8th INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC RELATIONS RESEARCH CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

*The Impact of PR in Creating a More Ethical World: Why Can’t We All Get Along?*

Best Western South Miami
South Miami, Florida
March 10 – March 13, 2005

Edited by
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Linking Ethnic Diversity & Excellence Model: Exploring Asian-American Public Relations Practitioners’ Roles

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This study attempted to explore the current status, jobs, concerns, barriers and roles of Asian-American public relations practitioners in their respective specialized organizations. Using in-depth interviews of thirteen participants, this study found the influential factors most affecting their careers are educational background, similarities between journalism and public relations, and a barrier for becoming media personnel as an Asian. The participants interviewed are in positions ranging from technician to managerial positions and are highly satisfied with their current status. In pursuit of their careers in public relations, several minor stereotypes exist as well as a gender barrier that persists even higher than a racial barrier. Other findings and implications are also discussed in detail.

Introduction

Until the middle of the 1980s, the majority of public relations practitioners were White men. Today, more diverse people such as women, non-White and non-Westerners are visible and working in the public relations industry. Organizations are now hiring more diverse people, especially minorities, and, thereby, reflecting more social responsibility, as well as making their organizations more effective in the principle of “excellence” theory, a normative theory guiding how the practice of public relations should be conducted in an ideal situation (J. Grunig, 1992). In the ideal public relations situation, ethnic diversity is an essential element because excellence and diversity are inextricably linked. Additionally, excellent communications are best achieved when ethnic diversity is supported (Dozier, L. Grunig, & J. Grunig, 1995).

Scholars agree that ensuring ethnic diversity is a public relations responsibility (L. Grunig, Toth, & Hon, 2000; Hon & Brunner, 2000; Kern-Foxworth, 1989b). In that sense, this study drew from the following proposition: ethnic diversity is an integral part of an excellent organization. An excellent organization would adopt the two-way symmetrical public relations model, which facilitates excellence, comparing it with the other three models, press agentry, public information, and two-way asymmetry. In this study, the excellence model has been refined to incorporate ethnic diversity, specifically illustrating Asian-American practitioners’ roles, in order to show to organizational power holders that ethnic diversity enhances the potential for public relations, especially in regards to excellence. Therefore, this study is based on three primary foundations: (a) Asian-Americans are unique because of their unique culture; (b) Multi-disciplinary perspectives broaden public relations theory building; (c) Public relations literature has not fully incorporated the perceptions of Asian-American practitioners in its roles research.

While this study attempts to examine the current status, jobs, concerns, barriers and roles of Asian-American public relations practitioners in their organizations, most minority studies have focused attention on African-American (e.g. Kern-Foxworth, Gandy, Hines, & Miller, 1994; Pomppe, 2004) and Hispanic practitioners (Abeyta & Hackett, 2002) within the field of public relations. Whereas, Asian public relations practitioners have not been a focus of study, this examination is, therefore, one of the first to examine the current status, jobs and roles of Asian-American practitioners within their organizations.

The result of this study may contribute to the field of public relations in several relevant ways. First, these findings will bring attention to Asian-American public relations practitioners within the field of public relations research. Such findings have not been part of any focus before. Second, the result of this study will determine how to remove barriers or concerns and better inform public relations managers to be aware of such barriers and concerns. Lastly, Asian-American practitioners, as well as CEOs who consider hiring Asian-American practitioners, may take advantage of the significance of the findings from this study.
Literature Review

Public Relations Roles’ Research. For more than a couple decades, role researchers in public relations have attempted to describe the different roles played by public relations practitioners. Two-role typologies have been discovered: the managerial role and the technician role. Managerial roles are closely related to the organizational decision-making environment in which the practitioners operate (Acharya, 1995; J. Grunig & L. Grunig, 1992). Thus, public relations professionals of the managerial role predominantly determine policy and are held accountable for a program’s success or failure.

