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## An Analytical Survey of Public Relations as Perceived by Public Relations Practitioners and Journalists

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AN ANALYTICAL SURVEY OF PUBLIC RELATIONS AS PERCEIVED  
BY PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTITIONERS AND JOURNALISTS

A Thesis  
Presented to the  
Department of Communication  
and the  
Faculty of the Graduate College  
University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts  
University of Nebraska at Omaha

By  
Wayne R. Johnson  
August, 1980

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THESIS ACCEPTANCE

Accepted for the faculty of the Graduate College,  
University of Nebraska, in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree Master of Arts, University of  
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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Estimates of the portion of a daily newspaper having public relations as a source range from 25 to 80 percent.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, one researcher observed that "the daily newspaper and wire services have become dependent upon press relations material to such a degree that, more often than not, at least 50 percent of news copy emerges from the practice of public relations."<sup>2</sup> While no figures could be found estimating the amount of radio and television news originating from public relations sources, these figures are indicative of the major role played by public relations sources in providing the information that the public ingests as news.

Though public relations is frequently credited with playing this major role in the dissemination of news, a difference of opinion toward the public relations role is apparent between public relations practitioners and journalists. Does this difference of opinion merely reflect the journalistic adversary tradition? This is not likely, for, as Sachsman noted, the adversary relationship does not seem to be evident in the day-to-day process of reporting an important issue.<sup>3</sup> Is this difference of opinion between public relations practitioners and journalists, then, a result of different concepts toward the role public relations plays

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<sup>1</sup> W.H. Chase, "Nothing Just Happens, Somebody Makes it Happen," Public Relations Journal, 18, 1962, pp. 5-11.

<sup>2</sup> C.S. Steinberg, "Public Relations as Mass Communication," Public Relations Journal, 17, 1971, pp. 13-14.

<sup>3</sup> Donald B. Sachsman, "Public Relations Influence on Coverage of Environment in San Francisco Area," Journalism Quarterly, 53, 1976, pp. 54-60.



or should play in the flow of information ? Is it a matter of occupational status ? What are the judgments of journalists towards public relations practices and practitioners, and of public relations practitioners toward themselves and their own role ? These are some of the questions this research set out to respond to. The results will enable members of the public relations and journalism professions in Omaha to achieve a greater understanding of how each perceives the role and function of public relations.

### Definitions of Terms

Public Relations. A type of organizational behavior in which the organization communicates with an external public.<sup>4</sup>

Public Relations Practitioner. A person currently employed by a public relations firm or in a public relations/public information department of any business or organization.

Print Journalist. A person currently employed by a newspaper or magazine in either a reportorial or editorial position.

Broadcast Journalist. A person currently employed by a radio or television station in either a reportorial or editorial position.

### Survey of Literature

#### Historical Overview

Commentary on public relations and the news media began at the beginning of the 1900s and has continued non-stop to present. Aronoff noted, however, that "little progress has been made" in bridging the

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<sup>4</sup> James E. Grunig, "Toward a Multi-Purpose Public Relations Theory," Public Relations Journal, 31, 1975, pp. 12-15.

gap between the two.<sup>5</sup> A brief examination of the public relations-news media discussion reveals, for example, that in 1908 Kimball expressed his disappointment about the loss of good but underpaid newspapermen to the publicity field. The same complaints are still heard today.<sup>6</sup>

In a 1922 debate, Brown condemned publicity as a "menace to journalism"<sup>7</sup> whereas Brownell offered the ethics of publicity in defense.<sup>8</sup> The debate continues today. Dickey revealed the "truth about newspapers" in 1924 by examining the extent to which newspapers were influenced by outside forces,<sup>9</sup> but Cunliffe made "the case for publicity" in 1925.<sup>10</sup> The publicity-news media debate continued to expand, and by 1930 Bixler predicted a "journalistic Little Big Horn," with reporters making a valiant "last stand" against the onrushing hordes of savage press agents.<sup>11</sup>

Of a more recent nature, such publications as Atlantic Monthly and Esquire have furthered the debate by publishing such items as Packard's 1958 assertion that public relations is a bad influence<sup>12</sup> and Harrington's

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<sup>5</sup> Craig E. Aronoff, "A Newspaper Without Walls: A Field Study of Journalistic Attitudes, Decision-Making Behavior, and Interorganizational Communication Patterns," unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Texas-Austin, 1975, p. 11.

<sup>6</sup> A.R. Kimball, "Profession of a Publicist," Atlantic Monthly, 92, 1903, pp. 804-811.

<sup>7</sup> R.L. Brown, "Menace to Journalism," North American Review, 214, 1921, pp. 610-618.

<sup>8</sup> A. Brownell, "Publicity and Its Ethics," North American Review, 215, 1922, pp. 188-196.

<sup>9</sup> C.C. Dickey, "The Truth About Newspapers, III: Press Agents and Propaganda," World Week, 49, 1924, pp. 35-46.

<sup>10</sup> J.W. Cunliffe, "The Case for Publicity," Journalism Bulletin, 2, 125, pp. 23-28.

<sup>11</sup> P.H. Bixler, "The Reporter's Last Stand," North American Review, 229, 1930, pp. 113-118.

<sup>12</sup> Vance Packard, "Public Relations, Good or Bad?" Atlantic Monthly, 201, 1958, pp. 53-57.

accusation of public relations practitioners as "truth arrangers," "image merchants," and "deception for hire."<sup>13</sup> More recently still, CBS television's highly lauded revelation of the expenditure of public funds for manipulative public relations in "The Selling of the Pentagon" (1971) rekindled the flames.

A 1979 New York Times editorial noted that the public relations label has evolved from "press agent" and "publicist" to "PR," all of them implying "well, exaggeration." The editorial noted, "Even public affairs seems to have lost prestige and gained tarnish." After listing a series of bureaucratic titles for information management and propaganda used by government agencies, the Times concluded, "Now that's PR."<sup>14</sup>

Though public relations has been faced with sharp criticism throughout its history, the practice is not without its defenders. "The essentiality of public relations," Cutlip and Center observed, "is beyond debate in a world bound together by interdependence and swift communications, yet split by recurring crises of change and confrontation." They continued by noting that public relations thinking has served to deepen the sense of social responsibility in our public enterprises. "Public relations has improved the communications required in our society,"<sup>15</sup> they concluded.

Despite such defenses, however, most of the literature dealing with public relations seems to indicate a perception on the part of the profession of generally negative attitudes toward itself. Much of the literature

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<sup>13</sup>A.Harrington, "The Self-Deceivers," Esquire, 67, 1959,pp. 59-63.

<sup>14</sup>"In Media's Rays," New York Times, March 13, 1979,p. 30.

<sup>15</sup>Scott M. Cutlip and Allen H. Center, "Effective Public Relations," (4th Edition) Englewood Cliffs, N.J. : Prentice Hall, Inc., 1971,pp. 2-3.

examining the relationship between public relations practitioners and journalists, written from the perspective of the former, has generally been defensive in tone and conciliatory in content, tending to justify and explain the purpose and existence of public relations.<sup>16</sup> Despite this apparent awareness of negative attitudes, however, or perhaps because of it, few attempts have been made to empirically describe and measure them.

### The Lack of Research

The lack of empirical research focusing on the interaction between public relations and the news media is surprising for a number of reasons. Aronoff, for example, noted that efforts to influence the media through public relations cost industry, government, and other organizations millions of dollars annually. "One would expect," he observed, "more research to be devoted to the relative effectiveness of techniques if only to insure the efficient utilization of this investment."<sup>17</sup>

Aronoff continued by stating that the public's concern over alleged manipulations of the mass media and of public opinion by public relations practitioners is evident from the wide appeal of derogatory fictional treatments of the profession, as well as the harsh treatment in popular magazines and televised documentaries.<sup>18</sup> This sort of public concern often provides a catalyst to spark research, but despite this concern and despite the assertion by Nicoli and Riley in 1972 that the public relations practitioner's livelihood depends upon the decision-making power

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<sup>16</sup> Aronoff, "A Newspaper Without Walls," p.51.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p.51.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p.13.

of editors,<sup>19</sup> behavioral scientists have been moved to few empirical studies.

There have been several explanations put forth for the lack of research in the public relations field. For example, after finding that only 63 out of 4,141 items in the second edition of the Public Relations Bibliography reported research or theory, Grunig noted:

Academic researchers and (public relations) practitioners generally find it difficult to bridge the gap between them so that academics can get ideas from practitioners on what needs to be researched and practitioners<sup>20</sup> can apply the research done by academics.

Another possible reason for the paucity of empirical research is that since public relations became generally accepted as an organizational function, it has been considered largely as an area which could not be evaluated on a cost-effective basis. Such an attitude may tend to eliminate a motivation for research.

