

STILL THE GREAT DIVIDE: CROSS-PERCEPTIONS  
OF ETHICS OF JOURNALISTS AND PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTITIONERS

by

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(Under the Direction of Lynne Sallot)

ABSTRACT

A mail survey was conducted of 97 journalists and 106 public relations practitioners in Georgia to compare ethical cross-perceptions between the two groups using coorientation methodology. Items from previous research as well as items based on an original ethical vignette including new technologies were tested. Comparisons were made between perceptions of the other group in general and the specific member of the other group with whom the respondent worked most closely. Results showed significant difference between responses to “specific” versus “general” perceptions of the other group. Results also showed disagreement between the groups, incongruence within the groups, inaccuracy among journalists’ perceptions, and accuracy among practitioners’ perceptions. Implications for practice and possibilities for future research are discussed.

INDEX WORDS: Journalists, Journalism, Public relations, Public relations practitioners, Coorientation, Ethics, Media ethics, Technology

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## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my grandparents, Coy and Tee Geren, whose lifetime of love, support and encouragement has made me the person that I am.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The fields of journalism and public relations are tied closely together in a number of ways. On a daily basis, public relations practitioners must make decisions about how to best support the needs of their clients/organizations. Often, these decisions lead the practitioner to gain media recognition of an event, a person, or an organization. In order to do so, the practitioner must work with journalists to provide them the needed information. Practitioners hope journalists will understand and agree with the value of the information and yield the media placements needed by practitioners. Some research has linked the vital nature of this interaction to the success of the practitioner (Nicolai & Riley, 1972).

Other researchers have focused on the interplay between journalists and practitioners and the varying effects that the struggle for coverage can produce. Gans (1979) looked at major news outlets, and found that in dealing with more powerful reporters and widespread outlets, sources who lack equal status are often left without coverage unless they can create a more significant event. When either a source or reporter has more power in a situation, their perceptions of the other entity can affect how an event is publicized.

The significance of one side having an advantageous position can be seen in research that looks at the source-reporter relationship in issues of public significance. The concept of agenda setting, introduced by McCombs and Shaw (1972) posits that the

media have the ability to establish what is on the minds of the public, and thus can shape the tone and topic of public debate and dialogue. An understanding of the relationship in the context of public affairs can provide a picture of the workings of democracy and how much information citizens have about government. Researchers have looked at a number of issues in this context, including likelihood of newspaper coverage of state press releases (Martin & Singletary, 1981) as well as the ways in which practitioners can shape views of major national figures (Sallot, 1990).

While there has been a great deal of research in looking at this source-reporter relationship, there has been only one study that examined the differences that exist between how practitioners view the journalist with whom they work most closely and practitioners in general (Jeffers, 1977). In addition, Jeffers is the only researcher to examine the differences between how each group views individual members of the other group with whom they work most closely compared to the other group in general.

This study seeks to look at these differences in how the groups view each other as a whole as compared to the specific members of the other group with whom they work most closely. It will also re-examine the ethical cross-perceptions that exist between journalists and public relations practitioners. The last research that was published on the subject was Sallot, Steinfatt, and Salwen's (1998) study, which relied on survey data from 1990. In the period since, there has been significant growth in the field of technology and change in how practitioners conduct relations with the media.

Hachigian and Hallahan (2001), in a survey of 101 computer industry trade journalists, found that on average, journalists reported using the World Wide Web over three hours daily. The journalists even ranked Web sites ahead of press conferences

(though still behind phone contact and face-to-face interviews) as a source of information for reporting. Their research also found that younger journalists tend to use the Web as a source much more than older reporters.

Journalists must inform the public of relevant news that impacts the public's lives. Thousands of events happen every day, and the journalist's role is to understand what is most relevant to their readers or viewers, and get the information necessary to let those readers/viewers get the information they need. In doing so, journalists must work with public relations practitioners on a daily basis to better understand situations, and to get interviews and information they may not be able to obtain elsewhere. Indeed, some research has shown that public relations influences as much as half of news content in the U.S. (Aronoff, 1976). In light of that, a better understanding of this relationship can provide a clearer picture of what might influence the information that is distributed to the public through the media.

It is clear, then, that this relationship between journalists and public relations practitioners is significant and in many ways symbiotic. Cameron, Sallot, and Curtin (1997) provide an extensive literature review outlining the research on this "source - reporter" relationship. For example, Aronoff (1975) found that practitioners are more likely to acknowledge this beneficial relationship than journalists are. However, research shows that there is a level of animosity and competition between the two groups that can hinder their ability to do their jobs (Jeffers, 1977; Nayman, McKee, & Lattimore, 1977). In order for each group to be able to effectively utilize the other, it is important to understand the attitudes that the two groups have towards each other, and whether or not those attitudes are justified. By learning more about this relationship, the field of

academics can empower both groups to use the resources available to them more successfully.

Also notable is the amount of change that has taken place over the last ten years in the way that people communicate. There has not been a great deal of research that has looked specifically about the relationships and cross-perceptions between journalists and practitioners in an age of increasingly electronic communication.

A more detailed literature review follows in Chapter 2.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Journalists' and Public Relations Practitioners' Relationship Is Influential

As noted in the previous chapter, the relationship between journalists and practitioners is part of an interplay that has a significant impact on public discourse. In the same way that the media can set the public's agenda, public relations serves to set the media's agenda. It has been argued that those issues that do not garner a great deal of attention in the media are those that lack a cohesive element of public relations (Sandman, Rubin, & Sachsman, 1976). This idea is supported by Newsom (1983), who proposed that in conflicts between groups attempting to garner media coverage, the group that utilizes pressure tactics will tend to have more coverage in the media.

Gans (1979) examined how journalists rely on sources for information, and his work showed that journalists rely on efficiency as a judge of how to interact with sources. He posits that this is a reflection of the sheer amount of news to be covered and the limited resources with which journalists can cover it. He found that there were four factors of credibility that led to a journalist's reliance on sources: incentives, power, ability to supply suitable information, and geographic/social proximity.

Of note were his findings that a source's ability to supply information is often staked on his sharing a similar socioeconomic status with the reporter. Along the same line, low-income areas and rural areas, which often lack social and geographic proximity



to the reporter, tend to be covered less. These findings fit with the work of Tuchman (1978), who also found that people who have status are used more often as sources, as their status gives them a level of inherent credibility.

Soley's (1994) results reinforce these concepts. He used content analysis to examine the change in the use of expert sources in three newspapers of note: the *Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times*, and *New York Times*. He found that in 1990, there were twice as many expert sources quoted in the three newspapers than in 1978, and that in 1990, the sources were more likely to be quoted.

Journalists and public relations practitioners are often seen in the literature as having very closely related professions yet significantly different attitudes and experiences. Since there is a perception (possibly mistaken) that the work they do is quite similar, that makes any differences that do exist a more fruitful topic for study.

Cameron, Sallot, and Curtin (1997), in addition to providing a significant literature review on the role of public relations in the media, also suggested a theoretical framework through which the literature can be organized and future research be classified. The framework is divided into three domains.

The first domain examines the source-reporter relationship, and is organized in two groups. The first group is "mutual assessment" (p. 113), which encompasses studies that use surveys to examine the attitudes that sources and reporters have towards each other. The second group is "power dynamics in source-reporter relations" (p.113), which is made up of research that concentrates on how power dynamics affect the adversarial relationship between sources and reporters.

The second domain focuses on practices and values in public relations, specifically on the organizational context of those elements. Within this domain, there are three groups. The first, “ethics and professional values” (p.113), are studies that “evaluate or formalize source ethics and professional standards” (p.113). The second group, “routines and practices of sources” (p.113), contains those studies that focus on how sources practice their work with the media. The third and final group in this domain is “news values and acceptance of source materials” (p.113), which is made up of research on what constitutes effective source materials.

The third domain examines the societal impact of news sources, and is made up of two groups. First is “information subsidy” (p.114), which is comprised of research that evaluates the ability of public relations to impact news agendas, or in effect, how well public relations sets the agenda for the agenda-setters. The second group is “marketing pressures” (p. 114), which are “studies that assess how budgetary pressures and profit motives affect source-reporter relations and hence the news ‘product’” (p.114).

This research in this thesis falls into two of the groups from Cameron et al.’s framework. The first is “mutual assessment,” as it utilizes survey research as a tool to measure attitudes of sources and reporters. This work also falls into the “ethics and professional standards” group, as a part of what is examined between source and reporter are their attitudes and perceptions of their own ethics, as well as those of the other group.

### Mutual Assessment Research Shows Significant Differences

The first known research to utilize techniques of mutual assessment was done by Feldman (1961a, 1961b), in which he surveyed 746 city editors of newspapers and 88

officers of local PRSA chapters from throughout the nation. His survey used Likert-type scales as responses to various statements about the two fields. While the actual data from his research were not reported in the published accounts of his work, there were some narrative descriptions of the results. Setting the standard for all future mutual assessment research, Feldman's results showed that there were discrepancies between the two groups' attitudes on a number of dimensions, including credibility, professionalism, and status.

The keystone of the relationship research is Aronoff's (1975) work on the credibility of public relations for journalists. This was the first article to apply coorientation theory to the journalist-practitioner line of research. He surveyed 48 staff members at a Texas daily newspaper, as well as 26 practitioners from throughout the area. Both groups were asked to rank a set of their own news values and what they perceived to be the news values of the other group. The two groups' responses tended to be very similar. Practitioners accurately predicted what the journalists stated news values would be. However, journalists incorrectly attributed news values opposite of their own to the practitioners. His work showed that, in looking at the answers given by journalists and practitioners on their own fields, they expressed many similar values in terms of ethical and effective communication.

Aronoff also applied a credibility scale, and journalists rated public relations practitioners extremely low in source credibility. In addition, he also used a rank-order scale for various professions to examine status of each group. Journalists ranked themselves first and practitioners last, while practitioners ranked journalists third and themselves fourth.

In addition, Aronoff then provided only the journalists in his study with a number of news stories, and attributed half to a journalist and half to a practitioner. On a scale of various news values, journalists rated the stories attributed to practitioners lower than those attributed to journalists. This was true in almost every facet of the stories from truthfulness to objectivity.

Aronoff's work did have some limitations. His sample was drawn from professional organizations, whose members may be more oriented towards ideal practices and who were possibly better trained than those who were not members. There is an inherent difficulty in generalizing from such a select subgroup of the field to a much larger group that may have marked differences than those who choose to belong to these organizations. Another methodological limitation of Aronoff's work is his relatively small sample size.

Jeffers (1977) continued this line of research, and examined issues of ethics and the working relationship between sources and reporters. In his work, he sampled 45 practitioners and 51 newspaper journalists in the state of Ohio. The significance of his work to this study lies in the structure of his questions. Respondents answered questions about their perceptions of three different groups: 1) their own group; 2) the other group as a whole; and 3) the members of the other group with whom they had regular contact. His questions looked at the skills of the two groups, as well as looking at their ethics, and the perceived level of cooperation that existed between the two groups.

Jeffers found that "practitioners consider themselves equal in status with the specific newsmen with whom they regularly work but assign slightly higher status to newsmen in general than to persons in their own occupational category" (p. 303). In

comparison, journalists did not assign the same status to practitioners as they did to themselves. Jeffers' research also showed that journalists tended to believe they were more ethical than practitioners were, and that the relationship between the two groups was minimally cooperative. On the other hand, the practitioners perceived the relationship between the two groups to be very cooperative.

Several studies were conducted to replicate Aronoff's original study. Kopenhaver, Martinson, and Ryan (1984) replicated parts of Aronoff's work dealing with perceptions of public relations, perceptions of occupational status, and news values by using some of the original group of statements from his survey instrument. This study looked at samples of 47 Florida newspaper editors and 57 Florida public relations practitioners. The sample of editors was drawn from a press association directory, while the practitioners were drawn from the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) directory.

They found that like in Aronoff's work, the attitudes towards public relations varied greatly between members of the two groups. While the editors' views of public relations were not overwhelmingly negative, they were "markedly less favorable" (p. 861) than those of practitioners. As well, their study showed that journalists and practitioners "agree remarkably about which elements of news are most important, and that practitioners perceive journalists' stated positions accurately" (p. 865).

Kopenhaver (1985) used the same data set to publish more research examining the news values listed by the journalists and practitioners surveyed. She found that while the two groups' rankings of news values were almost identical, journalists' perceptions of practitioners' rankings were inaccurate. Practitioners' perceptions of journalists, however, were generally more accurate in their rankings of news values. She also

reported that in ranking a number of different professions, journalists tended to rank themselves highest, but put public relations practitioners near the bottom. Practitioners on the other hand, though ranking themselves higher than journalists, had a much smaller gap between the two groups.

It is important to note that some researchers have stated that the differences that do exist between journalists and practitioners may not be as far-reaching as is sometimes implied. Brody (1984) looked at two sets of questions, one relating to ethical issues while the other was related to what he termed “product” issues, such as quality of writing and timeliness. He sampled 38 members of the Memphis chapter of PRSA, along with 74 working journalists in Memphis. These journalists were surveyed after having completed unrelated interviews with students at Memphis State University. The survey measured “ethical” items as well as “product quality” items. The results of the survey showed that “greater differences in perception [between the two fields] appear in terms of ethical factors than in the product quality area” (p. 15).

Other research has tried to look at more focused situations in which to compare the two fields. Stegall and Sanders (1986) looked at a smaller realm of public relations/journalism interaction, that of higher education. In this study, they surveyed editors from around Missouri whose beat was higher education, along with public relations managers at various institutions of higher education around the state. Their sample included 19 practitioners and 10 editors. Through factor analysis, they found two subsets of practitioners, one that was slightly older and more experienced, working at larger institution, and one the opposite: younger, with less experience at a smaller school. They also looked at a set of news values, and there was a marked difference between

journalists' perceptions of practitioners' news values and practitioners' actual news values.

Their results were similar to that of the earlier studies in Texas and Florida, but the results, while still significant, did not show as marked differences as had the previous studies. However, they did note that, "It is clear from the Florida and Missouri studies that PR as a profession is still seen by many journalists as a bastard child in terms of status" (p. 344). Stegall and Sanders emphasize the need to look for ways in which the coorientation of the two fields can be brought together, possibly in the field of undergraduate education.

Two other replications of Aronoff's work have reflected many of the findings of the initial mutual assessment research. Sallot (1990b) drew samples from two different geographic areas in her research. Her sample included 53 PRSA members in metropolitan New York and 66 PRSA members in South Florida, along with 35 working journalist members of the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ) in metropolitan New York and 50 working journalist members of SPJ in South Florida. Sallot draws a tie in her research between journalists' low evaluation of practitioners' news values and their low evaluation of practitioners' source credibility.

In another replication of Aronoff's work, Carroll (1994) examined the relationships of sources and reporters in the field of education. The sample included 83 journalists who covered education and 119 practitioners who were employed with colleges and universities across the country. Fitting with the results of previous studies, Carroll found that reporters assigned themselves different news values than they assigned to practitioners, as well as ranking themselves about journalists in occupational status,

and in terms of general opinion. Carroll's research also found, however, that the practitioners shared the same news values as the journalists and that the practitioners tended to rank themselves as equals in terms of their occupational status.

In response to this assertion, Ryan and Martinson (1988) surveyed practitioners to determine their perceived reasons for journalists' negative views of public relations. They sampled 200 practitioners at random from the PRSA national directory, and received 118 surveys, a 59% return rate. They looked at a number of factors, including whether the negative feelings were socialized through education and training. Respondents were also asked to assess how much of the negative attitudes might be the fault of practitioners, and the validity of the views held by journalists. They were also asked whether or not they believed that journalists thought more highly of specific practitioners than of the field of public relations as a whole.

The practitioners responded very significantly that the views traditionally held by journalists were not valid. Practitioners, however, also placed some of the blame for these incorrect perceptions on the field of public relations itself. Also of note is that fully 100% of the respondents stated that journalists tend to think more highly of an individual practitioner with whom they work than of the field of public relations in general.

Belz, Talbot, and Starck (1989) studied cross-perceptions between journalists and practitioners from the perspective of role theory, a departure from the coorientation method used by previous studies. Fourteen journalists with "editorial decision-making power" (128) along with 15 practitioners were asked to sort a set of statements twice. They looked at personal characteristics, rights, duties, and skills. Each group sorted the statements once for how they perceived their own group, and once for how they



perceived the other group. Journalists were found to have the same types of negative perceptions of public relations found in other studies. This was especially true for the perceptions that practitioners withhold information from journalists and compromise their ethics too easily.

Pincus, Rimmer, Rayfield, and Cropp (1993) performed a partial replication of Aronoff's (1975) work and found that there had been some lessening of many of the perceived differences between practitioners and journalists over time. Their sample was made up of news, business and sports editors at each of California's 121 daily newspapers. One of their more interesting findings was that almost one-fourth of the editors had worked in public relations and taken a public relations class. Those editors who had taken a public relations course tended to have better attitudes towards public relations. This was not, however, reflected in respondents who had worked in public relations. On the whole, they found Aronoff's work to still be supported, but that the polarization had become less extreme, especially in terms of attitudes about practitioners' character.

Using Sallot's 1990 data, Sallot, Steinfatt, and Salwen (1998) used cororientation methods to compare the perceptions of journalists and practitioners in two major metropolitan areas, Miami and New York. One hundred journalists and 100 practitioners in each area were surveyed, with samples drawn from PRSA and Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ) directories. Their study compared the news values of journalists and practitioners, and found that the values tended to be highly correlated between the two groups. However, as in past studies, journalists did not accurately perceive the news

values of practitioners. Practitioners' perceptions, while still not totally accurate, were closer to the journalists' actual news values.

Another area of comparison between the two groups is professionalism. Nayman, McKee, and Lattimore (1977) compared the two fields on a number of scales relating to professional elements. They sampled 160 practitioners from the Colorado chapter of PRSA, as well as the Advertising Club of Denver and the Denver Government Public Information Officers organization, as well as 318 daily journalists in Denver. They found that public relations practitioners placed a substantially higher priority than journalists did on "having an influence on important decisions within the organization" (p. 493 ). On the other hand, journalists placed more weight on "respect for the ability of co-workers" (p. 494). The authors assert that this difference may be reflective of the differing work environments of the two fields, saying, "Newspersons often are working in a larger group effort than a public relations counselor who may work either alone or in a relatively small group" (p. 495).