Technician roles primarily are located within peripheral departments inside the organization. According to Dozer (1984), practitioners in a technician role rarely participate in the management decision-making process, but they determine programs needed within the internal function of their departments. They also conduct lower-level communication techniques, which are implemented with decisions made by others. Technicians usually offer services that include writing, editing, photography, media contracts, and production of publications. These two-role typologies are found to be stable across time and among different practitioner samples within several studies (Berkowitz & Hristodoulakis, 1999; Dozier, 1992; J. Grunig, & L. Grunig, 1992; Lauzen, 1994). Socialization, public relations education, work experience (Berkowitz & Hristodoulakis, 1999) and gender (Dozier & Broom, 1995), are other factors that scholars have identified for further examination. Additionally, Toth, Serini, Wright, and Emig (1998) further investigated the trend of public relations roles and included “agency profile,” tasks of counseling, research, programming, communicating with clients and co-workers, and handling correspondence with media.

Other scholars such as Broom and Smith (1979) and Dozier (1992) refined the dichotomy of roles and proposed the existence of four roles; (a) the expert prescriber—“operates as the authority on both public relations problems and their solutions” (Broom, 1982, p.18), (b) the problem-solving process facilitator—collaborates with other managers to define and solve problems (Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 1994), (c) the communication facilitator—works closely with top managers to deal with public relations problems in a systematic, and process-oriented manner, (d) the communication technician—provides technical services including writing news releases, event planning, and graphic design. However, Dozier (1992) concluded that in a broad perspective, this four-role typology could be collapsed to the two-role typology, the manager and the technician, because the expert prescriber, the communication facilitator, and the problem-solving process facilitator roles all represented the managerial role.

Other scholars challenged the dichotomy of roles for public relations professionals. For example, Leichty and Springston (1996) criticized the dichotomy of roles for technicians versus managers because they contend that these two roles are not mutually exclusive and the communication manager/communication technician dichotomy does not have coherent theoretical justification. They further examined the structure of public relations roles and identified four main practitioner roles as: (a) internals, (b) generalist, (c) traditional managers, and (d) externals.

Diversity Issues in Public Relation. Diversity is defined as “difference in ethnicity, race, gender, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, disability, veteran status, age, national origin, and cultural and personal perspectives” (Bhawuk & Triandis, 1996, p.85). Diversity issues are becoming more important as demographics in America and its workplaces are changing, becoming more heterogeneous, and continuing to support this phenomenon. According to Armendorfer (1996), the current minorities such as Latino, Black, and Asian will become the majority of all people by 2055 or 2060.

Public relations scholars and professionals addressed diversity as a challenge as well as an opportunity (Allen, 1995; Banks, 1995; Hon & Brunner, 2000; “Communicating to a Diverse Workforce,” 1989; “Cosmetics Firm Targets, 1995; Multiculturalism Is Debated,” 1994; “Nowhere are the Implications of Gender Equality More Significant,” 1986; “Playing the Percentages,” 1995; “Valuing Diversity,” 1994). Discrimination and harassment in recruiting diverse employees present a challenge. One survey showed that only five percent of approximately 1,400 companies that participated, said their companies were doing a great job of managing diversity (Stoner, 1997). Besides this recruiting challenge, globalization of business and cultural sensitivity based on this globalization would provide opportunities.
As Brinkerhoff (1994) suggested, diversity is an advantage in that “the more different kinds of people that contribute to the team effort, the better. Different viewpoints, backgrounds and different approaches can lead to a better product” (p.E4). Thus, most organizations cannot afford to overlook the issue of diversity (Bruno, 1988; Graves, 1989).

**Minority Roles in Public Relations.** Minorities are sometimes known as “people of color” or “AHANA,” acronym for African-American, Hispanic, Asian, and Native American (Kern-Foxworth, 1989a). Twenty years ago, the field of public relations infrequently gave attention to minorities in public relations because minorities were invisible in the industry. As Gross (1985) indicated, blacks have been invisible in the field of public relations because they did not have job opportunities with major public relations companies. The Asian Business Association, the Federation of Minority Business Associations and the Asian Pacific Advertising and Public Relations Council indicated there was no color blindness in the area of public relations (Kern-Foxworth, 1989a). Kern-Foxworth (1989b) identified three main factors for restricting entry of minorities into the mainstream of the public relations profession: (a) racism and prejudice as superficially imposed barriers, (b) not enough opportunities to be aware of the profession of public relations, and (c) no access to the training and preparation for public relations jobs.