An understanding of the interaction between public relations and the news media would seem important, at least, to workers in the media themselves. In 1963 Schabecker found almost half of the local news items in Milwaukee's daily newspapers to be of public relations origin.<sup>21</sup> As noted earlier, figures similar to Schabecker's have been repeatedly cited.

<sup>19</sup> R.R. Nicoli and S.G. Riley, "The Gatekeeping Function From the Point of View of the PR Man," Journalism Quarterly, 49, 1972, pp. 371-373.

<sup>20</sup> James E. Grunig, "The Status of Public Relations Research," unpublished paper presented to the Public Relations Division, Association for Education in Journalism Annual Convention, Seattle, Washington, August, 1978, p. 2.

<sup>21</sup> W. Schabecker, "Public Relations and the News Media: A Study of Selection and Utilization by Representative Sources," unpublished masters thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1963.

Grunig and Hickson found in 1976 that most of the research systematically testing principles of public relations or designed to build and test theory was done by researchers outside of the public relations field; such research was, in fact, generally only peripherally related to public relations practices, the authors reported. They also found most theses and dissertations on public relations to be either pure description or prescription:

The most overworked masters thesis topics seem to be surveys of practitioners to determine which university courses had been most useful to them or asking for descriptions of the public relations program in a simple organization. The most overworked dissertation topics -- particularly in education -- were descriptions of how school districts carry out public relations programs or presentations of a model public relations program for a given school district. <sup>22</sup>

Other findings by Grunig and Hickson included few course descriptions indicating that readings from public relations research were assigned or taught and the "unfortunate" conclusion that existing Ph.D. programs were turning out few new public relations researchers. <sup>23</sup>

In placing public relations research into perspective, Aronoff divided the sources of a journalistic organization's informational input into three categories: that which newspeople gather themselves; that which comes from "across the wire" (i.e., from AP, UPI, or syndicated materials); and that which is given to the journalistic organization by self-interested third parties (i.e., amateur or professional public relations practitioners and public information officers), most commonly in the form of news releases. <sup>24</sup> Aronoff stated that, while

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<sup>22</sup>James E. Grunig and Ronald H. Hickson, "An Evaluation of Academic Research in Public Relations," Public Relations Review, 2 Spring 1976, pp. 31-43.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid

<sup>24</sup>Aronoff, "A Newspaper Without Walls," p. 7.

the quantity of research devoted to information gathered by journalists or judged as it comes across the wire is "disappointing," research dealing with decision-making in relation to the third major source of input, public relations, is virtually non-existent. Instead, he concluded, the literature concerning the interaction between public relations and the news media consists primarily of "anecdote, 'how-to' articles, low level philosophical discussion, and sometimes conflicting expert opinion" (most of which is found in trade publications such as Public Relations Journal).<sup>25</sup>

While all of this material suggests the need for a comprehensive study of public relations, the media, and society, such a task is beyond the capacity of a single Master's thesis. The problem can be narrowed, however, by selecting a crucial aspect of the interaction process constantly operating between public relations and the news media: the role that the two groups perceive public relations as playing in the flow of information in the mass media.

### Related Research

Hovland and Weiss were among the first to recognize the importance of attitudes held by an audience toward an information source in relation to communication effectiveness. They found in 1951 that an individual's attitudes toward other individuals, groups, or organizations will influence the way the objects of those attitudes are perceived. In addition, Hovland and Weiss concluded that those perceptions are related to behaviors taken in relation to those objects.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Aronoff, "A Newspaper Without Walls," p. 10.

<sup>26</sup>C.I. Hovland and W. Weiss, "The Influence of Source Credibility on Communication Effectiveness," Public Opinion Quarterly, 15, 1951, pp. 635-650.

Frequently the public relations practitioners-journalist relationship is viewed as one of communicator to audience, often referred to in public relations textbooks as "the press as a public." It is not difficult to recognize, then, the importance of attitudes in this area. Brown observed that an attitude always has a focus and, when that focus is known to many, that attitude can be used by the person for a comparative characterization of many persons who are the object of that attitude. He concluded that generalizations can be made about how persons<sup>27</sup> will behave toward the focus of the attitude.

Aronoff applied Brown's observations to the relationship between journalists and public relations practitioners and concluded that, for journalists, public relations is a focus for attitudes:

Of course, depending on the experience of any given journalist, (his or her) attitudes will vary and will not necessarily be applied consistently to all public relations practitioners. However, certain generalizations can be made concerning journalists' predispositions toward public relations and these predispositions can be seen as one of the factors influencing journalists' responses to information offered by public relations practitioners.<sup>28</sup>

The existence of the public relations profession rests on the assumption that positive attitudes contribute to favorable behavior toward individuals, products, or organizations. As Aronoff observed, it is the business of public relations to promote good will and favorable attitudes. He concluded that it is particularly interesting to measure attitudes toward the public relations profession itself.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Roger Brown, Social Psychology (New York: The Free Press, 1965) p.420.

<sup>28</sup> Aronoff, "A Newspaper Without Walls," p.51.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, p.51.



Katz and Kahn dealt specifically with the psychological aspects of individual decision-making in organizations. In particular, they examined the effects of the norms of sub-groups on values and frames of reference of group members and how an individual's position in organizational space will affect knowledge, experience, attitudes and judgment. In addition, Katz and Kahn examined identification with the norms, values, and status of reference groups outside of the organization in which the decision maker operates.<sup>30</sup>

The Katz and Kahn study is particularly relevant to studies showing that journalists strongly identify with their profession as a reference group and view public relations as a distinctly separate, lower status group with values toward news that are very different from their own. A description of the relationship between journalism and public relations in terms of the attitudes members of each profession hold toward each other would provide an important understanding of the operation of the news media organization sub-system which processes public relations input.<sup>31</sup>

In 1961, Feldman queried city editors and public relations practitioners throughout the country and found that "the city editor has a concept which is different from the concept the public relations man has of himself." While the public relations practitioner almost unanimously responded to Feldman's survey in a manner favorable to himself, the city editors' responses were mixed and frequently negative.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>D. Katz and R. Kahn, The Social Psychology of Organizations, (New York: John Wiley and Sons) 1966, p. 65.

<sup>31</sup>Aronoff, "A Newspaper Without Walls," p. 19.

<sup>32</sup>L. Feldman, "The Public Relations Man as City Editors See Him," Quill, 49, 1961, pp. 16-18.

Only one study surfaced that examined several different news media (the others were limited only to the public relations-newspaper journalist relationships). In 1965 Fisher surveyed 26 Chicago media editors. In his conclusions Fisher noted:

Gatekeepers in the media involved in this study appear to hold conflicting attitudes toward public relations and public relations practitioners. The lack of firm agreement by the news media is reflected in praise of public relations on one hand and criticism on the other. Gatekeepers believe the practitioner is generally competent in his field and has an adequate sense of news values but is often ignorant of the media's editorial requirements.<sup>33</sup>

In 1975 Aronoff published the results of a survey of the Austin, Texas, American Statesman editorial staff. His findings "reflected conflicting and mixed attitudes towards public relations practitioners, similar to those found by Feldman, but less laudatory than those found by Fisher."<sup>34</sup> By limiting his research only to newspapers, however (as did Feldman), Aronoff left a substantial gap in his findings. This researcher takes issue with Aronoff's assertion that "while public relations uses and affects all media of mass communication, it remains newspaper oriented."<sup>35</sup> Aronoff based this claim on Cutlip and Center's observation, "When a person thinks of publicity, he almost instinctively thinks of the newspaper,"<sup>36</sup> and Harlow's somewhat dated assertion that "newspapers

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<sup>33</sup>E. Fisher, "The Public Relations Wire Service and Selected Chicago News Media," unpublished Master's thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1965.

<sup>34</sup>Aronoff, "A Newspaper Without Walls," p.53.

<sup>35</sup>Aronoff, "A Newspaper Without Walls," p.16.

<sup>36</sup>Cutlip and Center, Effective Public Relations.

are the standard and traditional channel for conveying messages to the public."<sup>37</sup> In an era influenced so heavily by the electronic media, broadcast journalism must be included in such research.

Results from studies such as Aronoff's are generally applicable in that they provide insights into journalists' predispositions toward public relations material, as discussed earlier in this chapter. While the majority of journalists in Aronoff's survey agreed that "public relations and the press are partners in the dissemination of information," they strongly disagreed with the notion that "public relations is a profession equal to that of (newspaper) journalism." In addition, while almost half of Aronoff's respondents agreed that "the public relations practitioner does work for a newspaper that would otherwise go undone," a large majority of journalists felt that "public relations practitioners often act as obstructionists, keeping reporters from people they really should be seeing."<sup>38</sup>

The results of the study seem to present a clear indication that journalists' opinions (as represented by the Aronoff sample) recognize the dependency of modern newspapers on the public relations function, but at the same time criticize what are considered standard public relations practices. In general, journalists' judgments toward public relations were quite negative, while the public relations practitioners responding to Aronoff's survey contrasted sharply with these evaluations, holding both public relations practitioners and practices in almost unanimous high regard.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> R.F. Harlow and M.M. Black, Practical Public Relations (New York: Harper and Brothers) 1952, p. 290.