The research that does exist comparing public relations practitioners and journalists is not necessarily just limited to issues of how they practice their jobs. Wyatt, Smith and Andsager (1996) did research comparing the amount of support for media rights between practitioners, journalists and the public. Their sample of the public came from a nationwide phone survey, while their samples of journalists and practitioners came from SPJ (630 responses) and PRSA (811 responses). They found that, not surprisingly, journalists were most like to support media rights of the three groups, followed by practitioners and then the public. This research does show, however, one element in which journalists and practitioners tend to agree.

As part of the literature on job satisfaction, Olson (1989) compared measures of job satisfaction between journalists and practitioners in the San Francisco Bay area. She sampled 395 practitioners from the PRSA directory, as well as 395 journalists from local newspapers. She found that practitioners were much more satisfied with their jobs in a number of different areas. They more satisfied with their salaries and the amount of autonomy they receive in the workplace. Journalists, however, were shown to put a lesser value on salary as opposed to autonomy, but the research also showed that journalists had significantly less autonomy in the workplace.

#### Ethics and Professional Values Between Sources and Reporters

In the public relations literature, Day, Dong, and Robins (2001) provided background on basic ethical approaches to public relations. They noted the different types of ethics (teleological, deontological, and situational) as well as providing a brief literature review of empirical public relations ethics research. Curtin and Boynton (2001) reviewed the various schools of thought in public relations efforts. They noted the desire for compromise between an organization and its publics, as well as the emphasis that is placed on professionalism. They look the issues of how to reconcile the theories of ethics with the practical issues faced by practitioners. Leeper (2001) conducted a literature review to find the measures of ethics that could be best applied to public relations. She found that many were drawn from sociology and business applications. None was specifically oriented to the communications field.

Curtin (1996) reviewed literature on journalism ethics, especially as relating to the decision-making process in the newsroom, as part of a larger study on the effects of

market-driven journalism. In reviewing the literature, she looked for common themes of journalism ethics that arose from past research. She noted that ‘Observations of newsroom ethical decision making suggest that unwritten guidelines, not written codes, guide the process...’ (p. 61). She found that the most common ethical themes of the newsroom were objectivity and autonomy, as well as the impact a story might have on the community.

Curtin (1996) also noted the presence of a ‘case law’ approach to journalism ethics, based on past decisions, with the editor as the final arbiter of ethical decisions. She highlighted McManus’ (1992) argument that the media who best serve the market do not necessarily best serve the public, pointing out the fact that newspapers’ market needs relate to advertising sales, not public service.

In looking at ethics and professionalism in public relations, there has been a great deal of research relating to membership in professional organizations and accreditation, beginning with Wright’s (1982) comparison between accredited and non -accredited members of PRSA. When comparing the responses of 76 non-accredited and 72 accredited members of PRSA on a number of professionalism measures, Wright found that while the accredited members scored higher than those who were not, both groups scored relatively low on most measures.

Shamir, Reed, and Cornell (1990) explored the ways in which personal and professional ethics relate to one another. Using a mail survey of 198 PRSA members from around the country, they found that practitioners’ personal ethics correlated strongly with their professional ethics. This would seem to indicate that ethics is an issue that encompasses behaviors and attitudes both in and out of the workplace.

While there has been research conducted to analyze the implications of ethics on the individual communications disciplines, there has been less work examining the similarities and differences between the ethical situations faced by journalists and practitioners.

Some research has taken steps to look at how the topic of ethics can have an effect on the two fields in their relation to the world beyond their doors. Voakes (1997) looked at how the public views journalists' ethical motivations by performing telephone surveys of 376 residents and 60 journalists in the same county. He used coorientation theory to compare journalists' reaction to a hypothetical ethical dilemma with that of the public. The dilemma consisted of a news organization publishing the name of a juvenile involved in a crime. He found that there was little agreement or congruency between the two groups in terms of whether the decision made in the dilemma was ethical, and the motivations for making that decision.

Ryan and Martinson (1984, 1994) conducted two projects looking at the topic of ethics. The first (Ryan & Martinson, 1984) studied how practitioners would handle certain hypothetical ethical scenarios differently based on slight changes in the situations, as well as across the different dilemmas presented. One of these "vignettes" involved the firing of a football coach and the other a toxic waste disposal problem. Each vignette had two versions that were precisely the same, except for one change. In the scenario of the coach, one was at a semi-professional team, and the other at a local high school. In the toxic waste disposal issue, one involved a private company, the other a public university. A total sample of 260 practitioners was drawn from the PRSA directory to receive the survey by mail.

Their research found that practitioners had an “ethical subjectivism,” that is to say that they had different perspectives on information disclosure and the need for honesty depending on their perceived severity of the situation. This subjectivism was based on whether the institutions involved were public or private, as well on the total “impact” differences between firing a football coach and dumping toxic waste. They note that this is reflective of the relative difficulty in setting a “base line” for public relations ethics, as practitioners must face differing ethical dilemmas frequently, with different levels of impact on the community.

In their second article on ethics, Ryan and Martinson (1994) compared the views of journalists and practitioners with regards to lying. They sampled 200 practitioners from the PRSA directory, and 200 editors from the *Editor & Publisher International Year Book*. They selected 200 newspapers at random from the listing, and chose the “managing editor” of each. In this survey, the respondents were again asked to evaluate how they would react in the vignettes used in their earlier (1984) study. They had hypothesized the journalists would view a deceptive situation in a public organization more harshly than they would in a private organization. Instead, they found that there was no significant difference. They also found that there was no significant difference in the responses to any of the situations between journalists and practitioners.

#### Coorientation Method Common In Mutual Assessment Research

Several of the studies cited above used coorientation research methods to examine perceptions and cross-perceptions of journalists and public relations practitioners regarding themselves and each other (Aronoff, 1976; Jeffers, 1977; Kopenhaver et al.,

1984; Ryan & Martinson, 1984, 1994; Stegall & Sanders, 1986; Pincus et al., 1993; Sallot et al., 1998).

Coorientation research has its roots in a number of fields, going back to Heider's (1958) balance theory. It draws on symbolic interactionism and the work of Mead and Dewey that first began to propose the concept that perceptions of the nature of an interaction can be just as influential as the actual dynamics that may exist. Laing (1967) described multiple levels to people's perceptions in which they examine "whether they are in agreement with what most people think (2<sup>nd</sup> level)." (p. 81), and "whether they think that most people regard them as like themselves (3<sup>rd</sup> level)." (p. 81). From these roots, coorientation has been frequently applied in media research.

McLeod and Chaffee (1973) proposed what has become the most frequently used coorientation model in media studies. They proposed that there are three measures of coorientation: agreement, congruency, and accuracy. The three measures are most easily explained using their "A-B-X" model. In this model, "A" represents one subject of the study, "B" the other, and "X" the topic to be analyzed.

Agreement measures the correlation between A's cognitions of X and B's cognitions of X. If there is a high correlation, then A and B are said to be in agreement. Congruency measures the correlation between A's cognitions of X and A's perceptions of B's cognitions. This measure is repeated vice-versa. If the correlations between the two are high, then there is said to be a high level of congruency between A's and B's perceptions of one another. Finally, accuracy measures the correlation between A's actual cognitions and B's perception of those cognitions, and vice-versa. If these correlations are high, then A's and B's perceptions are said to be accurate.

The coorientation model is most often used to compare groups. For example, it has been used to study the similarities and differences between elected officials and their constituents (Hesse, 1976) as well as the relationships between elected officials and reporters (Dyer & Nayman, 1977). Coorientation has also been used to study public relations practitioners' views of their own field, as well as examining the differences that exist between public relations educators and practitioners. Sallot, Cameron, and Weaver-Lariscy (1998a) found that practitioners tended to greatly underestimate professionalism of the public relations field as a whole. Sallot, Cameron and Weaver-Lariscy (1998b) also compared the professional standards of public relations educators and practitioners. They found that educators tended to believe that they held higher standards than practitioners held, but that the educators misinterpreted practitioners' actual professional standards.

The next chapter discusses the purpose of this study and presents hypotheses stemming from the literature review.



## CHAPTER 3

### HYPOTHESES

#### Purpose of This Study

This research will test the conventional wisdom that exists in the fields of journalism and public relations that there is a difference in how professionals in each view the other field in general as opposed to a specific member of the other field. Some research (Jeffers, 1977; Ryan & Martinson, 1988) have looked at these differences in general and found significant differences. However, in these cases, the differences were identified by only one or two items, not across an entire survey instrument. As well, there has not been research to this point that focuses on how this difference might exist in an ethical context. Hypotheses testing this difference include:

H1) Journalists have a different perception of the ethics of the public relations professional with whom they work most frequently than of the field of public relations as a whole.

H2) Public relations practitioners will have a different perception of the ethics of the journalist with whom they work most frequently than of the field of journalism as a whole.

This research also draws on a number of previous studies that have examined the perceptions and cross-perceptions between members of the two fields. While there has been some research that has indicated that journalists and practitioners agree on certain issues (Wyatt, Smith, & Ansager, 1996; Ryan & Martinson, 1994), there has been a great deal of work that has indicated a significant difference between journalists and

practitioners in a number of areas. Journalists tend to see the credibility of practitioners as lower than their own (Aronoff, 1976; Kopenhaver, Martinson, & Ryan, 1984), as well as ranking the credibility of public relations as a job below that of journalism (Jeffers, 1977; Stegall & Sanders, 1986). Practitioners, however, have been shown in some studies to view themselves as equals with journalists in a number of categories including news values (Aronoff, 1976; Kopenhaver, Martinson & Ryan, 1984; Sallot, Steinfatt, & Salwen, 1998), ethical issues (Jeffers, 1977; Ryan & Martinson, 1994), as well as job status (Stegall & Sanders, 1986).

This study seeks to examine if those differences continue to exist in a significant way, and to include an element of new technology in the items that will be used to measure the difference. The hypotheses designed to examine those differences are:

H3) Journalists will rate themselves as being more ethical than their counterparts in public relations.

H4) Public relations practitioners will rate themselves as being at least as ethical as their counterparts in journalism.

To test these hypotheses, this research will rely on coorientation methods (McLeod & Chaffee, 1973) to examine the data. Three research questions related to use of the coorientation model will be explored:

RQ1) Do journalists and public relations practitioners agree with each other on ethical issues?

RQ2) Are journalists accurate in their predictions of public relations practitioners' responses on ethical issues?

RQ3) Are public relations practitioners accurate in their predictions of journalists' responses to ethical issues?

## CHAPTER 4

### METHODOLOGY

#### Subjects

For this study, a mail survey of 200 journalists and 200 public relations practitioners from throughout the state of Georgia was utilized to gather data. The journalists were randomly sampled from among the reporters and editors listed under daily newspapers in the Georgia section of the *Bacon's Newspaper Directory* (2002). The public relations practitioners were randomly sampled from the *Georgia Chapter Member Directory* (2002) of the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA).

#### Operationalizing Ethics

The concept of ethics has been operationalized in a number of ways. It is well summarized by Day, Dong, and Robins (2001) along with Curtin and Boynton (2001). They outline the various perspectives on ethics as either teleological (outcome-based) or deontological (rule-based). For this research, ethics were operationally defined in order to be measured as part of the survey instrument. This study drew on a number of questions used in other coorientation and cross-perception surveys (Aronoff, 1975; Curtin, 1996; Ryan & Martinson, 1988; Ryan & Martinson, 1998; Stegall & Sanders, 1986; Sallot, 1990; Sallot et al., 1998; Belz et al., 1989; ) that reflect issues of truth, disclosure, conflicts of interest/autonomy, and factual accuracy. These constructs were

used as an operational measure of ethics based on other researchers' use of them in previous research.

The measurement of ethics provided another hurdle for research. In the case of a co-orientation study, there is an emphasis placed on the perceptions of the respondents as opposed to the actual factual truths of the various groups involved. In this sense, respondents will simply be asked questions about the ethical standards of the professions and the people with whom they work most closely. In this case, Curtin's (1996) work provides a strong base for the measurement of ethics as it relates to issues of truthfulness, objectivity, and autonomy.

#### Coorientation Method

The choice was made to design this study around McLeod and Chaffee's (1973) coorientation model, measuring the agreement, congruency, and accuracy of the two groups' responses. The coorientation method has been used often to study the relationships between journalists and practitioners (Aronoff, 1976; Jeffers, 1977; Kopenhaver et al., 1984; Ryan & Martinson, 1984, 1994; Stegall & Sanders, 1986; Pincus et al., 1993; Sallot et al., 1998). The hypotheses for this research are focused specifically on how each field perceives the other field, either in general or thinking of a specific member of the other field. In terms of the coorientation model, this matches with the congruency measure. Since coorientation is based on all three measures, the research questions are designed to measure the agreement between journalists and practitioners, as well as the accuracy of the two groups' responses.

### Survey Instrument

The survey instrument included 21 items, some with slight variations from their original phrasing in previous studies to reflect a consistent use of terminology, i.e. ‘journalist’ and ‘public relations practitioner,’ that were drawn from previous surveys (Belz et al., 1989; Ryan & Martinson, 1984, 1988; Sallot, 1990; Sallot et al., 1998; Stegall & Sanders, 1986). Each of these surveys looked at the attitudes of journalists and public relations practitioners towards each other.

In addition to these 21 items, the survey utilized the technique developed by Ryan and Martinson (1984, 1994) of using a ‘vignette’ that described a sample ethical scenario and providing subsequent items that relate to the vignette itself. For the purpose of this research, a new vignette was developed to reflect the presence of the internet in the realm of the mass media, and to attempt to address some potential ethical questions that could arise. The vignette looks at some of the issues addressed in Ryan and Martinson’s vignettes, notably issues of disclosure of facts by practitioners to journalists. However, it also addressed ways in which the Internet can be used for research and communication purposes on Web message boards and chat rooms.

One of the issues addressed in the vignette is ‘lurking,’ the practice of observing a discussion on-line, either on a message board or in a chat room, but not participating in the discussion itself. The other technologically-oriented issue raised in the vignette is ‘seeding,’ the practice of not just observing conversations in chat rooms and on message boards, but actually participating in the discussions. This participation is done anonymously, without identifying as a representative of the company, product, etc.

Finally, in order to include an element of the relationship between practitioners and journalists, there is an element in the vignette about the practitioner's willingness to disclose the use of the seeding technique to a journalist. The survey included six questions related to the vignette itself.

The survey additionally included six demographic items. Following is a listing of all of the items included in the survey; the first 21 questions are grouped by the author from which they were derived (see Table 1) and numbered as they were in the survey itself. The vignette questions are listed and numbered as they appeared in the survey (see Table 2).

Table 1

### **Derived Items**

Author: Sallot (1990)

1. You often can't trust public relations practitioners.
2. You often can't trust journalists.
3. Journalists frequently use practices that are not in the public interest.
4. Public relations practitioners frequently use practices that are not in the public interest.

Author: Sallot, Cameron, and Weaver-Lariscy (1998)

5. A public relations practitioner's function is not just a job, but a service to the community.

Author: Ryan and Martinson (1984)

6. Public relations practitioners are just as concerned as journalists about getting complete, accurate information to the public.
7. A public relations person should not mislead the public, even if disseminating complete, accurate information costs him his job.

Table 1 Derived Items (cont'd.)

Author: Belz, Talbott and Starck (1989)

(In their original research, the authors used the phrase “professional communicator” instead of referring specifically to public relations practitioners or journalists. For purposes of this survey, the specific terms were replaced. In the questions below, the changes are indicated by bracketed terms.)

8. [Most journalists] seek to provide fairness in reporting.
9. [Most public relations practitioners] seek to provide fairness in reporting.
10. [Most public relations practitioners] provide as much balance as possible on issues about which they [provide information]
11. [Most journalists] provide as much balance as possible on issues about which they report.
12. [Most journalists] give accurate information.
13. [Most public relations practitioners] give accurate information.
14. Forthrightness and honesty are personal characteristics of [a public relations practitioner]
15. Forthrightness and honesty are personal characteristics of [a journalist].

Author: Ryan and Martinson (1988)

16. Many journalists’ stereotypes of public relations practitioners are based on the negative experience they have had with a few “bad apples.”
19. Many journalists’ stereotypes of public relations practitioners are based on a few highly publicized cases of unethical behavior by practitioners.

Author: Stegall and Sanders (1986)

(In their original research, the authors used the phrase “public relations director” instead of “public relations practitioner” in their survey items. For the purposes of this survey, the term was changed. In the questions below, the changes are indicated by bracketed items.)

17. Although both serve the information needs of the public, journalists have a more altruistic mission than do public relations [practitioners].
18. A public relations [practitioner] should deal openly with the press on issues detrimental to their organization.
20. A public relations [practitioner] should always tell the truth as he/she knows it.
21. A [journalist] should always tell the truth as he/she knows it.

Table 2

**Vignette Items**

22. The company is justified in its first practice of “lurking” in chatrooms and on message boards to follow the discussion and observe opinions about the company and its products, *since it is taking place in a public forum*.
23. The public relations department is within ethical bounds to “seed” chatrooms and message boards *on their own Web site* without identifying themselves as representatives of the company.
24. The public relations department is within ethical bounds to “seed” chatrooms and message boards *on public Web sites and online services* without identifying themselves as representatives of the company.
25. Since the Web sites and message boards at hand are focused towards a teenage audience, the public relations department is not justified in “seeding” the discussion.
26. The public relations director is justified in keeping the actual data gathered from the “seeding” process confidential on the grounds that it is proprietary.
27. The public relations director should disclose the “seeding” technique when asked by a journalist.

**Cover Letters**

Two different cover letters were prepared to accompany the mailed surveys, one to accompany the surveys sent to journalists and the other to accompany the survey sent to public relations practitioners. The cover letters stated the purpose of the research and that it was a part of masters research at the Grady College of Journalism at the University of Georgia. The letters, printed on stationery from the Office of Graduate Studies at the Grady College, were signed by the study’s investigator. The letters informed respondents that their responses were confidential, but that the surveys themselves were numbered to track return rates. The letters contained contact information for Dr. Lynne Sallot, the major professor on the thesis committee guiding the research, as well as information required by the University of Georgia’s Institutional Review Board. The initial letters requested that the surveys be returned by May 10, 2002. Each cover letter and survey was mailed April 16, 2002, with a pre-stamped and addressed return envelope.



On May 6, 2002, a follow-up e-mail was sent to those who had not responded, and on May 10, 2002, a second set of surveys with an updated cover letter was mailed to those who had not responded. Copies of the survey, e-mail, and cover letters are included in the appendix.

The next chapter presents results of the data analysis.