In the middle of the 1980s, minorities were becoming more visible in the field because their market was growing financially and their social and economic status improved in the last decade. In the case of African-Americans, by 1984, their disposable income had increased to $214 billion (Blake, 1985) compared to $42 billion in 1973 (DeWitt, 1974). Moreover, the necessity for hiring minority public relations professionals was noted during the early 70’s, when several clients of the majority-owned agencies jumped as much as 40 percent in profits from the black community (Stein, 1972). However, Kern-Foxworth (1989b) found that many organizations hired minority public relations practitioners only to deal with the same minority publics or just to fill a personnel quota/requirement.

Labor statistics from 1987 revealed that only 7.3 percent of minorities worked in public relations, while 21 percent of the U.S. work force was part of a minority group (Kern-Foxworth, 1989b). In public relations, African-Americans and Hispanics represent about 6 percent and 2 percent of the public relations work force, respectively. Federal statistics show these minority percentages have remained constant since 1984 (Wynter, 1994). Yet, employment projections estimate that between 1996 and the year 2006, management and public relations job opportunities will increase by 60 percent (Franklin, 1997).

The field of public relations currently gives attention to the status and roles of minorities more fervently and overtly than ever before and agrees with the importance of ethnic diversity. Gloster and Cherrie (1987) indicated the increased opportunities for minorities in the industry indicate that:

“Companies have realized that they must reach all the racial and ethnic groups in their markets and in their communities. That increasing awareness has led to greater opportunities in the form of growing numbers of minority owned advertising and public relations firms and in the form of aggressive recruiting of Black, Hispanic, Asian American, and Native American professionals by other firms.”

Several research studies have been conducted on ethnic minorities and the public relations professionals. Layton (1980) conducted one of the first studies pertaining to minority activities in public relations, and discovered that recent research on African-Americans in public relations revealed increased expectations and optimism on the part of minorities. The author also indicated that optimism is a basis for increasing opportunities for advancement in what has been pegged ‘the last of the lily-white professions.’ Kern-Foxworth (1989b) examined the status and roles of minority public relations practitioners and revealed that the majority of the minority respondents perceived themselves within the middle-level management position, such as a problem solver. However, their salaries were not comparable to that level on the calculated analysis by Broom and Dozier (1986) nor were their salaries commensurate with their white counterparts. Zerbinos and Clanton (1993) surveyed 140 minority public relations practitioners and found while most of the respondents were satisfied with their jobs, a substantial number of them felt their careers were hindered because of their ethnicity. Len-Rios (1998) explored the status of minority practitioners through in-depth interviews, and discovered that the minority public relations practitioners felt that while there had been progress toward including minorities in upper-level management positions.
in the field, their personal experiences revealed that barriers still exist. It is important to note, however, that each of these researches treated the minority as homogenous groups.

Some research has focused on specific ethnicity such as African-American or Hispanic public relations practitioners. For example, Kern-Forxworth et al. (1994) examined managerial roles of black female public relations practitioners in Washington D.C. and showed that black women at managerial levels in the industry identified themselves as occupying “meaningful roles within the profession and interfaced quite frequently within management.” More recently, Pompper (2004) focused on ethnic diversity with excellence theory and revealed four unique roles female African-American practitioners fulfilled: pioneer, educator, mentor, and agenda-builder.

In so far as none of these studies have given significant attention to Asian-American public relations practitioners, thus, this study attempts to explore the roles, current status, barriers and concerns of Asian-American working within the public relations industry.

