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Maximizing Media Relations Through a Better Understanding of the Public Relations - Journalist Relationship

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MAXIMIZING MEDIA RELATIONS THROUGH A BETTER UNDERSTANDING
OF THE PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTITIONER – JOURNALIST RELATIONSHIP

By

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<u>Maximizing Media Relations through a</u>
<u>Better Understanding of the Public Relations</u>
<u>Practitioner – Journalist Relationship</u>

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Understanding the relationship between public relations practitioners and journalists

is of paramount importance to practicing effective media relations. This study explores

that relationship using depth interviews and a survey to gauge perceptions of the

relationship for both journalists and public relations practitioners in the state of Florida.

It concludes that there has been little change in the relationship between public relations

practitioners and journalists over the past 17 years, and offers suggestions as to why that

is the case.

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Defining public relations has been, for academics and professionals alike, a difficult obstacle to overcome. The problem is not in knowing what it is that public relations does, or hopes to accomplish, but rather breaking it down to a simple, easily understood definition. One of the challenges lies in the fact that public relations is practiced in many different types of organizations, and focuses on many different stakeholders, and often to the dismay of writers of textbooks, it is difficult to parse all of those areas into a simple definition.

Texts in public relations focus on different areas. Each generally will mention at least several of the following: investor relations, community relations, employee relations, various practices and tactics in public relations focused on educational institutions, corporations, agencies, hospitals, not-for-profits, entertainment, religious institutions, and an assortment of other areas depending on the interests or expertise of the authors (Adams, 1965; Cutlip, Center & Broom, 1994; Lattimore, Baskin, Heiman, Toth & Van Leuven, 2004; Lesly, 1950; Seitel, 2007; Stephenson, 1960; Wilcox, Cameron, Ault & Agee, 2003). The commonly mentioned tactics, strategies and general principles of practice in each of these areas often includes the planning of special events, developing relationships with targeted audiences, doing research and evaluation, strategic planning and audience analysis, writing speeches and using internal communication vehicles. However, one thing that is common across all texts in public relations is an in-depth discussion of media relations (Turk & Snedeker, 1986).

Though seemingly as problematic to define as public relations, media relations can generally be viewed as the relationship between the uncontrolled mass media and public relations practitioners (Kendall, 1996).

Media relations can be defined as the systematic (Kendall, 1996), planned (Lesly, 1991), purposeful (Miller, 1984) and mutually beneficially relationship (Guth & Marsh, 2003) between journalists in the mass media and public relations practitioners. Its goal is to establish trust, understanding and respect between the two groups (Lattimore et al., 2004). James Fetig (2004), a media relations practitioner, sums up the relationship,

> It all comes down to relationships. I trust reporters I know and I don't trust the reporters I don't know. Most of us have long-standing relationships with journalists that are based on mutual trust. My advice to PR professionals is to know the journalists who cover their industry well and develop mutual credibility. (*as cited in* Lattimore et al., p. 183)

However, though terms like mutually beneficial and *relationship* are often used in defining both public relations and media relations, the effort in both cases generally is initiated from the public relations side, and not that of the journalists. This may be the result of a "solid prejudice against public relations people" (Nolte, 1979, p.442) by journalists, which has been examined by academics for many years (Carter, 1958; Howard & Mathews, 2000; Sachsman, 1976; Sampler, 2000; Singletary, 1976).

There can be no doubt, whatever the state of the relationship between journalists and public relations practitioners, that much of public relations practice today involves media relations, and has for much of its history. In fact, communicating with the public through the press was one component of Ivy Lee's "Declaration of Principles." In the 1906 declaration, Lee stated:

> In brief, our plan is, frankly and openly, on behalf of
> business concerns and public institutions, to supply the
> press and public of the United States prompt and accurate
> information concerning subjects which it is of value and
> interest to the public to know about. (*as cited in* Guth & Marsh,
> 2003, p. 66)

A study in 1965 revealed that the preparation and distribution of news releases was the number one job for 96% of survey respondents (Harmon, 1965). And no matter what direction public relations or the media take, particularly the rise of new media technologies and the continued dominance of the Internet, media relations will continue to play a major role in the practice of media relations.