<sup>38</sup> Aronoff, "A Newspaper Without Walls," pp. 53-68.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, pp. 53-68.

The results of Aronoff's survey indicate that the status differences between newspaper journalists and public relations practitioners, at least from the journalists' point of view, are extreme. Other findings in the study, however, suggest that a bi-level status might be operating to influence the rankings. For instance, even though Aronoff found that more than 80 percent of the journalists responded to some items in a way that would indicate perceptions of a competitive relationship, at the same time almost half responded to other items in a way that suggests they perceive the relationship as a cooperative one.<sup>40</sup>

In 1976, Jeffers surveyed 96 newspaper journalists and public relations practitioners in five Ohio cities. Jeffers' study examined the relative status of news and public relations professionals, and concluded that both journalists and public relations practitioners consider their relationship to be a cooperative one, though practitioners seemed to believe this to a greater degree than journalists. The researcher concluded that this provided additional support for the contention that this important journalist-source relationship is not an adversary one as suggested by conventional journalistic wisdom.<sup>41</sup>

### Summary

While there is no lack of material available pertaining to the "how to" aspects of public relations, the lack of empirical research

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<sup>40</sup> Aronoff, "A Newspaper Without Walls," p.59.

<sup>41</sup> Donald W. Jeffers, "Performance Expectations as a Measure of Relative Status of News and PR People," Journalism Quarterly, Summer, 1977, pp. 299-306.

in this particular area is astounding. The immense impact made by public relations in the area known as "news," however, makes empirical research on this topic a necessity. Only four studies could be found directly relating to the attitudes and the relationship between journalists and public relations practitioners. Two of these studies are now dated (Feldman, 1961, and Fisher, 1966) and are therefore worth re-examining, since a great many changes have occurred in the news-related professions over the past 13 years. Finally, both the Aronoff and Jeffers studies failed to include non-newspaper journalists in their samples.

## CHAPTER II

### RESEARCH PROBLEM AND DESIGN

#### Problem

The survey of literature indicated that a difference of opinion toward the public relations role does, indeed, exist between journalists and public relations practitioners. Little empirical research, however, has examined the nature of this difference of opinion. The purpose of this investigation, then, was to examine the journalism-public relations relationship in terms of the attitudes of public relations practitioners and journalists in both the print and broadcast media toward the role played by public relations in the dissemination of news.

#### Research Questions

Four specific questions were posed in this study. They were:

- (1) How do public relations practitioners judge the role they play in the mass media ?
- (2) How do print journalists judge the role of public relations and public relations practitioners in the mass media ?
- (3) How do broadcast journalists judge the role of public relations and public relations practitioners in the mass media ?
- (4) What differences, if any, exist in the judgments of these three groups toward the role of public relations and public relations practitioners in the dissemination of news ?

### Parameters

Because of inherent limitations with survey research, any study which relies solely on questionnaires for its data is limited, not only by the wording of the survey instrument, but also by other factors, including the method of distribution, the survey population (no sampling was done in this research), and the response rate. The principal parameter in this study was that the research was limited to public relations practitioners and journalists currently employed in those occupations and who were also members of the Omaha Press Club. This was the most expedient method available to reach a large number of journalists and public relations practitioners. Estimates revealed that members of the three professions involved in the research -- print journalists, broadcast journalists, and public relations practitioners -- make up almost half of the Omaha Press Club's membership roster. These persons are designated as active members as opposed to associate members, who are not employed in the communications field. Permission was granted to distribute the survey instrument via the mail using the current (October, 1979) mailing list of the Omaha Press Club, greatly simplifying distribution of the questionnaire and permitting efficient distribution to a relatively large survey population.

### Study Design

The design of this research was patterned after the method used in the previously-discussed Ph.D. dissertation of Dr. Craig Aronoff in Austin, Texas, in 1976. The Aronoff study consisted of three sections, only one of which was used in this research. The data collected here,

however, were analyzed to a greater extent than those collected in the comparable section of the Aronoff study. All data used in this research were obtained from the survey instrument distributed to all active members of the Omaha Press Club in October, 1979. The survey instrument consisted of 25 items duplicated from the Aronoff study and adapted to include broadcast journalism in the instrument's wording. (See Appendix A for copy of survey). The 25 items were all statements about public relations practices and practitioners, 11 reflecting a positive attitude toward public relations (i.e., "Public relations and the press are partners in the dissemination of information") and 14 reflecting negative attitudes toward public relations (i.e., "Public relations is a parasite to the press"). The statements were deliberately drawn from the relevant literature by Aronoff to reflect traditional opinions, both positive and negative, that have been expressed publicly by journalists and public relations practitioners about the role of public relations.

Subjects were asked to express agreement or disagreement with each statement on a seven-point Lickert-type scale, with mean scores used as a basis for comparison among the three groups. This survey instrument had already been tested in the Aronoff study to determine its capacity to reliably and validly discriminate among positive and negative groups through a multiple discrimination analysis. It was further pretested by this researcher on a small sample of six journalists and six public relations practitioners who were not members of the survey population. The instrument was administered personally by the researcher in these pretests and was followed with an interview. No major problems were found with the instrument.

The survey instrument was distributed by mail to all active members of the Omaha Press Club. To maximize the response rate, each questionnaire was accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope and a cover



letter from the researcher's committee chairman, a prominent member of the survey population (see Appendix B). Of 718 questionnaires sent out, 266 were returned for a response rate of slightly more than 37 percent. Seventy-one of the respondents identified their occupation as "print journalist," 32 as "broadcast journalist," and 88 as "public relations practitioner." The remainder of the respondents (75) were predominantly retired communicators, journalism and/or public relations educators, and persons employed in occupations peripheral to those of journalism and public relations (i.e. advertising, audio-visual, publishing, etc.). Because of the heterogeneous nature of these additional respondents, they were not included in the research report. Consequently, the effective response rate was 26 percent.

Though all of the respondents were members of the Omaha Press Club, not all were employed in the Omaha area. Some respondents are now employed in other cities throughout the nation, but retain their membership in the Omaha Press Club. When these respondents met the criteria for admissability of data (i.e., currently employed as either a print or broadcast journalist or public relations practitioner), their responses were included. The data were analyzed by oneway analysis of variance and follow-up Neumann-Keuls test.

### The Research Setting

Data for this study were collected from entirely within the membership roster of the Omaha Press Club. The majority of this organization's active members live in the Omaha area and are employed in the various communication-related occupations in the metropolitan area.

The city of Omaha, with an estimated population of 311,000, is approximately the 35th largest city in the United States.<sup>42</sup> Major corporate concerns include Mutual of Omaha (the largest of more than ten insurance companies headquartered in Omaha), Union Pacific Railroad, and Northern Natural Gas. Omaha also has five colleges in the greater metropolitan area, all of which generate vast quantities of public information material. With 33 banks, 15 savings and loans, 12 hospitals, four television stations, two newspapers, and 15 radio stations, Omaha is also a financial, communications, and medical center for the state of Nebraska and a large part of the midwest.

The Omaha World-Herald is a daily newspaper with an average daily circulation of 235,000 for morning and evening editions (combined on Saturdays and Sundays). It has no direct competition in its local market area. The newspaper's editorial staff consists of approximately 150 people who actually process copy.<sup>43</sup>

The Omaha Sun newspapers consists of seven weekly editions with an average circulation of approximately 45,000. The Sun's editorial staff consists of about 14 people.

The three Omaha commercial television stations are KMTV (NBC affiliate), WOUT (CBS affiliate), and KETV (ABC affiliate). According to news department spokespersons, KMTV's news staff consists of

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<sup>42</sup>Preliminary 1980 Census figures.

<sup>43</sup>All figures from August, 1979.

approximately 27 people, WOWT's of 27 people, and KETV's of 33 people.

The commercial radio stations with major news operations in the Omaha area are KFAB, with a six-person news staff, KOIL with a three-person staff, KYNN with a five-person staff, and WOW with a seven-person staff, according to news department spokespersons.

### CHAPTER III

#### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results of the survey of members of the Omaha Press Club (see questionnaire, Appendix A) reflected mixed and sometimes contradictory responses, similar to but less polarized than those found in earlier research (see Table I, Master Table of Means and Standard Deviations).<sup>44</sup> As in Aronoff's survey, the questionnaire was found to be highly reliable (Alpha = .9542 for Aronoff, Alpha = .9099 in this study). On 23 of 25 items, broadcast journalists and print journalists tended to agree with each other. Their responses differed significantly from the responses of the public relations practitioners, as revealed by a one-way analysis of variance and follow-up Neumann-Keuls test.