Asian Americans in Public Relations. Asian is defined as “those having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent including, for example, Cambodia, China, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippine islands, Thailand, and Vietnam” (Reeves & Bennett, 2003). In March 2002, 12.5 million Asians lived in the United States representing about four percent of the American population. Additionally, Asian residents reflect the highest college degree attainment rate with advanced degrees, especially in law, medicine, or other doctorate degrees (Le, 2005). Of more than six million Asian-Americans employed in the United States, the greater portion of them were concentrated in managerial and professional specialty occupations (Reeves & Bennett, 2003).

The Asian consumer market is one of fastest growing in the United States. It is approaching $35 billion annually according to the Los Angeles firm of Muse, Cord & Chen. Moreover, the Asian working population is the fastest growing workforce, compared with other minority groups. During 1980 to 1990, African-American worker participation increased by 23 percent, while Hispanics increased 67 percent, American Indians, Aleuts and Eskimos by 45 percent (Bovee, 1993). Asian worker participation, however, increased to 106 percent during the same time period (Bovee, 1993). This trend continued throughout the 1990s (Len-Rios, 1998). In addition to that, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reports indicated that more than 27 percent of the U.S. labor force will be comprised of ethnic minorities by the year of 2006 and the overall number of Asian workers will be increased by over 74 percent.

Despite the increase and significant contribution of Asian-Americans, they have been under-represented in the academic field of public relations. Thus, this study initially attempts to explore what their status, roles, barriers or concerns and contributions in public relations have been. This research brought forth the following five research questions which are adopted from Pompper’s 2004 study.

Research Questions

RQ1: What factors affect Asian-American’s decision to pursue a public relations career?
RQ2: How do Asian-Americans characterize their role in public relations?
RQ3: What are the primary career concerns of Asian-Americans working in public relations?
RQ4: How do Asian-Americans working in public relations characterize these concerns?
RQ5: How do Asian-Americans working in public relations address these concerns?

Methodology

In-depth interviews through the telephone were used to answer the following five research questions: (1) the factors affecting Asian-American’s decision to pursue a public relations career, (2) the ways Asian-Americans’ roles were characterized in public relations, (3) the primary career concerns of Asian-Americans working in public relations, (4) the ways Asian-Americans characterized these concerns and (5) the ways Asian-Americans addressed these concerns.

Despite the widespread popularity of survey methods, the public relations roles research, texture and depth of findings are formulated by qualitative methods (L. Grunig, Toth, & Hon, 2000; Toth & Cline, 1991). Given the exploratory nature of the five research questions, this research used qualitative interviewing techniques.

Administration and Operation. Most studies of minorities in public relations had been restricted with built-in methodological shortcomings because they were dependent on membership directories of
professional organizations for sampling resources. Validity and generalization of these results are somewhat questionable since only public relations professionals who can afford the membership fees are also the individuals more likely to join the trade organizations that participated in such research studies. It is further indicated that professionals working in non-profit sectors have not been fully represented in research studies (Grunig et al., 2000). In view of these considerations, the initial samples only were drawn from the PRSA Directory while the remaining samples were attempted from non-PRSA members.

A snowball sampling technique was used to recruit in-depth interview participants, for example, Asian-Americans practitioners working in public relations with at least three years experience in the industry. The researcher relied on this sampling technique because there is no master list to identify potential participants as Poindexter and McCombs (2000) suggested, and the Asian-American public relations professionals’ population is quite small. This technique has limitations, however. Even though this is an easy process of recruitment, the selected respondents often are known to one another, and many, therefore, share similar points of view regarding certain issues. For the current study, Asian-Americans were invited via e-mail to participate in in-depth interviews over the phone and, at the end of the interview process, they were asked to recommend other Asian-American public relations professionals. While none of the participants came from the same organization, some of them did come from the same state.

The 2004 Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) Blue Book Directory served as a starting point for the first three e-mails soliciting participation in the phone interview. Very few potential respondents declined participation when invited via e-mail. Efforts were made to assemble diverse respondents by age, organization types (agency, corporate, not-for-profit organizations), job-level (entry level to top management level), and years of experience.

