relations reported significantly more positive perceptions of public relations than those who had not."³³ The researchers also noted:

Analysis of the data revealed that news, business, and sport editors, pressed by varying information needs, view public relations professionals and the materials they offer editors differently. Among the three categories of editors, sports editors saw the public relations function in the most favorable light.

These findings may reflect basic differences in the type of information certain newspaper departments want and are offered by public relations sources. For example, we assume sports information public relations personnel have largely played an information-provider role with sports editors. However, public relations professionals who represent business clients are expected not only to handle the basic information needs of and requests by media, but also be advocates by pitching story ideas to editors on issues or events important to their organization or clients.³⁴

An important implication of these findings is that reporters and editors should not be viewed as an homogenous group. Research in this area needs to differentiate between "types" of journalists. As one communications scholar puts it:

Obviously all journalists do not view public relations, or all public relations practitioners, in the same way . . . One critically important step helping to

understand the way the "journalistic culture" views public relations rests in an ever increasingly detailed examination into why individual and various "types" of journalists hold the views they do.³⁵

While the results of the California study reveal that newspaper editors' negative attitudes toward PR practitioners "are remarkably similar to journalists' perceptions in prior studies conducted over 15 years," other findings disclosed a "difference between attitudes toward public relations materials and the people who provide them."³⁶ The strength of the negative views may be lessening, the researchers concluded.

But across the continent, the latest study to measure attitudes toward public relations "clearly indicate that not much has changed in the way Florida journalists view public relations and public relations practitioners."³⁷ In 1993, David Martinson replicated the survey which he, Kopenhaver and Ryan conducted in that state a decade earlier. This time, the research was taken a step further. With some modifications to the original instrument, Martinson attempted to find out if attitudes varied depending on whether a journalist (in this case, news editors only) worked for a daily or weekly newspaper. In addition, the survey tested whether other variables, such as sex, public relations work experience, and number of employees supervised, might make a difference.

The results did not bode well for the relationship. Martinson reported that "editors in this study were even more hostile than they were in 1984 . . . Similarly, Florida editors continue to perceive that they have very different news value orientations than public relations practitioners."³⁸ As in the previous study, "editors, whether in daily or weekly newspapers, continue to perceive that 'depicting the subject in a favorable light' is the practitioner's most important news value."³⁹ That journalists, Martinson concluded, "have something of a love-hate relationship with public relations practitioners seems clear."⁴⁰

Concerning the demographic variables he tested, Martinson found the number of employees an editor supervises, and whether the editor is a man or a woman, do not appear to make any significant difference in attitudes toward public relations. However, editors with some experience in PR, as well as those who work on a weekly paper, were found to be somewhat less negative toward public relations than their colleagues.

In the final analysis, evidence gleaned from research in the United States seems clear: PR practitioners face unreceptive attitudes in their relations with the news media.⁴¹ Although they consider practitioners to be an important news source, journalists question their reliability. They generally do not have a lot of respect for, and consider themselves superior to, people who work in public relations. And while PR practitioners can be very critical of news people — calling them incompetent bunglers who quote things out of context and sensationalize the negative — they hold journalists in higher esteem than journalists ever hold them.

A fair amount of research on the journalism-PR relationship has been done in the United States. So what about the case in Canada? Do Canadian journalists have the same negative views of public relations? Do they, too, see themselves as more ethical and skilled than public relations practitioners? Do journalists in Canada view PR practitioners as status equals? How accurately does each group describe the orientations of the other toward news values?

A review of communications research in Canada reveals only one study of the PR-journalist relationship in Canada. Conducted by Jean Charron at Laval University in 1989, it focuses on the processes governing the relationship (conflict, cooperation and negotiation) rather than the attitudes and perceptions each group has toward the other.⁴² It does not approach the problem from a normative standpoint, as do most of the US

studies, and uses "game theory" as a framework for analysis. Moreover, the study was restricted to relations between journalists and PR practitioners in Quebec who work in French. But its findings are useful and will be discussed in the final chapter, which examines why journalists feel so strongly about public relations.

In the apparent absence of research focusing on the relationship in English Canada, it is important to begin filling the void — opening the way for more investigation of the Canadian case, while expanding upon the American studies. Though the education and socialization process is similar for journalists in both countries, it can not be assumed that the negative attitudes public relations practitioners face in the United States also apply here. Differences in national or social character do exist. It is possible, for example, that Canadian journalists exhibit a trait many observers associate with Canadians in general — deference to authority. Journalists in Canada do live in a different culture, after all, which could result in differing attitudes about the "authority" and credibility of public relations. This may also manifest itself in how journalism education is approached in Canada, which, despite heavy reliance on American texts, leads to a distinctive result.

It is thus important to begin building the necessary data base for examination of the journalist-practitioner relationship in Canada. To assist in this effort, a survey of news editors and public relations practitioners in Ontario was conducted. The next two chapters outline the survey methodology and results.

Summary

From Craig Aronoff's 1975 study in Texas to Martinson's recent study in Florida, social science research has generally found that journalists hold negative attitudes toward the public relations profession and its practitioners. Ethical issues and communication skills are the focus of journalistic complaint. While PR practitioners see themselves as professionals with high standards of integrity, journalists have a different view. They ascribe lower occupational status to public relations and perceive PR people to have an opposing view of news values. At the same time, journalists do accord esteem to individuals in public relations whom they've come to know through work. They may not be regarded well as a group, but some practitioners do earn the respect and trust of news people.

Research on the journalist-PR relationship, however, has been conducted almost exclusively in the United States. The Canadian case has gone largely unexamined. Though journalists in both countries may experience similar education and socialization processes, each side lives in a different culture. This can result in divergent views between the two nationals concerning the value and credibility of public relations. Examination of the journalist-PR relationship in Canada is clearly warranted. The present study aims to help fill the research gap and open the way for more systematic investigation of these two important professional groups in Canada.

Notes for Chapter Two

1. The term "love-hate relationship" in this context is used by Michael Ryan and David L. Martinson in "Journalists and Public Relations: Why the Antagonism?" *Journalism Quarterly*, 65:1 (Spring 1988), pp. 131-40.
2. There is a substantial body of literature concerning PR's influence on the news. The frequent use journalists make of PR materials and sources is well-documented. In 1927, for example, a writer for the *American Mercury* reported that of 64 local news items in one edition of a New York daily newspaper, "42 were rewritten or pasted up from material sent in by press agents." (Stanley Walker, "Men of Vision," *The American Mercury*, 10:37 [January 1927], p. 89). In 1962, Scott Cutlip reported that some 35 per cent of the content of American newspapers comes from PR sources. (Scott Cutlip, "Third of Newspapers' Content PR-Inspired," *Editor and Publisher*, 95:4 [26 May 1962], p. 68). Seven years later, a content analysis of newspapers in six Canadian cities, coupled with interviews of news reporters and university information officers (i.e. university public relations officers), found that "newsmen acknowledged that information officers provided substantial quantities of useful information that the newspaper could not or would not gather on its own." (Bruce Yemen and Paul Williamson, *Universities and Newspapers: Press Releases and Coverage*. Ottawa: Commission on Relations Between Universities and Governments, March 1969, p. 53.) Another study of the influence of public relations on news coverage estimated that about 40 per cent of news on the environment reported by media in the San Francisco Bay Area came from public relations practitioners. Moreover, about 20 per cent of the stories consisted simply of rewritten press releases. (David B. Sachsman, "Public Relations Influence on Coverage of Environment in San Francisco Area," *Journalism Quarterly*, 53:2 [Spring 1976], pp. 54-60.) A 1979 study of six major Canadian daily newspapers found that 14 per cent of all editorial items had public relations input. (Karen Loder and Michael Rose, "Measuring PR Stories in Canadian Daily Papers," *Carleton Journalism Review*, 2:2 [Summer 1979], pp. 5-7). In a study conducted in 1984, another researcher found that about half of the information provided by PR officers at six state government agencies in Louisiana was used in news stories subsequently published by eight daily newspapers in that state. (Judy VanSlyke Turk, "Public Relations' Influence on the News," *Newspaper Research Journal*, 7:4 [Summer 1986], pp. 15-27.) Also see Harold Y. Jones, "Filling up the white space: A public relations man found it all too easy to get press releases printed as news stories," *Columbia Journalism Review*, May/June 1975, pp. 10-11. These examples underscore how the two sides have come to depend on one another. They also, perhaps, give some credence to the complaints of writers like Nelson, who argues that the media complacently accept and report PR-generated news stories, to the detriment of the public interest.

3. "PR give-aways to journalists," though an important ethical issue affecting this relationship, is a subject not specifically addressed in the research discussed here. For more about this long-standing source of controversy see references under "Notes for Chapter One," item no. 41, above. On the subject of ethics, other interesting studies include: Michael Ryan and David L. Martinson, "Public Relations Practitioners, Journalists View Lying Similarly," *Journalism Quarterly*, 71:1 (Spring 1994), pp. 199-211; and Jacob Shamir, Barbara Strauss Reed and Steven Connell, "Individual Differences in Ethical Values of Public Relations Practitioners," *Journalism Quarterly*, 67:4 (Winter 1990), pp. 956-963. Also see John H. Jurgensen and James E. Lukaszewski, "Ethics: Content Before Conduct," *Public Relations Journal*, 44:3 (March 1988), pp. 47-48; and Celia Kuperszmid Lehrman, "Truth or Consequences," *Public Relations Journal*, 45:1 (January 1988), pp. 25-27.
4. Craig Aronoff, "Credibility of Public Relations for Journalists," *Public Relations Review*, 1:2 (Fall 1975), pp. 45-56.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 46.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 48.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 49.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 47.
9. Craig Aronoff, "Newspapermen and Practitioners Differ Widely on PR Role," *Public Relations Journal*, 31:8 (August 1975), p. 24.
10. Craig Aronoff, *op. cit.* (*Public Relations Review*, 1:2), p. 51.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 55.
12. Dennis Jeffers, "Performance Expectations as a Measure of Relative Status of News and PR People," *Journalism Quarterly*, 54:2 (Summer 1977), pp. 299-306.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 299.
14. This finding parallels the results of a later study involving journalists, scientists and public relations practitioners. See J.A. Strasser, "How to Communicate with Your Scientific Identity," *Public Relations Journal*, 34:10 (October 1978), pp. 15-16. Strasser reported that while scientists tended to have a low opinion of journalists as a group (whose abilities to comprehend and communicate complex scientific issues were considered questionable), they held higher opinions of journalists with whom they had been in contact and had gotten to know on a more personal basis.
15. Dennis Jeffers, *op. cit.*, p. 306.

16. *Ibid.*, pp. 304-305.
17. E.W. Brody, "Antipathy Between PR, Journalism Exaggerated," *Public Relations Review*, 10:4 (Winter 1984), pp. 11-15.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 11.
19. While negative attitudes can be a deterrent to friendly relations, it could be argued that a more harmonious relationship may be undesirable. Indeed, too friendly of a relationship may make for lousy journalism and lazy public relations.
20. See Lillian Lodge Kopenhaver, David L. Martinson and Michael Ryan, "How Public Relations Practitioners and Editors in Florida View Each Other," *Journalism Quarterly*, 61:4 (Winter 1984), pp. 860-865, 884. For this study, the researchers replicated the survey done by Aronoff a decade earlier.
21. The three variables are discussed in Jack M. MacLeod and Steven H. Chaffee, "Interpersonal Approaches to Communication Research," *American Behavioral Scientist*, 16:3 (March-April 1973), pp. 469-499.
22. Lillian Lodge Kopenhaver et al., *op. cit.*, p. 865.
23. Sandra Kruger Stegall and Keith Sanders, "Coorientation of PR Practitioners and News Personnel in Education News," *Journalism Quarterly*, 63:2 (Summer 1986), pp. 341-347, 393.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 344.
25. Peter Habermann, Lillian Lodge Kopenhaver and David L. Martinson, "Sequence Faculty Divided on PR Value, Status and News Orientation," *Journalism Quarterly*, 65:2 (Summer 1988), pp. 490-496.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 495.
27. Andrew Beltz, Albert D. Talbott and Kenneth Starck, "Using Role Theory to Study Cross Perceptions of Journalists and Public Relations Practitioners," in James E. and Larissa A. Grunig, eds., *Public Relations Research Annual*, Hillsdale: Hove and London, 1989, pp. 125-139.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 135.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 132.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 133.

31. *Ibid.*
32. J. David Pincus, Tony Rimmer, Robert E. Rayfield and Fritz Cropp, "Newspaper Editor's Perceptions of Public Relations: How Business, News, and Sports Editors Differ," *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 5:1 (1993), pp. 27-45.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 42.
34. *Ibid.*, pp. 41-42.
35. David L. Martinson, *Credibility, Status of Public Relations Practitioners Remains Low in Eyes of Florida Daily, Weekly Editors*, Unpublished Research Paper (pp. 21), North Miami: Florida International University, 1993, p. 4.
36. J. David Pincus et al., *op. cit.*, p. 39.
37. David L. Martinson, *op. cit.*, p. 6.
38. *Ibid.*
39. *Ibid.*
40. *Ibid.*, p. 11.
41. There are also a number of unpublished studies concerning this subject. Recent ones include: Paul Allen Owles, *How Public Relations Practitioners and News Journalists Perceive Each Other in Nevada*, Unpublished MA Thesis, University of Nevada, 1993, pp. 71; Daradirek Ekachai, *Perceptions of Journalists and Public Relations Practitioners Toward Their Own and Each Other's Roles*, Unpublished PhD Thesis, Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, 1991, pp. 177; and Stanley D. Carpenter, *Texas Education Reporters' and University Public Relations Directors' Perceptions of Public Relations, Occupations and News Values*, Unpublished PhD Thesis, Texas A&M University, 1991, pp. 113. The findings of all of these studies support the results of previously published research.
42. See Jean Charron, "Relations Between Journalists and Public Relations Practitioners: Cooperation, Conflict and Negotiation," *Canadian Journal of Communication*, 14:1 (Winter 1989), pp. 41-54.

Chapter Three

Method for the Ontario Study

We have seen that journalists from Walter Lippmann at the beginning of the century to Meg Greenfield and others in recent years have had a love-hate relationship with the public relations industry. On the one hand, members of the fourth estate show some appreciation for the communication skills of PR people and the utility of the materials they generate for use by the news media. On the other hand, journalists frequently condemn public relations practitioners for being manipulative, deceitful and untrustworthy. Too often, news people complain, practitioners bar journalists from getting at the complete story or waste their time by trying to promote clients and services which are not newsworthy.

A series of studies over the past two decades generally confirm the views expressed in the anecdotal literature. But virtually all of those studies are American. The Canadian case requires examination to help close the research gap. The present study of news editors and public relations practitioners in Ontario is a first step in that direction. Before discussing its findings, however, a discussion of the methods used to generate information about the journalist-PR relationship in Canada is in order.

A. The Research Questions

Results of the survey of news editors and public relations practitioners in Ontario were tabulated and analysed to help answer six primary questions:

- 1. What are the perceptions of news editors in Ontario regarding the integrity, professionalism and occupational status of public relations practitioners?*

This question goes to the heart of the journalist-PR relationship. It has been asked in several prior studies — including Texas, Ohio, Tennessee, Florida, Missouri, Iowa, California, Nevada and Illinois — but has not been addressed in a systematic way in Canada.

- 2. Are there any differences between newspaper, radio or television news editors' perceptions of the integrity and professionalism of public relations practitioners?*

Some of the earlier studies did not distinguish among different types of journalists (e.g. reporter versus editor), because their sampling procedures did not identify job categories among journalist populations. The sample in the Aronoff study, for example, included both editors and reporters working in different newspaper departments. His findings did not distinguish between journalists in general and those in key "gatekeeper" roles. How editors, as "gatekeepers", determine what news gets reported (in print or on air) has been the subject of a great deal of research.¹ Those who occupy this key role in a news organization are an important audience for the public relations practitioner. Not surprisingly, a substantial body of research also examines how PR practitioners should present information to convince editors of its compelling news value.² The views of this key group (news editors) can have important implications for training and practice in public relations and journalism. Efforts to differentiate how particular journalists, working

in particular communications media, respond to public relations are critical in helping to understand the ways in which the "journalistic culture" views this profession.