## CHAPTER 5

### RESULTS

#### Response Rates

Of the 200 survey questionnaires mailed to journalists in the state of Georgia, 97 were returned, representing a response rate of 48.5%. Of the 200 questionnaires mailed to public relations practitioners, 109 were returned, representing a response rate of 54.5%. The overall response rate of the 400 questionnaires mailed was 51.7%. None of either version of the questionnaire was returned to the writer as undeliverable.

#### Description of Subjects

Journalists who responded ranged in age from 21 to 72, with a mean age of 43 ( $N=96$ ,  $SD=10.44$ ). Most (61.9%) of journalists reported that they were college graduates, while 11.3% stated that they had a graduate degree. Nine (9.2%) of the journalists who responded stated that they had not completed college. In terms of their self-identified career position, 57 journalists (58.8%) stated that they were “middle management” or “upper management” in their organizations, and 28 (28.9%) responded that they were “working professionals.”

Among public relations practitioners who responded, ages ranged from 23 to 65, with a mean age of 38 ( $N=106$ ,  $SD=10.45$ ). Two (1.8%) practitioners stated that they had not finished college, while 25 (22.7%) stated that they had graduate degrees. A total of 69 (62.7%) practitioners identified themselves as college graduates. In looking at what

positions in their field practitioners identified with, most (N=39 or 35.5%) called themselves “middle management,” while 33 (30%) called themselves “top management.” Five (4.5%) of the practitioners who responded identified themselves as “entry-level professionals.” A more informal analysis was also conducted of the geographical locations of the respondents. 26 out of 96 (27%) of journalists and 91 out of 107 (85%) of practitioners who responded were from metropolitan Atlanta.

#### Practitioners More Experienced Than Journalists

Respondents were asked to report the amount of time they had worked in their respective field in years and months. For public relations practitioners, the average amount of time spent in the field was 18 years and about 4 months (18.34 years).

The practitioner with the least experience had been in the field 1 year and 4 months, and the practitioner with the most experience had been in the field 40 years. Journalists, however, averaged almost 12 years spent in their field (11.97 years). Among journalists, the respondent with the least experience had been working for 1 year and 1 month, while the most experienced had been in the field for 37 years and 2 months.

#### More Practitioners than Journalists are “Crossovers”

Respondents were asked if they had ever worked in the other field being surveyed. Thirteen (13.4%) journalists responded that they had worked in public relations, while 50 (45.5%) practitioners responded they had worked in journalism. The average journalist who had worked in public relations had done so for 2.29 years (N=13, SD=2.39), and the average practitioner had done so for 4.12 years (N=49, SD=4.16).

### Some Questions Recoded For Proper Valence

The results of some items in the questionnaire had to be recoded so that all directional items shared the same valence, positive or negative. The coding of four items— items numbered 1, 2, 3 and 4—was reversed (i.e. 1=5, 2=4) to make the item valence uniform and to facilitate statistical testing.

### Construction of ‘Ethics’ Measures

Before factor analysis was performed on the data to determine if questions grouped naturally into any discrete factors that could provide insight into the responses and streamline data analysis, the researcher analyzed three conceptual groups of items for reliability using Cronbach’s alpha tests.

The first, ‘Truth/Honesty,’ consisted of questionnaire items numbered 1, 2, 7, 12, 13, 14, 15, 20, 21, 26\*, and 27\*, with items designated by an asterisk (\*) indicating those related to the vignette. (The questionnaire appears in the appendix.) This conceptual grouping yielded Cronbach’s alphas of .5 for ‘a’ responses, .5 for ‘b’ responses, and .62 for ‘c’ responses, none of which indicates acceptable levels of reliability.

The second grouping conceptualized pre-factor analysis was ‘Public Interest,’ and consisted of questionnaire items numbered 3, 4, 5, 6, 16, 17, 19, 22\*, 23\*, 24\*, and 25\*. It encapsulated items relating to public service and public interest in the fields. This conceptual grouping yielded Cronbach’s alphas of .26 for ‘a’ responses, .25 for ‘b’ responses, and .34 for ‘c’ responses, none of which were acceptable levels of reliability.

The third conceptual grouping pre-factor analysis was ‘Fairness/Balance,’ and consisted of questionnaire items numbered 8, 9, 10, 11, and 18. This conceptual grouping yielded Cronbach’s alphas of .24 for ‘a’ responses, .47 for ‘b’ responses, and .16 for ‘c’ responses, none of which were acceptable levels of reliability.

### Results of the Factor Analyses Were Inconclusive

Three principal components factor analyses were conducted—one for each subset of data. Unfortunately, the factors that emerged were not discrete factors, having several multiple loadings of factor values, nor did the items in these factors seem to have logical conceptual relationships of any use in streamlining further data analysis. Tables 3 through 5 report the respective factor loadings using varimax rotations from each factor analysis. Table 6 reports frequency distributions for each item in the questionnaire.

The factor analysis of the ‘a’ data, where respondents answered ‘You would say’ to each of the 27 items, yielded seven factors which converged in 11 iterations and had Eigenvalues of 1.0 or greater. The first factor explained 13.1% of the variance, the second factor 12.7%, the third 10.5%, the fourth 10.4%, the fifth 7.2%, the sixth 6.1% and the seventh 5.9%, for a total of 65.6% of variance explained.

Table 3

“a” Factor Analysis	<u>Factor Loadings</u>								
	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1+. You often can’t trust public relations practitioners.	3.32	1.14	.613						.364

Table 3 “a” Factor Analysis (cont’d.)

	M	SD	<u>Factor Loadings</u>						
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4+. Public relations practitioners frequently use practices that are not in the public interest.	3.10	1.16	.766						
5. A public relations practitioner’s function is not just a job, but a service to the community.	3.06	1.20	.467						.475
6. Public relations practitioners are just as concerned as journalists about getting complete, accurate information to the public.	3.16	1.41	.609		.511				
9. Most public relations practitioners seek to provide fairness in reporting.		3.34	1.10	.575		.538			
10. Most public relations practitioners provide as much balance as possible on issues about which they provide information.	2.44	1.10	.601		.340				
12. Most journalists give accurate information.	3.86	.70	-.411		.566				
14. Forthrightness and honesty are personal characteristics of a public relations practitioner.	3.40	1.11	.420		.491				

Table 3 “a” Factor Analysis (cont’d.)

	Factor Loadings								
	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
17. Although both serve the information needs of the public, journalists have a more altruistic mission than do public relations practitioners.	3.66	1.18	-.673	.368					
22. The company is justified in its first practice of “lurking” in chatrooms and on message boards to follow the discussion and observe opinions about the company and its products, <i>since it is taking place in a public forum.</i>	3.90	1.10	-.302			.364			.427
2+. You often can’t trust journalists.	3.62	.97		.742					
3+. Journalists frequently use practices that are not in the public interest.		3.75	1.04		.831				
8. Most journalists seek to provide fairness in reporting.	4.10	.87		.809					
11. Most journalists provide as much balance as possible on issues about which they report.	3.43	1.05		.692					-.388
15. Forthrightness and honesty are personal characteristics of a journalist.	3.64	.90		.522			.352		

Table 3 “a” Factor Analysis (cont’d.)

	M	SD	<u>Factor Loadings</u>						
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7
13. Most public relations practitioners give accurate information.	3.62	.90			.625	.315			
16. Many journalists’ stereotypes of public relations practitioners are based on the negative experiences they have had with a few ‘bad apples.’	3.92	.94			.772				
19. Many journalists’ stereotypes of public relations practitioners are based on a few highly publicized cases of unethical behavior by practitioners.	3.29	1.06			.742				
23. The public department is within ethical bounds to ‘seed’ chatrooms and message boards <i>on their own Web site</i> without identifying themselves as representatives of the company.						.879			
24. The public relations department is within ethical bounds to ‘seed’ chatrooms and message boards <i>on public Web sites and online services</i> without identifying themselves as representatives of the company.	2.11	1.07				.913			



Table 3 “a” Factor Analysis (cont’d.)

	M	SD	<u>Factor Loadings</u>						
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7
25. Since the Web sites and message boards at hand are focused towards a teenage audience, the public relations department is <i>not</i> justified in “seeding” the discussion.	2.33	1.07				.838			
18. A public relations practitioner should deal openly with the press on issues detrimental to their organization.	3.96	1.03					.576		
20. A public relations practitioner should always tell the truth as he/she knows it.	4.13	.93					.812		
21. A journalist should always tell the truth as he/she knows it.		4.51	.65					.794	
7. A public relations practitioner should not mislead the public, even if disseminating complete accurate information costs him his job.	4.27	.94						-.303	.686
26. The public relations director is justified in keeping the actual data gathered from the “seeding” process confidential on the grounds that it is proprietary.	2.32	1.14						.752	

Table 3 “a” Factor Analysis (cont’d.)

	M	SD	<u>Factor Loadings</u>						
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7
27. The public relations director should disclose the ‘seeding’ technique when asked by a journalist.	3.83	1.08						-.762	
Eigenvalues			3.5	3.4	2.8	2.8	1.9	1.6	1.6
% of Variance.			13.1	12.7	10.5	10.4	7.2	6.1	5.9

The factor analysis of the ‘b’ data, where respondents answered what the ‘generalized other would say’ to each of the 27 items, yielded five factors which converged in six iterations and had Eigenvalues of 1.0 or greater. The first factor explained 20.2% of the variance, the second factor 18.6%, the third 12.9%, the fourth 6.7%, and the fifth 6.5%, for a total of 65% of variance explained.

Table 4

**“b” Factor Analysis**

	M	SD	1	<u>Factor Loadings</u>				
				2	3	4	5	
1+. You often can’t trust public relations practitioners.	3.46	1.19	.777					
4+. Public relations practitioners frequently use practices that are not in the public interest.	3.26	1.21	.757		.375			
5. A public relations practitioner’s function is not just a job, but a service to the community.	3.26	1.23	.646	-.307				

Table 4 “b” F actor Analysis (cont’d.)

	M	SD	<b><u>Factor Loadings</u></b>				
			1	2	3	4	5
6. Public relations practitioners are just as concerned as journalists about getting complete, accurate information to the public.	3.35	1.18	.704				
9. Most public relations practitioners seek to provide fairness in reporting.		3.45	1.04	.736			
10. Most public relations practitioners provide as much balance as possible on issues about which they provide information.	2.81	1.15	.703				
13. Most public relations practitioners give accurate information.	3.63	.93	.653				.317
14. Forthrightness and honesty are personal characteristics of a public relations practitioner.	3.39	.98	.626				.363
17. Although both serve the information needs of the public, journalists have a more altruistic mission than do public relations practitioners.	3.48	1.12	-.528	.431			

Table 4 “b” Factor Analysis (cont’d.)

	M	SD	<u>Factor Loadings</u>				
			1	2	3	4	5
23. The public department is within ethical bounds to “seed” chatrooms and message boards <i>on their own Web site</i> without identifying themselves as representatives of the company.	2.94	1.30	.316		.767		
24. The public relations department is within ethical bounds to “seed” chatrooms and message boards <i>on public Web sites and online services</i> without identifying themselves as representatives of the company.	2.56	1.25	.356	-.348	.729		
25. Since the Web sites and message boards at hand are focused towards a teenage audience, the public relations department is <i>not</i> justified in “seeding” the discussion.	2.71	1.19	.305		.727		
26. The public relations director is justified in keeping the actual data gathered from the “seeding” process confidential on the grounds that it is proprietary.	2.76	1.29	.462	-.524	.516		
27. The public relations director should disclose the “seeding” technique when asked by a journalist.	3.42	1.23	-.518	.507	-.399		

Table 4 “b” Factor Analysis (cont’d.)

	M	SD	<u>Factor Loadings</u>				
			1	2	3	4	5
2+. You often can’t trust journalists.	3.46	1.18	.658				
3+. Journalists frequently use practices that are not in the public interest.		3.69	1.06	.704			
7. A public relations practitioner should not mislead the public, even if disseminating complete accurate information costs him his job.	3.71	1.24	.	.583	-.353		
8. Most journalists seek to provide fairness in reporting.	3.95	.92		.812			
11. Most journalists provide as much balance as possible on issues about which they report.	3.59	.96		.736			
12. Most journalists give accurate information.	3.87	.84		.738			
15. Forthrightness and honesty are personal characteristics of a journalist.	3.66	.95		.682			
18. A public relations practitioner should deal openly with the press on issues detrimental to their organization.	3.76	1.11		.393	-.375	.523	
20. A public relations practitioner should always tell the truth as he/she knows it.	4.02	.97		.327	-.305	.757	

Table 4 ‘b’ Factor Analysis (cont’d.)

	M	SD	<u>Factor Loadings</u>				
			1	2	3	4	5
22. The company is justified in its first practice of ‘lurking’ in chatrooms and on message boards to follow the discussion and observe opinions about the company and its products, <i>since it is</i> taking place in a public forum.	3.97	.98			.729		
21. A journalist should always tell the truth as he/she knows it.		4.28	.76				.817
16. Many journalists’ stereotypes of public relations practitioners are based on the negative experiences they have had with a few ‘bad apples.’	3.92	.85					.802
19. Many journalists’ stereotypes of public relations practitioners are based on a few highly publicized cases of unethical behavior by practitioners	3.57	.96					.664
Eigenvalues			5.5	5.0	3.5	1.8	1.8
% of Variance.			20.2	18.6	12.9	6.7	6.5

The factor analysis of the ‘c’ data, where respondents answered what the ‘specified other would say’ to each of the 27 items, yielded seven factors which converged in 10 iterations and had Eigenvalues of 1.0 or greater. The first factor explained 14.8% of the variance, the second factor 14.1%, the third 10.7%, the fourth

7.9%, the fifth 7.8%, the sixth 6.6% and the seventh 5.6%, for a total of 67.5% of variance explained.

Table 5

<b>“c” Factor Analysis</b>		<b><u>Factor Loadings</u></b>							
	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>7</u>
1+. You often can't trust public relations practitioners.	3.79	1.00	.664						.441
4+. Public relations practitioners frequently use practices that are not in the public interest.	3.54	1.07	.591	.320					.336
5. A public relations practitioner's function is not just a job, but a service to the community.	3.42	1.14	.638						
6. Public relations practitioners are just as concerned as journalists about getting complete, accurate information to the public.	3.58	1.04	.799						
9. Most public relations practitioners seek to provide fairness in reporting.		3.56	.93	.754					
10. Most public relations practitioners provide as much balance as possible on issues about which they provide information.	2.99	1.08	.566	.327					-.349

Table 5 “c” Factor Analysis (cont’d.)

	M	SD	<u>Factor Loadings</u>						
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7
13. Most public relations practitioners give accurate information.	3.78	.78	.677						
14. Forthrightness and honesty are personal characteristics of a public relations practitioner.	3.65	.84	.479	.385				.357	
17. Although both serve the information needs of the public, journalists have a more altruistic mission than do public relations practitioners.	3.48	1.04	-.416	-.436	.371				.310
18. A public relations practitioner should deal openly with the press on issues detrimental to their organization.	3.82	1.00		-.327		.369	.613		
22. The company is justified in its first practice of “lurking” in chatrooms and on message boards to follow the discussion and observe opinions about the company and its products, <i>since it is taking place in a public forum.</i>	3.90	.99		.336					.697
23. The public department is within ethical bounds to “seed” chatrooms and message boards <i>on their own Web site</i> without identifying themselves as representatives of the company.	2.69	1.22		.856					



Table 5 “c” Factor Analysis (cont’d.)

	M	SD	<u>Factor Loadings</u>						
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7
24. The public relations department is within ethical bounds to “seed” chatrooms and message boards <i>on public Web sites and online services</i> without identifying themselves as representatives of the company.	2.35	1.11		.812					
25. Since the Web sites and message boards at hand are focused towards a teenage audience, the public relations department is <i>not</i> justified in “seeding” the discussion.	2.51	1.10		.660					.416
26. The public relations director is justified in keeping the actual data gathered from the “seeding” process confidential on the grounds that it is proprietary.	2.51	1.12		.688					
27. The public relations director should disclose the “seeding” technique when asked by a journalist.	3.58	1.06		-.589					
3+. Journalists frequently use practices that are not in the public interest.		3.91	.88			.323	.744		

Table 5 “c” Factor Analysis (cont’d.)

	M	SD	<b><u>Factor Loadings</u></b>						
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. A public relations practitioner should not mislead the public, even if disseminating complete accurate information costs him his job.	3.83	1.14			.433	.325			
8. Most journalists seek to provide fairness in reporting.	4.10	.73			.777				
11. Most journalists provide as much balance as possible on issues about which they report.	3.66	.86			.804				
12. Most journalists give accurate information.	3.96	.69			.746				
15. Forthrightness and honesty are personal characteristics of a journalist.	3.72	.88			.507	.413	.380		
2+. You often can't trust journalists.	3.75	1.02				.808			
20. A public relations practitioner should always tell the truth as he/she knows it.	4.07	.87					.848		
21. A journalist should always tell the truth as he/she knows it.		4.33	.74					.744	
6. Many journalists' stereotypes of public relations practitioners are based on the negative experiences they have had with a few "bad apples."	3.94	.76						.739	

Table 5 “c” Factor Analysis (cont’d.)

	M	SD	Factor Loadings						
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7
19. Many journalists’ stereotypes of public relations practitioners are based on a few highly publicized cases of unethical behavior by practitioners.	3.56	.90						.613	
Eigenvalues			4.0	3.8	2.9	2.1	2.1	1.8	1.5
% of Variance.			14.8	14.1	10.7	7.9	7.8	6.6	5.6

Table 6

**Frequencies Distribution for All Ethics Items**

SD = Strongly Disagree, D = Agree, N = Neutral, A = Agree, SA = Strongly Agree

(a) = “You would say:”

(b) = “[PR Practitioners/Journalists] in general would say:”

(c) = “Your specific [PR Practitioner/Journalist] would say:”

		SD	D	N	A	SA
1*. You often can’t trust public relations practitioners.	(a)	14	42	42	81	27
	(b)	11	44	27	78	40
	(c)	5	19	30	91	43
2*. You often can’t trust journalists.	(a)	6	35	39	108	29
	(b)	10	45	26	79	39
	(c)	2	29	26	86	43
3*. Journalists frequently use practices that are not in the public interest.	(a)	3	31	31	89	51
	(b)	5	33	21	95	41
	(c)	2	15	24	101	44
4*. Public relations practitioners frequently use practices that are not in the public interest.	(a)	16	60	31	77	18
	(b)	13	63	36	64	33
	(c)	5	36	31	82	32
5. A public relations practitioner’s function is not just a job, but a service to the community.	(a)	20	57	47	57	26
	(b)	13	55	37	57	38
	(c)	6	41	46	54	38

Table 6 Frequencies Distribution for All Ethics Items (cont'd.)