A total of thirteen Asian-American professionals participated in the phone interviews that ranged in duration from 20 minutes to 45 minutes with interviews scheduled between November 7, to December 30, 2004. Interviews were conducted at a time and date recommended for the convenience of each participant. The researcher had no prior relationship with any of these participants. The participants were assured of utmost confidentiality, with the understanding that the research report would not reveal their identification by name or company affiliation. Additionally, the researcher informed all participants that they would be updated with research presentations and publications containing relevant findings. Respondents were also advised in advance that each interview would be recorded. After all interviews were completed, a letter of appreciation was sent to each participant.

Participants were approached with two main questions. First, brief questions pertaining to their demographic variables were asked. Secondly, respondents were asked to describe how they came to have a career in public relations, to share thoughts on their roles, and to identify career concerns, solutions, and any of their personal contributions to the field of public relations.

Data for analysis was derived from 87 single-spaced pages of audio-taped recordings, transcribed verbatim. The unit of analysis for the current study was Asian-Americans’ voices and experiences as described in their own words, then categorized and analyzed as data (Harding, 1986; Hon, 1995).

**Results**

**Participants Profiles.** As Table 1 summarizes, the racial representation of the thirteen participants was composed of two Korean-Americans, three Japanese-American, two Taiwanese-Americans, three Chinese-American, and one Filipino. The remaining two participants had mixed heritage such as half-Japanese and Chinese-American or Japanese and Filipino. All of them identified themselves as Asian-American, regardless of their birth place. In regards to why they identify themselves as Asian-American, although they are U.S. citizens and were born in United States; one respondent working as director of marketing and public relations in Florida said, “[W]e tend to identify ourselves, when we say Japanese-American, Korean- American, and Filipino-American. In this way we recognize the difference in the cultures and in our cultural identities.” In evaluation, therefore, culture is reflected as an important criterion of their identification.
Eight participants among thirteen were female and five were male. The age range was between 21 and 62 and with a mean of 34.7. The range of years in public relations experience was between three years and 28 years, resulting in a mean of 11.1 years. All participants possessed a bachelor’s degree in public relations or other fields of communications, one had a MBA degree, and the other had a degree in music. Six participants had achieved APR (Accredited Public Relations) status. Three had earned graduate degrees, while one was currently in the process of earning a graduate degree. Among the thirteen respondents, four were employed in public relations agencies, seven were employed by a not-for-profit organization, and two were working for a corporation. Among thirteen participants, six described their positions as senior level. Five other respondents described their position as middle-level and the remaining two participants identified their position as entry-level. Six of thirteen participants were from Hawaii because of the high Asian-American population in that state. Two participants were from New York, two others were from Colorado and the remaining three were from Washington, California, and Florida.

Research Question 1:
What factors affect an Asian-American’s decision to pursue a public relations career?

Factors found affecting the participants’ decision to pursue public relations clustered into the following five general areas: education, preference for public relations jobs because of the exciting and challenging job characteristics, inflexibility of journalism jobs, opportunities to enjoy writing with similarities between journalism jobs and public relations, and opportunities to interact and deal with people. A public relations job was the initial choice for a majority of the respondents and their educational background focused primarily on public relations. Additionally, their internship experiences during college had been in public relations. With reference to pursuing a career in public relations for its exciting and challenging experiences and job characteristics, the California agency public relations professional said: “PR is fun... I don’t have to sit in the office all day! I get to work on different things with different clients. It is challenging because depending on which client I have, I might have to work and change my entire image.”

Two respondents had different initial jobs, but they became interested in public relations after becoming disenchanted with news writing. One of them had an undergraduate degree in journalism and had worked as news writer. This respondent moved from news writing to public relations because of inflexibility in news writing. She described the reason for moving to public relations as follows:

“Working in news, I wanted a job that would allow me to work basically, Monday through Friday, 8 to 5. When you work in news, you tend to work in the evening, weekends, or holidays. I wanted more structure.” (Director of Marketing and PR in FL)
This observation is consistent with the study of Pompper (2004) that examined the factors for African-American women pursuing public relations careers.