3. Do Canadian editors have the same negative views of public relations as their colleagues in the United States?

Replication of the survey originally designed by Aronoff, and used in several subsequent studies from 1984 to 1993, provides a basis for comparison between American and Canadian journalists. Responses here help gauge the extent to which editors in Ontario differ from their counterparts in the US. National differences can also have important implications for education and work in both fields. If the results of this study duplicate those of earlier research, then PR practitioners in Ontario also face hostility from journalists in the province.

4. How do PR managers view the professionalism, integrity and occupational status of their own field?

Studies in Texas and Florida found greater agreement among practitioners concerning the contribution they make to the media. As one might expect, practitioners' attitudes toward their own profession are fairly positive. Measuring the extent to which editors and practitioners in Ontario differ in their attitudes provides a further basis for comparing the situation in Canada with the American case.

5. How precisely does each group perceive the other's orientations toward news values?

Prior research indicates general agreement between journalists and practitioners on what constitutes a good news story. At the same time, it has been consistently shown that journalists believe practitioners subscribe to a different set of news values from their own. Measuring the coorientations of the two groups in Canada will help to assess the extent to

which they agree on news values. The news-gathering process is central to the work of both groups. Comparing their news value judgments can provide better understanding of the perceptions affecting their relationship.

6. *To what extent are practitioners' and editors' perceptions of public relations affected by (a) work experience, (b) size of staff responsibility, (c) level of education, (d) sex, and (e) income?*

Demographic and work-related factors such as these enrich the basis of analysis. The most recent study in Florida suggests that editors with prior work experience in public relations take a position more favorable to public relations.³ Length of experience in journalism also appear to affect editors' attitudes. The number of persons an editor supervises can also make a difference. Education, sex and income may also influence attitudes. Testing for these variables allows one to see whether perceptions relate to differences in personal background.

B. Population Sample

To explore these six research questions, data were gathered in June and July 1995 through a mail survey of print and broadcast news editors and public relations practitioners in Ontario. A stratified sample of each group was drawn. The survey focuses on the views of persons employed as managers in either the news or public relations business. In both cases, the questionnaire was sent to managers at different companies or organizations, so that no two managers working for one company received the questionnaire.

The March 1995 edition of the *Matthews Media Directory*, a comprehensive listings of media outlets and personnel in Canada, was used to draw the sample of news

editors.⁴ Surveys were sent to news editors in comparable management positions at all 216 English-language media outlets reporting news on a daily basis in Ontario.

Specifically, the population of editors included all city or assignment editors of the province's 44 daily newspapers, and all news directors or assignment editors responsible for the daily news programs presented by the 25 television stations and 147 commercial radio stations (AM and FM) broadcasting in Ontario. Since 39 of the radio news managers were responsible for both the AM and FM stations operated by their employer, only 108 questionnaires were sent to individuals at the different radio stations. Thus, the total number of media surveys mailed was 177 ($n = 44 + 25 + 108$).

The sample of PR practitioners was taken from the May 1995 membership list of the Canadian Public Relations Society.⁵ CPRS is the major professional organization representing public relations practitioners in Canada. The survey was mailed to all practitioners with the titles of President, Vice-President, Principal, Director, Manager or Supervisor from the three CPRS chapters in Ontario (Toronto, Hamilton, and Ottawa). Thus the survey was sent to all members of CPRS's Ontario chapters who hold management positions in public relations — a total of 221 individuals. (The three chapters of CPRS in Ontario have a combined membership of 428.)

C. Response Rate

Of the 398 questionnaires mailed to individuals at separate organizations, 163 were returned, yielding a 41% response rate overall. Broken down by group, 105 of the 221 PR managers returned completed questionnaires, representing a 48% response rate. Of the 177 news editors in the sample, 58 returned completed questionnaires, representing a

33% response rate.⁶ The number of respondents — by title of position and type of organization — is shown below.

Table 1

Number of Respondents by Group, Management Position and Type of Organization

<i>News Editors</i>	<i>Newspaper</i>	<i>Radio Station</i>	<i>TV Station</i>
Assignment Editor	1	1	2
City Editor	4	--	--
News Editor	4	4	1
News Director	1	29	6
Other Editor	2	3	--
<i>Group Totals (58)</i>	12	37	9

<i>Public Relations Practitioners</i>	<i>Professional Consulting Firm</i>	<i>Private Sector</i>	<i>Public Sector</i>	<i>Non-Profit Organization</i>
President	15	--	--	--
Vice-President	7	4	3	2
Director	--	13	9	12
Manager	1	15	6	7
Other Practitioner	5	2	2	2
<i>Group Totals (105)</i>	28	34	20	23

Responses were collected through a single mail-out. A covering letter guaranteeing anonymity to all participants was sent with each questionnaire (see Appendices). Envelopes were addressed to specific, named individuals, using mailing labels generated by Matthews and CPRS. A postage-paid business reply envelope for returning completed questionnaires was provided.

D. The Questionnaire

The survey instrument — a seven-page questionnaire divided into five sections — is modeled on the questionnaires used for the 1984 and 1993 Florida studies.⁷ Those studies, in turn, replicate the instrument originally designed and used by Aronoff in 1975.⁸ Thus, the first three sections of the questionnaire incorporate previously tested measurements of opinion.

The first section explores attitudes toward public relations. Twenty-nine positive and negative statements about public relations were rated on a seven-point Likert scale. Survey participants indicated their level of agreement/disagreement by checking the appropriate blank on the scale (ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree).

All of Aronoff's 25 statements about public relations have been incorporated into this section, but with some modifications. Items 2, 20 and 24 as they appeared in the Aronoff instrument were divided into seven separate statements to measure more precisely the elements contained in each. Thus, statement 20 in the Aronoff questionnaire ("Public relations practitioners help reporters obtain accurate, complete and timely news") became items 21, 22 and 23 in the present study. Similarly, item 24 in Aronoff ("Public relations practitioners typically issue news release or statements on matters of genuine news value and public interest") is divided into statements 27 and 28 in this survey. Items 2 and 3 here also appear together as a single statement in the original survey by Aronoff (i.e. "Public relations practitioners are basically competitors with the advertising department of newspapers rather than collaborators with the news staff").

Slight modifications in language were also made to eliminate gender and media bias. For example, the term "news reporter" replaces the term "newsman" used by

Aronoff and other researchers, and where Aronoff and others simply refer to "newspapers," the statements used here refer to "newspapers or broadcasters."

The second section of the questionnaire measured occupational status. This section is also taken from the Aronoff survey, replicated as well by Kopenhaver *et al.* in their 1984 study.⁹ Again, slight modifications were made to eliminate gender bias (e.g., police officer is the term used instead of "policeman"). Respondents were asked to rank-order the following occupations according to the relative respect they hold for each of them: architect, artist, banker, carpenter, clergyman, corporate executive, engineer, farmer, high school teacher, journalist, lawyer, physician, police officer, politician, public relations practitioner and university professor. A value of one was given to the occupation indicated as first in order of respect, two for the next highest in order of respect, etc.

Section three tested news value judgments. Here respondents ranked in descending order of importance the following eight news values: Accuracy; Interest to Reader; Usefulness to Reader; Completeness; Prompt Publication; Depicts Subject in Favorable Light; Mechanical/Grammatical; News Story Style. Respondents were asked to rank-order these values twice: first based on their own personal views, and second based on how they believe the values would be ordered by their counterparts in public relations or journalism.

This section replicates the two Florida studies (1984 and 1993), which added two new items to the six news values originally included in the Aronoff study. "Mechanical/grammatical accuracy" and "news story styles" were added in the Florida studies.

The fourth section of the survey (designed specifically for this study) solicited demographic information, including job category, number of persons supervised, type of organization for which the respondent works, years of experience in journalism and/or public relations, education, sex, and income.

The final section provided space for open-ended comments.

The headings of all five sections were numbered differently for the two sample populations. Roman numerals were used for the headings in the questionnaire sent to editors (e.g., Part I, Part II, etc.), while the questionnaire sent to practitioners carried alphabetic headings (e.g., Part A, Part B, etc.). This facilitated sorting of completed questionnaires from the two sample groups prior to data entry.

E. Techniques for Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were produced using the *SPSS for Windows* computer program.¹⁰ Frequencies, means and standard deviations were calculated for the 29 attitude statements. Cross-tabulations were done to measure demographic variables. T-tests and ANOVA procedures were conducted for the analysis of variance between and within the sample groups in their responses to the 29 statements. Scores based on the rank-order frequencies for the 16 occupational categories were calculated and placed on an ordinal scale, as were the eight news value rankings. Spearman's "rank-difference method" was used to measure the correlations between each group's news value rankings.¹¹ Three variables were considered in the coorientation analysis: agreement, congruency, and accuracy of perceptions.¹²

Summary

The study focuses on the views of news editors and public relations managers in Ontario. A total of 58 print and broadcast news editors and 105 public relations practitioners in management positions responded to the five-part questionnaire. Designed to measure attitudes concerning the professionalism, news value orientations and occupational status of PR practitioners, the survey was mailed to a stratified sample of 177 newspaper, radio and television news editors, and 221 PR managers employed in the four primary sectors of the public relations industry. These include practitioners working in public relations consulting firms, non-profit organizations, government organizations or private enterprise. The response rate for practitioners (48 per cent) was higher than that received from editors (33 per cent).

The questionnaire replicates the survey instrument used in previous studies conducted in Texas (1975) and Florida (1984 and 1993). Thus, it has been tested as a reliable tool of measurement. Replication also provides a basis for comparing attitudes of journalists and practitioners in Canada and the United States.

Survey results were tabulated and analysed to answer six primary research questions. Descriptive statistics were produced by computer to measure response variance between and within each group regarding the 29 attitudes statements. Influences of five demographic variables were also measured. Manual procedures were employed for calculating rank-order differentials in news value orientations and perceptions of occupational status.

Notes for Chapter Three

1. See, for example: David Manning White, "The 'gatekeeper': A case study in the selection of news," *Journalism Quarterly*, 27:3 (Fall 1950), pp. 383-390; Warren Breed, "Social Control in the News Room," *Social Forces*, 33 (1955), pp. 326-335; E. Roy Carter, "Newspaper Gatekeepers and the Sources of News," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 22 (1958), pp. 133-44; and D.L. Shaw & M.E. McCombs, *The Emergence of American Political Issues: The Agenda Setting Function of the Press*. St. Paul, MN: West, 1977.
2. See, for example: Craig Aronoff, "Predictors of Success in Placing News Releases in Newspapers," *Public Relations Review*, 2:4 (Winter 1976), pp. 43-57; James E. Grunig and Todd Hunt, *Managing Public Relations*, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1984; Scott M. Cutlip and Allen H. Center, *Effective Public Relations* (revised 5th edition), Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1982; and Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America*, New York: Athenaeum, 1961.
3. David L. Martinson, *Credibility, Status of Public Relations Practitioners Remains Low in Eyes of Florida Daily, Weekly Newspaper Editors*, Unpublished Research Paper, North Miami: Florida International University, 1993 (pp. 21).
4. *Matthews Media Directory*. Toronto: Canadian Corporate News, March 1995.
5. Canadian Public Relations Society Inc., *Membership Directory 1995-96*. Ottawa: CPRS, 1995.
6. Follow-up letters to the 177 news editors may have helped to improve their response rate, but budgetary allowances only provided for a second mailing if the initial response rate was below 20 per cent. Broken down by media type, 36 per cent of the TV news editors (n = 25), 27 per cent of the newspaper editors (n = 44) and 34 per cent of the radio news editors (n = 108) participated in the survey. Response rates between the three media subgroups are thus relatively proportional.
7. Lillian Lodge Kopenhaver, David L. Martinson and Michael Ryan, "How Public Relations Practitioners and Editors in Florida View Each Other," *Journalism Quarterly*, 61:4 (Winter 1984), pp. 860-865, 884; and David L. Martinson, *op. cit.*, 1993.
8. Craig Aronoff, "Credibility of Public Relations for Journalists," *Public Relations Review*, 1:2 (Fall 1975), pp. 45-56.
9. Lillian Lodge Kopenhaver et al., *op. cit.*, 1984.

10. Marija J. Norusis, *SPSS for Windows: Base System User's Guide (Release 5.0)*, Chicago: SPSS Inc., 1992.
11. The Spearman rho test is described in J.P. Guilford and Benjamin Fruchter, *Fundamental Statistics in Psychology and Education* (6th edition). New York: McGraw-Hill, 1978, pp. 294-295.
12. The three variables are discussed in Jack M. MacLeod and Steven H. Chaffee, "Interpersonal Approaches to Communication Research," *American Behavioral Scientist*, 16:3 (March-April 1973), pp. 469-499. Chaffee and MacLeod's "coorientation model," for measuring degrees of correlation in "person perception," was used to determine how accurately the editors and practitioners assessed each other's news value orientations.

Chapter Four

Findings of the Ontario Study

Results of the survey completed by news editors and public relations practitioners in Ontario are consistent with prior research — finding generally negative attitudes toward PR on the part of journalists.¹ Canadian editors agree substantially with American colleagues in their critical assessment of public relations. Nevertheless, evidence suggests Canadian practitioners may face a moderately less hostile, and in some respects, more appreciative news media than their counterparts in the United States. Before comparing data from the two countries, however, response to the Ontario survey itself must be discussed.

The following begins with a profile of the two groups in the Ontario study, proceeds with an analysis of their attitudes toward public relations, and then explores the overall similarities and differences between present findings and the American data. We then explore in greater detail important subgroup characteristics within the Ontario sample, compare each group's rankings of the 16 occupations, and look at the two groups' news values. Comments provided by respondents in the open-ended section of the questionnaire close the chapter.

A. Population Profile

Demographic information provided by the respondents reveals striking differences and some similarities between and within the two groups. A major difference is in the number of men and women working as managers in each field. While women make up just 17 per cent of the population of editors, they represent 57 per cent of the public relations practitioners who participated in the survey (see table below). Public relations is known to be an occupation in which women comprise the majority, while the upper ranks of journalism are known to be predominantly male. The survey sample is in accord with this common observation.

Table 2

Population Profile — Male and Female Respondents

<i>Job Title</i>	Male	Female	Total	<i>Organization</i>	Male	Female	Total
Assignment Editor	4	--	4	Newspaper	11	1	12
City Editor	4	--	4	Radio	28	9	37
News Editor	5	4	9	Television	9	--	9
News Director	31	5	36	Consulting Firm	16	12	28
Other Editor	4	1	5	Non-Profit	8	15	23
President	10	5	15	Private Sector	15	19	34
Vice-President	10	6	16	Public Sector	6	14	20
Director	14	20	34	<i>Group</i>	Male	Female	Total
Manager	9	20	29	All Editors	48	10	58
Other Practitioner	2	9	11	All Practitioners	45	60	105

Income distribution is another area in which the two groups are uneven. PR, it seems, is far more lucrative than journalism. The majority of editors (62 per cent) earn salaries ranging from \$25,000 to \$60,000 per year. Less than 26 per cent of the PR practitioners fall into that range, while 55 per cent report higher incomes, ranging from

\$60,000 to \$100,000 per annum (see Table 3).² Radio news editors appear to be the “poor cousins” of the media, with 51 per cent earning less than \$40,000 a year, compared to 25 per cent of the newspaper editors and 22 per cent of the TV editors who fall into that range. Managers working in public relations/communications consulting firms are the highest paid group. Of those, 37 per cent earn more than \$80,000 annually. At least one respondent in every group also earns that amount, which suggests that employment in either field can lead to a high income, although the chance of that happening is less likely in journalism. The discrepancy in income levels has long been a bone of contention for journalists, who lament the crossing over of colleagues into PR, lured by higher salaries.