6. Public relations practitioners are just as concerned as journalists about getting complete, accurate information to the public.	(a)	29	58	18	55	47
	(b)	7	59	26	72	36
	(c)	5	31	33	85	32
7. A public relations practitioner should not mislead the public, even if disseminating complete accurate information costs him his job.	(a)	3	13	13	72	103
	(b)	9	35	27	57	67
	(c)	6	26	19	68	59
8. Most journalists seek to provide fairness in reporting.	(a)	1	15	17	103	70
	(b)	0	25	15	105	55
	(c)	0	10	11	116	50
9. Most public relations practitioners seek to provide fairness in reporting.	(a)	11	41	40	85	23
	(b)	5	43	32	94	24
	(c)	2	31	31	99	19
10. Most public relations practitioners provide as much balance as possible on issues about which they provide information.	(a)	40	88	23	48	3
	(b)	21	73	33	54	12
	(c)	13	56	39	61	10
11. Most journalists provide as much balance as possible on issues about which they report.	(a)	5	47	33	94	25
	(b)	2	31	41	93	29
	(c)	2	19	38	101	21
12. Most journalists give accurate information.	(a)	1	11	27	141	24
	(b)	0	18	29	107	39
	(c)	0	9	19	123	30
13. Most public relations practitioners give accurate information.	(a)	6	21	36	119	19
	(b)	4	22	44	99	28
	(c)	4	5	41	111	23
14. Forthrightness and honesty are personal characteristics of a public relations practitioner.	(a)	8	41	47	72	33
	(b)	5	34	49	82	18
	(c)	2	17	40	98	19
15. Forthrightness and honesty are personal characteristics of a journalist.	(a)	5	17	51	103	27
	(b)	2	24	45	85	34
	(c)	2	16	40	91	29

Table 6 Frequencies Distribution for All Ethics Items (cont'd.)

16. Many journalists' stereotypes of public relations practitioners are based on the negative experiences they have had with a few 'bad apples.'	(a)	1	23	15	104	53
	(b)	1	15	25	107	43
	(c)	2	7	24	112	33
17. Although both serve the information needs of the public, journalists have a more altruistic mission than do public relations practitioners.	(a)	10	35	21	83	52
	(b)	6	44	30	78	35
	(c)	4	36	34	78	26
18. A public relations practitioner should deal openly with the press on issues detrimental to their organization.	(a)	7	15	23	91	65
	(b)	6	27	24	78	51
	(c)	2	23	22	82	43
19. Many journalists' stereotypes of public relations practitioners are based on a few highly publicized cases of unethical behavior by practitioners.	(a)	5	51	36	76	20
	(b)	1	33	34	90	25
	(c)	2	23	37	86	17
20. A public relations practitioner should always tell the truth as he/she knows it.	(a)	0	18	21	79	84
	(b)	1	20	20	81	66
	(c)	0	15	16	86	58
21. A journalist should always tell the truth as he/she knows it.	(a)	0	4	6	75	119
	(b)	0	7	16	89	86
	(c)	0	6	11	83	83
22. The company is justified in its first practice of 'lurking' in chatrooms and on message boards to follow the discussion and observe opinions about the company and its products, <i>since it is taking place in a public forum.</i>	(a)	12	18	6	108	58
	(b)	6	15	12	100	54
	(c)	6	14	14	94	43
23. The public relations department is within ethical bounds to 'seed' chatrooms and message boards <i>on their own Web site</i> without identifying themselves as representatives of the company.	(a)	52	66	17	58	8
	(b)	31	48	19	65	17
	(c)	31	57	24	49	9
24. The public relations department is within ethical bounds to 'seed' chatrooms and message boards <i>on public Web sites and online services</i> without identifying themselves as representatives of the company.	(a)	63	86	18	26	5
	(b)	45	53	24	48	8
	(c)	42	61	27	32	3

Table 6 Frequencies Distribution for All Ethics Items (cont'd.)

25. Since the Web sites and message boards at hand are focused towards a teenage audience, the public relations department is not justified in "seeding" the discussion.	(a)	48	78	37	32	4
	(b)	31	53	31	49	8
	(c)	31	57	33	35	3
26. The public relations director is justified in keeping the actual data gathered from the "seeding" process confidential on the grounds that it is proprietary.	(a)	52	77	23	38	5
	(b)	34	53	23	49	15
	(c)	31	58	30	33	5
27. The public relations director should disclose the "seeding" technique when asked by a journalist.	(a)	6	22	28	79	58
	(b)	9	45	23	61	38
	(c)	4	30	25	74	29

### Constructing Measures of Ethics

A calculation of Cronbach's alpha across all coorientation parts of all 27 items in the questionnaire yielded an alpha of .84, an acceptable level of reliability, which led the researcher to conclude that the entire set of items together would be the most efficacious and reliable measure of ethics for data collected in this study. Indices were constructed consisting of responses for each of the three coorientation subsets, i.e. all of the "a" responses for a case were summed and divided by 27 to create an index or new variable that reflected the average of all of the "a" responses combined. In those cases where values for individual items were missing, means for each item were substituted.

Reliability tests were performed on each of the new measures. Cronbach's alpha for the index of "a" response items measuring all of the "You would say" responses was .64. Mean for the "a" index was 3.43 and standard deviation was .32. For the "b" items index, consisting of all the "generalized other" responses, Cronbach's alpha was .55. Mean for the "b" index was 3.48 and standard deviation was .30. For the "c" items index

of all the “specified other” items, Cronbach’s alpha was .69. Mean for the “c” index was 3.56 and standard deviation was .29. These reliability values were judged acceptable to proceed with testing of hypotheses using the “ethics indices” described above as measures of ethics.

### Results of Hypothesis Testing

Results of hypothesis testing were as follows:

H1 stated that journalists have a different perception of the ethics of the public relations professional with whom they work most frequently than of the field of public relations as a whole. A paired t-test between the “b” index of journalists’ perceptions of practitioners in general ( $M=3.57$ ) and the “c” index of their perceptions of the practitioner with whom they work most closely ( $M=3.62$ ) was significant ( $t(96)=-5.348$ ,  $p<.005$ ). Therefore, H1 is supported.

H2 stated that public relations practitioners will have a different perception of the ethics of the journalist with whom they work most frequently than of the field of journalism as a whole. A paired t-test between the “b” index of practitioners’ perceptions of journalists in general ( $M=3.39$ ) and the “c” index of their perceptions of the journalist with whom they work most closely ( $M=3.50$ ) was significant ( $t(109)=-5.794$ ,  $p<.005$ ). Therefore, H2 is supported.

H3 stated that journalists will rate themselves as being more ethical than their counterparts in public relations. A paired t-test between the “a” index of journalists’ own answers ( $M=3.35$ ) and the “b” index of perceived responses of practitioners in general ( $M=3.57$ ) was significant difference ( $t(96)=-5.348$ ,  $p<.001$ ). Therefore, H3 is supported.

H4 stated that public relations practitioners will rate themselves as being at least as ethical as their counterparts in journalism. A paired t-test between the ‘a’ index of practitioners’ own answers ( $M=3.50$ ) and the ‘b’ index of perceived responses of journalists in general ( $M=3.39$ ) was significant ( $t(109)=4.187, p<.001$ ). Therefore, H4 is supported.

RQ1 asked “Do journalists and public relations practitioners agree with each other on ethical issues?” An independent samples t-test between the ‘a’ index of journalists’ own responses ( $M=3.35$ ) and the ‘a’ index of practitioners’ own responses ( $M=3.50$ ) was significant ( $t(205)=-3.411, p<.001$ ). This indicates that journalists and public relations practitioners do not agree with each other on ethical issues.

RQ2 asked “Are journalists accurate in their predictions of public relations practitioners’ responses on ethical issues?” A paired t-test between the ‘b’ index of journalists’ perceived responses of practitioners in general ( $M=3.57$ ) and the ‘a’ index of practitioners’ own answers ( $M=3.50$ ) was not significant ( $t(96)=1.571, p=.120$ ). This indicates that journalists’ predictions of practitioners’ responses were accurate.

RQ3 asked “Are public relations practitioners accurate in their predictions of journalists’ responses to ethical issues?” A paired t-test between the ‘b’ index of practitioners’ perceived responses of journalists in general ( $M=3.40$ ) and the ‘a’ index of journalists’ own responses ( $M=3.35$ ) was not significant ( $t(96)=-1.073, p=.286$ ). This indicates that practitioners’ predictions of journalists’ responses were accurate.

### Post Hoc Analyses

Post-hoc analyses consisted of item-by-item analyses using paired t-test comparisons between the coorientation sub-sets of data.



Post Hoc Analysis of Items By Journalists About ‘Specified Other’

In item by item comparisons using paired t-tests, there were significant differences ( $p < .05$ ) between journalists’ perceptions of practitioners in general and the practitioners with whom they work most closely on 19 items out of 27 tested. Table 7 contains t-test results for journalists’ responses comparing their ‘b’ answer, or their perception of practitioners as a whole, and their ‘c’ answers, their perception of the practitioner with whom they work most frequently.

Table 7

**Ethics Items Answered by Journalists About Specific Practitioners**

	b mean	c mean	t-value	p
1+. You often can’t trust public relations practitioners.	4.17	4.11	.575	.567
2+. You often can’t trust journalists.	2.71	3.35	-6.093	.000*
3+. Journalists frequently use practices that are not in the public interest.	3.07	3.54	-5.441	.000*
4+. Public relations practitioners frequently use practices that are not in the public interest.	4.12	4.07	.754	.453
5. A public relations practitioner’s function is not just a job, but a service to the community.	4.08	4.08	.000	1.000
6. Public relations practitioners are just as concerned as journalists about getting complete, accurate information to the public.	4.00	3.88	1.996	.049*

Table 7 Ethics Items Answered by Journalists About Specific Practitioners (cont'd.)

	<u>b mean</u>	<u>c mean</u>	<u>t-value</u>	<u>p</u>
7. A public relations practitioner should not mislead the public, even if disseminating complete accurate information costs him his job.	3.07	3.32	-2.837	.006*
8. Most journalists seek to provide fairness in reporting.	3.46	3.80	-4.750	.000*
9. Most public relations practitioners seek to provide fairness in reporting.	4.03	3.89	2.778	.007*
10. Most public relations practitioners provide as much balance as possible on issues about which they provide information.	3.55	3.54	.217	.829
11. Most journalists provide as much balance as possible on issues about which they report.	3.00	3.32	-3.549	.001*
12. Most journalists give accurate information.	3.38	3.63	-3.432	.001*
13. Most public relations practitioners give accurate information.	4.15	4.10	1.157	.251
14. Forthrightness and honesty are personal characteristics of a public relations practitioner.	3.97	3.96	.241	.810
15. Forthrightness and honesty are personal characteristics of a journalist.	3.18	3.33	-2.261	.027*
16. Many journalists' stereotypes of public relations practitioners are based on the negative experiences they have had with a few 'bad apples.'	4.14	4.06	2.532	.013*
17. Although both serve the information needs of the public, journalists have a more altruistic mission than do public relations practitioners.	2.79	3.07	-3.735	.000*

Table 7 Ethics Items Answered by Journalists About Specific Practitioners (cont'd.)

	b mean	c mean	t-value	p
18. A public relations practitioner should deal openly with the press on issues detrimental to their organization.	3.06	3.23	-2.542	.013*
19. Many journalists' stereotypes of public relations practitioners are based on a few highly publicized cases of unethical behavior by practitioners.	3.85	3.79	1.653	.103
20. A public relations practitioner should always tell the truth as he/she knows it.	3.65	3.77	-2.244	.028*
21. A journalist should always tell the truth as he/she knows it.	4.38	4.43	-1.650	.103

**Vignette-related Ethics Items**

22. The company is justified in its first practice of "lurking" in chatrooms and on message boards to follow the discussion and observe opinions about the company and its products, <i>since it is taking place in a public forum.</i>	4.28	4.13	3.235	.002*
23. The public relations department is within ethical bounds to "seed" chatrooms and message boards <i>on their own Web site</i> without identifying themselves as representatives of the company.	3.76	3.39	4.274	.000*
24. The public relations department is within ethical bounds to "seed" chatrooms and message boards <i>on public Web sites and online services</i> without identifying themselves as representatives of the company.	3.42	3.01	4.257	.000*
25. Since the Web sites and message boards at hand are focused towards a teenage audience, the public relations department is <i>not</i> justified in "seeding" the discussion.	2.65	2.97	-3.331	.001*

Table 7 Ethics Items Answered by Journalists About Specific Practitioners (cont'd.)

	b mean	c mean	t-value	p
26. The public relations director is justified in keeping the actual data gathered from the “seeding” process confidential on the grounds that it is proprietary.	3.83	3.46	3.908	.000*
27. The public relations director should disclose the “seeding” technique when asked by a journalist.	2.40	2.75	-3.865	.000*

\* =  $p < .05$ , + = item reverse coded in data analysis

#### Post Hoc Analysis of Items By Practitioners About “Specific Other”

In an item-by-item comparisons using paired t-tests, there were significant differences ( $p < .05$ ) between practitioners’ perceptions of journalists in general and the journalists with whom they work most closely on 15 items of 27 tested. Table 8 contains t-test results for practitioners’ responses comparing their “b” answer, or their perception of journalists as a whole, and their “c” answers, their perception of the journalist with whom they work most frequently.

Table 8

#### **Ethics Items Answered by Practitioners about Specific Journalists**

	b mean	c mean	t-value	p
1+. You often can’t trust public relations practitioners.	2.79	3.50	-6.455	.567
2+. You often can’t trust journalists.	4.10	4.04	.815	.417
3+. Journalists frequently use practices that are not in the public interest.	4.24	4.19	.779	.438
4+. Public relations practitioners frequently use practices that are not in the public interest.	2.50	3.10	-7.815	.000*
5. A public relations practitioner’s function is not just a job, but a service to the community.	2.54	2.86	-5.175	.000*

Table 8 Ethics Items Answered by Practitioners about Specific Journalists (cont'd.)

	b mean	c mean	t-value	p
6. Public relations practitioners are just as concerned as journalists about getting complete, accurate information to the public.	2.82	3.33	-6.607	.000*
7. A public relations practitioner should not mislead the public, even if disseminating complete accurate information costs him his job.	4.30	4.22	1.469	.145
8. Most journalists seek to provide fairness in reporting.	4.40	4.33	1.538	.127
9. Most public relations practitioners seek to provide fairness in reporting.	2.94	3.30	-5.876	.000*
10. Most public relations practitioners provide as much balance as possible on issues about which they provide information.	2.21	2.57	-6.051	.000*
11. Most journalists provide as much balance as possible on issues about which they report.	4.11	3.91	3.761	.000*
12. Most journalists give accurate information.	4.30	4.20	2.413	.018*
13. Most public relations practitioners give accurate information.	3.16	3.52	-5.586	.000*
14. Forthrightness and honesty are personal characteristics of a public relations practitioner.	2.87	3.40	-6.785	.000*
15. Forthrightness and honesty are personal characteristics of a journalist.	4.10	4.00	2.759	.007*
16. Many journalists' stereotypes of public relations practitioners are based on the negative experiences they have had with a few 'bad apples.'	3.68	3.87	-2.880	.005*
17. Although both serve the information needs of the public, journalists have a more altruistic mission than do public relations practitioners.	4.04	3.81	4.195	.000*

Table 8 Ethics Items Answered by Practitioners about Specific Journalists (cont'd.)

	b mean	c mean	t-value	p
18. A public relations practitioner should deal openly with the press on issues detrimental to their organization.	4.34	4.25	2.101	.038*
19. Many journalists' stereotypes of public relations practitioners are based on a few highly publicized cases of unethical behavior by practitioners.	3.34	3.39	-1.043	.300
20. A public relations practitioner should always tell the truth as he/she knows it.	4.35	4.28	2.388	.019*
21. A journalist should always tell the truth as he/she knows it.	4.25	4.25	.332	.741

**Vignette-related Ethics Items**

22. The company is justified in its first practice of "lurking" in chatrooms and on message boards to follow the discussion and observe opinions about the company and its products, <i>since it is taking place in a public forum.</i>	3.67	3.72	-1.648	.103
23. The public relations department is within ethical bounds to "seed" chatrooms and message boards <i>on their own Web site</i> without identifying themselves as representatives of the company.	2.16	2.17	-.445	.657
24. The public relations department is within ethical bounds to "seed" chatrooms and message boards <i>on public Web sites and online services</i> without identifying themselves as representatives of the company.	1.81	1.86	-1.648	.103
25. Since the Web sites and message boards at hand are focused towards a teenage audience, the public relations department is <i>not</i> justified in "seeding" the discussion.	3.94	3.90	1.070	.288

Table 8 Ethics Items Answered by Practitioners about Specific Journalists (cont'd.)

	<u>b mean</u>	<u>c mean</u>	<u>t-value</u>	<u>p</u>
26. The public relations director is justified in keeping the actual data gathered from the "seeding" process confidential on the grounds that it is proprietary.	1.82	1.83	-.276	.783
27. The public relations director should disclose the "seeding" technique when asked by a journalist.	4.20	4.14	1.751	.083

\* =  $p < .05$ , + = item reverse coded in data analysis

#### Post Hoc Analysis of Items By Journalists About "Generalized Other"

In item-by-item comparisons using paired t-tests, there were significant differences ( $p < .05$ ) between journalists' perceptions of themselves as compared to their perceptions of practitioners as a whole on all 27 items tested. Table 9 contains t-test results for journalists' responses comparing their "a" answers, which are their own response to the item, and their "b" answers, their perception of practitioners as a whole.