Early revolutionaries in the history of the United States understood the power of the mass media as a means of not only reaching large audiences, but also influencing them. It is no wonder, then, that so many of our founding fathers were involved in the publishing business, and the dissemination of pamphlets and newspapers (realizing that "objectivity" was an unknown concept to early publishers) throughout the colonies were the main ways in which the revolutionary war was communicated among the colonists. Lattimore et al. (2004) discusses Samuel Adams' role as a public relations practitioner during the American Revolution:

> Adams was to the communication dimension of the
> Revolutionary War what George Washington was to the
> military dimension. Adams recognized the value of using
> symbols like the Liberty Tree that were easily identifiable
> and aroused emotions. Adams also used slogans that
> are still remembered, like 'taxation without representation
> is tyranny.' Because he got his side of the story to a receptive
> public first, shots fired into a group of rowdies became known
> as the 'Boston Massacre.' Adams directed a sustained-saturation
> public relations campaign using all available media. He staged the
> Boston Tea Party to influence public opinion. (pp. 22-23)

However, it was not until the explosion of an independent news media that media relations became an important part of public relations. In fact, it may be no coincidence that the rise of the independent news media was soon followed by the rise of public relations as a field. One of public relations earliest cases, involving the (arguable) father of public relations, Ivy Lee, involved the 1913 Colorado Coal Strike – and the fairly unique (at the time) solution of using the mass media to disseminate messages.

Whether we examine media relations in a historical context, or look at the modern-day practices, one thing is certain: effective media relations involve good working relationships (Duke, 2001). As Howard (2004) states about public relations: "in the end… this is a people-to-people business. A media relations person deals with writers, editors, producers and photographers – not with newspapers, television stations, radio microphones and Web sites" (p. 70).

In any effort to define public relations, we must examine the word *relationship*. And, as we further seek to define public relations through what public relations practitioners do – in particular for the purposes of this study, media relations – we must keep the concept of the relationship in mind. It should be made clear, though, that this study is not meant to indicate that media relations *is* public relations. Media relations are simply one aspect of the relationships necessary for the profession. However, it is an important aspect, one that is generally considered to be essential in all fields of public relations.

But why is it so important? Why do public relations professionals use media relations to achieve their goals? It is, or should be, clear that the mass media are not always the best way to achieve contact with specified audiences, in other words, the mass

media may not be the best way to disseminate information to targeted audiences. Grunig (1990) states that the "situational theory of public relations implies that only the unsophisticated public relations practitioner would try to communicate with active publics through the mass media" (p.19).

The answer to why media relations benefit the public relations practitioner is two-fold. First, it is in fact a good way to reach a large, or general audience. Public relations practitioners might want to reach a large audience for a variety of reasons, including to increase awareness, create a positive reputation, disseminate point-of-view messages from the organizations, or to create "buzz" about their organization – whether that organization is a corporation, not-for-profit or even an individual.

The second purpose of media relations is that the news media serve as a "credible third party" for public relations practitioners (Geary, 2005). According to Geary (2005) though, public confidence in the news media is on the decline, and at the time of his study, had waned to about 30%. However, although public confidence in the news media credibility may be declining, they remain for media relations practitioners the only outlet to reach a broad general audience.

Media relations, too, is not without its critics. In fact, James Grunig (1984, 1990), one of the best known academics in public relations – primarily for his four models of public relations – has been a critic of the practice of media relations for some time. He states that "the relationship between public relations and journalism continually produces conflict because many practitioners will do whatever it takes to gain exposure for their client organizations in the media" (1990, p.19). He further writes that public relations

practitioners practice a "manipulative" rather than "interactive" relationship with the media, though the latter is more beneficial.

This manipulative relationship that Grunig (1990) refers to is at the heart of the conflict between the two professions, and has been the subject of repeated study. However, most public relations practitioners today recognize that the media are not dealt with most effectively in this fashion; that in fact the development of relationships is the best way of not only communicating, but also placing messages with journalists.