On the two items where this dichotomy between broadcast/print journalists and public relations practitioners was not present, broadcast journalists and public relations practitioners grouped in the Neumann-Keuls analysis and their responses were different (more negative to the statements) than the responses of print journalists. These were item #17 ("Journalists and public relations practitioners carry on a running battle,") and item #23 ("Public relations is a parasite to the press.")

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<sup>44</sup>See Appendices C,D,E and F for specific item-choice distributions.

TABLE I

## MASTER TABLE OF MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS

Variable	Print Journalists		Broadcast Journalists		Public Relations Practitioners	
Public relations and the press are partners in the dissemination of information.	001	3.437 2.041	3.226 1.961	1.977 1.587		
Public relations practitioners too frequently insist on promoting products, services, and other activities which do not legitimately deserve promotion.	002	2.676 1.593	2.750 1.437	3.966 2.020		
Public relations is a profession equal in status to journalism.	003	4.886 2.033	4.290 2.312	1.816 1.581		
Public relations practitioners often act as obstructionists, keeping reporters from the people they really should be seeing.	004	3.577 1.910	3.125 1.680	4.750 1.996		
Public relations practitioners have cluttered our channels of communication with pseudo-events and phoney phrases that confuse public issues.	005	3.394 1.801	3.250 1.884	4.943 2.031		
The abundance of free and easily obtainable information provided by public relations practitioners has caused an increase in the quality of reporting.	006	4.141 1.959	3.906 1.785	2.568 1.617		
Public relations material is usually publicity disguised as news.	007	3.000 1.724	2.781 1.453	5.034 1.884		

\*Means are listed first 1.0 = strongly agree  
7.0 = strongly disagree  
Standard deviations are listed second.

TABLE I (Continued)

Variable		Print		Broadcast		Public Relations	
		Journalists	Journalists	Journalists	Practitioners		
The public relations practitioner does work for the journalist that would otherwise go undone.	008	3.845	3.875	2.625			
		1.961	1.913	1.731			
Public relations practitioners too often try to deceive the press by attaching too much importance to a trivial and uneventful happening.	009	3.257	3.281	4.807			
		1.603	1.529	2.033			
The public relations practitioner serves as an extension to the news staff, covering the organization for which he is responsible.	010	4.225	4.250	2.591			
		2.133	2.243	1.836			
Public relations practitioners are really just errand boys in the dissemination of information.	011	4.577	4.438	6.193			
		1.954	1.848	1.508			
Public relations practitioners and the press are competitors in the dissemination of information.	012	5.500	5.875	6.182			
		1.808	1.497	1.474			
Public relations practitioners are people of good sense, good will, and good moral character.	013	3.254	3.000	2.489			
		1.471	1.342	1.381			
It is a shame that because of inadequate staffs, the press must depend on information provided by public relations practitioners.	014	4.000	3.844	5.670			
		2.057	2.034	1.617			
Public relations practitioners understand such	015	3.286	2.844	1.705			
		1.889	1.780	1.666			

TABLE I (Continued)

	Variable	Print Journalists	Broadcast Journalists	Public Relations Practitioners
You can't trust public relations practitioners.	016	4.900 1.746	5.219 1.581	6.643 1.143
Journalists and public relations practitioners carry on a running battle.	017	4.671 1.816	5.688 1.595	5.489 1.695
Public relations officers are typically frank and honest.	018	4.507 1.739	3.688 1.595	2.885 1.595
The massiveness of the impact of public relations makes it harder and harder for the average citizen to know when they are being sold a bill of goods.	019	2.957 1.574	2.563 1.413	4.705 2.129
Public relations practitioners help reporters obtain accurate, complete, and timely news.	020	3.479 1.646	3.188 1.401	1.807 1.071
Public relations practitioners frequently use a shield of words for practices which are not in the public interest.	021	3.371 1.543	3.438 1.366	5.125 1.874
Public relations practitioners are necessary to the production of daily news as we know it.	022	4.169 2.077	3.625 1.792	2.352 1.598
Public relations is a parasite to the press.	023	5.197 1.778	6.156 1.019	6.460 1.319
Public relations practitioners typically issue news releases or statements on matters of genuine news value and public interest.	024	3.803 1.627	3.313 1.575	2.102 1.269
The prime function of public relations is to get free advertising space for the companies and institutions they represent.	025	3.845 1.983	3.625 1.897	5.966 1.685

There were indications that journalists in both media recognize an important role played by public relations in the dissemination of news. For example, 70 percent of the print journalists and 69 percent of the broadcast journalists agreed that "public relations and the press are partners in the dissemination of information." (See Table II). Similarly, 58 percent of the print journalists and 56 percent of the broadcast journalists agreed that "the public relations practitioner does work for the journalist that would otherwise go undone." Also supporting the conclusion that journalists recognize an important role played by public relations practitioners in the dissemination of news is the fact that 70 percent of the print journalists and 78 percent of the broadcast journalists agreed that "public relations practitioners help reporters obtain accurate, complete and timely news."

That these attitudes were mixed, however, can be shown by the fact that 79 percent of the print journalists and 84 percent of the broadcast journalists agreed that "public relations practitioners too frequently insist on promoting products, services, and other activities which do not legitimately deserve promotion." Further, 69 percent of the print journalists and 81 percent of the broadcast journalists agreed that "public relations material is usually publicity disguised as news." Thus, while the results of the survey indicate that the journalists participating in this study recognize the importance of public relations in disseminating news, at the same time they express disapproval of what appear to be standard public relations practices.



TABLE II  
JOURNALISTS ATTITUDES TOWARD PUBLIC RELATIONS

Statement	*Agree (Percentage) Print Broadcast	**Disagree (Percentage) Print Broadcast
1. Public relations and the press are partners in the dissemination of information.	70 69	29 31
2. Public relations practitioners too frequently insist on promoting products, services, and other activities which do not legitimately deserve promotion.	79 84	20 15
3. Public relations is a profession equal in status to journalism.	30 39	64 55
4. Public relations practitioners often act as obstructionists, keeping reporters from the people they really should be seeing.	61 72	35 25
5. Public relations practitioners have cluttered our channels of communication with pseudo-events and phoney phrases that confuse public issues.	65 72	30 25
6. The abundance of free and easily obtainable information provided by public relations practitioners has caused an increase in the quality of reporting.	44 47	44 43
7. Public relations material is usually publicity disguised as news.	69 81	29 19
8. The public relations practitioner does work for the journalist that would otherwise go undone.	58 56	36 37

\* Agree = A response of 1, 2 or 3  
\*\* Disagree = A response of 5, 6 or 7

TABLE II (Continued)

Statement	Agree (Percentage) Print	Agree (Percentage) Broadcast	Disagree (Percentage) Print	Disagree (Percentage) Broadcast
9. Public relations practitioners too often try to deceive the press by attaching too much importance to a trivial and uneventful happening.	67	71	26	25
10. The public relations practitioner serves as an extension to the news staff, covering the organization for which he is responsible.	49	51	48	49
11. Public relations practitioners are really just errand boys for whoever hires them.	36	40	58	51
12. Public relations practitioners and the press are competitors in the dissemination of information.	16	15	79	84
13. Public relations practitioners are people of good sense, good will, and good moral character.	48	55	14	3
14. It is a shame that because of inadequate staffs, the press must depend on information provided by public relations practitioners.	48	48	42	35
15. Public relations practitioners understand such journalistic problems as meeting deadlines, attracting audience interest, and making the best use of space or time.	67	75	30	18
16. You can't trust public relations practitioners.	23	19	64	81
17. Journalists and public relations practitioners carry on a running battle.	36	19	61	72

TABLE II (Continued)

Statement	Agree (Percentage) Print Broadcast	Disagree (Percentage) Print Broadcast
18. Public relations practitioners are typically frank and honest.	35 50	53 41
19. The massiveness of the impact of public relations makes it harder and harder for the average citizen to know when they are being sold a bill of goods.	75 88	18 9
20. Public relations practitioners help reporters obtain accurate, complete, and timely news.	70 78	27 18
21. Public relations practitioners frequently use a shield of words for practices which are not in the public interest.	56 60	29 22
22. Public relations practitioners are necessary to the production of daily news as we know it.	45 62	44 35
23. Public relations is a parasite to the press.	21 0	69 87
24. Public relations practitioners typically issue news releases or statements on matters of genuine news value and public interest.	57 63	39 34
25. The prime function of public relations is to get free advertising space for the companies and institutions they represent.	50 63	46 37

If the responses of the journalists reflected mixed judgments toward public relations, the 88 public relations practitioners responding to the survey reflected consistent judgments toward their profession and, in opposition to the journalists, held public relations in almost unanimously high regard (See Table III). On only one item did a majority of public relations practitioners agree with a statement expressing a negative attitude toward their profession. Fifty-six percent of the public relations practitioners agreed with the majority of journalists that "public relations practitioners too frequently insist on promoting products, services, and other activities which do not legitimately deserve promotion." The only other items on which as many as 40 percent of the public relations practitioners indicated negative judgments toward a particular aspect of public relations were: item #4, where 41 percent of the respondents agreed that "public relations practitioners often act as obstructionists, keeping reporters from the people they really should be seeing;" item #9, where 40 percent of the public relations practitioners responding agreed that "public relations practitioners too often try to deceive the press by attaching importance to trivial and uneventful happenings;" and item #19, where 40 percent of the public relations practitioners agreed that "the massiveness of the impact of public relations makes it harder and harder for the average citizen to know when they are being sold a bill of goods," (See Table III).