Table 9

#### **Ethics Items Answered by Journalists About Practitioners In General**

	<u>a mean</u>	<u>b mean</u>	<u>t-value</u>	<u>p</u>
1+. You often can't trust public relations practitioners.	2.69	4.20	-11.630	.000*
2+. You often can't trust journalists.	3.97	2.75	10.360	.000*
3+. Journalists frequently use practices that are not in the public interest.	4.34	3.07	9.950	.000*
4+. Public relations practitioners frequently use practices that are not in the public interest.	2.63	4.10	-12.111	.000*

Table 9 Ethics Items Answered by Journalists About Practitioners In General (cont'd.)

	a mean	b mean	t-value	p
5. A public relations practitioner's function is not just a job, but a service to the community.	2.65	4.06	-10.243	.000*
6. Public relations practitioners are just as concerned as journalists about getting complete, accurate information to the public.	2.15	3.99	-14.785	.000*
7. A public relations practitioner should not mislead the public, even if disseminating complete accurate information costs him his job.	4.26	3.02	8.871	.000*
8. Most journalists seek to provide fairness in reporting.	4.63	3.41	11.764	.000*
9. Most public relations practitioners seek to provide fairness in reporting.	2.78	4.01	-10.523	.000*
10. Most public relations practitioners provide as much balance as possible on issues about which they provide information.	1.82	3.49	-13.357	.000*
11. Most journalists provide as much balance as possible on issues about which they report.	4.06	2.98	11.032	.000*
12. Most journalists give accurate information	4.17	3.33	8.691	.000*
13. Most public relations practitioners give accurate information.	3.19	4.18	-8.807	.000*
14. Forthrightness and honesty are personal characteristics of a public relations practitioner	2.78	3.96	-10.412	.000*
15. Forthrightness and honesty are personal characteristics of a journalist.	3.94	3.11	8.007	.000*
16. Many journalists' stereotypes of public relations practitioners are based on the negative experiences they have had with a few 'bad apples.'	3.59	4.15	-4.380	.000*



Table 9 Ethics Items Answered by Journalists About Practitioners In General (cont'd.)

	a mean	b mean	t-value	p
17. Although both serve the information needs of the public, journalists have a more altruistic mission than do public relations practitioners.	4.35	2.80	12.347	.000*
18. A public relations practitioner should deal openly with the press on issues detrimental to their organization.	4.19	3.04	8.038	.000*
19. Many journalists' stereo types of public relations practitioners are based on a few highly publicized cases of unethical behavior by practitioners.	3.00	3.85	-6.750	.000*
20. A public relations practitioner should always tell the truth as he/she knows it.	4.35	4.28	5.420	.000*
21. A journalist should always tell the truth as he/she knows it.	4.66	4.33	4.336	.000*

**Vignette-related Ethics Items**

22. The company is justified in its first practice of "lurking" in chatrooms and on message boards to follow the discussion and observe opinions about the company and its products, <i>since it is taking place in a public forum.</i>	3.75	4.28	-5.458	.000*
23. The public relations department is within ethical bounds to "seed" chatrooms and message boards <i>on their own Web site</i> without identifying themselves as representatives of the company.	2.30	3.83	-11.136	.000*
24. The public relations department is within ethical bounds to "seed" chatrooms and message boards <i>on public Web sites and online services</i> without identifying themselves as representatives of the company.	1.89	3.46	-12.074	.000*
25. Since the Web sites and message boards at hand are focused towards a teenage audience, the public relations department is <i>not</i> justified in "seeding" the discussion.	3.84	2.60	8.383	.000*

Table 9 Ethics Items Answered by Journalists About Practitioners In General (cont'd.)

	a mean	b mean	t-value	p
26. The public relations director is justified in keeping the actual data gathered from the “seeding” process confidential on the grounds that it is proprietary.	2.21	3.88	-11.118	.000*
27. The public relations director should disclose the “seeding” technique when asked by a journalist.	4.23	2.39	12.128	.000*

\* =  $p < .05$ , + = item reverse coded in data analysis

#### Post Hoc Analysis of Items By Practitioners About “Generalized Other”

In item-by-item comparisons using paired t-tests, there were significant differences ( $p < .05$ ) between practitioners’ perceptions of themselves as compared to their perceptions of journalists as a whole on 26 items of 27 tested. Table 10 contains t-test results for practitioners’ responses comparing their “a” answers, which is their own answer to the item, and their “b” answers, their perception of journalists as a whole.

Table 10

#### **General Ethics Items Answered by Practitioners About Journalists In General**

	a mean	b mean	t-value	p
1+. You often can’t trust public relations practitioners.	3.85	2.80	8.824	.000*
2+. You often can’t trust journalists.	3.33	4.08	-7.048	.000 *
3+. Journalists frequently use practices that are not in the public interest.	3.21	4.23	-11.354	.000*
4+. Public relations practitioners frequently use practices that are not in the public interest.	3.49	2.50	10.357	.000*

Table 10 General Ethics Items Answered by Practitioners About Journalists In General (cont'd.)

	a mean	b mean	t-value	p
5. A public relations practitioner's function is not just a job, but a service to the community.	3.45	2.55	9.149	.000*
6. Public relations practitioners are just as concerned as journalists about getting complete, accurate information to the public.	4.08	2.78	11.208	.000*
7. A public relations practitioner should not mislead the public, even if disseminating complete accurate information costs him his job.	4.26	4.30	-.394	.694
8. Most journalists seek to provide fairness in reporting.	3.65	4.41	-8.513	.000*
9. Most public relations practitioners seek to provide fairness in reporting.	3.82	2.94	10.149	.000*
10. Most public relations practitioners provide as much balance as possible on issues about which they provide information.	2.91	2.21	8.576	.000*
11. Most journalists provide as much balance as possible on issues about which they report.	2.87	4.11	-11.816	.000*
12. Most journalists give accurate information.	3.63	4.30	-9.165	.000*
13. Most public relations practitioners give accurate information.	3.97	3.16	10.398	.000*
14. Forthrightness and honesty are personal characteristics of a public relations practitioner	3.93	2.89	12.685	.000*
15. Forthrightness and honesty are personal characteristics of a journalist.	3.40	4.11	-7.503	.000*
16. Many journalists' stereotypes of public relations practitioners are based on the negative experiences they have had with a few "bad apples."	4.24	3.70	5.144	.000*

Table 10 General Ethics Items Answered by Practitioners About Journalists In General (cont'd.)

	a mean	b mean	t-value	p
17. Although both serve the information needs of the public, journalists have a more altruistic mission than do public relations practitioners.	3.04	4.05	-9.436	.000*
18. A public relations practitioner should deal openly with the press on issues detrimental to their organization.	3.76	4.33	-5.241	.000*
19. Many journalists' stereotypes of public relations practitioners are based on a few highly publicized cases of unethical behavior by practitioners.	3.59	3.34	2.603	.011*
20. A public relations practitioner should always tell the truth as he/she knows it.	4.02	4.35	-4.077	.000*
21. A journalist should always tell the truth as he/she knows it.	4.39	4.25	2.395	.018*

#### **Vignette-related Ethics Items**

22. The company is justified in its first practice of "lurking" in chatrooms and on message boards to follow the discussion and observe opinions about the company and its products, <i>since it is taking place in a public forum.</i>	4.10	3.69	5.533	.000*
23. The public relations department is within ethical bounds to "seed" chatrooms and message boards <i>on their own Web site</i> without identifying themselves as representatives of the company.	2.66	2.20	5.346	.000*
24. The public relations department is within ethical bounds to "seed" chatrooms and message boards <i>on public Web sites and online services</i> without identifying themselves as representatives of the company.	2.23	1.81	4.652	.000*
25. Since the Web sites and message boards at hand are focused towards a teenage audience, the public relations department is <i>not</i> justified in "seeding" the discussion.	3.58	3.90	-3.795	.000*

Table 10 General Ethics Items Answered by Practitioners About Journalists In General (cont'd.)

	a mean	b mean	t-value	p
26. The public relations director is justified in keeping the actual data gathered from the "seeding" process confidential on the grounds that it is proprietary.	2.54	1.84	6.695	.000*
27. The public relations director should disclose the "seeding" technique when asked by a journalist.	3.51	4.22	-6.734	.000*

\*  $p < .05$ , + = item reverse coded in data analysis

#### Post Hoc Analysis of Agreement on Individual Items

In item-by-item comparisons using paired t-tests, there were significant differences ( $p < .05$ ) between journalists' own responses as compared to practitioners' own responses on 26 items of 27 tested. Table 11 contains t-test results for journalists' "a" answers, which are their own responses, and practitioners' "a" answers, which are their own responses.

Table 11

#### **General Ethics Items Answered by Journalists and Practitioners About Themselves**

	journ. a mean	prac. a mean	t-value	p
1+. You often can't trust public relations practitioners.	2.70	3.86	-8.433	.000*
2+. You often can't trust journalists.	3.96	3.33	4.981	.000 *
3+. Journalists frequently use practices that are not in the public interest.	4.33	3.24	8.944	.000*
4+. Public relations practitioners frequently use practices that are not in the public interest.	2.63	3.52	-5.877	.000*

Table 11 General Ethics Items Answered by Journalists and Practitioners About Themselves (cont'd.)

	journ. a mean	prac. a mean	t-value	p
5. A public relations practitioner's function is not just a job, but a service to the community.	2.61	3.45	-5.391	.000*
6. Public relations practitioners are just as concerned as journalists about getting complete, accurate information to the public.	2.13	4.06	-13.379	.000*
7. A public relations practitioner should not mislead the public, even if disseminating complete accurate information costs him his job.	4.28	4.26	.166	.868
8. Most journalists seek to provide fairness in reporting.	4.60	3.65	9.590	.000*
9. Most public relations practitioners seek to provide fairness in reporting.	2.76	3.83	-7.697	.000*
10. Most public relations practitioners provide as much balance as possible on issues about which they provide information.	1.83	2.95	-8.591	.000*
11. Most journalists provide as much balance as possible on issues about which they report.	4.06	2.87	10.024	.000*
12. Most journalists give accurate information	4.16	3.61	6.168	.000*
13. Most public relations practitioners give accurate information.	3.21	3.96	-6.292	.000*
14. Forthrightness and honesty are personal characteristics of a public relations practitioner	2.76	3.94	-8.805	.000*
15. Forthrightness and honesty are personal characteristics of a journalist.	3.94	3.38	4.649	.000*

Table 11 General Ethics Items Answered by Journalists and Practitioners About Themselves (cont'd.)

	journ. a mean	prac. a mean	t-value	p
16. Many journalists' stereotypes of public relations practitioners are based on the negative experiences they have had with a few "bad apples."	3.57	4.24	5.180	.000*
17. Although both serve the information needs of the public, journalists have a more altruistic mission than do public relations practitioners.	4.34	3.06	9.395	.000*
18. A public relations practitioner should deal openly with the press on issues detrimental to their organization.	4.23	3.72	3.643	.000*
19. Many journalists' stereotypes of public relations practitioners are based on a few highly publicized cases of unethical behavior by practitioners.	2.98	3.56	-3.882	.000*
20. A public relations practitioner should always tell the truth as he/she knows it.	4.32	3.98	2.576	.011*
21. A journalist should always tell the truth as he/she knows it.	4.67	4.38	3.360	.001*
<b>Vignette-related Ethics Items</b>				
22. The company is justified in its first practice of "lurking" in chatrooms and on message boards to follow the discussion and observe opinions about the company and its products, <i>since it is taking place in a public forum.</i>	3.66	4.10	-2.869	.005*
23. The public relations department is within ethical bounds to "seed" chatrooms and message boards <i>on their own Web site</i> without identifying themselves as representatives of the company.	2.26	2.75	-2.826	.005*

Table 11 General Ethics Items Answered by Journalists and Practitioners About Themselves (cont'd.)

	journ. a mean	prac. a mean	t-value	p
24. The public relations department is within ethical bounds to “seed” chatrooms and message boards <i>on public Web sites and online services</i> without identifying themselves as representatives of the company.	1.89	2.30	-2.766	.006*
25. Since the Web sites and message boards at hand are focused towards a teenage audience, the public relations department is <i>not</i> justified in “seeding” the discussion.	2.14	2.49	-2.327	.021*
26. The public relations director is justified in keeping the actual data gathered from the “seeding” process confidential on the grounds that it is proprietary.	2.10	2.52	-2.625	.009*
27. The public relations director should disclose the “seeding” technique when asked by a journalist.	4.25	3.46	5.470	.000*

\* =  $p < .05$ , + = item reverse coded in data analysis

#### Post Hoc Analysis of Accuracy of Journalists’ Predictions

In item-by-item comparisons using paired t-tests, there were significant differences ( $p < .05$ ) between journalists’ predictions of practitioners’ responses as compared to practitioners’ own responses on 14 items of 27 tested. Table 12 contains t-test results for journalists’ “b” answers, which are their predictions of practitioners’ responses, and practitioners’ “a” answers, which are their own responses.



Table 12

**General Ethics Items Answered by Journalists about Practitioners  
with Practitioners' Actual Responses**

	journ. b mean	prac. a mean	t-value	p
1+. You often can't trust public relations practitioners.	4.19	3.89	2.341	.021*
2+. You often can't trust journalists.	2.75	3.23	-3.171	.002 *
3+. Journalists frequently use practices that are not in the public interest.	3.05	3.20	-.971	.334
4+. Public relations practitioners frequently use practices that are not in the public interest.	4.11	3.50	4.183	.000*
5. A public relations practitioner's function is not just a job, but a service to the community.	4.06	3.48	3.716	.000*
6. Public relations practitioners are just as concerned as journalists about getting complete, accurate information to the public.	3.98	4.09	-.716	.476
7. A public relations practitioner should not mislead the public, even if disseminating complete accurate information costs him his job.	3.00	4.20	-6.799	.000*
8. Most journalists seek to provide fairness in reporting.	3.41	3.65	-1.671	.098
9. Most public relations practitioners seek to provide fairness in reporting.	4.02	3.84	1.400	.165
10. Most public relations practitioners provide as much balance as possible on issues about which they provide information.	3.51	2.96	3.408	.001*
11. Most journalists provide as much balance as possible on issues about which they report.	2.98	2.90	.527	.599
12. Most journalists give accurate information.	3.33	3.61	-2.418	.018*

Table 12 General Ethics Items Answered by Journalists about Practitioners with Practitioners' Actual Responses(cont'd.)

	journ. b mean	prac. a mean	t-value	p
13. Most public relations practitioners give accurate information.	4.18	3.98	1.882	.063
14. Forthrightness and honesty are personal characteristics of a public relations practitioner	3.98	3.98	.472	.638
15. Forthrightness and honesty are personal characteristics of a journalist.	3.11	3.38	-1.862	.066
16. Many journalists' stereotypes of public relations practitioners are based on the negative experiences they have had with a few 'bad apples.'	4.17	4.25	-.732	.466
17. Although both serve the information needs of the public, journalists have a more altruistic mission than do public relations practitioners.	2.82	3.11	-1.753	.083
18. A public relations practitioner should deal openly with the press on issues detrimental to their organization.	3.03	3.76	-4.293	.000*
19. Many journalists' stereotypes of public relations practitioners are based on a few highly publicized cases of unethical behavior by practitioners.	3.85	3.55	2.068	.042*
20. A public relations practitioner should always tell the truth as he/she knows it.	3.60	3.93	-1.935	.056
21. A journalist should always tell the truth as he/she knows it.	4.33	4.36	-.303	.763
22. The company is justified in its first practice of "lurking" in chatrooms and on message boards to follow the discussion and observe opinions about the company and its products, <i>since it is taking place in a public forum.</i>	4.30	4.08	1.619	.109

Table 12 General Ethics Items Answered by Journalists about Practitioners with Practitioners' Actual Responses (cont'd.)

	<u>journ.</u> <u>b mean</u>	<u>prac.</u> <u>a mean</u>	<u>t-value</u>	<u>p</u>
<b>Vignette-related Ethics Items</b>				
23. The public relations department is within ethical bounds to "seed" chatrooms and message boards <i>on their own Web site</i> without identifying themselves as representatives of the company.	3.86	2.71	6.664	.000*
24. The public relations department is within ethical bounds to "seed" chatrooms and message boards <i>on public Web sites and online services</i> without identifying themselves as representatives of the company.	3.44	2.30	6.968	.000*
25. Since the Web sites and message boards at hand are focused towards a teenage audience, the public relations department is <i>not</i> justified in "seeding" the discussion.	3.38	2.51	5.233	.000*
26. The public relations director is justified in keeping the actual data gathered from the "seeding" process confidential on the grounds that it is proprietary.	3.88	2.57	7.307	.000*
27. The public relations director should disclose the "seeding" technique when asked by a journalist.	2.39	3.43	-6.719	.000*

\* =  $p < .05$ , + = item reverse coded in data analysis

#### Post Hoc Analysis of Accuracy of Practitioners' Predictions

In item-by-item comparisons using paired t-tests, there were significant differences ( $p < .05$ ) between practitioners' predictions of journalists' responses as compared to journalists' own responses on 1 item of 27 tested. Table 13 contains t-test

results for journalists' 'b' answers, which are their predictions of practitioners' responses, and practitioners' 'a' answers, which are their own responses.

Table 13

**General Ethics Items Answered by Practitioners About Journalists In General with Journalists' Actual Answers**

	journal. a mean	prac. b mean	t-value	p
1+. You often can't trust public relations practitioners.	2.68	2.79	-.731	.466
2+. You often can't trust journalists.	3.97	4.06	-.669	.505
3+. Journalists frequently use practices that are not in the public interest.	4.36	4.17	1.804	.075
4+. Public relations practitioners frequently use practices that are not in the public interest.	2.65	2.52	.741	.460
5. A public relations practitioner's function is not just a job, but a service to the community.	2.59	2.56	.130	.897
6. Public relations practitioners are just as concerned as journalists about getting complete, accurate information to the public.	2.13	2.76	-3.667	.000*
7. A public relations practitioner should not mislead the public, even if disseminating complete accurate information costs him his job.	4.29	4.33	-.232	.817
8. Most journalists seek to provide fairness in reporting.	4.62	4.38	2.709	.008*
9. Most public relations practitioners seek to provide fairness in reporting.	2.72	3.02	-1.926	.057

Table 13 General Ethics Items Answered by Practitioners About Journalists In General with Journalists' Actual Answers(cont'd.)

	journ. a mean	prac. b mean	t-value	p
10. Most public relations practitioners provide as much balance as possible on issues about which they provide information.	1.78	2.22	-3.486	.001*
11. Most journalists provide as much balance as possible on issues about which they report.	4.08	4.09	-.113	.910
12. Most journalists give accurate information.	4.16	4.27	-1.254	.213
13. Most public relations practitioners give accurate information.	3.19	3.20	-.081	.935
14. Forthrightness and honesty are personal characteristics of a public relations practitioner	2.75	2.90	-1.012	.314
15. Forthrightness and honesty are personal characteristics of a journalist.	3.96	4.13	-1.509	.135
16. Many journalists' stereotypes of public relations practitioners are based on the negative experiences they have had with a few 'bad apples.'	3.56	3.75	-1.349	.181
17. Although both serve the information needs of the public, journalists have a more altruistic mission than do public relations practitioners.	4.36	4.02	2.723	.008*
18. A public relations practitioner should deal openly with the press on issues detrimental to their organization.	4.22	4.39	-1.251	.214
19. Many journalists' stereotypes of public relations practitioners are based on a few highly publicized cases of unethical behavior by practitioners.	2.94	3.36	-2.378	.020*
20. A public relations practitioner should always tell the truth as he/she knows it.	4.33	4.32	.097	.923

Table 13 General Ethics Items Answered by Practitioners About Journalists In General with Journalists' Actual Answers (cont'd.)

	journ. a mean	prac. b mean	t-value	p
21. A journalist should always tell the truth as he/she knows it.	4.69	4.21	5.203	.000*

### Vignette-related Ethics Items

22. The company is justified in its first practice of "lurking" in chatrooms and on message boards to follow the discussion and observe opinions about the company and its products, <i>since it is taking place in a public forum.</i>	3.68 .848		3.71	-.192
23. The public relations department is within ethical bounds to "seed" chatrooms and message boards <i>on their own Web site</i> without identifying themselves as representatives of the company.	2.21	2.16	.322	.749
24. The public relations department is within ethical bounds to "seed" chatrooms and message boards <i>on public Web sites and online services</i> without identifying themselves as representatives of the company.	1.89	1.77	.820	.414
25. Since the Web sites and message boards at hand are focused towards a teenage audience, the public relations department is <i>not</i> justified in "seeding" the discussion.	2.12	2.12	.000	1.000
26. The public relations director is justified in keeping the actual data gathered from the "seeding" process confidential on the grounds that it is proprietary.	2.04	1.90	.932	.354
27. The public relations director should disclose the "seeding" technique when asked by a journalist.	4.23	4.19	.609	.544

\*= p<.05, + = item reverse coded in data analysis

The next chapter discusses the results of the data analyses.