The similarities between journalists’ work and public relations practitioners’, in terms of writing and deadline emphasis, were another reason given for joining the public relations field. One interviewee mentioned that she chose public relations as her major because she was aware of a barrier for Asian-Americans to become a media personality. The Colorado public relations practitioner said, “At that time [when she decided her major], I thought that journalism was even more culturally embedded than PR. I don’t see myself being an anchor with CNN, nor do I see myself writing for the New York Times.”

In summary, Asian-American public relations practitioners who participated in the telephone interview consistently identified the following five factors that most affected their decision to pursue public relations: 1) educational background in public relations or related fields, 2) dissatisfaction with journalism but similarities between public relations and journalism, 3) the exciting and challenging nature of public relations, 4) personal and professional satisfaction from writing, and dealing with people, 5) and the barrier for an Asian-American to enter the ranks of media personnel.

**Research Question 2: How do Asian-Americans characterize their role in public relations?**

The three main roles characterized throughout the interviews/discussions were managerial roles, mixed roles of managerial and entry-level, and entry level. One group of five respondents working in management level positions accepted their responsibilities in managerial roles because they were involved in the organizational decision-making process. One public relations professional in New York described his role saying, “The main role I played was as an advisor or counselor to the senior executives, senior CEO and corporate executives of public relations.” Another respondent, the Florida director of Marketing and Public Relations, described her role as, “planning or organizing events, talking to the media, and involved with the employee communication side.” These participants have worked in the public relations industry for more than ten years and were highly satisfied with their achievements in the industry.

The second group was comprised of thirteen respondents. Five of the thirteen participants worked in mixed-level positions between managerial and entry-level positions. An interviewee working in California said, “It is kind of between, because I’ve performed a lot of entry-level jobs, but at the same time, I decide what we are going to get and what would be best for the organization or the company.” Most of these people were working at small or mid-size organizations.

The two remaining respondents had worked in public relations for about three years including internship experiences in entry levels positions. Their everyday work pertained mainly to communication such as writing press releases, sending e-mails, and news releases, etc.

**Research Questions 3 & 4.**

**RQ3: What are the primary career concerns of Asian-Americans working in public relations?**

All of the respondents reported a high level of satisfaction with their public relations careers except one. However, they admitted barriers that challenge full organizational integration was concerns for bias and stereotypes linked to race and gender, lack of networking opportunities, low salary, and inflexible work hours. Concerns for unsatisfactory relationships with media or media people also emerged from the telephone interviews/discussions, although they agreed that these barriers are not big ones and they could be easily resolved.

The Asian-American public relations professionals described several stereotypes which mainly focused on their physical appearances such as younger looking or shorter. With Asian characteristics such as introverted personalities, and being Asian, it is sometimes assumed that they do not speak English. One public relations professional working in Hawaii expressed his experience as a younger looking stereotype, saying, “Asians tend to look younger than their true age and some people tend to treat them accordingly. I was actually involved in a situation once before when I visited a client for the first time and they jokingly commented, ‘Jesus I didn’t know they [the agency] were sending someone who’s 16 over here’.” One public relations professional in California said, “People have stereotypical attitudes because Asians tend to be introverted, and non-opinionated, which is not a personality fit for public relations.” She also described another stereotype as follows:
“[People really assume that one person from any Asian background can communicate with all Asians, which isn’t true. Somebody who is Chinese-American, depending on the situation, will not always be able to communicate with Korea-Americans and Japanese-Americans and Filipino Americans.”

With a similar observation, one respondent working in Hawaii described her experience in another state. She said:

“Even though I was born in Hawaii I only speak English. I don’t speak any other language. People would take one look and assume that I was from Japan or that I don’t speak English. So I would imagine that people would have stereotypes and preconception in their minds”

Despite these outlined stereotypes, most of the respondents disagreed on the existence of a gender or race barrier. A few female respondents agreed that the gender barrier is greater than the racial barrier. The Washington public relations agency practitioner summarized by saying, “I think being Asian-American is not the barrier but being a woman is.” However, a couple of them indicated that the two barriers exist at the same time.