Table 3: Salaries *

<i>Organization</i>	<i>less than \$25K</i>	<i>\$25-40K</i>	<i>\$40-60K</i>	<i>\$60-80K</i>	<i>\$80-100K</i>	<i>more than \$100K</i>
Newspaper	1	2	5	3	--	1
Radio	5	14	11	4	1	1
Television	--	2	1	1	2	1
Consulting Firm	--	1	1	1	3	10
Non-Profit	1	2	12	6	1	1
Public Sector	--	--	4	10	3	3
Private Sector	--	--	7	10	13	4

* *K = \$1,000 per year*

Whether the attraction of higher wages leads practitioners to leave journalism and enter public relations was not a question asked in this study. However, close to 50 per cent of the public relations practitioners who took part in the survey report previous experience in journalism, working on average just over five years in the other field (see

Table 4). In contrast, very few editors said they had worked in public relations. Those who did (14 per cent) worked an average 2½ years in the other field. The cross-over phenomenon between the two groups clearly skews one way.

In terms of years worked in their own field, the two groups are almost identical. On average, the news editors have been working in journalism for 16 years, whereas the practitioners' experience in public relations averages 15 years (see Table 5).

Table 4: Work Experience in Other Field

<i>Group</i>	Number of respondents with experience in other field	Percentage of all respondents in group	Range of years worked in other field	Average number of years worked in other field
News Editors	8	14%	1-5 years	2.6
PR Practitioners	50	48%	1-17 years	5.4

Table 5: Work Experience in Own Field

<i>Group</i>	Range of years worked in own field	Average number of years worked in own field
News Editors	1-30 years	16
Practitioners	1-36 years	15

Both groups may have similar years of experience, but they manage widely divergent numbers of employees within their organizations. The television and newspaper editors, for example, are responsible for staff sizes averaging 39 and 26 employees

respectively (see Table 6). Radio news editors, who also earn less on average than their confreres in TV and the press, supervise relatively small groups of employees (five-member news staffs on average). Seven is the average number of employees a PR manager supervises. Only in the public sector do staff complements begin to rival those of television and daily newspapers.

Table 6: Numbers of Employees Supervised

<i>Managers and Types of Organization</i>	Total Number of Employees Supervised	Range of Staff Size	Average Number Supervised
Newspaper Editors	308	4 - 150	26
Radio News Editors	354	2 - 25	5
Television News Editors	180	7 - 160	39
PR Consulting Firm Managers	179	1 - 25	6
PR Managers in Non-Profit Organizations	100	1 - 33	4
PR Managers in Public Sector	242	1 - 70	12
PR Managers in Private Sector	186	1 - 30	5

From managerial responsibility, work experience, income and sex, we turn to the last demographic variable to be considered: levels of education (see Table 7). While many of the editors have a university degree, a greater number possess college diplomas. The vast majority of the PR professionals hold university degrees, several at the Master's level.³ There are interesting similarities, however, between the eight editors and five practitioners who have only a high school education. The majority have worked for more than 20 years in either journalism or public relations, and they earn relatively high incomes. Several report salaries exceeding \$80,000 per year — reward, no doubt, for years of

experience in the field. Years worked, therefore, is a better predictor of income for these groups than level of education attained.

Table 7: Education Levels

<i>Organization</i>	High School	College Diploma	Bachelor's Degree	Master's	Professional Accreditation
Newspaper	3	5	4	--	--
Radio	4	21	10	1	1
Television	1	2	6	--	--
Consulting Firm	2	2	16	6	2
Non-Profit	--	4	16	2	1
Public Sector	1	1	16	1	1
Private Sector	2	10	18	3	1

Profiles of each group thus emerge from the demographic data. The public relations practitioners, for example, generally earn higher salaries than the editors, tend to be university-educated, and frequently have experience in journalism. The PR group is also predominantly female. The news editors, on the other hand, are mostly male, generally have no experience in PR, and earn lower salaries on average than their counterparts in public relations yet tend to be responsible for larger numbers of employees. They also tend to be college educated, though a significant number hold university degrees.

B. Attitudes Toward Public Relations

Table 8 shows response frequencies for the 29 attitude statements which form the bulk of the questionnaire. Item-by-item analysis of the data reveals serious disagreement between news editors and PR managers regarding the integrity of the people who work in public relations and the value of their activities. T-tests for the two sample groups found significant differences of opinion in the majority of cases ($p < .001$).

Twenty of the statements concerned the professionalism and integrity of public relations practitioners (all items except numbers 1-3, 10, 12, 15-16, 18 and 25). Only five of those showed a positive pattern of response from the editors (items 17, 21, 23, 26 and 28). They disagreed that PR is "a parasite to the press," and registered some approval with the credibility of public relations as a news source.

Editors do not view practitioners as "collaborators" or "an extension of news staff" (items 3 and 12) and have difficulty agreeing on whether they are "partners" in the news process (item 1). They seem quite certain, however, that public relations practitioners are not the status equals of journalists (item 5). They show some appreciation for the utility of PR-generated materials (e.g. items 10 and 28), but do not agree that public relations people are necessary to the daily production of news (item 25). Too often, the editors say, PR practitioners try to deceive reporters (item 11) and use words as a shield for questionable practices (item 24). They agree that public relations material is usually publicity disguised as news (item 9). The editors may give practitioners credit for their journalistic skills (item 16), but appear suspicious about their personal integrity (e.g., items 19 and 22).

Table 8

**Responses of Ontario News Editors and Public Relations Practitioners
to 29 Statements About Public Relations**

1. Public relations and the news media are partners in the dissemination of information.

	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral*</i>
Editors (n = 58)	48%	48%	4%
Practitioners (n = 105)	81%	17%	2%

2. Public relations practitioners are basically competitors with the advertising departments of newspapers or broadcasters.

	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>
Editors	36%	54%	10%
Practitioners	12%	83%	5%

3. Public relations practitioners are basically collaborators with the news staff.

	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>
Editors	17%	74%	9%
Practitioners	51%	35%	14%

4. Public relations practitioners too frequently insist on promoting products, services and other activities which do not legitimately deserve promotion.

	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>
Editors	67%	26%	7%
Practitioners	46%	43%	11%

5. Public relations is a profession equal in status to journalism.

	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>
Editors	16%	63%	21%
Practitioners	71%	14%	15%

6. Public relations practitioners often act as obstructionists, keeping reporters from the people they really should be seeing.

	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>
Editors	71%	21%	8%
Practitioners	20%	81%	9%

* Neutral = neither agree nor disagree.

7. Public relations practitioners have cluttered our channels of communication with pseudo-events and phony phrases that confuse public issues.

	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>
Editors	67%	24%	9%
Practitioners	20%	70%	10%

8. The abundance of free and easily obtainable information provided by public relations practitioners has caused an increase in the quality of reporting.

	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>
Editors	33%	53%	14%
Practitioners	63%	22%	15%

9. Public relations material is usually publicity disguised as news.

	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>
Editors	79%	18%	3%
Practitioners	26%	66%	8%

10. The public relations practitioner does work for newspapers or news broadcasters that would otherwise go undone.

	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>
Editors	47%	43%	10%
Practitioners	73%	15%	12%

11. Public relations practitioners too often try to deceive news reporters by attaching too much importance to a trivial, uneventful happening.

	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>
Editors	76%	9%	15%
Practitioners	23%	78%	9%

12. The public relations practitioner serves as an extension of news staff, covering the organization for which the practitioner is responsible.

	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>
Editors	10%	83%	7%
Practitioners	54%	36%	10%

13. Public relations practitioners are really just errand boys for whomever hires them.

	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>
Editors	64%	15%	21%
Practitioners	14%	84%	2%

14. Public relations practitioners are people of good sense, good will and good moral character.

	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>
Editors	26%	10%	64%
Practitioners	75%	4%	21%

15. It is a shame that because of inadequate staff, the news media must depend on information provided by public relations practitioners.

	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>
Editors	50%	47%	3%
Practitioners	12%	70%	18%

16. Public relations practitioners understand such journalistic problems as meeting deadlines, attracting reader interest and making the best use of space.

	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>
Editors	76%	17%	7%
Practitioners	96%	3%	1%

17. You can't trust public relations practitioners.

	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>
Editors	22%	43%	35%
Practitioners	2%	91%	7%

18. Journalists and public relations practitioners carry on a running battle.

	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>
Editors	31%	50%	19%
Practitioners	31%	57%	12%

19. Public relations practitioners are typically frank and honest.

	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>
Editors	21%	52%	27%
Practitioners	69%	11%	20%

20. The massiveness of the impact of public relations makes it harder and harder for the average citizen to know when he or she is being sold a bill of goods.

	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>
Editors	71%	15%	14%
Practitioners	20%	74%	6%

21. Public relations practitioners help reporters obtain accurate news.

	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>
Editors	48%	26%	26%
Practitioners	94%	2%	4%

22. Public relations practitioners help reporters obtain complete news.

	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>
Editors	31%	43%	26%
Practitioners	83%	10%	7%

23. Public relations practitioners help reporters obtain timely news.

	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>
Editors	53%	26%	21%
Practitioners	95%	3%	2%

24. Public relations practitioners frequently use a shield of words for practices which are not in the public interest.

	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>
Editors	57%	12%	31%
Practitioners	11%	72%	12%

25. Public relations practitioners are necessary to the production of the daily news as we know it.

	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>
Editors	34%	57%	9%
Practitioners	73%	13%	14%

26. Public relations is a parasite to the press.

	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>
Editors	17%	61%	22%
Practitioners	6%	91%	3%

27. Public relations practitioners typically issue news releases or statements on matters of genuine news value.

	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>
Editors	33%	48%	19%
Practitioners	81%	11%	8%

28. Public relations practitioners typically issue news releases or statements on matters of public interest.

	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>
Editors	52%	34%	14%
Practitioners	83%	7%	10%

29. The prime function of public relations practitioners is to get free advertising space for the companies and institutions they represent.

	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>
Editors	74%	14%	12%
Practitioners	13%	84%	3%

Table 9

Mean Responses of Editors and Practitioners by Organization ⁵

Statement No.	News Editors				Public Relations Practitioners				
	Newspapers	Radio	TV	Group Mean	Group Mean	PR Firms	Private Sector	Public Sector	Non-Profit
1. +	4.2	3.9	5.0	4.1	2.6	2.5	3.0	2.6	2.3
2. -	4.9	4.4	3.7	4.4	5.7	6.0	5.9	5.9	5.0
3. +	4.8	5.3	6.0	5.3	3.8	3.9	3.6	4.9	3.1
4. -	2.2	3.2	3.4	3.0	4.1	4.3	4.0	4.6	3.6
5. +	5.5	5.0	4.7	5.1	2.5	2.5	2.6	2.3	2.5
6. -	2.6	3.3	3.0	3.1	5.3	5.8	5.3	5.1	4.9
7. -	2.8	3.2	3.4	3.2	5.2	5.5	5.2	5.4	4.7
8. +	4.1	4.5	4.6	4.4	3.2	3.0	3.1	3.8	3.0
9. -	2.7	2.9	2.6	2.8	4.8	4.8	5.1	5.4	4.0
10. +	4.1	4.1	4.5	4.2	2.8	2.9	2.8	3.2	2.6
11. -	2.9	3.1	2.7	3.0	5.1	5.3	5.0	5.3	4.8
12. +	5.6	5.4	5.4	5.5	3.7	4.2	3.6	4.1	2.8
13. -	2.8	3.0	3.5	3.0	5.8	6.1	5.9	5.9	5.3
14. +	3.8	3.7	3.7	3.7	2.5	2.4	2.7	2.6	2.5
15. -	3.7	3.7	4.2	3.8	5.2	5.3	5.3	5.7	4.6
16. +	2.8	3.1	3.2	3.1	1.8	1.7	2.0	2.1	1.6
17. -	4.2	4.4	4.1	4.3	6.3	6.6	6.2	6.4	6.0
18. -	3.7	4.7	3.5	4.3	4.7	4.3	4.8	5.3	4.6
19. +	4.8	4.3	5.0	4.5	2.9	2.6	2.8	3.0	3.2
20. -	3.2	3.1	3.4	3.2	5.2	5.4	5.5	5.2	4.6
21. +	4.0	3.7	4.0	3.8	2.0	1.8	2.0	2.0	2.2
22. +	4.4	4.4	4.0	4.3	2.4	1.9	2.6	2.4	2.6
23. +	4.0	3.6	3.7	3.7	1.9	1.7	2.0	2.1	2.0
24. -	3.2	3.6	3.1	3.4	5.3	5.7	5.4	5.5	4.6
25. +	4.7	4.8	3.5	4.6	2.6	2.0	2.8	3.1	2.7
26. -	4.5	5.0	5.0	4.9	6.3	6.4	6.2	6.4	6.0
27. -	4.7	4.2	4.2	4.3	2.7	2.4	2.5	2.8	3.3
28. +	4.5	3.7	3.8	3.9	2.6	2.3	2.6	2.7	2.7
29. -	2.8	2.9	3.1	2.9	5.7	6.0	5.8	6.0	5.0

Table 10
Mean Responses of Journalists and Public Relations Practitioners
in Texas, Florida and Ontario to Statements About Public Relations

<i>State- ment No.</i>	<i>Journalists</i>				<i>PR Practitioners</i>		
	Texas (1975)	Florida (1984)	Florida (1993)	Ontario (1995)	Texas (1975)	Florida (1984)	Ontario (1995)
1. +	3.8	3.9	3.8	4.1	1.7	2.4	2.6
2. -	4.3	4.3	4.9	4.4	6.8	6.1	5.7
3. +	--	--	5.2	5.3	--	--	3.8
4. -	1.8	2.6	2.5	3.0	4.6	4.0	4.1
5. +	5.7	4.8	5.1	5.1	2.2	2.3	2.5
6. -	2.4	3.1	3.2	3.1	4.8	5.3	5.3
7. -	3.6	3.5	2.8	3.2	4.7	5.1	5.2
8. +	4.7	4.2	4.5	4.4	3.3	3.0	3.2
9. -	2.3	2.8	2.6	2.8	5.1	4.8	4.8
10. +	4.3	3.8	4.5	4.2	2.4	2.9	2.8
11. -	2.2	3.2	2.7	3.0	4.8	5.0	5.1
12. +	5.2	4.9	5.8	5.5	1.8	3.2	3.7
13. -	3.0	4.1	3.5	3.0	6.3	6.4	5.8
14. +	3.7	3.4	3.8	3.7	2.1	2.7	2.5
15. -	4.3	4.4	4.3	3.8	6.1	5.9	5.2
16. +	4.3	3.8	3.5	3.1	1.8	2.0	1.8
17. -	3.5	4.5	4.1	4.3	6.2	6.4	6.3
18. -	3.2	4.6	4.0	4.3	5.4	5.0	4.7
19. +	4.9	4.7	4.9	4.5	3.0	3.3	2.9
20. -	2.2	3.4	2.8	3.2	4.7	4.8	5.2
21. +	4.3	3.9	3.5	3.8	1.8	2.0	2.0
22. +	--	--	4.4	4.3	--	--	2.4
23. +	--	--	3.5	3.7	--	--	1.9
24. -	2.4	3.5	3.2	3.4	5.4	5.2	5.3
25. +	4.8	4.4	4.8	4.6	2.3	3.0	2.6
26. -	4.1	5.0	4.8	4.9	6.9	6.5	6.3
27. +	4.5	4.2	4.7	4.3	2.3	2.4	2.7
28. +	--	--	4.4	3.9	--	--	2.6
29. -	2.4	3.6	2.5	2.9	6.3	6.0	5.7

Fifteen of the 29 attitude statements express positive sentiments about public relations, but the editors register favorable views on only five of these (items 14, 16, 21, 23 and 28).⁴ And in one case (item 14) the extraordinarily large neutral response impinges upon an otherwise favorable mean score. Editors seem most guarded about questions of trust.