## CHAPTER 6

### DISCUSSION

This thesis was designed to study the ethical perceptions and cross-perceptions that exist among journalists and public relations practitioners. Its purpose was to better understand the perceptions that exist between journalists and practitioners in regard to the other professions' ethics, as well as to address the questions of how those perceptions differ when professionals are asked to think about specific members of the other profession. It was also designed to provide a basis for expanding future research into the broader relationships that exist between journalists and practitioners.

#### Results of Hypothesis Testing

The following section reviews and discusses the results of the testing of hypotheses.

H1 stated that journalists have a different perception of the ethics of the public relations professional with whom they work most frequently than of the field of public relations as a whole. There is a significant difference in journalists' perceptions of public relations practitioners in general and their perceptions of the practitioners with whom they work most closely, indicating a lack of congruence in the two sets of responses in the coorientation model. When looking at specific ethical items from the research, there were some notable differences. Journalists perceived that the practitioner with whom they work most closely would say that they could often trust journalists, while they

predicted that journalists in general would not. Along the same line, journalists predicted that their specific practitioner would be less likely to agree that journalists use practices that are not in the public interest.

While they perceived that both groups agreed that journalists provided fairness in reporting, journalists felt that the practitioners with whom they worked closely would agree with that assertion significantly more than journalists in general. This was also the case when asked about practitioners perceptions of whether or not journalists provide as much balance as possible on issues about which they report.

Journalists also perceived that while practitioners in general would disagree that journalists have a more altruistic mission than practitioners, their specific practitioners would marginally tend to agree with that statement.

Additionally, journalists perceived that their specific practitioners would be significantly more likely than practitioners in general to agree that practitioners should deal openly with the press on detrimental issues, as well as that practitioners should always tell the truth as they know it.

In looking at the specific items from the questionnaire that drew on the included ethical vignette, journalists perceived a significant difference on how practitioners in general and their specific practitioner would respond. However, the differences were in terms of level of agreement with a position, not necessarily a difference in opinion.

On the whole, H1 was supported, and matched with Jeffers' (1977) finding on items from his research indicating a difference in responses among journalists relating to a specific practitioner as opposed to practitioners in general.



H2 stated that public relations practitioners will have a different perception of the ethics of the journalist with whom they work most frequently than of the field of journalism as a whole.

There was a significant difference between public relations practitioners' perceptions of the journalists with whom they work most closely and their perceptions of journalists in general. This is indicative of a lack of congruence in the coorientation model. When looking at specific ethical items from the research, there were some notable differences.

One significant difference came in practitioners' perception that while journalists in general believed that they used practices that are not in the public interest, they perceived that the journalists with whom they work most closely believe that practitioners did act in the public interest.

While practitioners perceived that both journalists in general and their specific journalist did not believe that public relations was a service to the community, they perceived that their specific journalist would be significantly closer to being neutral on the issue. Another significant difference came in practitioners' perception that their specific journalist believed that practitioners placed the same priority on disseminating complete and accurate information as journalists. Practitioners did not believe that journalists in general would agree.

Practitioners also perceived a significant difference in terms of how journalists viewed their personal characteristics. They stated that while their specific journalist would agree that forthrightness and honesty were personal characteristics of a practitioner, journalists in general would not.

In looking at which field has a more altruistic mission, practitioners perceived that their specific journalist would be significantly closer to neutral on the question that would journalists in general.

Also telling in this instance is the fact that in terms of the individual tests related to vignette-specific questions, there was no significant difference between practitioners' specific journalists and journalists in general.

Overall, H2 was supported, and generally matched with the findings of Ryan and Martinson's (1988) research that found a difference between practitioners' views of specific journalists as opposed to their views of journalists in general.

H3 stated that journalists will rate themselves as being more ethical than their counterparts in public relations.

Journalists did perceive a significant difference between themselves and journalists in general, indicating a lack of congruence in the coorientation model. This tends to support the findings of previous research that has shown this difference to be significant (Aronoff, 1976; Jeffers, 1977; Kopenhaver, Martinson, & Ryan, 1984; Stegall & Sanders, 1986; Wyatt, Smith, & Ansager, 1996; Ryan & Martinson, 1994). There were a number of interesting differences that appeared in the analysis of individual items.

Journalists tended to agree that "you often can't trust public relations practitioners," as well as that "public relations practitioners frequently use practices that are not in the public interest."

Journalists thought that public relations practitioners were not as concerned as they about getting "complete, accurate information to the public." On the same lines, journalists perceived that practitioners would agree significantly less than they would

with the statement that a practitioner shouldn't lie, even if telling the truth "costs him his job."

Journalists also disagreed with the statement that "forthrightness and honesty are personal characteristics of a public relations practitioner." However, on a brighter note, journalists did come out slightly better than neutral on whether practitioners give accurate information.

In looking at the items related to the ethical vignette, journalists felt that practitioners were significantly more likely to agree that the practices of "lurking" and "seeding" were acceptable ethical practices. There was no change in significance between the practices on public Web sites and company Web sites.

Perhaps not surprising was that while journalists disagreed with the public relations director in the vignette withholding information, they perceived that practitioners would approve of the decision.

H4 stated that public relations practitioners will rate themselves as being at least as ethical as their counterparts in journalism.

There was a significant difference between practitioners' responses and their perceptions of journalists' responses in the survey, which reflects a lack of congruence in the coorientation model. This tends to support the findings of previous research (Aronoff, 1976; Jeffers, 1977; Kopenhaver, Martinson & Ryan, 1984; Stegall & Sanders, 1986; Ryan & Martinson, 1994; Sallot, Steinfatt, & Salwen, 1998). In addition to the general difference, there were some interesting specific results on individual items.

Practitioners stated that they did not think that journalists did not provide as much balance as possible on issues about which they report, but did give about the same level of response to the same item about practitioners' own balance.

Practitioners were generally neutral in their reaction to the item stating that journalists have a more altruistic mission than practitioners, but perceived that journalists would agree with the statement.

Also notable was that practitioners perceived that they would agree significantly more than journalists that journalists "should always tell the truth as [they] know it."

When looking at the questions relating to the ethical vignette, practitioners tended to think that journalists would be less likely to agree that the practices outlined in the vignette were ethical.

RQ1 asked "Do journalists and public relations practitioners agree with each other on ethical issues?" There was a significant difference between journalists and practitioners' answers about themselves. This indicates that there is a lack of agreement between the two parties. This does confirm one of the fundamental assumptions of this research, notably that a difference does exist between the two groups. Individual tests on specific items did uncover one instance in which there was agreement between the two groups. Practitioners and journalists both agreed that public relations practitioners should not mislead the public even in the face of losing their job. This overall disagreement runs counter to previous studies using the coorientation model that found that the groups tend to agree on news values (Aronoff, 1976; Kopenhaver, 1985; Sallot et al., 1998) and on ethical measures (Ryan & Martinson, 1984).

RQ2 asked “Are journalists accurate in their predictions of public relations practitioners’ responses on ethical issues?” There was not a significant difference between the indices of journalists’ perceptions of practitioners’ responses and practitioners’ actual responses, which indicates that journalists are accurate in their predictions. Previous research (Kopenhaver, et al., 1984; Kopenhaver, 1985; Sallot, et al. 1998; Stegall & Sanders, 1986) has generally shown that journalists will be inaccurate in their predictions of practitioners’ perceptions on news values and ethics.

Individual tests on specific items provided additional information as well. Journalists underestimated practitioners’ level of trust towards journalists, predicting that practitioners would indicate that they did not trust journalists, when practitioners stated that they did trust journalists. Along this line, journalists similarly underestimated practitioners’ level of agreement with the statement “Most journalists give accurate information.”

Journalists also underestimated the number of practitioners who would agree with the assertion that practitioners should not mislead the public, even at the risk of being fired for being truthful. Practitioners were significantly more supportive of that view than journalists anticipated. Looking at comparable issues, journalists again were inaccurate in their estimation of practitioners’ belief that detrimental information should be handled openly with the press.

One interesting inaccuracy in journalists’ predictions occurred with the item inquiring about whether practitioners provide as much balance as possible in giving information. While journalists predicted that practitioners would agree with that

statement, practitioners agreed with the statement significantly less than journalists predicted.

The items in the questionnaire related to the ethical vignette also led to a number of inaccurate predications by journalists. Journalists tended to greatly overestimate the likelihood that practitioners would the practices described in the vignette as ethical. Reflective of other inaccuracies in the general ethics items, Journalists also thought that practitioners were significantly more likely to support hiding information on the company's practices from the media than was actually the case.

RQ3 asked "Are public relations practitioners accurate in their predictions of journalists' responses to ethical issues?" There was not a significant difference in the index measuring practitioners' perceptions of journalists' responses and the index measuring journalists' actual responses, indicating that practitioners' perceptions were accurate. This tends to support the findings of previous research on news values (Sallot, et al. 1998; Stegall & Sanders, 1986) as well as on broader ethical measures (Kopenhaver et al., 1984; Kopenhaver, 1985).

In comparisons of the responses based on specific items in the questionnaire, there were a number of instances where practitioners gave themselves too much credit, i.e. they predicted journalists would view practitioners as more ethical than was actually the case. This inaccuracy was the case on an item about whether practitioners were as concerned as journalists with getting accurate information to the public, as well as an item that looked to whether practitioners provided as much balance as possible on the information they provide. In a similar case of inaccuracy, practitioners underestimated

the extent to which journalists would agree that they have a more altruistic mission than practitioners.

Practitioners also underestimated the extent to which journalists would agree with the assertion that a journalist should always tell the truth as they know it.

### Conventional Wisdom About “Specific Other” Perception Holds True

This research took an original perspective on the perceptions that exist between journalists and practitioners by looking at the difference between perceptions of the other group in general as opposed to specific members of the other group. Conventional wisdom holds that each group will have a generally negative perception of the other group, but that their answer will change when asked about a specific member of the other group. Some research (Jeffers, 1977; Ryan & Martinson, 1988) had examined some general elements of this potential relationship, but to this point no known research has been conducted that looks at this possible difference specifically through the filter of ethics. As shown by the support of H1 and H2, it seems that there is a difference in perception between how the “others” in general are viewed as opposed to the specific members of that other field.

### New Technologies, Same Incongruence

In the ethical vignette used in this study, the topics of “lurking” and “seeding” as methods of research were used as examples in order to get an indication of how the differences that exist between journalists and practitioners might have been affected by changes in technology. Research has shown that as recently as 2001, some 72.3% of

Americans were online (UCLA Center for Communication Policy, 2002), and that 98 percent of practitioners surveyed believed that the Internet is having an impact on the practice of public relations (Wright, 2001).

Some research has shown that despite the boom in Internet usage by communications professionals, public relations practitioners are not yet utilizing the Internet as effectively as possible. One study found that on top corporate Web sites, a group of 20 journalists were only able to find the information they were looking for some 60% of the time (Internet PR Guide, 2001).

It would seem, however, that the more things change in the environment surrounding the practitioner-journalist relationship, the more they stay the same. There was still a significant incongruence in each group's perceptions about the other group in looking at the questions related to the ethical items presented in response to the vignette. The only instance in which either lurking or seeding was considered ethical was by practitioners. They tended to agree that it is within ethical bounds for a company's representatives to "lurk" in chatrooms on its own Web site.

#### Validity/Limitations of This Study

There are a number of possible limitations to this research. In terms of the sample chosen, it is geographically limited, and in the case of the practitioners, is limited to membership in professional organizations. Choosing to sample within the state of Georgia was a matter of convenience and management of resources by way of smaller sample sizes and easier access to lists from which to sample. Obviously, choosing to sample only from the state of Georgia is a limitation in terms of the ability to generalize



the results of the research to the respective fields as a whole. However a number of past studies (Aronoff, 1975; Jeffers, 1977; Sallot et al., 1998; Stegall & Sanders, 1986; Nayman et al., 1977; Sallot, 1990) have focused on specific geographical areas, and their results have been widely accepted and cited in the literature.

There are also potential limitations on the samples based on the types of listings from which they draw subjects. In the case of the public relations sample, reliance on a professional organization that does not necessarily reflect the entire field of public relations is a limiting factor. However, the use of PRSA is a matter of finding the best available resource from which to sample. A number of past studies have used samples drawn from professional organizations' directories (Aronoff, 1975; Jeffers, 1977; Sallot et al., 1998; Stegall & Sanders, 1986; Nayman et al., 1977; Sallot, 1990), and are widely cited.

The sample of journalists also faces some limitations in relying on a publication listing, in that the listing of staff may not be completely updated. However, it would be nearly impossible to formulate an accurate sample of *all* journalists in Georgia, thus the publication listing must suffice as the most accurate sample possible within the available resources.

Each of these limitations does hinder the external validity of the study in that it is not drawn from a totally representative sample. Ideally, the sample could be drawn nationwide from all of those who work in a public relations position, including those who are not members of a professional organization like PRSA. However, without a comprehensive listing of those professionals, a sample of that nature would be very difficult to obtain. An ideal sample of journalists would also be more geographically

meaningful, drawing from a number of areas, urban, suburban, and rural to reflect the potential influence of those changes.

There is also an inherent difficulty in studying ethics, as it is an extremely subjective topic. This research attempted to draw upon, for the most part, items used to measure ethics and ethical elements in other research instead of attempting to develop a great deal of new ethical measures (Aronoff, 1975; Curtin, 1996; Ryan and Martinson, 1988; Ryan and Martinson, 1998; Stegall and Sanders, 1986; Sallot, 1990; Sallot et al., 1998; Belz et al., 1989). The focus on development of items was placed on the ethical vignette section, which while drawing on Ryan and Martinson's (1984, 1994) work, was designed to include some of the more recent changes in the use of technology in public relations.

It was expected that the items would either fall into a coherent factor structure or to at least match a set of expected factors. However, as outlined in the previous chapter, this was not the case. One possible reason for this failure to produce useful factors or to match predicted factors is the high level of covariance between the subjects. Truth and honesty could be argued to be an inherent part of fairness and balance, and the same could be said of fairness and balance playing an important role in serving the public interest. This covariance is a likely cause of the lack of factors among the responses, and is also reflective of the difficult nature of quantifying the elements of ethics. Another possible reason for the failure of factor analysis to produce meaningful results may be in the subject to variable (STV) ratio for the research. For the 27-item instrument, there were 96 journalists and 107 practitioners who responded, providing STV ratios of 3.55-to-1 and 3.96-to-1 respectively. Bryant and Yarnold (1995) state that a minimum STV of 5-

to-1 is necessary to find meaningful factors in the resulting data, therefore these lower values could have influenced the outcome of the factor analysis.

The content validity of this research comes from two factors. First, the items drawn from previous research in the questionnaire have an inherent validity based on their use and acceptance in previous research, though to this point, previous studies have not attempted a factor analysis on those items. For the items in the vignette designed for this study, content validity is drawn from the review of the vignette and items by the thesis committee guiding the research.

### Implications for Practice

It is clear that the antagonistic relationship that has existed between journalists and practitioners still exists today. There is a high level of distrust between the two professions, with members of each profession feeling that the others are not truthful. Also telling is that fact that while members of each profession say that theirs works most for the public good, few are willing to acknowledge that the other field might also act in the public interest as well.

The items included in the vignette showed clearly that the practices presented were generally considered unethical by both practitioners and journalists. The vignette looked at ‘lurking,’ or the practice of observing discussions in chatrooms or on message boards without identifying oneself, and ‘seeding,’ or intentionally attempting to start discussion about a specific product or initiative, again without identifying as someone with an interest in the topic being discussed. The items attempted to also look at the

differences between this behavior occurring with underage Internet users, as well as the differences between doing so on a company Web site and a public online service.

The only practice that both groups felt was within ethical bounds was lurking, “since it is taking place in a public forum.” This seems to match with statistics that say 57 percent of practitioners use the Web “in surveillance of other companies” (Ryan, 1999). However, the practice of seeding the discussion was considered less ethical by members of both groups in varying degrees. Both groups agreed that seeding was not ethical, even on a company’s own Web site, though generally the response was that seeding on a company’s own Web site was more ethical than on a public online service.

When asked specifically about the impact of the seeding taking place on a Web site oriented towards a teenage audience, both groups agreed that the seeding was especially unethical in that context.

Perhaps most interesting among the responses to the items related to the vignette came from the item asking if the practitioner in question is justified in keeping the data collected from the seeding, “on the grounds that it is proprietary.” While both groups expected that practitioners would be more willing to agree that this was a valid argument, neither group agreed with the statement.

Also notable was that both groups agreed that the public relations practitioner in the vignette should disclose the seeding practice when asked by a journalist.

### More Research Is Needed

This study, while answering some questions about the ethical perceptions that exist between journalists and practitioners, provides many future research possibilities.