The California public relations agency professional said:

“You have to be able to take criticism because there are a lot of people who are going to criticize you and who are going to put you down not only because of your race but also because of your gender... the higher you go [in the corporate ladder], the more male dominance.

Regarding the existence of ethnic bias, one male respondent, a Marketing and Communication Manager in Hawaii indicated only few Asian-Americans are working in the industry. He said, “It is a little more difficult [to get a job in PR] because Asian-Americans are not abundant in that profession. An industry with very-low volume representation from a specific ethnic group, I would assume, would have inherent bias there or some type of possibly unseen, unaddressed barrier.”

A couple of respondents expressed age as a concern when working in the public relations industry. Additionally, Asians’ last names, which are hard to pronounce, were also described as concerns for Asian American public relations professionals. A Hawaiian public relations professional described concerns saying, “[T]hey [clients, or media people] can’t pronounce my last name. It’s hard to send out press releases and that sort of thing when they can’t even pronounce my name.”

Some participants, especially males expressed concerns about unsatisfactory relationships with media personnel and undesirable news reporting. A Hawaiian participant expressed his concern as follows: “I feel like I am really trying to kiss their [media people’s] ass too much to try and get a story to run and they really treat you like dirt. I didn’t really like that.” He described it in detail saying:

“I would e-mail them and I would fax them information, like a press release, and then would follow-up with them via phone. They would only tell me that they didn’t get it and ask if I would send it again. Then I would follow-up with them again and then they would say ‘Oh no, I didn’t get it.’ So then I would try to set up a meeting where I could personally give it to them, but of course, they don’t have the time. They just try to avoid you. But the ironic thing is when a big story hatches, they [media personnel] would start calling me up and demand that I give them this information. There is no respect displayed by them.”

Another concern expressed was a lack of networking opportunities, less than their American counterparts. A respondent who moved to America at the age of 12 said, “A barrier for Asian-Americans in the PR field is the lack of connections that American counterparts have because you were born and raised in different countries. Networking is so important in PR.”

On the whole, the interviewees expressed diverse career concerns focused primarily on ethnic stereotypes, unsatisfactory media relationships, and gender issues.

Research Question 5: How do Asian-Americans working in public relations address these concerns?

When asked how they deal with such career concerns and barriers, the respondents took optimistic positions. All of them agreed that the barriers are not huge and they can break the barrier by “being more prepared,” “more educated,” “work harder,” “change their images,” “being very positive,” and “being more experienced.” A Hawaii public relations manager said, “Education and experience are keys to
overcome the concerns. And repetitiveness, you just need to keep working in the industry and people will get used to you, especially if you start to make a name for yourself.”

The California public relations manager emphasized that Asian women need to change their traditional image to survive in the industry saying, “Asian women are looked at as a whole as material. You are going to marry someone who would be a good mother and good wife and stay home and not talk back to you.” To change the Asian women’s image, she said, “Asian women need to be more aggressive like ‘warrior women’.” Most of the female respondents stated that Asian-American public relations professionals are the top group among minority women.

**Conclusion & Discussions**

Previous research involving the normative theory of excellence and the two-way symmetrical public relations had not fully accounted for ethnic diversity as a key component of public relations potential except the study of Pompper (2004). Further, scholars in feminism had not considered ethnicity as an important factor and those in multiculturalism primarily considered minorities as a homogenous group. In this study, however, a specific subset of minority public relations practitioners, Asian-American public relations professionals, were the focus of research while using the excellence theory. Thus, this study provides several significant contributions to existing literature by redesigning Grunig’s public relations model in order to include ethnic diversity as a potential public relations variable. This study brings additional attention to the Asian-American practitioners’ roles and the career concerns that enable them to practice a special brand of two-way symmetry.