As might be expected, the public relations practitioners were uniformly favorable in their assessment of the contribution they make to the media. The vast majority see themselves as partners with the news media in the dissemination of information (item 1) who do work for newspapers or broadcasters that would otherwise go undone (item 10). They are virtually unanimous in the opinion that they provide accurate, complete and timely news for the media (items 21, 22 and 23). Three out of every four members of the group felt that public relations is necessary to the production of the daily news as we know it (item 25).

Many of the practitioners, however, were critical of certain practices in their profession. Close to half of the group agreed that practitioners frequently promote products, services and other activities which do not deserve promotion (item 4). One in four called PR-generated material "publicity disguised as news" (item 9). A similar number agreed that PR practitioners often try to deceive reporters by attaching unwarranted importance to trivial happenings (item 11). Some 20 per cent agreed to charges of obstructionism and cluttering channels of communication with pseudo-events (items 6 and 7).

Turning to an examination of the group mean scores, Table 9 data (see page 66) reveals seven apparent points of agreement between the journalists and PR group (items 16, 17, 18, 21, 23, 26, 28). These mostly relate to the journalistic skills of practitioners.

They agree, for example, that "public relations practitioners understand such journalistic problems as meeting deadlines, attracting reader attention and making the best use of space" (item 16). They generally agree that practitioners typically issue news releases of public interest (item 28). Editors also agree, though a large number (21-26%) remained neutral, that practitioners help reporters obtain accurate and timely news (items 21, 23). Most say, however, that practitioners do not always provide "complete news" (item 22).

On the question of trustworthiness, more editors disagreed than agreed with the statement "You can't trust public relations practitioners" (item 17). But unlike the practitioners, a large number (35 per cent) chose to be neutral on this question. The largest neutral response for the entire questionnaire, in fact, concerned the issue of trust. An astonishing 64% of the editors offered no opinion on whether "public relations practitioners are people of good sense, good will and good moral character" (item 14). Finally, their apparent agreement on item 18 is borderline. Exactly half of the editors do not agree that journalists and practitioners "carry on a running battle," but close to one in five remain neutral on the subject, while about one in three concur with this adversarial image.

The high proportion of neutral responses to some of the statements in the survey is remarkable. As we have seen, those which focus on the character or professional practices of public relations practitioners produced the highest neutral responses among editors. Practitioners, on the other hand, have relatively high neutral responses on just two statements (items 14 and 19), both of which beg their modesty. One in five practitioners offer no opinion on questions about their honesty and moral character.

This phenomenon of a high proportion of "neutrals" reflects the results of the study by Pincus *et al.* which incorporates virtually all of Aronoff's statements into the 22

questions they asked of editors in California. This finding, the researchers suggest, may mean the intensity of feelings against public relations is subsiding among journalists. "The high percentage of 'neutral' responses reported in this study," the authors wrote, "may signify a change or a coming change in the journalist-public relations association: a gradual shifting from the hard negative to a more undecided or moderate position."⁶

That assessment might apply here. Although editors still report negative perceptions of public relations, the high percentage of "neutral" responses could indicate a less severe, more moderate position toward the profession. By taking a "neutral" position on some of the thornier issues (e.g. items 24 and 26), at least they did not state a bad opinion. But neither, when given the chance, did they react favorably. A large number preferred to remain silent instead (e.g. item 14). One should not draw overly optimistic conclusions — or pessimistic ones, depending on one's point of view — from these results. At best it seems reasonable to conclude that some Ontario editors are undecided about the professionalism and integrity of people who work in public relations. These editors may have had a moderating affect on the overall results which, with mean scores falling more often in the slightly agree or slightly disagree range, do not indicate an overwhelmingly negative attitude toward public relations across news media.

C. Comparison with Findings of US Studies

The present study, however, like those which precede it, does reveal a preponderance of negative feeling toward public relations. Though Texas in 1975 and Florida in 1984 are far removed — geographically, temporally, and culturally — from Ontario in 1995, a comparison of findings from the same survey conducted in those states can also be instructive.

Table 10, showing mean responses to the Texas, Florida and Ontario surveys, contains remarkably parallel data (see page 67). Including mean scores from the last study to replicate the Aronoff questionnaire — Martinson in 1993 — the results show general consensus between the two nationals in almost every area.⁷ Indeed, Canadian and American journalists stand on the same side of the pole in their responses to all but three of the 29 attitude statements (1, 15 and 28). By the same token, however, a small but important gap in the strength of their opinion toward public relations demonstrates possibly less hostility among Canadian editors.

On the issue of ethics and integrity, both sides agree with the perception of practitioners as obstructionists and deceivers who confound the public and clutter the channels of communication with publicity disguised as news (items 6, 7, 9 and 11). As their predecessors from earlier in the century would have put it, PR people are bamboozlers.

Ontario editors, on the other hand, appear closer to neutral on certain matters of trust (e.g., items 14, 17 and 19). On questions regarding the journalistic skills of practitioners and quality of their products, they also appear more willing to give credit to public relations people (e.g., item 16). Canadian editors agree by a slim majority that PR practitioners “typically issue news releases or statements on matters of public interest” (item 28). Their colleagues to the south reject this statement. This may suggest that the PR-materials received by Canadian newsrooms are of a different quality. In addition, perhaps greater resources in American newsrooms helps explain why, unlike the journalists of Florida and Texas, Canadian editors agree that because of inadequate staff, the news media depend on information supplied by practitioners (item 15).

Editors in the Ontario sample show a somewhat more negative attitude on only one question. They seem less willing than the American journalists to view public

relations as a partner in the dissemination of information (item 1). But the Canadians are also evenly split on the question. The practitioner may be considered a useful news source who understands the problems of journalists, but he or she remains deeply suspect to journalists in both countries.

Completing the simple comparison of mean scores in Table 10, we find the Ontario group marginally more favorable on the positive statements and marginally less disagreeable on the negative ones. However, the fact that the sample groups in each study concern newspaper editors and reporters only must be taken into account. In the Canadian sample, as previously mentioned, radio news editors had a positive, moderating effect on the final results of the survey.

If instead of comparing the mean scores of the three media subgroups collectively (as Table 10 does), we compare the mean scores of the Ontario newspaper editors alone (from Table 9), we find a level of hostility toward public relations that in a few instances exceeds that of the American print journalists (e.g., items 1, 4, 6, 7 and 18). But disparities in the various sample sizes, as well as in types of newspaper journalists, make it difficult to draw firm observations in this respect. It seems, however, that editors in the Ontario sample are, overall, less intense in their expressions of disfavor with the PR trade than their American colleagues.

It appears that the Texan journalists in 1975 — in the heat of the Watergate scandal which led to the first ever resignation of an American president — were far more hostile toward public relations than their colleagues in both Florida and Ontario in later years. The fact that journalists at a single newspaper (the *American Statesman*) comprised the Texas sample must be kept in mind. The culture of that particular organization may

have been particularly unfriendly toward public relations practitioners at that time, leading many who worked there to express similarly strong negative views.

D. Intra-Group Differences in the Ontario Sample

Comparing mean scores within the two Ontario groups, one finds varying levels of favorability (or negativity) toward PR among the three media subgroups. Radio news editors, the data suggest, are generally more positive about public relations practitioners than either newspaper or television news editors. Comparative study of responses by the three media types to the 29 statements finds newspaper editors the least favorable toward public relations (as Table 11 shows).⁸

Table 11: PR Favorability Index *

<i>Editor Group</i>	Favorable	Neutral	Unfavorable
Radio News Editors	38%	7%	55%
TV News Editors	28%	10%	62%
Newspaper Editors	21%	14%	66%

* *Frequencies of favorable responses by editors to 29 statements about public relations.*

Item-by-item analysis of the 15 positive and 14 negative statements about public relations confirms the tendency of radio news editors to view PR more favorably than their colleagues in TV and print journalism. Table 11 shows the higher frequency with which radio editors rejected a negative statement, or agreed with a positive one, about public

relations. TV and newspaper editors registered a higher level of agreement with the 14 negative items.

An ANOVA identified seven statements (out of 29) for which responses of the three editor groups were significantly different ($p < .01$). All relate to the practitioner's role in the news gathering process.⁹ Once again, the radio news editors tended to view the contributions made by PR people as more helpful to the process than did their counterparts in TV or print journalism.

There are one or two interesting differences of opinion between the four PR subgroups as well. For example, whereas practitioners working in the private, non-profit or consulting sectors see themselves as "collaborators with news staff," those who work in the public sector do not. This may suggest less willingness among public servants to cooperate with the media. The image of a public servant actively collaborating with the news media often inspires fear and loathing within government circles. The practice is taboo — leading to sometimes unpleasant consequences for those who break it.

Another notable difference within the PR group concerns item four. Here, managers in the non-profit sector broke ranks with their colleagues and agreed with the editors that PR practitioners "too frequently insist on promoting products, services and other activities which do not legitimately deserve promotion." Perhaps the managers of non-profit organizations were acknowledging that groups with noble causes sometimes press too hard for attention. Though charity groups may disagree, their activities are not always newsworthy. Charitable organizations may insist too frequently on getting the news media to publicize their work, which can pose problems for those managing a charity's media relations. Alternatively, it may be that practitioners in the non-profit sector were expressing a criticism of their colleagues in government or private industry. PR

practitioners in non-profit organizations may feel that workers in the public or corporate sectors are the ones who too often promote products or events not worthy of the media's attention.

E. Effects of Demographic Variables

Demographic information provided in the next-to-last section of the survey was used to help determine whether personal characteristics make a difference in responses to the 29 statements. Variables examined here include sex, income, education, work experience, and number of employees supervised.

One detects a modest, but surprising difference between the sexes when it comes to the views of editors. In the majority of cases, men took a position more favorable to public relations than women. In seven of those cases (items 2, 5, 8, 13, 15, 23 and 24) ANOVA results indicate statistically significant differences between male and female editors. In virtually every instance, women registered more negative feelings toward public relations than men. On the other side, gender does not appear to be a factor in how Ontario PR practitioners view their profession. Perhaps the more equal population of men and women in the PR group resulted in the more evenly balanced responses of male and female practitioners.

This finding concerning the differing views of male and female editors in Ontario reflects to some extent the results of the 1993 Florida study. It found that for 19 of the 29 statements "male editors took a position more favorable to public relations — although . . . in only two cases [items 10 and 20] were the differences significant."¹⁰ The study concluded, however, that gender does not appear to be a major factor in how the Florida editors view PR. "It may well be," the researchers note, "that other variables accounted for

the disparity we found and that the relationship between gender and attitude toward public relations is a spurious one."¹¹ The question of gender clearly warrants further investigation.

The Ontario data also indicate that salary levels may influence attitudes. Curiously, practitioners on the lower half of the income scale (less than \$60,000 a year) tend to view their profession a tad more favorably than their peers at the upper end of the scale. Their responses to items 14 and 16 were particularly more positive than all other practitioners. The lower paid editors also seem to differ from their colleagues who earn more. Editors with salaries below \$40,000 a year appear to respond a little more favorably when it comes to the role practitioners play in news generation. They respond a bit more positively, for example, to items 1, 15, 23, 25, 27 and 28, and a bit more negatively to items 11, 24 and 29. Radio news editors largely comprise this group.

Having smaller resources at their disposal may be one reason why editors at radio stations appear to be somewhat more favorable toward public relations than their peers in newspapers or TV. Prior research suggests that editors at larger news organizations, who have more resources to work with, can be less dependent upon, perhaps less accessible to, and possibly less favorably disposed toward practitioners and their products than editors at smaller organizations.¹² To test whether fewer resources at an editor's disposal may be a factor in his or her views toward public relations, the Ontario survey asked news managers about the number of employees they supervise. The premise here is that people are the most important resource in a news organization.

It seems staff complements may be a factor in how editors view public relations. News managers responsible for less than 12 employees, compared to those who supervise a dozen or more, seem somewhat more favorably disposed to the offerings of PR

practitioners. Differences between editors with larger or smaller staff responsibility are most noticeable with respect to four positive statements about the utility of public relations to news work. While the editors were unanimous in disagreeing with all four (items 3, 10, 12 and 21), editors who supervise staffs of under 12 people showed significantly lower levels of disagreement with these statements. Oddly, though, unlike those with fewer employees to manage, editors with staff sizes ranging from 12 to 65 seem inclined to view public relations practitioners as "necessary to the production of the daily news as we know it" (item 25). The resources practitioners represent have value as well to large news organizations. Like their colleagues supervising small staff sizes, even editors supervising the largest number of employees only slightly disagreed with the statement.

The number of years an editor has worked in journalism appears to have a major impact on his or her views of public relations. Here the editors are divided into two groups: those who have worked 14 years or less and those with 15 years or more experience in the field. On 26 of the 29 statements, editors with less years in the field took a position more favorable toward public relations. T-tests reveal statistically significant differences in four of those items (specifically, 14, 16, 22 and 29: $p < .01$). Editors with the lengthiest experience in journalism seem far less favorably disposed toward public relations than their younger colleagues. This finding is consistent with the recent Florida study, which also observed that "the number of years the editor has worked in journalism does have some impact."¹³

On the PR side, the number of years in the field has little impact on how practitioners view their profession. Only two items record statistically significant differences within the PR group on this question: items 5 and 13 ($p < .001$). Compared to their younger colleagues in the field, managers with over 15 years' experience in public

relations more strongly agreed that theirs is a profession equal in status to journalism. Alternately, managers with less than 15 years' experience disagreed more strongly with the proposition that practitioners are really just errand boys for whoever hires them.

It seemed reasonable to expect that editors with some experience in public relations would have more positive attitudes toward the profession than those who did not. A comparison of mean scores found that for 19 of the 29 items, editors who said they had some PR work experience were more favorable toward public relations than those who had none. These results were also found among editors who participated in the latest survey conducted in Florida. In that case, editors with PR experience were more supportive of public relations on 22 of the 29 attitude statements.

T-tests for the Ontario data, however, show only five items in which the different scores have some statistical significance ($p < .01$ in items 3, 5, 14, 25 and 27). Editors with a background in public relations were more favorable on only two of these items (3 and 27). On the other three items, however, the same editors rejected, even more strongly than their colleagues with no PR experience, the notion that public relations is equal in status to journalism and necessary to news production. They were neutral, without exception, on whether public relations practitioners are people of good sense, good will and good moral character. This group is not without hostility toward the profession they once worked in, however briefly.

Conversely, PR practitioners with experience in journalism, while overwhelmingly positive about public relations, seem not quite as enthusiastic about their current profession as practitioners without journalistic experience. Their mean scores for 19 of the 29 attitude statements are marginally lower in terms of favorability. For four of these items (1, 2, 13 and 19), the difference in responses of practitioners with and without a

background in journalism was statistically significant ($p < .01$). In every case, those with experience in journalism were moderately less favorable in their views of public relations. In two other instances of significant difference, however, this group rallied to the defense of their profession with greater zeal than their compatriots. They disagreed more strongly with the idea that PR material is simply publicity disguised as news (item 9) and uniformly rejected the premise that a practitioner's prime function is to get free advertising space for the company he or she represents (item 29).

Unlike the other variables discussed here, education appears to have little bearing on how news editors view public relations. The data show little evidence of significant difference in this respect except for two items: statements 11 and 17, which address deceptive practices and the trustworthiness of PR practitioners. In both instances, editors with a college education were more supportive of public relations than those with a university degree. The same appears to hold for practitioners. Results indicate a small measure of difference between university and college-educated practitioners. Responses to items 9, 10, 14, 18 and 24, which mostly address issues of professional integrity, are noteworthy. In all but one case, practitioners with college diplomas view their profession in a more favorable light. However, they were close to neutral on the question of carrying on a running battle with journalists (item 18), while their peers with Bachelor degrees generally voiced disagreement over that characterization of the journalist-PR relationship.