There is more potential to study the relationships and differences in perceptions involving specific members of the other group, in order to better understand the day-to-day implications of these perceptions and cross-perceptions between the two fields. If future research supports this data that a difference does exist, it could lead to a different interpretation of the implications of the more generalized perceptions between the two groups. Professionals' day-to-day interactions with the members of the other group that they know well have the most influence, and could also provide the most insight into what might drive each profession to act in the ways and use the methods that it does.

One point that emerged in the examination of the accuracy of practitioners' predictions of journalists was a sense of a "double standard." Practitioners predicted that journalists would agree more with the statement "A public relations practitioner should always tell the truth as he/she knows it," more than they would with the statement "A journalist should always tell the truth as he/she knows it." This would seem to imply that practitioners perceive that journalists set higher expectations of practitioners than of themselves. While this research cannot confirm that statistically, it opens a potential topic for future research.

Another avenue for future research is to examine the nature of the cause of incongruence between the two groups and whether it reflects cynicism of the other group or skepticism. In this instance, cynicism would be rooted in a more personal sense of distrust for members of the other group, while skepticism would reflect a cautious view of the other group. While skepticism is probably a beneficial element of a relationship in which each group has somewhat competing interests, cynicism rooted in a more overt

dislike of the other group beyond professional standards could be an unnecessary hindrance to the groups' interactions.

Also important is to continue looking at the ways in which new technologies might change the dynamics of ethics in journalism and public relations, as well as the ways in which the two professions interact and view each other. Especially as the Web becomes more prominent, it presents a number of opportunities for both fields to have access to unfettered communication, and seemingly unlimited amounts of people and information.

It is also important to continue the research that finds its origin in the work of Jeffers and Aronoff that simply looks at this intricate and important relationship between symbiotic professions in general. As we reach the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of much of this early work, how much has changed, and how much has stayed the same? It seems from this research that the "Great Divide" between the two professions still seems to exist, but it remains an important subject to study.

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## APPENDICES

APPENDIX A  
JOURNALIST COVER LETTER

Dear Georgia Journalist,

Would you please help a graduate student in need of information?

The relationship between journalists and public relations practitioners is fluid and difficult to define, but is an important one to both professions. Enclosed is a survey that will help us better understand the dynamics of that relationship in order to benefit both professions.

The survey is part of my master's thesis research at the Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Georgia. As part of my research, I am examining the different perceptions that journalists and public relations practitioners have of each other. I would greatly appreciate your help with my research by completing and returning this survey by May 10<sup>th</sup>.

I have enclosed a pre-stamped return envelope for your convenience. Your answers to this survey will remain completely confidential, and will not be shared with anyone. While each survey is numbered for tracking returns, your identity is totally protected.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me via email at [jaymay@arches.uga.edu](mailto:jaymay@arches.uga.edu), by phone at (706) 357-2478, or by mail at 719 Creswell Hall, Athens, GA, 30609. You can also contact my major professor, Dr. Lynne Sallot, at [sallot@uga.edu](mailto:sallot@uga.edu).

Thank you again for your help!

Sincerely,

Jay Mayfield  
Graduate Student  
The University of Georgia

Please Note: For questions or problems about your rights please call or write: Chris A. Joseph, Ph.D. Human Subjects Office, University of Georgia, 606A Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia, 30602-7411; Telephone (706) 542-6514; E-Mail Address [IRB@uga.edu](mailto:IRB@uga.edu) For more information, please see the reverse side of this letter.

Research Information per UGA Institutional Review Board Requirements:

Research Title: "Ethical Perceptions and Cross-Perceptions of Journalists and Public Relations Practitioners"

University Department:: Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication  
Journalism Building  
The University of Georgia  
Athens, GA 30602

Purpose: To increase the understanding of the relationships between journalists and public relations practitioners to allow journalists and public relations practitioners to more effectively interact in the course of their work..

Time required: 5-10 minutes

Anticipated discomforts or stresses associated with participation: None.

"Your participation in this survey is voluntary, and you can withdraw at any time without penalty. Those not returning the survey within 3 weeks will receive a follow-up card, and those not returning the survey within 5 weeks will receive a second copy of the survey. Those who do not return the survey after a 2-month period will be considered to have withdrawn from the research."

"Each survey is numbered to track return rates, but your answers will be kept strictly confidential. No one besides the research team consisting of myself and Dr Lynne Sallot, my advisor, will see your answers, and the data used to track return rates will be destroyed one year from the completion of this research."

Contact information for faculty advisor: Dr. Lynne Sallot  
Journalism Building  
The University of Georgia  
Athens, GA 30602  
(706) 542-4999  
sallot@uga.edu

Contact information for primary researcher: Jay Mayfield  
719 Creswell Hall  
The University of Georgia  
Athens, GA 30602  
(706) 357-2478  
jaymay@uga.edu

"Note: For questions or problems about your rights please call or write: Chris A. Joseph, Ph.D. Human Subjects Office, University of Georgia, 606A Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia, 30602-7411; Telephone (706) 542-6514; E-Mail Address IRB@uga.edu."

APPENDIX B  
PRACTITIONER COVER LETTER

Dear Georgia PRSA Member,

Would you please help a graduate student in need of information?

The relationship between journalists and public relations practitioners is fluid and difficult to define, but is an important one to both professions. Enclosed is a survey that will help us better understand the dynamics of that relationship in order to benefit both professions.

The survey is part of my master's thesis research at the Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Georgia. As part of my research, I am examining the different perceptions that journalists and public relations practitioners have of each other. I would greatly appreciate your help with my research by completing and returning this survey by May 10<sup>th</sup>.

I have enclosed a pre-stamped return envelope for your convenience. Your answers to this survey will remain completely confidential, and will not be shared with anyone. While each survey is numbered for tracking returns, your identity is totally protected.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me via email at jaymay@arches.uga.edu, by phone at (706) 357-2478, or by mail at 719 Creswell Hall, Athens, GA, 30609. You can also contact my major professor, Dr. Lynne Sallot, at sallot@uga.edu.

Thank you again for your help!

Sincerely,

Jay Mayfield  
Graduate Student  
The University of Georgia

Please Note: For questions or problems about your rights please call or write: Chris A. Joseph, Ph.D. Human Subjects Office, University of Georgia, 606A Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia, 30602-7411; Telephone (706) 542-6514; E-Mail Address IRB@uga.edu For more information, please see the reverse side of this letter.

Research Information per UGA Institutional Review Board Requirements:

Research Title: ‘Ethical Perceptions and Cross-Perceptions of Journalists and Public Relations Practitioners’

University Department:: Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication  
Journalism Building  
The University of Georgia  
Athens, GA 30602

Purpose: To increase the understanding of the relationships between journalists and public relations practitioners to allow journalists and public relations practitioners to more effectively interact in the course of their work..

Time required: 5-10 minutes

Anticipated discomforts or stresses associated with participation: None.

‘Your participation in this survey is voluntary, and you can withdraw at any time without penalty. Those not returning the survey within 3 weeks will receive a follow-up card, and those not returning the survey within 5 weeks will receive a second copy of the survey. Those who do not return the survey after a 2-month period will be considered to have withdrawn from the research.’

‘Each survey is numbered to track return rates, but your answers will be kept strictly confidential. No one besides the research team consisting of myself and Dr Lynne Sallot, my advisor, will see your answers, and the data used to track return rates will be destroyed one year from the completion of this research.’

Contact information for faculty advisor: Dr. Lynne Sallot  
Journalism Building  
The University of Georgia  
Athens, GA 30602  
(706) 542-4999  
sallot@uga.edu

Contact information for primary researcher: Jay Mayfield  
719 Creswell Hall  
The University of Georgia  
Athens, GA 30602  
(706) 357-2478  
jaymay@uga.edu

‘Note: For questions or problems about your rights please call or write: Chris A. Joseph, Ph.D. Human Subjects Office, University of Georgia, 606A Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia, 30602-7411; Telephone (706) 542-6514; E-Mail Address IRB@uga.edu.’

## APPENDIX C

## E-MAIL FOLLOW UP TO JOURNALISTS

Date: Mon, 6 May 2002 21:56:33 -0400 (EDT)  
 From: Jay Mayfield <jaymay@arches.uga.edu>  
 To: jaymay@arches.uga.edu  
 Subject: UGA Journalism Master' s Thesis Please Help!

Dear Georgia Journalist,

A couple of weeks ago, you should have received a survey from me about your opinions of journalists and public relations practitioners. My records show that you haven' t returned it yet.

If you already have, thank you very much! Your help is immeasurable in aiding my research. If you forgot to return it or have misplaced it, another copy should be arriving in the mail within the next two days. While the enclosed letter gives a May 10th deadline, if you can still return it later, please do so!

I urge you to please take the few minutes to fill out and return this survey. It will not only benefit a graduate student working on his master' s thesis, but it will also increase our knowledge of the way in which these two vital groups interact.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to respond to this email, or call me at 706-357-2478 (until May 13) or at 423-892-0339 (after May 13).

Thank you again for all of your help.

Jay Mayfield

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 Jay Mayfield  
 Graduate Student - Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication  
 The University of Georgia  
 jaymay@arches.uga.edu  
 -----



## APPENDIX D

## E-MAIL FOLLOW UP TO PRACTITIONERS

Date: Mon, 6 May 2002 22:40:00 -0400 (EDT)  
From: Jay Mayfield <jaymay@arches.uga.edu>  
To: jaymay@arches.uga.edu  
Subject: UGA PR Master' s Thesis Please Help!

Dear Georgia PRSA Member,

A couple of weeks ago, you should have received a survey from me about your opinions of journalists and public relations practitioners. My records show that you haven' t returned it yet.

If you already have, thank you very much! Your help is immeasurable in aiding my research. If you forgot to return it, or have misplaced it, another copy should be arriving in the mail within the next two days. While the enclosed letter gives a May 10th deadline, if you can still return it later, please do so!

I urge you to please take the few minutes to fill out and return this survey. It will not only benefit a graduate student working on his master' s thesis, but it will also increase our knowledge of the way in which these two vital groups interact.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to respond to this email, or call me at 706-357-2478 (until May 13) or at 423-892-0339 (after May 13).

Thank you again for all of your help.

Jay Mayfield

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Jay Mayfield  
Graduate Student - Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication  
The University of Georgia  
jaymay@arches.uga.edu

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## APPENDIX E

## JOURNALIST SECOND WAVE COVER LETTER

Dear Georgia Journalist,

You should have received a survey within the last couple of weeks asking you to take a few minutes of your time to fill it out and return it, and I haven't heard from you! Your help is crucial in the completion of my thesis, and your opinions will help to shape research that will help us better understand the relationship between journalists and PR practitioners.

The survey is part of my master's thesis research at the Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Georgia. As part of my research, I am examining the different perceptions that journalists and public relations practitioners have of each other. I would greatly appreciate your help with my research by completing and returning this survey by May 10<sup>th</sup>.

I have enclosed a pre-stamped return envelope for your convenience. Your answers to this survey will remain completely confidential, and will not be shared with anyone. While each survey is numbered for tracking returns, your identity is totally protected, and the information you provide will not be used for any other purpose.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me via email at jaymay@arches.uga.edu, by phone at (706) 357-2478, or by mail at 719 Creswell Hall, Athens, GA, 30609. You can also contact my major professor, Dr. Lynne Sallot, at sallot@uga.edu.

Thank you again for your help!

Sincerely,

Jay Mayfield  
Graduate Student  
The University of Georgia

Please Note: For questions or problems about your rights please call or write: Chris A. Joseph, Ph.D. Human Subjects Office, University of Georgia, 606A Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia, 30602-7411; Telephone (706) 542-6514; E-Mail Address IRB@uga.edu

## APPENDIX F

## PRACTITIONER SECOND WAVE COVER LETTER

Dear Georgia PRSA Member,

Would you please help a graduate student in need of information?

You should have received a survey within the last couple of weeks asking you to take a few minutes of your time to fill it out and return it, and I haven't heard from you! Your help is crucial in the completion of my thesis, and your opinions will help to shape research that will help us better understand the relationship between public relations practitioners and journalists.

The survey is part of my master's thesis research at the Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Georgia. As part of my research, I am examining the different perceptions that journalists and public relations practitioners have of each other. I would greatly appreciate your help with my research by completing and returning this survey by May 10<sup>th</sup>.

I have enclosed a pre-stamped return envelope for your convenience. Your answers to this survey will remain completely confidential, and will not be shared with anyone. While each survey is numbered for tracking returns, your identity is totally protected, and the information you provide will not be used for any other purpose.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me via email at jaymay@arches.uga.edu, by phone at (706) 357-2478, or by mail at 719 Creswell Hall, Athens, GA, 30609. You can also contact my major professor, Dr. Lynne Sallot, at sallot@uga.edu.

Thank you again for your help!

Sincerely,

Jay Mayfield  
Graduate Student  
The University of Georgia

Please Note: For questions or problems about your rights please call or write: Chris A. Joseph, Ph.D. Human Subjects Office, University of Georgia, 606A Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia, 30602-7411; Telephone (706) 542-6514; E-Mail Address IRB@uga.edu

## APPENDIX G

### JOURNALIST SURVEY INSTRUMENT

The survey instrument for journalists is on the following seven pages. Due to margin restrictions for the thesis document, it is not possible to recreate the survey exactly as it was mailed. The original survey document was four pages long, with two columns on each page in a 10-point, Arial Narrow typeface. The scale (Strongly Disagree – Strongly Agree with Don't Know) was included at the beginning of each column, as shown in the initial paragraph of the survey instrument.

## JOURNALISTS' SURVEY

Thank you for your participation in this survey. Please read the following instructions closely, as accuracy is important in the completion of the questionnaire. Please be as frank as possible in your answers. The results of this survey will remain confidential.

This survey is designed to determine the nature of relationships between journalists and public relations practitioners. For each statement below, you will be asked to give three responses on a scale from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree, or Don't Know, as outlined below:

Strongly Disagree		Neutral		Strongly Agree	Don't Know
SD	D	N	A	SA	DK

On scale (a), please give your own response to the statement. On scale (b), please answer as you would expect public relations practitioners in general to answer. On scale (c), think of the public relations practitioner with whom you work most closely, and answer as you would expect them to answer. Please remember to circle ONLY ONE answer per scale.

Thank you again for participating in the survey! Your help is greatly appreciated.

1) You often can't trust public relations practitioners.

a) You say:					
SD	D	N	A	SA	DK
b) PR Practitioners in general would say:					
SD	D	N	A	SA	DK
c) Your specific PR practitioner would say:					
SD	D	N	A	SA	DK

2) You often can't trust journalists.

a) You say:					
SD	D	N	A	SA	DK
b) PR Practitioners in general would say:					
SD	D	N	A	SA	DK
c) Your specific PR practitioner would say:					
SD	D	N	A	SA	DK

3) Journalists frequently use practices that are not in the public interest.

a) You say:					
SD	D	N	A	SA	DK
b) PR Practitioners in general would say:					
SD	D	N	A	SA	DK
c) Your specific PR practitioner would say:					
SD	D	N	A	SA	DK

4) Public relations practitioners frequently use practices that are not in the public interest.

a) You say:					
SD	D	N	A	SA	DK
b) PR Practitioners in general would say:					
SD	D	N	A	SA	DK
c) Your specific PR practitioner would say:					
SD	D	N	A	SA	DK

- 5) A public relations practitioner's function is not just a job, but a service to the community.
- a) You say:  
SD      D      N      A      SA      DK
- b) PR Practitioners in general would say:  
SD      D      N      A      SA      DK
- c) Your specific PR practitioner would say:  
SD      D      N      A      SA      DK
- 6) Public relations practitioners are just as concerned as journalists about getting complete, accurate information to the public.
- a) You say:  
SD      D      N      A      SA      DK
- b) PR Practitioners in general would say:  
SD      D      N      A      SA      DK
- c) Your specific PR practitioner would say:  
SD      D      N      A      SA      DK
- 7) A public relations person should not mislead the public, even if disseminating complete, accurate information costs him his job.
- a) You say:  
SD      D      N      A      SA      DK
- b) PR Practitioners in general would say:  
SD      D      N      A      SA      DK
- c) Your specific PR practitioner would say:  
SD      D      N      A      SA      DK
- 8) Most journalists seek to provide fairness in reporting.
- a) You say:  
SD      D      N      A      SA      DK
- b) PR Practitioners in general would say:  
SD      D      N      A      SA      DK
- c) Your specific PR practitioner would say:  
SD      D      N      A      SA      DK
- 9) Most public relations practitioners seek to provide fairness in reporting.
- a) You say:  
SD      D      N      A      SA      DK
- b) PR Practitioners in general would say:  
SD      D      N      A      SA      DK
- c) Your specific PR practitioner would say:  
SD      D      N      A      SA      DK

10) Most public relations practitioners provide as much balance as possible on issues about which they provide information.

- a) You say:  
 SD      D      N      A      SA      DK
- b) PR Practitioners in general would say:  
 SD      D      N      A      SA      DK
- c) Your specific PR practitioner would say:  
 SD      D      N      A      SA      DK

11) Most journalists provide as much balance as possible on issues about which they report.

- a) You say:  
 SD      D      N      A      SA      DK
- b) PR Practitioners in general would say:  
 SD      D      N      A      SA      DK
- c) Your specific PR practitioner would say:  
 SD      D      N      A      SA      DK

12) Most journalists give accurate information.

- a) You say:  
 SD      D      N      A      SA      DK
- b) PR Practitioners in general would say:  
 SD      D      N      A      SA      DK
- c) Your specific PR practitioner would say:  
 SD      D      N      A      SA      DK

13) Most public relations practitioners give accurate information.

- a) You say:  
 SD      D      N      A      SA      DK
- b) PR Practitioners in general would say:  
 SD      D      N      A      SA      DK
- c) Your specific PR practitioner would say:  
 SD      D      N      A      SA      DK

14) Forthrightness and honesty are personal characteristics of a public relations practitioner.

- a) You say:  
 SD      D      N      A      SA      DK
- b) PR Practitioners in general would say:  
 SD      D      N      A      SA      DK
- c) Your specific PR practitioner would say:  
 SD      D      N      A      SA      DK

15) Forthrightness and honesty are personal characteristics of a journalist.

- a) You say:  
 SD      D      N      A      SA      DK
- b) PR Practitioners in general would say:  
 SD      D      N      A      SA      DK
- c) Your specific PR practitioner would say:  
 SD      D      N      A      SA      DK

16) Many journalists' stereotypes of public relations practitioners are based on the negative experiences they have had with a few 'bad apples.'

- a) You say:  
 SD      D      N      A      SA      DK
- b) PR Practitioners in general would say:  
 SD      D      N      A      SA      DK
- c) Your specific PR practitioner would say:  
 SD      D      N      A      SA      DK

17) Although both serve the information needs of the public, journalists have a more altruistic mission than do public relations practitioners.