For the most part, however, public relations practitioners responded consistently in a positive manner toward themselves and their profession. For example, 95 percent of the public relations practitioners agreed with item #15 ("Public relations practitioners understand such journalistic problems as meeting deadlines, attracting audience interest, and making the

best use of space or time") and 96 percent agreed with item #20 ("Public relations practitioners help reporters obtain accurate, complete, and timely news"). The large disparity between the responses of journalists and those of public relations practitioners is, again, in agreement with earlier research (particularly Feldman and Aronoff) as are the generally high positive responses by public relations practitioners about themselves and their profession.

TABLE III

## PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTITIONERS' ATTITUDES TOWARD PUBLIC RELATIONS

Statement	Agree (Percentage)	Disagree (Percentage)
1. Public relations and the press are partners in the dissemination of information.	89	10
2. Public relations practitioners too frequently insist on promoting products, services, and other activities which do not legitimately deserve promotion.	56	43
3. Public relations is a profession equal in status to journalism.	88	9
4. Public relations practitioners often act as obstructionists, keeping reporters from the people they really should be seeing.	41	58
5. Public relations practitioners have cluttered our channels of communication with pseudo-events and phoney phrases that confuse public issues.	33	64
6. The abundance of free and easily obtainable information provided by public relations practitioners has caused an increase in the quality of reporting.	80	17
7. Public relations material is usually publicity disguised as news.	30	65
8. The public relations practitioner does work for the journalist that would otherwise go undone.	80	15
9. Public relations practitioners too often try to deceive the press by attaching too much importance to a trivial and uneventful happening.	40	59

TABLE III (Continued)

Statement	Agree (Percentage)	Disagree (Percentage)
10. The public relations practitioner serves as an extension to the news staff, covering the organization for which he is responsible.	77	20
11. Public relations practitioners are really just errand boys for whoever hires them.	10	90
12. Public relations practitioners and the press are competitors in the dissemination of information.	9	90
13. Public relations practitioners are people of good sense, good will, and good moral character.	72	8
14. It is a shame that because of inadequate staff, the press must depend on information provided by public relations practitioners.	17	79
15. Public relations practitioners understand such journalistic problems as meeting deadlines, attracting audience interest, and making the best use of space or time.	96	4
16. You can't trust public relations practitioners.	4	92
17. Journalists and public relations practitioners carry on a running battle.	18	74
18. Public relations practitioners are typically frank and honest.	69	19

TABLE III (Continued)

Statement	Agree (Percentage)	Disagree (Percentage)
19. The massiveness of the impact of public relations makes it harder and harder for the average citizen to know when he is being sold a bill of goods.	40	56
20. Public relations practitioners help reporters obtain accurate, complete, and timely news.	96	4
21. Public relations practitioners frequently use a shield of words for practices which are not in the public interest.	27	68
22. Public relations practitioners are necessary to the production of daily news as we know it.	85	11
23. Public relations is a parasite to the press.	4	90
24. Public relations practitioners typically issue news releases or statements on matters of genuine news value and public interest.	90	9
25. The prime function of public relations is to get free advertising space for the companies and institutions they represent.	15	85



From multiple discriminant analysis, the most discriminating issues related both to the professionalism of public relations practitioners and to the news value of the materials they produce (see Table IV). For example, item #3 ("Public relations is a profession equal in status to journalism"), and item #7 ("Public relations material is usually publicity disguised as news") were the most discriminating individual items in terms of standardized canonical discriminant function coefficients. Nearly two-thirds of the print journalists (64 percent) and a majority of the broadcast journalists (55 percent) disagreed with item #3, while 88 percent of the public relations practitioners agreed, 68 percent agreed strongly. Similarly, 69 percent of the print journalists and 81 percent of the broadcast journalists agreed with #7, but two-thirds of the public relations practitioners disagreed. Item #14 ("It is a shame that because of inadequate staffs, the press must depend on information provided by public relations practitioners") and #15 ("Public relations practitioners understand such journalistic problems as meeting deadlines, attracting audience interest, and making the best use of space or time") were similarly but not as strongly discriminated in terms of standardized canonical discriminant function coefficients.

TABLE IV  
SAMPLE OF MULTIPLE DISCRIMINANT RESULTS

	Standardized Canonical Discriminant Function Coefficients	%Agreeing		
		PJ	BJ	PR
3) Public relations is a profession equal in status to journalism.	-0.37114	30	39	88
7) Public relations material is usually publicity disguised as news.	0.3654	69	81	30
14) It is a shame that because of inadequate staffs, the press must depend on information provided by public relations practitioners.	0.21918	48	48	17
15) Public relations practitioners understand such journalistic problems as meeting deadlines, attracting audience interest, and making the best use of space or time.	-0.26184	67	75	96

Analyses of variance by educational background, college degree, years of work experience, and sex produced results that were not significant at the .05 level. An analysis of variance by age, however, produced significant results on two items (See Table V). On item #22 ("Public relations practitioners are necessary to the promotion of daily news as we know it"), the younger respondents tended to agree more strongly than the older respondents. Those respondents over the age of 61 actually disagreed with the statement (mean response: 4.4), while those in the younger age groups agreed. Similarly, on item #25 ("The prime function of public relations is to get free advertising space for the companies and institutions they represent"), those respondents over the age of 61 responded significantly differently from those respondents below 61, agreeing with the statement (mean response: 3.5), while those respondents in the younger age groups disagreed. Aside from a difference of interpretation of "the production of daily news as we know it," these responses may indicate a lessening of the traditional "public relations practitioner as publicity hack" image among younger journalists.

TABLE V  
ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE BY AGE\*

Statement	F ratio	F prob.	Mean Responses by Age*				
			(15-30) N=47	(31-40) N=69	(41-50) N=62	(51-60) N=63	(61-99) N=25
22. Public relations practitioners are necessary to the production of daily news as we know it.	2.755	.0285	1,2 3.1915	1 2.9130	1,2 3.3333	1,2 3.4603	2 4.4000
25. The prime function of public relations is to get free advertising space for the companies and institutions they represent.	2.847	.0245	1,2 4.4468	2 5.1594	1,2 4.5238	1,2 4.6667	1 3.5200

\* 1.0 = strongly agree  
7.0 = strongly disagree

\*\* Means with common subscripts do not differ significantly at the .05 level by Neumann-Keuls analysis

A comparison of means by job title produced one interesting result. (See Table VI). Those respondents identifying their job title as one of public relations management tended to respond more positively toward public relations than did both lower-level public relations practitioners and public relations/marketing personnel. Even though the responses of public relations management were not significantly different from the other two public relations job title groups (lower level employees, i.e., "specialists," public relations writers, photographers, publication editors, etc., and people in public relations marketing, promotion, or publicity positions), the responses of public relations management were clearly more positive toward public relations practices and practitioners on 18 of the 25 items. The reason management responses did not differ significantly from the other title groups can probably be traced to the relatively small cell sizes. No additional patterns could be identified by the comparison of means by job title.