F. Perceptions of Occupational Status

The rankings each group gave to the 16 occupations listed in the second part of the questionnaire reveal interesting similarities and serious differences of opinion. Both groups agree on which occupations merit the top three positions (see Table 12).¹⁴ They rank physicians first, police officers second, and members of the clergy third in order of

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respect. Both accord the least respect to politicians — placing them dead last among the professions. They also agree in their rankings of lawyers and bankers — near the bottom. Each places artists in eleventh position, higher than their rankings for one another. Each places the other close to last on the list. Editors ranked practitioners just ahead of politicians in order of respect, while journalists were consigned to 13th place by the practitioners.¹⁵

Table 12
Rankings of 16 Occupations *

<i>Occupation</i>	Editors' Rankings	Practitioners' Rankings
Physician	1	1
Police Officer	2	2
Clergyman	3	3
Farmer	4	5
High School Teacher	5	7
Journalist	6	13
Architect	7	4
University Professor	8	12
Engineer	9	6
Carpenter	10	8
Artist	11	11
Banker	12	14
Lawyer	13	15
Corporate Executive	14	9
Public Relations Practitioner	15	10
Politician	16	16

* Rankings are in order of respect attributed to the occupations by each group, with 1 being highest and 16 lowest in order of respect.

The low esteem in which the editors held public relations, as measured by their responses to the 29 statements, is thus reflected in the status they ascribe to practitioners among the 16 occupations. But the esteem, or lack of it, seems mutual. What the statements do not reveal, but this section does, is the lower status PR managers accord to journalists. However, the fact that the PR managers rank their own occupation rather low in order of respect — 10th on the list, just ahead of journalists — suggests they have a bit more respect for the media than the media have for PR. The editors rank themselves sixth, after all, far ahead of their placement of practitioners.

These findings bear striking resemblance to those of the Texas and Florida studies, which also measured perceptions of occupational status through rankings of the 16 professions. Journalists ranked themselves ahead of practitioners in both studies. Both groups also placed physicians in the number one spot. In the Florida study, both groups ranked politicians last, with journalists ranking practitioners next to last in order of respect. Journalists in the Texas study were even less favorable. They placed practitioners at the bottom of the list, just ahead of politicians. Practitioners in the Florida study also ranked journalists lower than themselves. The practitioners in Texas, however, ranked journalists third — one step ahead of public relations.

Results of the Florida and Texas surveys differ from the Ontario study in the way PR practitioners ranked their own profession. Practitioners in the American studies ranked public relations fourth, well ahead of the tenth-place position the Canadian practitioners gave themselves. These results may indicate a higher level of modesty among the Canadians in responding to questions about their relative occupational status.

G. News Value Orientations

Rankings for the eight news values in Part III of the survey also reveal significant differences and certain levels of agreement between the two groups in their perceptions of news value. Within each group, as one might expect, respondents share very similar news value orientations. However, there was greater consensus among editors than practitioners. While newspaper, radio and TV news editors may diverge somewhat in their opinion of the professionalism and integrity of public relations practitioners, they agree almost unanimously in their assessment of which news elements are the most important.

The editors completely agree in their rankings of five news values. They rank, in identical order, accuracy, interest to reader, completeness and usefulness as the four most important news values (see Table 13).¹⁶ They place "depicts subject in a favorable light" dead last on their list, but perceive it to be the number one news value of practitioners (see Table 14). The practitioners, however, agree with the editors in placing accuracy at the top of the list. They also place high value on interest to reader, but generally rank "depicts subject in a favorable light" ahead of completeness and usefulness. The editors were thus fairly accurate in their perceptions of the value practitioners accord to favorable news coverage.

The fact that practitioners in the Ontario study rank favorable depiction so high sharply contrasts with the results of the Florida and Texas studies (see Table 15).¹⁷ In both cases practitioners agreed with the journalists in giving it last place value. It may be that the American practitioners, asked to consider theoretical questions about the importance of various news elements, respond differently in the abstract than they do in actual practice. If that was the case, the authors of the Florida study note, "editors' perceptions may not be as inaccurate" as those indicated by the data.¹⁸

Table 13 *

**News Value Rankings of Editors and Public Relations Practitioners in Ontario
by Type of Organization**

<i>News Value</i>	<i>News Editors</i>				<i>Public Relations Practitioners</i>				
	NP	RD	TV	GRP	GRP	PRF	PS	PBS	NPO
Accuracy	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Interest to Reader	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	3	3
Completeness	3	3	3	3	4	4	5	2	5
Usefulness to Reader	4	4	4	4	5	5	4	5	4
Prompt Publication	5	7	6	5	6	7	7	7	6
News Story Style	6	6	5	6	8	6	8	8	8
Mechanical/ Grammatical	7	5	7	7	7	8	6	6	7
Depicts Subject in Favorable Light	8	8	8	8	3	3	3	4	2

Table 14 *

Perceptions of Other Group's News Value Rankings

<i>News Value</i>	<i>Editors' perceptions of practitioners' rankings</i>				<i>Practitioners' perceptions of editors' rankings</i>				
	NP	RD	TV	GRP	GRP	PRF	PS	PBS	NP
Accuracy	4	6	4	4	2	2	2	2	2
Interest to Reader	2	3	2	2	1	1	1	1	1
Completeness	5	4	6	5	5	6	5	6	5
Usefulness to Reader	8	7	5	6	6	5	6	7	6
Prompt Publication	3	2	3	3	4	4	3	3	4
News Story Style	6	8	7	8	3	3	4	4	3
Mechanical/ Grammatical	7	5	8	7	7	7	7	5	7
Depicts Subject in Favorable Light	1	1	1	1	8	8	8	8	8

- * NP = Newspaper; RD = Radio; TV = Television; PRF = PR Consulting Firm; PS = Private Sector; PBS = Public Sector; NPO = Non-Profit Organization; and GRP = Group (overall rankings for group).

Table 15 *

**News Value Rankings of Journalists and Public Relations Practitioners
in Texas, Florida and Ontario**

<i>News Value</i>	Journalists' Rankings			<i>Perceptions of Practitioners' Rankings</i>			Practitioners' Rankings			<i>Perceptions of Journalists' Rankings</i>		
	<i>T</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>O</i>
Accuracy	1	1	1	5	4	4	1	1	1	2	2	2
Interest to Reader	2	2	2	3	3	2	2	2	2	1	1	1
Usefulness to Reader	3	4	4	6	5	6	5	4	5	3	7	6
Completeness	4	3	3	4	7	5	3	3	4	4	4	5
Prompt Publication	5	6	5	2	2	3	4	7	6	5	5	4
Mechanical / Grammatical	--	5	7	--	8	7	--	5	7	--	6	7
News Story Style	--	7	6	--	6	8	--	6	8	--	3	3
Depicts Subject in Favorable Light	6	8	8	1	1	1	6	8	3	6	8	8

* *T = Texas; F = Florida; O = Ontario*

How accurately do Canadian editors perceive the news value orientations of practitioners? Less accurately than practitioners, it seems, who correctly perceived the editors' top two news values (though in reverse order) and last choice. As mentioned earlier, a Spearman rho test was used to measure the rank-difference correlation between the editors' perceptions of the practitioners rankings and the actual rankings of practitioners. Results indicate that while the editors perceived the stated values of practitioners with some degree of accuracy ($\rho = .60$), practitioners were much more accurate in predicting the editors' views ($\rho = .74$). Still, both were far from being perfectly accurate (when $\rho = 1.0$).

Along with *accuracy* (i.e. the degree to which each group correctly perceived the other's rankings) two other variables were considered in measuring the two groups' perceptions: *agreement* and *congruency*.

Spearman rho results show a moderate level of agreement in their rankings of the eight news values ($\rho = .62$). The difference in rank-order given to "depicts subject in a favorable light" significantly affected the extent of their agreement. In fact, when removed from the equation, the stated views of editors and those of practitioners stand in almost complete accord ($\rho = .92$).

In terms of congruency (i.e. the similarity between one group's views on a particular subject and their perceptions of a second group's views on the same subject), Spearman rho results indicate highly incongruent news value orientations. Editors especially perceived a wide gulf between themselves and public relations people on the question of which news values come first ($\rho = .02$). There was low congruency among practitioners as well ($\rho = .29$), whose news value orientations conflict with those of the editors. PR's approach to the news is a long-standing source of complaint for journalists who believe practitioners only want positive coverage for their clients and that news people should provide it with dispatch. But to the professional practitioner, speed and favorability are only the second choice. They prefer accuracy in the news media to all other considerations.

Canadian practitioners may differ somewhat from their American colleagues in judging news elements, but editors in the two countries share remarkably similar news value orientations. Editors on both sides of the border chose the same top four news values. They also give least weight to depicting subjects favorably. Like their mean scores on the 29 attitude statements, the news value rankings of PR practitioners in the

non-profit and public sectors varied somewhat from their colleagues in the private sector or in professional consulting firms. PR managers working for non-profit or public sector organizations rank interest to reader lower than their other colleagues who agree with how the editors rank this news value. While the editor's perceived prompt publication as a high news value for practitioners (second or third place), the practitioners place this value next to the bottom of the list (seventh place). The editors' views here may indicate a feeling of pressure from practitioners who seek prompt publication of their news items.

H. Participant Comments

Finally, comments by individuals provided in the open-ended section of the questionnaire are illuminating. Approximately 29 per cent of the editors and 43 per cent of the practitioners offered some remarks. We begin with a sampling of these from the editors.¹⁹

The long-standing complaint of public relations luring journalists into the trade with the promise of larger salaries was echoed by two writers. Here's what one editor said:

Journalists are often offered higher paying jobs in PR because companies know they are best-suited to the job. A former journalist knows what the current journalist is looking for, and hence, is best-suited to make sure that information is *not* easily made accessible. That's also why former journalists find it impossible to come back. They have lost balance and are overpaid. The whole can't return to the convent, etc.

But former journalists *do* return to the fold, as one radio editor who did a brief stint in PR demonstrates. His criticism of the ex-journalist turned PR-person, however, is just as severe as his newspaper colleague's. In this editor's view, PR people with journalistic

experience couldn't make the grade and left the job for mercenary reasons: "PR types are usually journalists who quit to make more money," he said. "Had they been good and persistent, they might still be in the job."

Another editor attacked both the ethics and professional skills of practitioners:

Almost all *real* news does *not* come through PR agents. . . PR agents are very valuable for helping producers line-up guests for current/public affairs shows, but are a sheer hindrance when trying to get hard facts on real breaking news stories. Many will actually lie to news people during breaking events. Not enough PR people are aware of the broadcasting industry's requirements for *truth*, accuracy and simplicity.

This editor also complained about spending a good part of his day answering "nuisance calls" from practitioners trying to get free publicity for "a product disguised as a valuable news story." The extent to which such offerings tie-up the newsroom's fax machine is another annoyance. "Our newsroom is switching to computer selected faxes in order to cut down on the waste." Public relations practitioners, anxious to get some attention for their client, may be doing themselves and their employers a great disservice.

But all is not bad. Indeed, the majority of news editors who provided comments had rather favorable things to say. Referring to the 29 attitude statements, one of the editors found it "interesting that many questions appear to slam PR people." Here's his rejoinder: "Let's get over the phobia! PR people *can help* reporters!!" Those sentiments were echoed by others, one of whom said: "Public relations people are just doing their job. In doing ours, we get the final word on what we *use* and don't use — thus the term editor. I just view PR info. as another news source."

Another editor also expressed some discomfort with statements in the survey. Her remarks would warm the heart of most PR practitioners:

Part I difficult to answer with general statements [*sic*]. There are some excellent public relations practitioners in the field today who conduct themselves in a professional manner, understand the needs of journalists, alert us to stories we might not be aware of, and help put us in contact with the best spokesperson possible. There are others who aggressively try to push a product our listeners are simply not interested in. I would say the majority (these days) are in the first category.

The editor's remarks underscore the fact that not all journalists view public relations, or all PR practitioners, in the same way. Research suggests, for example, "that journalists have higher opinions of individual practitioners than they have of the field as a whole."²⁰ The comments of one of the television editors concurs with that finding. "I find it unfair to generalize," he wrote. "Some PR are excellent — very helpful and a credit to their organization. Others are simply shields. Hard to categorize when there is such a broad range in the profession."

Some editors may be quite appreciative of the work done by public relations practitioners, but as one of them noted, "journalists must never forget where PR's first priority lies — with public image of client." Keeping that balance in mind, as another puts it, helps the journalist make use of PR sources without necessarily accepting their agenda:

While I agree that public relations practitioners' primary function is to have their client portrayed in the best light possible, I don't see anything particularly wrong with that. It is the journalist's job to sort out the truly newsworthy from the B.S. . . . PR is a fact of life and a good journalist will learn to work with PR practitioners and use them as a resource. There is no need for antagonism — just a good appreciation of who the practitioner is working for. Some of your questions suggest that PR practitioners see themselves as "helpers" of news departments. This goes too far I think. In the course of their duties they very often do help reporters get through a story. But their primary motivation is service to their client/institution. The "help" the media get is a by-product of the PR person's

primary task — improving client image. Some other questions suggest journalists see themselves as morally superior to PR practitioners. I think this is a bit of a conceit these days — the public doesn't have a lot of faith in any of us.

That last observation is taken up by one of the practitioners, who wrote:

While we are both partners in disseminating information, we have different objectives. The PR person is hired to put his/her client in a good light; the journalist to explore the negative and get to "the truth." Neither is a saint; neither should be held in esteem.

Others acknowledge the presence of unethical persons in the ranks of the profession, giving some credence to one of journalism's oldest complaints about PR people. Here's what one practitioner had to say:

I believe the PR profession not to be regulated enough . . . practitioners too often try to deceive news reporters by attaching too much importance to trivial, uneventful happenings. There are too many people who have joined the ranks of PR practitioners who I believe not to be professionals.

How effective the disreputable practitioner may be, or for how long, is questionable. As one practitioner put it: "The PR professional ultimately only has his or her reputation for honesty and integrity to fall back on — without it your effectiveness in media relations is nil." Journalists, the writer implies, quickly discover who can be trusted.

The notion that they lack ethics is an understandably troublesome one for PR practitioners. Many say theirs is a noble calling, the best in the business are highly ethical people. Suggestions to the contrary do not sit well with many in the profession, as evidenced by the following comments from a practitioner:

I think this study is going to perpetuate the misunderstanding reporters have of public relations practitioners. There is a mindset in the newsrooms that PR people are only hired to distort the truth and mislead the public. I believe it is common for PR professionals to have a high degree of integrity and a superior code of

ethics. Like politicians and policemen, PR professionals are people too — no better or worse than others, including reporters. The PR professionals I know learned long ago that honesty is always going to be the best policy.

But if the issue of trust concerns the practitioner, so do the realities of contemporary journalism. The following words from one of the respondents highlight some of the tensions felt on both sides:

I wish the relationship between journalists and PR people was not so clouded by mistrust based on a few bad experiences over the years. I have always had fairly good experiences with reporters. I recognize their pressures and worry about the quality of journalism declining due to staff cutbacks at papers. The PR profession needs to do more to educate senior management within corporations about the role and responsibility of the company's relationship with media. Unfortunately, company executives would still rather avoid reporters because of the adversarial stereotypes and approaches used over the years.

There is plenty of suspicion going around on both sides. It seems neither side is fully prepared to trust the other.

But the adversarial nature of the two groups' relationship, for some at least, is a healthy thing. "I believe that there is a natural tension between PR practitioners and journalists, and that's the way it should be," wrote one practitioner. After all, each side plays a different role in the dissemination process, as Walter Lippmann pointed out in his seminal work, *Public Opinion*.