This study found that Asian American public relations practitioners were well educated as related to public relations with all of the participants having at least a bachelor degree in the related area of public relations. Many of them have Advance Public Relations or graduate degrees. As the census data reflects, Asian-Americans are in the top percentages of all those with bachelors and advanced degrees. In public relations, Asian-American practitioners were no exception to those findings. The influential factors pertaining to Asian-American practitioners’ career are education, similarities between journalism and public relations, barriers for Asians becoming media personnel, the characteristics of public relations (rewarding, challenging, and exciting), journalism’s inflexibility, and a strong preference for writing, interacting and dealing with people. These findings are similar and consistent with the experiences of African-American women who chose a career in public relations (Pompper, 2004). Almost all participants of Asian-American public relations professionals are working at higher than entry-level positions. The majority of them working at managerial-level positions are influential to an organization’s policy decisions and hold responsibility for a program’s success or failure. Compared to other ethnic minorities, these findings indicated that Asian-American public relations practitioners are at higher levels than any other ethnic group in the field of public relations. The findings of this study are inconsistent with other minority studies in terms of their roles because other minority studies found that Asian-Americans were mainly working in technician roles with lower salaries (Len-Rios, 1998).

In their pursuit of careers in public relations, participants expressed that they are highly satisfied with their current careers. However, they admitted the existence of stereotypes and bias linked to race and gender and that this continues to challenge full organizational integration. The stereotypes were related to Asians’ physical appearances such as looking younger, shorter, a presumption that Asian people speak poor English, and their cultural characteristics such as introverted personalities. The stereotypes found were more relevant to their physical appearance than their abilities. As Kern-Foxworth (1989a) pointed out, the existence of stereotypes is one of the major contributors to the lack of minority representation. More aggressive hiring of additional Asian public relations practitioners is a key solution to removing stereotypes as well as resolving the lack of minority representation. Other people, especially Caucasians, have less opportunity to work with minorities and may never have their stereotypes challenged.

This study also found that the gender barrier persists even higher than the racial barrier. This might be explained because the majority of the respondents were female. Despite the gender barrier, all of the participants presented optimistic opinions saying that it is not a huge barrier and it can be overcome with harder work and more preparation. Furthermore, improvements in diversity can be achieved as the work
force of Asian-Americans in public relations continues to grow. Ethnic bias exists largely because there are simply not enough Asian-Americans working in the industry.

Other concerns were having a lack of networking opportunities, low salaries, and inflexible work hours coupled with unsatisfactory relationships that emerged with the media and media personnel. They described these concerns as minor problems that could be easily resolved. All of them said they would continue to work in the public relations industry with great pleasure.

Public relations scholars and practitioners should take some responsibility for creating a more ethnic and minority-friendly environment, especially in the White centered area. Scholars or educators need to include cultural diversity in the classroom by using examples and choosing textbooks that include minorities. It is important to make students aware that diversity is better for public relations by illustrating the importance of research in teaching about target audiences, by inviting successful minority practitioners to share their experiences within the classroom, and by fostering and mentoring minority public relations students. As Strenski (1993) suggested, practitioners can promote diversity through employee communication programs, training of managers, and training of human resource personnel.

**Limitation and Future Research.** This study has revealed several limitations, which leads to future study within this area. First of all, several other Asian-Americans such as Indonesian, Malaysian, Pakistan-American public relations professionals were not included. These Asian public relations professionals may have different perspectives from the sampled respondents. Thus, further research needs to include these Asian-American public relations practitioners. Secondly, comparative study with other ethnicities such as Hispanic-Americans, or African-Americans would be an invaluable study. Additionally, studies using different demographic variables are needed. For example, there may be differences in the way Asian-American men and women perceive their roles in public relations and the barriers within the field. Other variables to be considered in collecting and analyzing data are those of age, physical appearance, geographic regions, placement level in an organization, education, and personality type.

**Acknowledgement:** The author gratefully acknowledges the valuable input of the participants interviewed. Without their important contributions, this study could not be successfully completed.

**References**


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