TABLE VI

COMPARISON OF MEANS BY JOB TITLE : PUBLIC RELATIONS\*

Statement	PR Management N=29	PR specialists, editors, writers N=44	PR marketing promotion or publicity N=14
1. Public relations and the press are partners in the dissemination of information.	1.9643	1.8409	2.4286
2. Public relations practitioners too frequently insist on promoting products, services, and other activities which do not legitimately deserve promotion.	3.2857	4.3556	4.0667
3. Public relations is a profession equal in status to journalism.	1.6591	2.000	1.9333
4. Public relations practitioners often act as obstructionists, keeping reporters from the people they really should be seeing.	5.0889	4.3571	4.4667
5. Public relations practitioners have cluttered our channels of communication with pseudo-events and phoney phrases that confuse public issues.	5.2667	4.6429	4.5333

\* 1.0 = strongly agree  
7.0 = strongly disagree

TABLE VI (Continued)

Statement	PR Management	PR specialists, editors, writers	PR marketing promotion or publicity
6. The abundance of free and easily obtainable information provided by public relations practitioners has caused an increase in the quality of reporting.	2.3778	2.7500	2.8000
7. Public relations material is usually publicity disguised as news.	5.5778	4.3214	4.7333
8. The public relations practitioner does work for the journalist that would otherwise go undone.	2.5333	2.9643	2.2667
9. Public relations practitioners too often try to deceive the press by attaching too much importance to a trivial and uneventful happening.	5.0444	4.3571	4.9333
10. The public relations practitioner serves as an extension to the news staff, covering the organization for which he is responsible.	2.4444	2.7500	2.7333
11. Public relations practitioners are really just errand boys for whoever hires them.	6/3778	5.7143	6.5333
12. Public relations practitioners and the press are competitors in the dissemination of information.	6.3556	6.2500	5.5333

TABLE VI (Continued)

Statement	PR Management	PR specialists, editors, writers	PR marketing promotion or publicity
13. Public relations practitioners are people of good sense, good will, and good moral character.	2.0667	3.1429	2.5333
14. It is a shame that because of inadequate staffs, the press must depend on information provided by public relations practitioners.	5.8444	5.5357	5.4000
15. Public relations practitioners understand such journalistic problems as meeting deadlines, attracting audience interest, and making the best use of space or time.	1.6000	2.0714	1.3333
16. You can't trust public relations practitioners.	6.5556	6.1429	6.6667
17. Journalists and public relations practitioners carry on a running battle.	5.4444	5.6071	5.4000
18. Public relations practitioners are typically frank and honest.	2.4545	3.5000	3.0000
19. The massiveness of the impact of public relations makes it harder and harder for the average citizen to know when they are being sold a bill of goods.	5.4667	3.6429	4.4000



TABLE VI (Continued)

Statement	PR Management	PR specialists, editors, writers	PR marketing promotion or publicity
20. Public relations practitioners help reporters obtain accurate, complete, and timely news.	1.6444	2.0714	1.8000
21. Public relations practitioners frequently use a shield of words for practices which are not in the public interest.	5.6889	4.3214	4.9333
22. Public relations practitioners are necessary to the production of daily news as we know it.	2.4222	2.5000	1.8667
23. Public relations is a parasite to the press.	6.4222	6.3929	6.7143
24. Public relations practitioners typically issue news releases or statements on matters of genuine news value and public interest.	1.8444	2.3929	2.3333
25. The prime function of public relations is to get free advertising space for the companies and institutions they represent.	6.2222	5.5714	5.9333

An analysis of variance by employment background resulted in 20 of the 25 items reflecting significant differences at the .05 level. Respondents were asked to identify their employment background in each of the three professions involved in the research. For example, 26 percent of the respondents said they had worked in all three professions: print journalism, broadcast journalism, and public relations; 20 percent said they had experience in both print journalism and public relations; 18 percent of the respondents said their employment background covered print journalism only; 10 percent said public relations only; 10 percent said broadcast journalism and public relations; 8 percent of the respondents said their employment background covered both print and broadcast journalism; and 8 percent said broadcast journalism only.

As might be expected, this procedure revealed that those respondents who have never worked in public relations were almost always more strongly negative toward public relations than those with an employment background in public relations (See Table VII). On 13 of the 20 significant items, those respondents claiming public relations only as their employment background responded most positively toward public relations. On the remaining items, the group claiming employment experience in all three professions responded most positively toward public relations. On every one of the 20 significant items, the group responding most negatively toward public relations did not claim experience in the public relations profession. On 11 of the 20 items, the group responding most negatively to public relations was the group claiming experience in both print and broadcast journalism. On the remaining nine items, the print journalism-only group responded most

negatively toward public relations on five items and the broadcast journalism-only group most strongly against public relations on four items.

TABLE VII

## ONEWAY ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE BY EMPLOYMENT BACKGROUND\*

Statement**	Print Jrnls Only N=48	Broad- cast Jrnls Only N=20	Public Relations Only N=26	Both Print cast Jrnls and PR N=21	Both Print Jrnls and PR N=52	Both broad- cast Jrnls and PR N=27	Print Jrnls, Broadcast Jrnls & PR N=70	F prob	F ratio
1. Public relations and the press are partners in the dissemination of information.	2 3.6875	1,2 3.0500	1 2.4231	1,2 2.9500	1,2 2.6400	1,2 2.5556	1 1.9429	0.0001	4.817
2. Public relations practitioners too frequently insist on promoting products, services, and other activities which do not legitimately deserve promotion.	1 2.8333	1 3.1500	1 3.6538	1 2.7619	1 3.3654	1 2.9630	1 3.7429	0.0951	1.822
3. Public relations is a profession equal in status to journalism.	2 5.2979	2 4.2500	1 1.9615	2 5.3333	1 2.6471	1 2.8889	1 2.5652	0.0000	15.822

\*1 = strongly agree

7 = strongly disagree

\*\*Means with common subscripts do not differ significantly at the .05 level by Neumann-Keuls analysis.

TABLE VII (Continued)

Statement	Print Jrnls Only	Broad-cast Jrnls Only	Public Relations Only	Both Print and Broad-cast Jrnls	Both Print Jrnls and PR	Both broad-cast Jrnls and PR	Print Jrnls, Broadcast Jrnls & PR	F prob	F ratio
4. Public relations practitioners often act as obstructionists, keeping reporters from the people they really should be seeing.	1,2 3.6458	3.3000	1,2 4.6923	2 2.6667	1 4.2692	1,2 4.0370	2 4.6429	0.0005	4.168
5. Public relations practitioners have cluttered our channels of communication with pseudo-events and phoney phrases that confuse public issues.	1,2 3.5000	3.5000	1,2 4.9231	2 2.8095	1 4.4038	1,2 3.4815	2 4.7714	0.0000	5.219
6. The abundance of free and easily obtainable information provided by public relations practitioners has caused an increase in the quality of reporting.	1 4.1458	4.6000	1 3.0000	1 4.3810	1 3.3462	1 3.111	1 3.0429	0.0006	4.095
7. Public relations material is usually publicity disguised as news.	1,2 3.0208	2.9500	1,2 4.8077	3 2.4286	2,3 4.0962	2,3 4.1852	3 4.9571	0.0000	6.813

TABLE VII (Continued)

Statement	Print Jnlsm Only	Broad-cast Jnlsm Only	Public Relations Only	Both Print and Broad-cast Jnlsm and PR	Both Print Jnlsm and PR	Both broad-cast Jnlsm and PR	Print Jnlsm, Broadcast Jnlsm & PR	F prob	F ratio
8. The public relations practitioner does work for the journalist that would otherwise go undone.	2,3 4.1458	3 4.7000	1,2,3 3.4615	1,2,3 3.5714	1,2 3.1154	1,2,3 3.1852	1 2.7714	0.0003	4.403
9. Public relations practitioners too often try to deceive the press by attaching too much importance to a trivial and uneven- tful happening.	1 3.1250	3.6000	1,2 5.3846	3 2.9000	1,2 4.0962	1,2 3.5926	2 4.4714	0.0000	6.331
10. The public relations practitioner serves as an extension to the news staff, covering the organization for which he is responsible.	2 4.4375	4.6000	1,2 2.9231	2 4.4762	1,2 3.3269	1,2 3.0370	1 2.5286	0.0000	6.990
11. Public relations practitioners are really just errand boys for whoever hires them.	1 4.3333	4.3000	1 5.8846	2,3 4.3333	1,2 5.3846	1,2 5.0741	3 6.2143	0.0000	7.478

TABLE VII (Continued)

Statement	Print Jnlsm Only	Broad-cast Jnlsm Only	Public Relations Only	Both Print and Broad-cast Jnlsm	Both Print Jnlsm and PR	Both broad-cast Jnlsm and PR	Print Jnlsm, Broadcast Jnlsm & PR	F prob	F ratio
12. Public relations practitioners and the press are competitors in the dissemination of information.	1 5.2766	1 5.7000	1 6.4231	1 5.5714	1 5.7308	1 5.7407	1 6.1714	0.0499	2.135
13. Public relations practitioners are people of good sense, good will, and good moral character.	1 3.3333	1 2.9000	1 2.6923	1 3.3500	1 2.7692	1 3.1111	1 2.7286	0.2478	1.321
14. It is a shame that because of inadequate staffs, the press must depend in information provided by public relations practitioners.	1 3.8750	1 4.0500	3 5.6923	1 3.8000	1 4.9808	1,2,3 4.5556	2,3 5.3000	0.0001	4.964
15. Public relations practitioners understand such journalistic problems as meeting deadlines, attracting audience interest, and making the best use of space or time.	3 3.5106	1,2,3 2.8000	1,2 1.9615	2,3 3.0952	1,2 2.1731	1,2 2.4074	1 1.8000	0.0000	7.229