Summary

Referring back to the six research questions which are the focus of this study, results indicate that:

- 1. News editors in Ontario have generally negative perceptions of the integrity and professionalism of public relations practitioners. They ascribe low occupational status to PR work.**
- 2. Differences in responses to the 29 attitude statements suggest that radio news editors are somewhat less negative toward the public relations profession and its practitioners than their colleagues in television and print journalism. Newspaper editors appear to be the most negative of the three media subgroups.**
- 3. Canadian editors generally agree with American journalists in their negative assessment of public relations practice. However, evidence suggests that Canadian PR practitioners may face a moderately less hostile, and in some ways, more appreciative news media than their colleagues in the US.**
- 4. PR managers uniformly hold their profession in high esteem, though there are differences in news value orientations, and in attitudes toward certain PR practices, among those working in either the non-profit, government, private or consulting sectors. They rank journalists slightly below themselves in occupational status.**

5. Editors perceive PR practitioners to have an opposite set of news values. The practitioners, however, agree with the editors that "accuracy" is the highest news value. But the two sides diverge substantially in their views of the value of depicting a subject in a favorable light.

6. In terms of demographic variables, it appears that editors with 15 years or more experience in the news business are more negative in their views of PR people than their less experienced colleagues. Length of work experience has little impact on how public relations practitioners view their field. Editors with prior experience in public relations work were a bit more favorable toward PR than those who had none. Conversely, PR managers with experience in journalism, while overwhelmingly positive about public relations, appear not entirely as enthusiastic about their current profession as those with no journalistic background. Male editors seem slightly less negative in their views of the professionalism and integrity of public relations practitioners than their female colleagues. Men and women in public relations show no variance in attitudes. Level of education appears to make little difference to the perceptions of either PR practitioners or editors, but staff size may influence attitudes. Editors supervising less than 12 employees are somewhat more favorably disposed to the offerings of PR practitioners. Finally, salary levels may influence attitudes. Editors earning less than \$40,000 a year appear to respond a little more favorably when it comes to the role practitioners play in generating news. Practitioners on the lower half of the income scale also tend to be a tad more positive toward their profession than managers at the upper end of the scale.

Notes for Chapter Four

1. Two TV news editors, one radio news editor and one practitioner working in a consulting firm did not indicate their salary levels. Thus four cases are missing from the counts presented in Table 3.
2. Cf. Aronoff, Jeffers, Kopenhaver *et al.*, Stegall & Sanders, Pincus *et al.*, and Martinson.
3. Another 35 practitioners also listed having professional accreditation in public relations (APR) in addition to a postsecondary diploma or degree. These, however, were not included in Table 7 data which only show the single highest level of education the respondent claimed to have.
4. The 15 positive statements include items 1, 3, 5, 8, 10, 12, 14, 16, 19, 21, 22, 23, 25, 27 and 28. The remaining 14 negative statements include items 2, 4, 6, 7, 9, 11, 13, 15, 17, 18, 20, 24, 26, and 29. These are identified with + and - signs in Tables 9 and 10.
5. Mean scores were derived using the following values on the seven-point Likert scale: 1 = strongly agree; 2 = agree; 3 = slightly agree; 4 = neutral; 5 = slightly disagree; 6 = disagree; 7 = strongly disagree. Thus, for positive statements, the lower the mean score (i.e. from 1 to 4), the more favorable is the response. Conversely, a higher mean score (i.e. from 4 to 7) is an unfavorable response. The polarity is reversed for negative statements (i.e., the lower the mean score, the more the respondent agreed with the negative statement, while higher mean scores represent more favorable responses.)
6. J. David Pincus, Tony Rimmer, Robert E. Rayfield and Fritz Cropp, "Newspaper Editor's Perceptions of Public Relations: How Business, News, and Sports Editors Differ," *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 5:1 (1993), p. 41.
7. The American data in Table 10 come from three sources. Mean scores for the 1975 Texas study were provided (over the telephone and via facsimile transmission) by Dr. Craig Aronoff, Professor of Management, Kennesaw State College, Marietta, Georgia. Mean scores for the 1984 Florida study were taken from Lillian Lodge Kopenhaver, David L. Martinson and Michael Ryan, "How Public Relations Practitioners and Editors in Florida View Each Other," *Journalism Quarterly*, 61:4 (Winter 1984), pp. 862-863. Mean responses for the 1993 Florida study were provided by Professor David L. Martinson (in his unpublished research paper entitled *Credibility, Status of Public Relations Practitioners Remains Low in Eyes of Florida Daily, Weekly Editors*, North Miami: Florida International University, 1993, pp. 15-18). That study did not include PR practitioners in its sample, hence only journalists' responses are listed in the table under the year 1993.
8. Favorability perception ratings were derived by collapsing the mean scores of each group for the 29 statements on public relations into three categories:

favorable ($M = 1$ to 3.8), neutral ($M = 3.9$ to 4.1) and unfavorable ($M = 4.2$ to 7). The polarity of mean scores for negative items was reversed for consistency in summing each group's response to the individual statements and tabulating frequencies of favorable responses to public relations. Thus, percentages in Table 10 represent cumulative frequencies based on the mean scores for each group in the three categories ($n = 29$).

9. These include items 1, 3, 5, 15, 16, 19, and 27.
10. David L. Martinson, *Credibility, Status of Public Relations Practitioners Remains Low in Eyes of Florida Daily, Weekly Editors*, Unpublished Research Paper, North Miami: Florida International University, 1993, p. 7.
11. *Ibid.*
12. J. David Pincus et al., *op. cit.*, p. 36.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
14. A number of respondents in both groups either did not complete this section or filled it out incorrectly. Scores for nine editors and 10 practitioners (19 in total) are thus missing from the final rankings grouped in Table 12. It is interesting to note that in many cases the respondent commented on why he or she chose not to ascribe occupational rankings. In most cases respondents explained that they accord respect to individuals, not groups within a particular profession. One person called the exercise "silly". Another said it was "dangerous" to be rating professions this way.
15. It is interesting to note that the practitioners also gave a rather low ranking to university professors. Perhaps this reflects a certain displeasure the group may have felt in answering so many critical questions about their professionalism and integrity put to them in a university-based research project.
16. News value rankings were not provided in several cases. Eight editors and four practitioners either left the section blank or did not fill it out properly. Thus 12 cases are missing from the final rank-orders shown in Tables 13-15.
17. News value rankings for the 1975 Texas study and the 1984 study in Florida are from Lillian Lodge Kopenhaver et al., *op. cit.*, p. 864.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 865.
19. All italicized words in quotations throughout this section were emphasized by respondents.
20. Michael Ryan and David L. Martinson, "Journalists and Public Relations Practitioners: Why the Antagonism?" *Journalism Quarterly*, 64:2 (Spring 1988), p. 139.

Chapter Five

PR Flacks and Media Hacks: Why the Antipathy?

Like journalists in America, Canadian news editors on balance cast public relations in a bad light. Though a few positive rays manage to break through, negative attitudes dominate their orientation toward people in the business of public relations. But what are the sources of this long-standing aversion toward the profession and its practitioners evinced by the news media in both countries? Why the antipathy?

Researchers and commentators have postulated various reasons for the antagonism. Some identify social, psychological or educational forces influencing the tone and character of the relationship. Others have tried to understand the dynamics of the problem from the perspectives of role and game theory. PR people often lay responsibility for the mistrust of journalists at the feet of incompetent or unethical practitioners. All would agree that the adversarial stance taken by journalists has been a traditional feature of the two groups' interactions. Historical factors, therefore, are also seen to play an important role in how the two groups correlate. Finally, it is argued that a natural and healthy tension lies at the centre of much of their conflict, rather than any predilection on either side for adversity.

The educational process at the college and university level has been investigated to determine whether it plays a role in fostering the negative attitudes of journalists. An oft-cited study in this area was completed in the early 1980s by Caroline Cline, then at the

University of Texas (Austin). Analysing the content of 12 widely used introductory textbooks in mass communication, she found strong biases against public relations in all but a few. Students of the mass media, she reported, are being presented with "information that says public relations is a prostitute's profession, one which includes terrorists, the Ayatollah Khomeini, and the first US president to resign his office."¹

These books, most of which were written by persons with a news/editorial background, show lack of understanding about PR and intimate "the resentment of reporters for their former colleagues who have 'sold out' to the high-paying public relations jobs."² Cline concluded that some journalists hold negative views in part because of the undergraduate texts they have read, which "perpetuate the antagonism" toward public relations. Though she does not make the point, it is conceivable that the widespread use of American texts in Canadian journalism education may have transferred negative influences to students here.³ Whether such books continue to dominate the undergraduate curriculum is difficult to say since Cline's research has not been followed up in more recent years.

The previously cited study by Habermann, Kopenhaver and Martinson in 1988, however, supported Cline's finding that media programs at universities and colleges contribute to the misperceptions of journalists. News-editorial faculty at some 82 schools or departments of journalism/mass communication appeared to share the same unfavorable assessment of public relations that working journalists hold. While the study did not prove that some socialization against public relations takes place in the classroom, it shows, along with Cline's research, that the low opinion journalists have of public relations is echoed in the halls of academe.

The flip side to all of this is that education in public relations may promote improved attitudes toward the field among reporters and editors. The recent California study found evidence to this effect. When education in public relations (whether having taken a simple course or more elaborate program of study) was controlled for, the researchers found "a significant difference between editor groups who had taken a public relations course and those who had not."⁴ Journalists who have studied the subject appear more inclined to view public relations in a positive, or at least more understanding, way. "A first step to orient journalism students to public relations," Pincus *et al.* suggest, "may be to urge or require journalism majors to take a public relations course."⁵ If students are learning about the down side of PR, why not the up side as well, in the interest of promoting a more balanced view of public relations and its professionals?

Improving the knowledge and understanding of fledgling journalists about an important relationship they will encounter in the workplace is a good idea. But ameliorating journalistic antipathies toward the industry should not be the objective, stated or implied, of our postsecondary institutions. That's a mission best left to the organizations representing the special interests of each profession. Educators should be deeply concerned, however, about the misperceptions and stereotypes they may be reinforcing.

There is a certain view held by journalists that theirs is a more noble calling than public relations. Consider, for example, the higher opinion news editors in the Ontario have of themselves. The notion that their work is more valued by the public and more valuable to society automatically degrades public relations and puts the relationship off balance. Feelings of superiority can destroy relationships, or hurt them profoundly. Journalism educators, it seems, reinforce this bias.⁶ Perhaps journalists — and teachers of journalism training students for careers in the field — should ask themselves why they

persist in placing the trade on a so much higher plane. It can be counterproductive in their dealings with PR practitioners, who often provide useful, and sometimes vital, services to the news media.

Perhaps how the media define "news" also contributes to the problem. In fact, according to one of America's most-respected public relations educators, "the media's definition of the news is at the heart of the problem."⁷ Cutlip and Center argue that "the basic conflict lies in the never-ending quest of the media for exciting news, in their efforts to keep the news stream uncontaminated, and in the need for money coming into their cash registers."⁸ Striving for content that excites and sells, the news media emphasize conflict, the sensational, and the imperfections of people and organizations. These values place those who regularly deal with the press in an uncomfortable position. They provoke an understandably defensive posture on the part of public relations people. But denouncing the media's news values is akin to blaming the messenger for the problems PR must confront. Cutlip and Center's argument seems too one-sided.

If education and socialization processes within journalism bear some responsibility for the unfavorable perceptions of the news media, it is fair to ask how the public relations industry itself may be contributing to the problem. The responsibility of practitioners for the negative views of journalists was examined, among other issues, in a 1988 study by Michael Ryan and David Martinson.

In a survey of 118 practitioners, "65% agreed or strongly agreed that public relations, as a field, is partially responsible for journalists' negative views."⁹ This opinion is reflected in the comments of a practitioner who participated in the Ontario survey, as we saw in the previous chapter, who criticized the lack of regulation in the industry. The profession's failure to police itself and effectively address unethical practices is cited by

practitioners as a primary reason for the bad image. Of those who participated in the Ryan-Martinson survey, "more than 80% agreed or strongly agreed that public relations has not policed itself well enough to eliminate the 'bad apples'."¹⁰

Attempts to address the problem have had little effect over the years. Almost 12 years after the Public Relations Society of America adopted its first Code of Ethics for the industry (1950), members of the profession were still feeling the sting of questionable conduct by individuals who all too easily joined their ranks.¹¹ Bernard Rubin, a professor of public relations at Boston University, made the following observation in 1961:

The public relations man too often gains entrance to the field on his own announcement . . . Some of the blame for the low esteem which public relations suffers in many quarters can be laid on the shoulders of the self-appointed public relations expert. It is high time that we in the field realize that experience in some process or some cheerily enthusiastic willingness to join the ranks is not enough to qualify in public relations. Before the "Shingle" is displayed the standards of a profession must be met.¹²

Licensing for the profession has long been proposed as an effective way of addressing the problem. Edward Bernays, for one, repeatedly called for this throughout his career, but to no avail.¹³ It remains the case to this day that persons of questionable character enter the field with some facility. As the research clearly demonstrates, such individuals continue to tarnish the industry's reputation, as many like them do in virtually any other line of work. Unprofessional practitioners hurt the image of the field and cultivate the enmity of journalists. Journalists tend to mistrust the profession because of bad experiences with some practitioners. But it has also been shown that reporters and editors do place a good deal of trust in individual practitioners they've worked with and gotten to know. The bad apples, it seems, do not always spoil the barrel. The relationship has endured despite the improprieties of some.

Just as ethical lapses — stonewalling journalists, lying, or inhibiting their search for the truth — raise the ire of the press, the communication skills of practitioners who fail to understand the press' needs can be a real frustration, too. The majority of respondents in the Ryan-Martinson survey "said practitioners are partly responsible for the negative attitudes because many public relations persons are not sufficiently concerned about the journalist's need for clear, concise, accurate information."¹⁴

Recitals of PR sins which pain the journalist and reinforce cynicism toward the practitioner figure largely in meetings with the news media arranged by professional groups like CPRS.¹⁵ "The litany," as one commentator observed, "usually includes — with considerable justification — such major, and minor, vexations as telephoning on or near deadline times; failing to deal even-handedly with the press; assuming an unearned first-name intimacy; proposing inappropriate story ideas that clearly reflect ignorance of editorial content; sending pitch letters filled with information the reporter already knows; making unnecessary follow-up calls; persisting in pushing an unwanted story, and so on."¹⁶

The peccadilloes of other journalists who regularly deal with public relations people add to the list. "The best" practitioners, one of the Ontario editors observed, "the ones most respected in their field, are those who *do not* pester editors with trivial events. They value their personal credibility and do not squander it by 'crying wolf' too often." Though most editors in the Ontario study agreed that practitioners largely understand journalistic problems, the poor skills of some are a continuing source of irritation.

Practitioners who openly publicize, or even boast about, their success in getting favorable media attention for clients also hurt their cause. Self-congratulatory pronouncements simply feed into journalists' suspicion that "PR types" are merely

propagandists paid to manipulate the media. As an advertising technique, this can backfire, as one observer points out:

Awareness by journalists that there is a direct connection between what they are being asked to do and financial rewards to the public relations person is yet another source of underlying resentment. That equation has been noisily spotlighted in recent times by a new class of self-styled media specialists who not only advertise their successes, but openly operate on the pay-for-placement principle — so much per story placement or broadcast appearance. This sort of unabashed flaunting is not calculated to make friends with the media. Simple pragmatism would seem to dictate that successful placement activity, other than what is reported to a client, is best kept muted — and our role, ideally, invisible.¹⁷

Pride, in this case, inspires prejudice. Perhaps practitioners need to exhibit greater discretion in their relations with the press.