- a) You say:  
 SD      D      N      A      SA      DK
- b) PR Practitioners in general would say:  
 SD      D      N      A      SA      DK
- c) Your specific PR practitioner would say:  
 SD      D      N      A      SA      DK

18) A public relations practitioner should deal openly with the press on issues detrimental to their organization.

- a) You say:  
 SD      D      N      A      SA      DK
- b) PR Practitioners in general would say:  
 SD      D      N      A      SA      DK
- c) Your specific PR practitioner would say:  
 SD      D      N      A      SA      DK

19) Many journalists' stereotypes of public relations practitioners are based on a few highly publicized cases on unethical behavior by practitioners.

- a) You say:  
 SD      D      N      A      SA      DK
- b) PR Practitioners in general would say:  
 SD      D      N      A      SA      DK
- c) Your specific PR practitioner would say:  
 SD      D      N      A      SA      DK

20) A public relations practitioner should always tell the truth as he/she knows it.

- a) You say:  
 SD      D      N      A      SA      DK
- b) PR Practitioners in general would say:  
 SD      D      N      A      SA      DK
- c) Your specific PR practitioner would say:  
 SD      D      N      A      SA      DK



21) A journalist should always tell the truth as he/she knows it.

a) You say:

SD      D      N      A      SA      DK

b) PR Practitioners in general would say:

SD      D      N      A      SA      DK

c) Your specific PR practitioner would say:

SD      D      N      A      SA      DK

Before continuing on to the next section, please insure that you have completed all questions on this section according to the directions provided.

Please read the following hypothetical story about the public relations practices of a fictional soft drink company, along with the journalistic practices of reporters that cover the company. Then, please respond to the statements as honestly as possible. Please note that the scales are the same as before, with a) representing your own response, b) representing public relations practitioners in general, and c) representing the response you would expect from the practitioner with whom you work most closely.

A large, nationwide soft drink company has recently decided to expand its product line. Their new product, a fruit-flavored drink with a high caffeine content, is specifically targeted toward a teenage audience.

As part of its market research, the company's public relations staff frequently observes online chatrooms and discussion boards for a picture of how consumers view their products. The staff observes chatrooms and message boards on its own Web site, as well as those on other websites and online services, such as AOL or MSN. Those who observe the chatrooms simply "lurk," i.e., they do not participate in the discussion or identify themselves. In the past, this has provided useful information that has benefited the company in learning how well its products are received by consumers.

In introducing their new product, the company's public relations director decided to take the process one step further. He sent members of the company's public relations staff into chatrooms and discussion boards both on and off of the company's Web site that were targeted towards teenagers. These staff members "seeded" the discussion in the rooms and on the boards, by intentionally discussing the company's new product in a positive light. They did so not only to judge the reaction, but also to stimulate positive discussion of the product.

The staff members did not identify themselves as staff members or as adults, but also did not identify themselves falsely as teens. The members of the staff collected the transcripts of the chats and the message board postings resulting from their postings, and compiled a report on the results. Their data showed that the product was a great success among their target audience, and that the product was well-received.

The public relations director decides to include in a press release the statement "Online research has even shown that our new product is preferred by most teens over our leading competitor." A journalist for an online trade publication notices this comment, and decides to ask a public relations staff member for the actual statistics that were found. The public relations director declines the journalist's request for the data, saying that the market data is "proprietary and could be put to use by our competition."

The journalist then asks for at least minimal information on how the data was collected, as it would be of interest to the readers of the online publication. The staff member is told by the public relations director to "avoid the topic on the same proprietary grounds."

22) The company is justified in its first practice of ‘lurking’ in chatrooms and on message boards to follow the discussion and observe opinions about the company and its products, *since it is taking place in a public forum*.

a) You say:

SD      D      N      A      SA      DK

b) PR Practitioners in general would say:

SD      D      N      A      SA      DK

c) Your specific PR practitioner would say:

SD      D      N      A      SA      DK

23) The public relations department is within ethical bounds to ‘seed’ chatrooms and message boards *on their own Web site* without identifying themselves as representatives of the company.

a) You say:

SD      D      N      A      SA      DK

b) PR Practitioners in general would say:

SD      D      N      A      SA      DK

c) Your specific PR practitioner would say:

SD      D      N      A      SA      DK

24) The public relations department is within ethical bounds to ‘seed’ chatrooms and message boards *on public web sites and online services* without identifying themselves as representatives of the company.

a) You say:

SD      D      N      A      SA      DK

b) PR Practitioners in general would say:

SD      D      N      A      SA      DK

c) Your specific PR practitioner would say:

SD      D      N      A      SA      DK

25) Since the Web sites and message boards at hand are focused towards a teenage audience, the public relations department is *not* justified in ‘seeding’ the discussion.

a) You say:

SD      D      N      A      SA      DK

b) PR Practitioners in general would say:

SD      D      N      A      SA      DK

c) Your specific PR practitioner would say:

SD      D      N      A      SA      DK

26) The public relations director is justified in keeping the actual data gathered from the ‘seeding’ process confidential on the grounds that it is proprietary.

a) You say:

SD      D      N      A      SA      DK

b) PR Practitioners in general would say:

SD      D      N      A      SA      DK

c) Your specific PR practitioner would say:

SD      D      N      A      SA      DK

27) The public relations director should disclose the "seeding" technique when asked by a journalist.

a) You say:

SD      D      N      A      SA      DK

b) PR Practitioners in general would say:

SD      D      N      A      SA      DK

c) Your specific PR practitioner would say:

SD      D      N      A      SA      DK

Following are some demographic questions. Please remember that your answers remain completely confidential and will not be seen by anyone other than members of the research team.

28) Your age: \_\_\_\_\_

29) Your educational background: (circle one)

Some High School                      High School Graduate

Some College                      College Graduate

Some Graduate School      Graduate Degree

Other: (please describe) \_\_\_\_\_

30) How long have you been a journalist?

\_\_\_\_\_ years, \_\_\_\_\_ months

31) Circle the choice that best describes your current position:

Top Management                      Middle Management

Beginning Management      Working Professional

Entry-Level Professional

Other: (please describe) \_\_\_\_\_

32) Have you ever worked in public relations?

Yes                      No

33) If yes, how long did you work in public relations?

\_\_\_\_\_ years, \_\_\_\_\_ months

Thank you again for completing this survey! Remember that your responses will remain completely confidential. Please mail this survey in the pre-stamped envelope provided to you.

Attn: Survey  
7129 Saratoga Lane  
Chattanooga, TN 37421-5208

## APPENDIX H

### PRACTITIONER SURVEY INSTRUMENT

The survey instrument for journalists is on the following seven pages. Due to margin restrictions for the thesis document, it is not possible to recreate the survey exactly as it was mailed. The original survey document was four pages long, with two columns on each page in a 10-point, Arial Narrow typeface. The scale (Strongly Disagree – Strongly Agree with Don't Know) was included at the beginning of each column, as shown in the initial paragraph of the survey instrument.

## PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTITIONERS' SURVEY

Thank you for your participation in this survey. Please read the following instructions closely, as accuracy is important in the completion of the questionnaire. Please be as frank as possible in your answers. The results of this survey will remain confidential.

This survey is designed to determine the nature of relationships between journalists and public relations practitioners. For each statement below, you will be asked to give three responses on a scale from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree, or Don't Know, as outlined below:

Strongly Disagree			Neutral		Strongly Agree	Don't Know
SD	D	N	A	SA	DK	

On scale (a), please give your own response to the statement. On scale (b), please answer as you would expect journalists in general to answer. On scale (c), think of the journalist with whom you work most closely, and answer as you would expect them to answer. Please remember to circle ONLY ONE answer per scale.

Thank you again for participating in the survey! Your help is greatly appreciated.

1) You often can't trust public relations practitioners.

- a) You say:  
SD      D      N      A      SA      DK
- b) Journalists in general would say:  
SD      D      N      A      SA      DK
- c) Your specific journalist would say:  
SD      D      N      A      SA      DK

2) You often can't trust journalists.

- a) You say:  
SD      D      N      A      SA      DK
- b) Journalists in general would say:  
SD      D      N      A      SA      DK
- c) Your specific journalist would say:  
SD      D      N      A      SA      DK

3) Journalists frequently use practices that are not in the public interest.

- a) You say:  
SD      D      N      A      SA      DK
- b) Journalists in general would say:  
SD      D      N      A      SA      DK
- c) Your specific journalist would say:  
SD      D      N      A      SA      DK

4) Public relations practitioners frequently use practices that are not in the public interest.

- a) You say:  
 SD      D      N      A      SA      DK
- b) Journalists in general would say:  
 SD      D      N      A      SA      DK
- c) Your specific journalist would say:  
 SD      D      N      A      SA      DK

5) A public relations practitioner's function is not just a job, but a service to the community.

- a) You say:  
 SD      D      N      A      SA      DK
- b) Journalists in general would say:  
 SD      D      N      A      SA      DK
- c) Your specific journalist would say:  
 SD      D      N      A      SA      DK

6) Public relations practitioners are just as concerned as journalists about getting complete, accurate information to the public.

- a) You say:  
 SD      D      N      A      SA      DK
- b) Journalists in general would say:  
 SD      D      N      A      SA      DK
- c) Your specific journalist would say:  
 SD      D      N      A      SA      DK

7) A public relations person should not mislead the public, even if disseminating complete, accurate information costs him his job.

- a) You say:  
 SD      D      N      A      SA      DK
- b) Journalists in general would say:  
 SD      D      N      A      SA      DK
- c) Your specific journalist would say:  
 SD      D      N      A      SA      DK

8) Most journalists seek to provide fairness in reporting.

- a) You say:  
 SD      D      N      A      SA      DK
- b) Journalists in general would say:  
 SD      D      N      A      SA      DK
- c) Your specific journalist would say:  
 SD      D      N      A      SA      DK

9) Most public relations practitioners seek to provide fairness in reporting.

- a) You say:  
 SD      D      N      A      SA      DK
- b) Journalists in general would say:  
 SD      D      N      A      SA      DK
- c) Your specific journalist would say:  
 SD      D      N      A      SA      DK

10) Most public relations practitioners provide as much balance as possible on issues about which they provide information.

- a) You say:  
 SD      D      N      A      SA      DK
- b) Journalists in general would say:  
 SD      D      N      A      SA      DK
- c) Your specific journalist would say:  
 SD      D      N      A      SA      DK

11) Most journalists provide as much balance as possible on issues about which they report.

- a) You say:  
 SD      D      N      A      SA      DK
- b) Journalists in general would say:  
 SD      D      N      A      SA      DK
- c) Your specific journalist would say:  
 SD      D      N      A      SA      DK

12) Most journalists give accurate information.

- a) You say:  
 SD      D      N      A      SA      DK
- b) Journalists in general would say:  
 SD      D      N      A      SA      DK
- c) Your specific journalist would say:  
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- a) You say:  
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- b) Journalists in general would say:  
 SD      D      N      A      SA      DK
- c) Your specific journalist would say:  
 SD      D      N      A      SA      DK

14) Forthrightness and honesty are personal characteristics of a public relations practitioner.

- a) You say:  
 SD      D      N      A      SA      DK
- b) Journalists in general would say:  
 SD      D      N      A      SA      DK
- c) Your specific journalist would say:  
 SD      D      N      A      SA      DK

15) Forthrightness and honesty are personal characteristics of a journalist.

- a) You say:  
 SD      D      N      A      SA      DK
- b) Journalists in general would say:  
 SD      D      N      A      SA      DK
- c) Your specific journalist would say:  
 SD      D      N      A      SA      DK

16) Many journalists' stereotypes of public relations practitioners are based on the negative experiences they have had with a few 'bad apples.'

- a) You say:  
 SD      D      N      A      SA      DK
- b) Journalists in general would say:  
 SD      D      N      A      SA      DK
- c) Your specific journalist would say:  
 SD      D      N      A      SA      DK

17) Although both serve the information needs of the public, journalists have a more altruistic mission than do public relations practitioners.

- a) You say:  
 SD      D      N      A      SA      DK
- b) Journalists in general would say:  
 SD      D      N      A      SA      DK
- c) Your specific journalist would say:  
 SD      D      N      A      SA      DK

18) A public relations practitioner should deal openly with the press on issues detrimental to their organization.

- a) You say:  
 SD      D      N      A      SA      DK
- b) Journalists in general would say:  
 SD      D      N      A      SA      DK
- c) Your specific journalist would say:  
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- a) You say:  
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- b) Journalists in general would say:  
 SD      D      N      A      SA      DK
- c) Your specific journalist would say:  
 SD      D      N      A      SA      DK

20) A public relations practitioner should always tell the truth as he/she knows it.

- a) You say:  
 SD      D      N      A      SA      DK
- b) Journalists in general would say:  
 SD      D      N      A      SA      DK
- c) Your specific journalist would say:  
 SD      D      N      A      SA      DK



21) A journalist should always tell the truth as he/she knows it.

a) You say:

SD      D      N      A      SA      DK

b) Journalists in general would say:

SD      D      N      A      SA      DK

c) Your specific journalist would say:

SD      D      N      A      SA      DK

Before continuing on to the next section, please insure that you have completed all questions on this section according to the directions provided.

Please read the following hypothetical story about the public relations practices of a fictional soft drink company, along with the journalistic practices of reporters that cover the company. Then, please respond to the statements as honestly as possible. Please note that the scales are the same as before, with a) representing your own response, b) representing journalists in general, and c) representing the response you would expect from the journalist with whom you work most closely.

A large, nationwide soft drink company has recently decided to expand its product line. Their new product, a fruit-flavored drink with a high caffeine content, is specifically targeted toward a teenage audience.

As part of its market research, the company's public relations staff frequently observes online chatrooms and discussion boards for a picture of how consumers view their products. The staff observes chatrooms and message boards on its own Web site, as well as those on other websites and online services, such as AOL or MSN. Those who observe the chatrooms simply "lurk," i.e., they do not participate in the discussion or identify themselves. In the past, this has provided useful information that has benefited the company in learning how well its products are received by consumers.

In introducing their new product, the company's public relations director decided to take the process one step further. He sent members of the company's public relations staff into chatrooms and discussion boards both on and off of the company's Web site that were targeted towards teenagers. These staff members "seeded" the discussion in the rooms and on the boards, by intentionally discussing the company's new product in a positive light. They did so not only to judge the reaction, but also to stimulate positive discussion of the product.

The staff members did not identify themselves as staff members or as adults, but also did not identify themselves falsely as teens. The members of the staff collected the transcripts of the chats and the message board postings resulting from their postings, and compiled a report on the results. Their data showed that the product was a great success among their target audience, and that the product was well-received.

The public relations director decides to include in a press release the statement "Online research has even shown that our new product is preferred by most teens over our leading competitor." A journalist for an online trade publication notices this comment, and decides to ask a public relations staff member for the actual statistics that were found. The public relations director declines the journalist's request for the data, saying that the market data is "proprietary and could be put to use by our competition."

The journalist then asks for at least minimal information on how the data was collected, as it would be of interest to the readers of the online publication. The staff member is told by the public relations director to "avoid the topic on the same proprietary grounds."

22) The company is justified in its first practice of ‘lurking’ in chatrooms and on message boards to follow the discussion and observe opinions about the company and its products, *since it is taking place in a public forum.*

a) You say:

SD	D	N	A	SA	DK
----	---	---	---	----	----

b) Journalists in general would say:

SD	D	N	A	SA	DK
----	---	---	---	----	----

c) Your specific journalist would say:

SD	D	N	A	SA	DK
----	---	---	---	----	----

23) The public relations department is within ethical bounds to ‘seed’ chatrooms and message boards *on their own Web site* without identifying themselves as representatives of the company.

a) You say:

SD	D	N	A	SA	DK
----	---	---	---	----	----

b) Journalists in general would say:

SD	D	N	A	SA	DK
----	---	---	---	----	----

c) Your specific journalist would say:

SD	D	N	A	SA	DK
----	---	---	---	----	----

24) The public relations department is within ethical bounds to ‘seed’ chatrooms and message boards *on public web sites and online services* without identifying themselves as representatives of the company.

a) You say:

SD	D	N	A	SA	DK
----	---	---	---	----	----

b) Journalists in general would say:

SD	D	N	A	SA	DK
----	---	---	---	----	----

c) Your specific journalist would say:

SD	D	N	A	SA	DK
----	---	---	---	----	----

25) Since the Web sites and message boards at hand are focused towards a teenage audience, the public relations department is *not* justified in ‘seeding’ the discussion.

a) You say:

SD	D	N	A	SA	DK
----	---	---	---	----	----

b) Journalists in general would say:

SD	D	N	A	SA	DK
----	---	---	---	----	----

c) Your specific journalist would say:

SD	D	N	A	SA	DK
----	---	---	---	----	----

26) The public relations director is justifies in keeping the actual data gathered from the ‘s seeding’ process confidential on the grounds that it is proprietary.

a) You say:

SD	D	N	A	SA	DK
----	---	---	---	----	----

b) Journalists in general would say:

SD	D	N	A	SA	DK
----	---	---	---	----	----

c) Your specific journalist would say:

SD	D	N	A	SA	DK
----	---	---	---	----	----

27) The public relations director should disclose the “seeding” technique when asked by a journalist.

a) You say:

SD      D      N      A      SA      DK

b) Journalists in general would say:

SD      D      N      A      SA      DK

c) Your specific journalist would say:

SD      D      N      A      SA      DK

Following are some demographic questions. Please remember that your answers remain completely confidential and will not be seen by anyone other than members of the research team.

28) Your age: \_\_\_\_\_

29) Your educational background: (circle one)

Some High School                      High School Graduate

Some College                      College Graduate

Some Graduate School      Graduate Degree

Other: (please describe) \_\_\_\_\_

30) How long have you been a public relations practitioner?

\_\_\_\_\_ years, \_\_\_\_\_ months

31) Circle the choice that best describes your current position:

Top Management                      Middle Management

Beginning Management      Working Professional

Entry-Level Professional

Other: (please describe) \_\_\_\_\_

3) Have you ever worked in journalism?

Yes                      No

4) If yes, how long did you work in journalism?

\_\_\_\_\_ years, \_\_\_\_\_ months

Thank you again for completing this survey! Remember that your responses will remain completely confidential. Please mail this survey in the pre-stamped envelope provided to you.

Attn: Survey  
7129 Saratoga Lane  
Chattanooga, TN 37421-5208