TABLE VII (Continued)

Statement	Print Jrnls Only	Broad- cast Jrnls Only	Public Relations Only	Both Print and Broad- cast Jrnls and PR	Both broad- cast Jrnls and PR	Print Jrnls, Broadcast Jrnls & PR	F prob	F ratio
16. You can't trust public relations practitioners.	1 4.8125	1,2 5.5000	2 6.2308	1,2 5.0000	2 5.8077	2 6.1304	0.0002	4.664
17. Journalists and public relations practitioners carry on a running battle.	1 4.7021	1,2 5.9000	2 6.3462	1 4.4286	1 4.9615	1 4.9286	0.0002	4.577
18. Public relations practitioners are typically frank and honest.	2 4.3333	1,2 3.5000	1 2.8462	2 4.6667	1,2 3.5577	1,2 3.4928	0.0019	3.601
19. The massiveness of the impact of public relations makes it harder and harder for the average citizen to know when they are being sold a bill of goods.	1 2.9583	1 3.2500	1 4.2692	1 2.7000	1 4.0000	1 3.9429	0.0132	2.749
20. Public relations practitioners help reporters obtain accurate, complete and timely news.	2,3 3.5000	3 3.7000	1 2.1538	2,3 3.5238	1,2 2.5585	1 2.2571	0.0000	6.395



TABLE VII (Continued)

Statement	Print Jrnls Only	Broad- cast Jrnls Only	Public Relations Only	Both Print and Broad- cast Jrnls and PR	Both Print Jrnls and PR	Both Broad- cast Jrnls and PR	Print Jrnls, Broadcast Jrnls & PR	F prob	F ratio
21. Public relations practitioners frequently use a shield of words for practices which are not in the public interest.	1 3.5625	1 3.4000	2 5.6154	1 3.3500	1 4.3846	1 4.1852	1 4.1857	0.0001	5.116
22. Public relations practitioners are necessary to the production of daily news as we know it.	2 4.1875	1,2 3.5000	1,2 3.2308	1,2 3.2308	1,2 3.0769	1,2 2.8889	1 2.7429	0.0005	4.160
23. Public relations is a parasite to the press.	1 4.9375	2 6.5000	2 6.5769	1,2 5.4286	2 6.0588	2 6.2222	2 6.2286	0.0000	6.246
24. Public relations practitioners typically issue news releases or statements on matters of genuine news value and public interest.	3 4.0000	1,2,3 3.1500	2,3 2.3462	3.8095	1,2 2.7115	1,2 2.7037	1,2 2.7429	0.0000	5.393

TABLE VII (Continued)

Statement	Print Jrnls Only	Broad- cast Jrnls Only	Public Relations Only	Both Print and Broad- cast Jrnls and PR	Both Print Jrnls and PR	Both Broad- cast Jrnls and PR	Print Broadcast Jrnls & PR	F prob	F ratio
25. The prime function of public relations is to get free advertising space for the companies and institutions they represent.	1 3.6875	1 3.3000	1 5.9231	1 3.2381	2,3 5.1346	1,2 4.3333	2,3 5.2714	0.0000	8.489
EMPLOYMENT BACKGROUND									
Percentage of total respondents claiming work experience in print journalism only								18	
Percentage of total respondents claiming work experience in broadcast journalism only								8	
Percentage of total respondents claiming work experience in public relations only								10	
Percentage of total respondents claiming work experience in both print journalism and public relations								20	
Percentage of total respondents claiming work experience in both print and broadcast journalism								8	
Percentage of total respondents claiming work experience in both broadcast journalism and public relations								10	
Percentage of total respondents claiming work experience in print journalism, broadcast journalism, and public relations								$\frac{26}{100\%}$	

## CHAPTER IV

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In this study the researcher set out to examine journalists' judgments toward public relations and compare them with the attitudes public relations practitioners hold toward themselves and their practices. A research instrument was adapted from an instrument developed by Aronoff in his 1975 doctoral dissertation to measure these judgments. This instrument was distributed by mail to 718 members of the Omaha Press Club in October, 1979. Two-hundred-sixty-six questionnaires, or approximately 37 percent, were returned and 191, or 26 percent, were valid on the basis of occupation and could therefore be used.

An examination of the results of this study reveals that, in general, print and broadcast journalists agreed with each other in their responses. Though mixed, these responses seem to indicate that the journalists participating in this study recognize an important role played by public relations in disseminating information. At the same time, however, journalists expressed disapproval with what are usually considered standard public relations practices. In contrast to these mixed judgments by the journalists, however, the public relations practitioners responding to the survey reflected consistently favorable judgments toward their profession.

The most polarized issues in the research related both to the professionalism of public relations practitioners and to the news value of the materials they produce, with public relations practitioners responding very favorably toward themselves on these issues, and journalists responding negatively. While educational background, the number of years of work experience, and sex did not seem to be a factor in how

the respondents answered the questionnaire, age, job title, and employment background were all significant factors.

An examination of age, for example, revealed that the traditional "public relations practitioner as publicity hack" reputation may be becoming less pronounced among younger journalists. As might be expected, those respondents identifying their job title as one of public relations management tended to respond more positively toward public relations than did other public relations practitioners. Finally, those respondents who had never worked in public relations almost always responded more negatively toward public relations than did those with an employment background in public relations.

It is neither the purpose nor intent of this research to explain why the respondents answered the way they did. The survey instrument does not tell us why nearly two-thirds of the journalists responding do not consider the public relations profession as equal in status to journalism, while nearly nine out of ten public relations practitioners responding to the survey do consider the two professions equal in status. Certainly the source of these judgments is rooted deeply in the historical development of the news media themselves.

The first step in closing the gap between journalists and public relations practitioners, however, must obviously be to explore the nature of the gap. Where do the two professions differ in their evaluations and expectations of public relations? In what areas are the possibilities for misunderstanding the greatest? This research is just one step toward reaching a better understanding and improving communication between these vital professions. For only when the problems are clearly identified can progress be made in developing viable solutions that will benefit all.

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## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A

I am a graduate student at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. The following questionnaire is part of my masters thesis. It's goal is to provide greater understanding between journalists and public relations practitioners. Your cooperation is extremely important for the successful completion of this study. I would greatly appreciate it if you would take 5 minutes to anonymously complete the questionnaire and return it to me by October 19. The results of this study will be made available to the Omaha Press Club. Thank you very much for your cooperation.

Instructions: Below are a number of statements concerning public relations practice and practitioners. Consider each statement separately and then indicate your agreement or disagreement with each statement by marking an "x" in the appropriate column to the right.

		strongly disagree	moderately disagree	slightly disagree	no opinion	slightly agree	moderately agree	strongly agree
1.	Public relations and the press are partners in the dissemination of information.							
2.	Public relations practitioners too frequently insist on promoting products, services, and other activities which do not legitimately deserve promotion.							
3.	Public relations is a profession equal in status to journalism.							
4.	Public relations practitioners often act as obstructionists keeping reporters from the people they really should be seeing.							
5.	Public relations practitioners have cluttered our channels of communication with pseudo-events and phoney phrases that confuse public issues.							
6.	The abundance of free and easily obtainable information provided by public relations practitioners has caused an increase in the quality of reporting.							

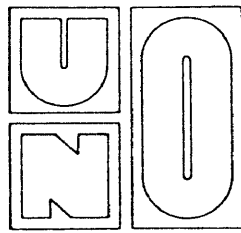




	strongly disagree	moderately disagree	slightly disagree	no opinion	slightly agree	moderately agree	strongly agree
19. The massiveness of the impact of public relations makes it harder and harder for the average citizen to know when they are being sold a bill of goods.							
20. Public relations practitioners help reporters obtain accurate, complete, and timely news.							
21. Public relations practitioners frequently use a shield of words for practices which are not in the public interest.							
22. Public relations practitioners are necessary to the production of daily news as we know it.							
23. Public relations is a parasite to the press.							
24. Public relations practitioners typically issue news releases or statements on matters of genuine news value and public interest.							
25. The prime function of public relations is to get free advertising space for the companies and institutions they represent.							