If the benefits public relations practitioners derive from their relationship with the media rankle some journalists, the benefits practitioners provide to news people can also produce tension and resentment. It is hard to find another business where the kind of assistance practitioners offer — furnishing journalists with story ideas, supplying background materials, packaging items for print or broadcast, and putting them in touch with news makers — is given free of charge. Though often accepted, these gratuitous offerings are a mixed blessing for the journalist, whose psychological reaction to them can be less than welcoming.

Assessing some of the psychological factors influencing the media's attitudes toward public relations, Joel Pomerantz, a veteran practitioner in the US, considered how the benefactor/beneficiary relationship affects the two groups:

Psychologists have long been aware of how this works in other circumstances. Call it human nature, but givers, whatever their motives, are not always appreciated. To be a receiver implies, to some extent, a failing or deficiency.

Beneficiaries, not infrequently, harbor very mixed feelings about their benefactors.¹⁸

Pomerantz implies that journalists are the primary “beneficiaries” in this relationship. As such, they may resent their “benefactors” in public relations, which helps to explain some of their negative feelings. As one of the Ontario respondents put it: “Journalists generally have little respect or regard for PR practitioners, yet require them in order to do their jobs — in fact, *rely* on them. That's why they dislike us so much.”

This, of course, is the particular conceit of practitioners: “Journalists can't live without us!” The fact is, the opposite is also true: the ink and air time news people provide make them the benefactors and practitioners the beneficiaries of this relationship. Pomerantz's analogy, with its limited application, offers inadequate explanation for why journalists feel so negatively about public relations. It ignores the interdependence of each side.

Two other observations by him, however, offer better clues to why practitioners feel the pangs of news media disfavor. Ironically, the explosive growth of the trade — its success — could be among its worst enemies. “Because so much, from so many sources, is available, the sheer glut of public relations-originated material tends to devalue everything,” Pomerantz remarks.¹⁹ As it becomes increasingly difficult for the media to separate newsworthy items from the rest, a great deal goes unattended.

The sometimes servile role practitioners perform can also have negative repercussions. The “eagerness of public relations people to assist the media undermines respect and fosters negative perceptions.”²⁰ Unsolicited offers of assistance can generate suspicion or be a nuisance. As the saying goes: “Hard-to-get is respected — easy is rejected.” It seems fewer practitioners are prepared to play for respect. The “hard-to-

get" proposition can be risky in the face of journalism's unforgiving deadlines, of course. Playing hard-to-get can also imply that the practitioner has something to hide. A better stance might be: helpful when asked, but not solicitous.

Understanding each side's role in the relationship is an important first step toward understanding the outcomes, positive or negative, of their interactions. The key assumption in studying interpersonal relations is that "a person's behavior is not based simply upon his private cognitive construction of his world; it is also a function of his *perception* of the orientations held by others around him and of his orientation to them."²¹ Two widely-used theoretical constructs in communications science — role theory and game theory — have been adopted by researchers analysing the media-PR relationship.

Role theory, using the drama metaphor as a framework, suggests that people play parts in life which are determined, to some extent, by the expectations of others. In a drama, to carry the metaphor forward, an actor plays a part from a written script. The actor reacts to others on the stage, to the director, and even to the audience. His or her action is "programmed" by these factors. As a result, the act is quite similar, no matter who fills the role.

Applying role theory to their study of the journalist-PR relationship, Beltz *et al.* suggest that the common educational background and socialization of many journalists and PR practitioners help set the stage for ongoing intergroup conflict.²² There is no protagonist in this drama, only two antagonists. Journalists, justified or not, expect practitioners to be involved in ethical compromises or hidden agendas. Practitioners, on the other hand, perceive themselves to be skilled, honest and informative. They resent the

journalistic caricatures of their profession. Conflict and tension are essential elements in the drama which practitioners and journalists play out on a daily basis.

The only Canadian study to investigate the journalist-practitioner relationship makes reference to another paradigm developed by theorists to help explain the dynamics of communications and interpersonal relations. Conducted by Jean Charron at Laval University in 1989, the study incorporated "game theory" to explore the processes governing the journalist-practitioner relationship — conflict, cooperation and negotiation.²³ The research focused on a group of journalists and public relations professionals in Quebec.

Charron describes the relationship as one in which both sides are engaged in playing a kind of game. Their conduct as players is governed by a set of rules which help to define the game and provide a base from which each player may develop a strategy to win. But there are no formal rules written down somewhere that are recognized by all players. Rather, the rules result from "a recurring situation" in which the resources and constraints of the players "lead to the establishment of more or less defined rules . . . which then rather rigidly define the conduct of the players."²⁴

Like a game, relations between journalists and PR practitioners involve a dimension of conflict and a dimension of cooperation. "Incentives to cooperate follow from the interdependence of the two groups, while the dimension of conflict arises from the struggle to control the distribution of the 'news' by two groups of professional 'communicators'."²⁵ Both sides "negotiate" to address conflict and achieve cooperation. Thus, in terms of influence, neither side has the upper hand. Charron's model shows:

... that neither partner is completely powerless before the other, that there is not a puppeteer (the public relations practitioner) on one side and a puppet (the journalist) on the other. Public relations officers succeed in exerting influence on journalists only to the extent that they yield, to a point, to the journalists' demands ... By complying with the journalists' working requirements, and by striving to meet their needs, public relations practitioners make use of journalistic constraints for their own benefit. The compromise must satisfy both sets of players at least minimally if the relationship is to endure. Relations between public relations practitioners and journalists are maintained and become institutionalized in a game, because both sides want to continue playing.²⁶

A century of hostility from journalists notwithstanding, PR people have always wanted to play the game. Theirs is a dynamically interactive relationship, fraught with conflict and negativity, yes, but tempered through negotiation.

James Grunig, a leading researcher in the field of public relations and communications science, agrees with Charron's assessment that the two groups do not play a "zero-sum" game in which one side always wins or another side must always lose. Grunig's model of "symmetrical public relations" sees both groups competing in a "nonzero-sum game" in which each side can gain "if they play the game right."²⁷

Unfortunately, Grunig argues, the approach predominantly taken in public relations is based on *asymmetrical* presuppositions. In this approach, "organizations and opposing groups use communication to persuade or manipulate publics, governments, or other organizations for the benefit of the organization sponsoring the communication program and not for the benefit of the other group or of both." Put in the language of game theory, "public relations based on asymmetrical presuppositions is a zero-sum game: One organization, group or public gains and the other loses."²⁸

The asymmetrical, winner-takes-all approach, leads "to the state of conflict and manipulation that so often characterizes relations between public relations people and the

media."²⁹ It produces a mindset in which practitioners believe that the fate of their clients and of their careers "live and die with the media." This perceived life-and-death situation, Grunig points out, "leads many practitioners to take desperate means to control what and how the media report about their organizations."³⁰

By contrast, in the "two-way symmetrical model" the two competing groups "interact to manage conflict for the benefit of all."³¹ Public relations, notes Grunig, is most effective when it uses communication strategically to negotiate mutually satisfying solutions to problems. Practitioners are most ineffective when they view the media as some kind of hostile force which must be controlled. Taking that position simply perpetuates the conflict. On the other hand, as Pincus *et al.* put it, Grunig's model of interactive media relations, "characterized by efforts to build long-term relationships, is most likely to serve both journalists' and public relations practitioners' best interests."³²

What researchers, communications theorists and commentators on all sides agree upon is that the journalist/practitioner relationship has always been and remains essentially an adversarial one. The fact is, like so many other groups in a pluralistic society, journalists and public relations practitioners have different goals and conflicting interests. Each side plays a specific role in the information dissemination process.

PR largely concerns itself with image management and the promotion of goodwill among the "publics" an organization serves. Advancing a particular cause or private interest is an accepted, and respected, practice in a democracy. Journalism, on the other hand, focuses on the broader "public interest." News people have a duty to shed light on situations in which private interests conflict with the concerns of the public. This frequently places them at odds with public relations practitioners who serve as advocates for a particular cause.

While the resulting tension can make life uncomfortable for both the journalist and public relations practitioner, it ultimately serves the public's best interests. It helps to ensure the free flow of information and ideas, unfettered by special interests, which is crucial to the smooth functioning of a democratic society. The journalist's caution when it comes to public relations is a healthy thing. As is the practitioner's concern that information about the organization he or she represents be accurately conveyed. As adversaries, the two sides perform a valuable service for the general public. Nevertheless, however natural and healthy this tension between the two groups may be, it has certainly been a constant source of friction throughout their century-old relationship. And likely will remain so in the foreseeable future.

Summary

Researchers and commentators offer various explanations for the attitudes of journalists toward public relations practitioners. The educational process, to some extent, contributes to journalistic misperceptions and stereotypes. The ways in which the media approach the news can be frustrating to the public relations professional. The poor opinions expressed by news media are partly blamed by questionable practices within the PR industry. Just as ethical lapses raise the ire of the press, practitioners who fail to understand media requirements are also a source of friction. The benefits public relations people derive from their relationship with the media are another source of underlying resentment. The free assistance practitioners provide to the news media can also produce a less than welcoming reaction on the part of journalists. The growth and success of the public relations industry, along with the lack of professional licensing and regulation, are among the other factors which contribute to journalistic animosity.

Understanding each side's role in the news dissemination process is key to understanding the outcomes, positive or negative, of the two group's interactions. Two widely-used theoretical constructs in communication science — role theory and game theory — have been adopted by researchers analysing the journalist-PR relationship. Public relations practitioners who approach media relations as a “zero-sum game” perpetuate the state of adversity. In the final analysis, despite professional interdependence, an inherent conflict of interest between journalists and PR practitioners lies at the centre of much of that divides the two groups. Each plays a specific role in news dissemination. The adversarial nature of their relationship can be healthy and beneficial to society.

Notes for Chapter Five

1. Carolyn Cline, "The Image of Public Relations in Mass Comm Texts," *Public Relations Review*, 8:3 (Fall 1982), p. 70.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 71.
3. A content analysis of textbooks used in Canadian colleges and universities would help to measure the influence of the educational process on journalists' attitudes in this country. This is an area in need of further study.
4. J. David Pincus, Tony Rimmer, Robert E. Rayfield and Fritz Cropp, "Newspaper Editor's Perceptions of Public Relations: How Business, News, and Sports Editors Differ," *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 5:1 (1993), p. 37.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 42.
6. Scott Cutlip and Allen Center, *Effective Public Relations* (revised 5th edition). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall Inc., p. 382.
7. *Ibid.*
8. Cf. Peter Habermann, Lillian Lodge Kopenhaver and David L. Martinson, "Sequence Faculty Divided on PR Value, Status and News Orientation," *Journalism Quarterly*, 65:2 (Summer 1988), p. 492-95.
9. Michael Ryan and David L. Martinson, "Journalists and Public Relations Practitioners: Why the Antagonism?" *Journalism Quarterly*, 65:2 (Spring 1988), p. 134.
10. *Ibid.*, pp. 135-36.
11. Like the PRSA's *Code of Ethics*, the Canadian Public Relations Society's *Code of Professional Standards* includes specific ethical guidelines for dealing with the media. The following two sections illustrate the profession's long-standing ethical concerns regarding journalism (words emphasized in italics by CPRS):
 2. *A member shall deal fairly and honestly with the communications media and the public.* Members shall neither propose or act to improperly influence the communications media, government bodies or the legislative process. Improper influence may include conferring gifts, privileges or benefits to influence decisions.
 3. *A member shall practice the highest standards of honesty, accuracy, integrity and truth, and shall not knowingly disseminate false or misleading information.*

12. Bernard Rubin, "Public Relations, Communication Science: The Practical and the Professional," *The American Editor*, 5:2 (July 1961), p. 15.
13. Mr. Bernays passed away just this year, a few months after his 103rd birthday.
14. Michael Ryan and David L. Martinson, *op. cit.*, p. 136.
15. See Anon., "Deliver news, not 'mediocre' messages, PR industry told," *Marketing*, 84 (9 July 1979), p. 29; and Laura Metcalfe, "Improving relations: PR meets the press," *Marketing*, 90 (13 February 1989), p. 8. In the latter meeting, John King, then executive editor of the *Globe and Mail Report on Business*, commenced the proceedings by observing that "PR people don't enjoy a good reputation amongst my colleagues." Nevertheless, along with other senior editors in attendance, he proceeded to outline ways in which the relationship might be improved.
16. Joel Pomerantz, "The Media and Public Relations: Pride and Prejudice," *Public Relations Quarterly*, 34:4 (Winter 1988/89), p. 15.
17. *Ibid.*
18. *Ibid.*, p. 14.
19. *Ibid.*
20. *Ibid.*
21. Jack M. MacLeod and Steven H. Chaffe, "Interpersonal Approaches to Communication Research," *American Behavioral Scientist*, 16:3 (March-April 1973), p. 470.
22. Cf. Andrew Betlz, Albert D. Talbott and Kenneth Starck, "Using Role Theory to Study Cross-Perceptions of Journalists and Public Relations Practitioners," in James E. and Larissa A. Grunig, eds., *Public Relations Research Annual*, Hillsdale: Hove and London, 1989, pp. 132-33.
23. Jean Charron, "Relations Between Journalists and Public Relations Practitioners: Cooperation, Conflict and Negotiation," *Canadian Journal of Communication*, 14:1 (Winter 1989), p. 41-54.
24. *Ibid.* p. 46.
25. *Ibid.* p. 52.
26. *Ibid.* p. 52-53.

27. James E. Grunig, "Theory and Practice of Interactive Media Relations," *Public Relations Quarterly*, 35:3 (Fall 1990), p. 20.
28. *Ibid.*
29. *Ibid.*, p. 23.
30. *Ibid.*
31. *Ibid.*, p. 20.
32. J. David Pincus et al., *op. cit.*, p. 43.

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Appendix A

Covering Letter and Questionnaire Sent to News Editors *

*** The questionnaire was sent to editors on four double-sided pages.**

School of Journalism and Communication
346 St. Patrick's Building
1125 Colonel By Drive
Ottawa, Canada K1S 5B6
Tel (613) 788-7404
Fax (613) 788 6690

June 15, 1995

Dear News Editor:

What kind of attitudes help shape and define the relationship of two important professional groups in Canada — journalists and public relations practitioners? That's the central question of a study I am completing at the School of Journalism and Communication, Carleton University. The study focuses on each group's views of the other's occupational status, news value orientations, and professionalism.

While this relationship has been studied extensively in the United States, little research has been done in Canada. I am writing to solicit your help.

The enclosed questionnaire has been sent to 200 news editors and 200 PR practitioners in Ontario. To the best of my knowledge, no similar survey profiling the attitudes and cross-perceptions of the two groups has ever been conducted in Canada. The results will help fill a major gap in Canadian research on the subject. The findings will be of interest not only to the thousands of professionals in both fields, but also to educators training students for careers in journalism or public relations. I hope to publish the results later this year following the successful defense of my master's thesis, of which this survey forms a major part.

I would be grateful if you could take a few moments of your time in the next day or two to fill out the questionnaire and return it in the enclosed self-addressed, postage-paid envelope. Your doing so would greatly assist this study. Please be assured that your reply will be treated confidentially. All respondents shall remain anonymous.

Your help is appreciated very much.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brian J. Biggar".

Brian Biggar
M.J. Candidate

Office: (613) [REDACTED]

Home: (613) [REDACTED]

cc: Prof. Peter Johansen, Director, School of Journalism and Communication

Opinion Survey: Journalism and Public Relations

Part I:

For each of the following statements, please indicate with a check-mark in the appropriate blank the extent to which you agree or disagree with the statement. Please be sure to check one blank (but not more than one) for each item. There are no "right" or "wrong" answers. The meaning of each point on the scale is:

Strongly Agree		Slightly Agree		Neutral	Slightly Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :

1. Public relations and the news media are partners in the dissemination of information.

Strongly Agree	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	Strongly Disagree
-------------------	---------	---------	---------	---------	---------	---------	---------	----------------------

2. Public relations practitioners are basically competitors with the advertising departments of newspapers or broadcasters.