## PART 3: OTHER INFORMATION

- (1) I am currently employed as (a) a print journalist (b) a broadcast journalist (c) a public relations practitioner (d) other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_.
- (2) Age: \_\_\_\_\_. (3) Sex: \_\_\_\_\_. (4) Job Title: \_\_\_\_\_.
- (5) Educational background: (a) high school diploma only (b) some college (c) college degree (specify degree and major) (d) advanced degree (specify degree and major). \_\_\_\_\_.
- (6) My employment background in the mass media is (a) limited to print journalism (b) limited to broadcast journalism (c) limited to public relations (d) covers both print and broadcast journalism (e) covers both print journalism and public relations (f) covers both broadcast journalism and public relations (g) covers print journalism, broadcast journalism, and public relations. \_\_\_\_\_.
- (7) Years of professional experience: (a)1-2 (b)3-6 (c)7-10 (d)10-15 (e)15-20 (f) more than 20 years. \_\_\_\_\_.



The University of Nebraska at Omaha  
Box 688 Omaha, Nebraska 68101 402/554-2520

College of Arts and Sciences  
Department of Communication  
Broadcasting and Film  
Journalism  
Speech

October 4, 1979

Dear Press Club Member:

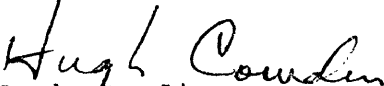
The attached questionnaire is part of a Master's thesis being written by Wayne Johnson, a graduate student in communication at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. His thesis is a study of the attitudes of Omaha journalists and public relations people toward the function and status of public relations. After considering the various ways in which he might approach you for the information, he and his faculty committee decided that the most expeditious method would be to use the mailing list of the Omaha Press Club -- since the Press Club includes both journalists and public relations personnel.

At its September meeting the Press Club Board approved a policy to consider -- on a case-by-case basis -- the sharing of its mailing list with those researchers whose projects have been approved by the journalism heads at Creighton, UNO and UNL. Approval in a given case implies no more than cooperation by the Press Club with higher education and journalism research -- it in no way implies Press Club sponsorship of the project. Such requests are not expected to be very frequent -- I think this one is the first -- so Press Club members need not worry about being overwhelmed with questionnaires.

There is not a great deal of research on public relations, and I think that Wayne's study will make a contribution to what literature there is (the validity and reliability of the questionnaires have been established by previous researchers). Anonymity is guaranteed, and we will make the results of the study available to the Press Club.

Wayne has set October 31 as his deadline for receiving your responses. I would like to thank in advance those of you who do take the few minutes that are needed to fill out the questionnaire and return it in the stamped, self-addressed envelope.

Sincerely,

  
Hugh Cowdin  
Chairperson

APPENDIX C  
TABLE OF OVERALL MEANS

Item #	Mean	Stndrd Dvtn.	Corrected Item-Total Correlation
1	2.675	1.865	.40118
2	3.295	1.358	.47829
3	3.415	2.368	.56170
4	4.086	2.038	.53378
5	4.123	2.080	.53235
6	3.537	1.932	.53544
7	3.858	2.023	.54106
8	3.410	1.948	.34120
9	3.974	1.993	.60229
10	3.444	2.124	.44271
11	5.265	1.974	.59109
12	5.820	1.654	.30466
13	2.966	1.510	.41455
14	4.738	2.018	.49416
15	2.464	1.691	.40620
16	5.633	1.634	.69708
17	5.173	1.808	.41967
18	3.678	4.800	.53216
19	3.640	2.020	.60339
20	2.761	1.620	.61477
21	4.127	1.869	.61195
22	3.351	2.018	.43644
23	5.963	1.531	.55570
24	3.045	1.700	.62345
25	4.604	2.178	.57362

Alpha = 0.90993

## APPENDIX D

Print Journalists  
 Item Choice Distribution (Percentages)  
 N=71

Item #	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Mean	Stndrd Dvtn.	#Missing
1	15	24	31	0	4	11	14	3.437	2.041	0
2	27	28	24	1	13	6	1	2.676	1.593	0
3	6	14	10	6	16	17	31	4.886	2.033	1
4	14	20	27	4	13	14	8	3.577	1.910	0
5	14	23	28	4	11	15	4	3.394	1.801	0
6	11	10	23	13	14	13	17	4.141	1.959	0
7	25	20	24	1	21	7	1	3.000	1.724	0
8	7	24	27	6	7	15	14	3.845	1.961	0
9	13	21	33	7	14	9	3	3.257	1.603	1
10	8	20	21	3	11	13	24	4.225	2.133	0
11	7	11	18	6	15	23	20	4.577	1.954	0
12	6	6	4	6	13	27	27	5.500	1.808	1
13	13	24	11	38	10	0	4	3.254	1.471	0
14	13	16	19	11	13	10	19	4.000	2.057	1
15	11	39	17	3	11	10	9	3.286	1.889	1
16	6	6	11	13	16	31	17	4.900	1.746	1
17	6	6	24	4	16	29	16	4.671	1.816	1
18	3	11	21	11	20	18	15	4.507	1.739	0
19	19	23	33	7	11	3	4	2.957	1.574	1
20	6	23	41	4	10	10	7	3.479	1.646	0
21	16	13	27	14	24	4	1	3.371	1.543	1
22	11	14	20	11	10	13	21	4.169	2.077	0
23	4	6	11	10	11	30	28	5.197	1.778	0
24	1	24	32	3	18	17	4	3.803	1.627	0
25	15	15	20	3	20	18	8	3.845	1.983	0

## APPENDIX E

Broadcast Journalists  
Item Choice Distribution (Percentages)  
N=32

Item #	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Mean	Stndrd Dvtn.	# Missing
1	23	23	23	0	10	19	3	3.226	1.961	1
2	16	34	34	0	6	9	0	2.750	1.437	0
3	23	6	10	6	10	26	19	4.290	2.312	1
4	13	31	28	3	16	3	6	3.125	1.680	0
5	13	31	28	3	9	3	13	3.250	1.884	0
6	9	13	28	6	25	9	9	3.906	1.785	0
7	16	34	31	0	16	0	3	2.781	1.453	0
8	9	16	31	6	6	22	9	3.875	1.913	0
9	3	34	34	3	13	9	3	3.281	1.529	0
10	13	16	22	0	9	16	25	4.250	2.243	0
11	6	6	28	9	13	22	16	4.438	1.848	0
12	0	6	6	3	6	34	44	5.875	1.497	0
13	13	29	13	42	0	0	3	3.000	1.342	1
14	16	13	19	19	13	3	19	3.844	2.034	0
15	22	34	19	6	6	6	6	2.844	1.780	0
16	0	13	6	0	28	34	19	5.219	1.581	0
17	0	0	19	9	3	22	47	5.688	1.595	0
18	3	31	16	9	25	16	0	3.688	1.595	0
19	25	25	38	3	0	9	0	2.563	1.413	0
20	6	22	50	3	9	6	3	3.188	1.401	0
21	6	16	38	19	16	3	3	3.438	1.366	0
22	9	9	34	3	13	16	6	3.625	1.792	0
23	0	0	0	13	6	34	47	6.156	1.019	0
24	6	33	19	3	25	9	0	3.313	1.575	0
25	13	19	31	0	13	19	6	3.625	1.897	0

## APPENDIX F

Public Relations Practitioners  
 Item Choice Distribution (Percentages)  
 N=88

Item #	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Mean	Stndrd Dvtn.	#Missing
1	55	27	7	1	2	5	3	1.977	1.587	2
2	9	19	28	0	10	18	15	3.966	2.020	0
3	68	15	5	3	3	1	5	1.816	1.581	1
4	3	13	25	0	11	19	28	4.750	1.996	0
5	6	10	17	3	13	17	34	4.943	2.031	0
6	31	30	19	3	8	8	1	2.568	1.617	0
7	5	7	18	5	11	26	28	5.034	1.884	0
8	30	31	19	6	3	6	6	2.625	1.731	0
9	3	14	23	1	8	20	31	4.807	2.033	0
10	39	24	14	3	8	9	3	2.591	1.836	0
11	5	0	5	0	9	17	65	6.193	1.508	0
12	3	1	5	1	7	20	63	6.182	1.474	0
13	26	39	7	20	6	1	1	2.489	1.381	0
14	1	3	13	3	15	19	45	5.670	1.617	0
15	57	30	9	0	2	0	2	1.705	1.166	0
16	1	1	2	2	3	20	69	6.443	1.143	0
17	2	5	11	8	9	27	38	5.489	1.695	0
18	18	34	17	10	11	6	2	2.885	1.595	1
19	6	16	18	5	6	18	32	4.705	2.129	0
20	47	38	11	0	3	0	1	1.807	1.071	0
21	3	8	16	5	16	18	34	5.125	1.874	0
22	35	33	17	3	3	3	5	2.357	1.598	0
23	2	2	0	5	2	10	78	6.460	1.319	1
24	35	42	13	1	7	1	1	2.102	1.269	0
25	2	6	7	0	10	14	61	5.966	1.685	0