Strongly Agree	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	Strongly Disagree
-------------------	---------	---------	---------	---------	---------	---------	---------	----------------------

3. Public relations practitioners are basically collaborators with the news staff.

Strongly Agree	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	Strongly Disagree
-------------------	---------	---------	---------	---------	---------	---------	---------	----------------------

4. Public relations practitioners too frequently insist on promoting products, services and other activities which do not legitimately deserve promotion.

Strongly Agree	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	Strongly Disagree
-------------------	---------	---------	---------	---------	---------	---------	---------	----------------------

5. Public relations is a profession equal in status to journalism.

Strongly Agree	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	Strongly Disagree
-------------------	---------	---------	---------	---------	---------	---------	---------	----------------------

(OVER PLEASE)

Strongly		Slightly		Slightly		Strongly
Agree	Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree
_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :

6. Public relations practitioners often act as obstructionists, keeping reporters from the people they really should be seeing.

Strongly							Strongly
Agree	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	Disagree

7. Public relations practitioners have cluttered our channels of communication with pseudo-events and phony phrases that confuse public issues.

Strongly							Strongly
Agree	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	Disagree

8. The abundance of free and easily obtainable information provided by public relations practitioners has caused an increase in the quality of reporting.

Strongly							Strongly
Agree	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	Disagree

9. Public relations material is usually publicity disguised as news.

Strongly							Strongly
Agree	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	Disagree

10. The public relations practitioner does work for newspapers or news broadcasters that would otherwise go undone.

Strongly							Strongly
Agree	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	Disagree

11. Public relations practitioners too often try to deceive news reporters by attaching too much importance to a trivial, uneventful happening.

Strongly							Strongly
Agree	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	Disagree

12. The public relations practitioner serves as an extension of news staff, covering the organization for which the practitioner is responsible.

Strongly							Strongly
Agree	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	Disagree

(NEXT PAGE PLEASE)

Strongly		Slightly		Slightly		Strongly
Agree	Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree
_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :

13. Public relations practitioners are really just errand boys for whomever hires them.

Strongly							Strongly
Agree	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	Disagree

14. Public relations practitioners are people of good sense, good will and good moral character.

Strongly							Strongly
Agree	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	Disagree

15. It is a shame that because of inadequate staff, the news media must depend on information provided by public relations practitioners.

Strongly							Strongly
Agree	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	Disagree

16. Public relations practitioners understand such journalistic problems as meeting deadlines, attracting reader interest and making the best use of space.

Strongly							Strongly
Agree	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	Disagree

17. You can't trust public relations practitioners.

Strongly							Strongly
Agree	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	Disagree

18. Journalists and public relations practitioners carry on a running battle.

Strongly							Strongly
Agree	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	Disagree

19. Public relations practitioners are typically frank and honest.

Strongly							Strongly
Agree	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	Disagree

(OVER PLEASE)

Strongly		Slightly		Slightly		Strongly
Agree	Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree
_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :

20. The massiveness of the impact of public relations makes it harder and harder for the average citizen to know when he or she is being sold a bill of goods.

Strongly							Strongly
Agree	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	Disagree

21. Public relations practitioners help reporters obtain accurate news.

Strongly							Strongly
Agree	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	Disagree

22. Public relations practitioners help reporters obtain complete news.

Strongly							Strongly
Agree	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	Disagree

23. Public relations practitioners help reporters obtain timely news.

Strongly							Strongly
Agree	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	Disagree

24. Public relations practitioners frequently use a shield of words for practices which are not in the public interest.

Strongly							Strongly
Agree	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	Disagree

25. Public relations practitioners are necessary to the production of the daily news as we know it.

Strongly							Strongly
Agree	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	Disagree

26. Public relations is a parasite to the press.

Strongly							Strongly
Agree	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	Disagree

(NEXT PAGE PLEASE)

Strongly		Slightly		Slightly		Strongly
Agree	Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree
_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :

27. Public relations practitioners typically issue news releases or statements on matters of genuine news value.

Strongly							Strongly
Agree	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	Disagree

28. Public relations practitioners typically issue news releases or statements on matters of public interest.

Strongly							Strongly
Agree	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	Disagree

29. The prime function of public relations practitioners is to get free advertising space for the companies and institutions they represent.

Strongly							Strongly
Agree	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	Disagree

Part II:

Rank the following professions/occupations in the order of your respect for each of them, with 1 being the highest in order of respect, 2 next, etc. Please rank order all 16 listed.

____ Architect	____ High school teacher
____ Artist	____ Journalist
____ Banker	____ Lawyer
____ Carpenter	____ Physician
____ Clergyman	____ Police officer
____ Corporate executive	____ Politician
____ Engineer	____ Public relations practitioner
____ Farmer	____ University professor

(OVER PLEASE)

Part III:

Following are eight news values listed in alphabetical order. Rank order these twice. First how you believe journalists rank them, then how you perceive public relations practitioners rank them. Please rank order them 1 through 8, with one being what you believe is the most important news value for that group and eight being the least important.

	Journalists' ranking	Public relations practitioners' ranking
Accuracy	_____	_____
Completeness	_____	_____
Depicts subject in favorable light	_____	_____
Interest to reader	_____	_____
Mechanical / grammatical	_____	_____
News story style	_____	_____
Prompt publication	_____	_____
Usefulness to reader	_____	_____

Part IV:

Obtaining some general demographic information about respondents is an important part of this study. This information will be used for statistical analysis only. It will not be used to identify individuals. Please provide the following information:

1. Indicate the title which best describes the position you hold in journalism (check one only):

____ City Editor ____ Assignment Editor ____ News Editor ____ News Director
Other (please specify) _____

2. Number of people reporting to you in this position: ____

3. Indicate type of organization for which you work (check one only):

____ Daily Newspaper ____ Radio Station ____ Television Station
Other (please specify) _____

(NEXT PAGE PLEASE)

4. Number of years you have worked in journalism: ____
5. Have you ever worked in public relations? ____ Yes ____ No
If yes, state number of years you have worked in public relations: ____
6. Indicate highest level of education obtained (check one only):
____ less than high school ____ high school ____ college diploma or certificate
____ Bachelor's ____ Master's ____ Ph.D.
____ professional accreditation
7. Gender: ____ Male ____ Female
8. Indicate the annual salary range which applies to you (check one only):
____ less than \$25,000 ____ \$25,001 to \$40,000 ____ \$40,001 to \$60,000
____ \$60,001 to \$80,000 ____ \$80,001 to \$100,000 ____ more than \$100,000

Part V:

You are encouraged to add any comments or observations you believe would be of interest to this study. Please provide your comments in the space below or overleaf.

Appendix B

Covering Letter and Questionnaire Sent to Public Relations Practitioners *

*** The questionnaire was sent to practitioners on four double-sided pages.**

School of Journalism and Communication
346 St. Patrick's Building
1125 Colonel By Drive
Ottawa, Canada K1S 5B6
Tel: (613) 788-7404
Fax: (613) 788-6690

June 15, 1995

Dear Public Relations Practitioner:

What kind of attitudes help shape and define the relationship of two important professional groups in Canada — journalists and public relations practitioners? That's the central question of a study I am completing at the School of Journalism and Communication, Carleton University. The study focuses on each group's views of the other's occupational status, news value orientations, and professionalism.

While this relationship has been studied extensively in the United States, little research has been done in Canada. I am writing to solicit your help.

The enclosed questionnaire has been sent to 200 news editors and 200 PR practitioners in Ontario. To the best of my knowledge, no similar survey profiling the attitudes and cross-perceptions of the two groups has ever been conducted in Canada. The results will help fill a major gap in Canadian research on the subject. The findings will be of interest not only to the thousands of professionals in both fields, but also to educators training students for careers in journalism or public relations. I hope to publish the results later this year following the successful defense of my master's thesis, of which this survey forms a major part.

I would be grateful if you could take a few moments of your time in the next day or two to fill out the questionnaire and return it in the enclosed self-addressed, postage-paid envelope. Your doing so would greatly assist this study. Please be assured that your reply will be treated confidentially. All respondents shall remain anonymous.

Your help is appreciated very much.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Brian J. Biggar'.

Brian Biggar
M.J. Candidate
Office: (613) [REDACTED]
Home: (613) [REDACTED]

cc: Prof. Peter Johansen, Director, School of Journalism and Communication

Opinion Survey: Journalism and Public Relations

Part A:

For each of the following statements, please indicate with a check-mark in the appropriate blank the extent to which you agree or disagree with the statement. Please be sure to check one blank (but not more than one) for each item. There are no "right" or "wrong" answers. The meaning of each point on the scale is:

Strongly Agree	Agree	Slightly Agree	Neutral	Slightly Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :

1. Public relations and the news media are partners in the dissemination of information.

Strongly Agree	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	Strongly Disagree
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2. Public relations practitioners are basically competitors with the advertising departments of newspapers or broadcasters.

Strongly Agree	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	Strongly Disagree
-------------------	---------	---------	---------	---------	---------	---------	----------------------

3. Public relations practitioners are basically collaborators with the news staff.

Strongly Agree	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	Strongly Disagree
-------------------	---------	---------	---------	---------	---------	---------	----------------------

4. Public relations practitioners too frequently insist on promoting products, services and other activities which do not legitimately deserve promotion.

Strongly Agree	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	Strongly Disagree
-------------------	---------	---------	---------	---------	---------	---------	----------------------

5. Public relations is a profession equal in status to journalism.

Strongly Agree	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	Strongly Disagree
-------------------	---------	---------	---------	---------	---------	---------	----------------------

(OVER PLEASE)

Strongly Agree	Agree	Slightly Agree	Neutral	Slightly Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :

6. Public relations practitioners often act as obstructionists, keeping reporters from the people they really should be seeing.

Strongly Agree	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	Strongly Disagree
-------------------	---------	---------	---------	---------	---------	---------	---------	----------------------

7. Public relations practitioners have cluttered our channels of communication with pseudo-events and phony phrases that confuse public issues.

Strongly Agree	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	Strongly Disagree
-------------------	---------	---------	---------	---------	---------	---------	---------	----------------------

8. The abundance of free and easily obtainable information provided by public relations practitioners has caused an increase in the quality of reporting.

Strongly Agree	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	Strongly Disagree
-------------------	---------	---------	---------	---------	---------	---------	---------	----------------------

9. Public relations material is usually publicity disguised as news.

Strongly Agree	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	Strongly Disagree
-------------------	---------	---------	---------	---------	---------	---------	---------	----------------------

10. The public relations practitioner does work for newspapers or news broadcasters that would otherwise go undone.

Strongly Agree	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	Strongly Disagree
-------------------	---------	---------	---------	---------	---------	---------	---------	----------------------

11. Public relations practitioners too often try to deceive news reporters by attaching too much importance to a trivial, uneventful happening.

Strongly Agree	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	Strongly Disagree
-------------------	---------	---------	---------	---------	---------	---------	---------	----------------------

12. The public relations practitioner serves as an extension of the news staff, covering the organization for which the practitioner is responsible.

Strongly Agree	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	Strongly Disagree
-------------------	---------	---------	---------	---------	---------	---------	---------	----------------------

(NEXT PAGE PLEASE)

Strongly		Slightly		Slightly		Strongly
Agree	Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree
_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :

13. Public relations practitioners are really just errand boys for whomever hires them.

Strongly							Strongly
Agree	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	Disagree

14. Public relations practitioners are people of good sense, good will and good moral character.

Strongly							Strongly
Agree	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	Disagree

15. It is a shame that because of inadequate staff, the news media must depend on information provided by public relations practitioners.

Strongly							Strongly
Agree	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	Disagree

16. Public relations practitioners understand such journalistic problems as meeting deadlines, attracting reader interest and making the best use of space.

Strongly							Strongly
Agree	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	Disagree

17. You can't trust public relations practitioners.

Strongly							Strongly
Agree	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	Disagree

18. Journalists and public relations practitioners carry on a running battle.

Strongly							Strongly
Agree	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	Disagree

19. Public relations practitioners are typically frank and honest.

Strongly							Strongly
Agree	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	Disagree

(OVER PLEASE)

Strongly		Slightly		Slightly		Strongly
Agree	Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree
_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :

20. The massiveness of the impact of public relations makes it harder and harder for the average citizen to know when he or she is being sold a bill of goods.

Strongly							Strongly
Agree	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	Disagree

21. Public relations practitioners help reporters obtain accurate news.

Strongly							Strongly
Agree	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	Disagree

22. Public relations practitioners help reporters obtain complete news.

Strongly							Strongly
Agree	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	Disagree

23. Public relations practitioners help reporters obtain timely news.

Strongly							Strongly
Agree	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	Disagree

24. Public relations practitioners frequently use a shield of words for practices which are not in the public interest.

Strongly							Strongly
Agree	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	Disagree

25. Public relations practitioners are necessary to the production of the daily news as we know it.

Strongly							Strongly
Agree	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	Disagree

26. Public relations is a parasite to the press.

Strongly							Strongly
Agree	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	Disagree

(NEXT PAGE PLEASE)

Strongly		Slightly		Slightly		Strongly
Agree	Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree
_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :

27. Public relations practitioners typically issue news releases or statements on matters of genuine news value.

Strongly							Strongly
Agree	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	Disagree

28. Public relations practitioners typically issue news releases or statements on matters of public interest.

Strongly							Strongly
Agree	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	Disagree

29. The prime function of public relations practitioners is to get free advertising space for the companies and institutions they represent.

Strongly							Strongly
Agree	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	_____ :	Disagree

Part B:

Rank the following professions/occupations in the order of your respect for each of them, with 1 being the highest in order of respect, 2 next, etc. Please rank order all 16 listed.

____ Architect	____ High school teacher
____ Artist	____ Journalist
____ Banker	____ Lawyer
____ Carpenter	____ Physician
____ Clergyman	____ Police officer
____ Corporate executive	____ Politician
____ Engineer	____ Public relations practitioner
____ Farmer	____ University professor

(OVER PLEASE)

Part C:

Following are eight news values listed in alphabetical order. **Rank order these twice.** First how you believe public relations practitioners rank them, then how you perceive journalists rank them. Please rank order them 1 through 8, with one being what you believe is the most important news value for that group and eight being the least important.

	Public relations practitioners' ranking	Journalists' ranking
Accuracy	_____	_____
Completeness	_____	_____
Depicts subject in favorable light	_____	_____
Interest to reader	_____	_____
Mechanical / grammatical	_____	_____
News story style	_____	_____
Prompt publication	_____	_____
Usefulness to reader	_____	_____

Part D:

Obtaining some general demographic information about respondents is an important part of this study. This information will be used for statistical analysis only. It will not be used to identify individuals. Please provide the following information:

1. Indicate the title which best describes the position you hold in public relations (check one only):

____ President ____ Vice-President ____ Director ____ Manager ____
Supervisor

Other (please specify)

2. Number of people reporting to you in this position: ____

(NEXT PAGE PLEASE)

3. Indicate type of organization for which you work (check one only):

☐ public relations/communications consulting ☐ private sector organization
☐ non-profit organization ☐ public sector organization
 Other (please specify) _____

4. Number of years you have worked in public relations: _____

5. Have you ever worked in journalism? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, state number of years you have worked as a journalist: _____

6. Indicate highest level of education obtained (check one only):

☐ less than high school ☐ high school ☐ college diploma or certificate
☐ Bachelor's ☐ Master's ☐ Ph.D.
☐ professional accreditation

7. Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female

8. Indicate the annual salary range which applies to you (check one only):

☐ less than \$25,000 ☐ \$25,001 to \$40,000 ☐ \$40,001 to \$60,000
☐ \$60,001 to \$80,000 ☐ \$80,001 to \$100,000 ☐ more than \$100,000

Part E:

You are encouraged to add any comments or observations you believe would be of interest to this study. Please provide your comments in the space below or overleaf.

END

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FIN