Most practitioners would agree that there are in fact reasons to communicate with audiences through the mass media, though Grunig (1990) states that "there is seldom good reason for an organization to communicate with a mass audience," and that media relations is a last "resort…when absolutely no research is available to segment the mass audience" (1990, p.19). Obviously this is not the case, or the practice of media relations would not have continued from Ivy Lee onward.

The purpose of this study is to better understand the current state of the relationship between journalists and public relations practitioners. Though this has been studied in the past, the topic is important, particularly as confidence in the credibility of the mass media is on the decline. And for this reason, we must revisit how public relations practitioners and journalists view each other.

Most importantly, this study will seek to identify whether public relations practitioners are in fact practicing the relationship-building element that is prevalent in the academic literature as being the most important aspect of public relations. Using a triangulated approach in its methodology, this study will be beneficial to both practitioners and academics in public relations and journalism in understanding the

current state of the relationship. Its ultimate goal is to better understand the practice of media relations from both the journalistic and public relations viewpoints, and to promote not only an updated, but also a deeper understanding of how media *relationships* can be developed.

The next chapter, "Literature Review," will discuss relevant literature pertaining to the relationship between public relations practitioners and journalists, and also contains the specific research questions for this study.

CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

A significant amount of research has been conducted in the media relations field, and while much of it has been academic in its nature, there is a significant body of literature that addresses practitioner concerns as well. Much of this has been from a tactical standpoint, utilizing the "how-to" approach rather than studying the "reason behind." Areas of interest for this type of tactical research have included increasing media attention for products or services (Brooks, 1999; Cantelmo, 1994), use of media relations with respect to the Internet (Duke, 2001; Howard, 2000; Kent & Taylor, 2003; Fitzgerald-Sparks & Spagnolia, 1999) and how to utilize media relations during a crisis situation (Adams, 1993, 2000; Trahan, 1993).

This is not to say there has not also been a large number of studies dedicated towards the strategy of media relations, with topics such as creating strategic communication plans, responding to changes in the media environment (Bucy, 2004; Brody, 1989; Colby, 2005; Goldstein, 2004; Howard, 2000), building long-term relationships with the media (Howard, 2004) and also media relations planning and evaluation as part of the overall public relations process (Adams, 1995; Bollinger, 2001; Dyer, 1996; Kelleher, 2001; Tilson, 2005). But whether academics have taken a strategic or tactical viewpoint to media relations research, it is clear that there is a serious interest in how media relations is practiced.

So what exactly is media relations? It is the practice, performed by public relations practitioners, of providing information subsidies to the media to systematically distribute information on behalf of their client (Turk, 1985). *Information subsidy* is a term used to describe the generation by practitioners of prepackaged information to

promote their organizations' viewpoints on issues, with little cost (in terms of time or money) or effort to the person receiving the information (Zoch and Molleda, 2006). In other words, the media relations practitioner acts as a sort of "pre-reporter" for the journalist, providing them with information that they need to do their jobs. Sallot, Steinfatt and Salwen (1998) explain the process as an effort by practitioners "to gain ink and air time" by "continually offer[ing] journalists unsolicited assistance in the performance of their jobs. With good reason, journalists perceive that practitioners have self-serving motives for offering this 'service'" (p. 374).

There are varying estimates of how much news in the media originates from media relations efforts. The success of media relations is most often dependent on the media relations practitioner's understanding of the media audience. This will be explored later. It has been estimated that as much as 50% or more of daily newspaper content originates from media relations efforts (Curtin, 1999). This, however, is most likely very generous, particularly considering that media relations practitioners and journalists have had a "rocky" past (which is also explored later in this chapter).

It is also a generous estimate considering that much research has shown that journalists desire to act independently (Pincus, Rimmer, Rayfield & Cropp, 1993; Turk, 1985, 1986a, 1986b). Perhaps more likely than the up to 50% estimate, Elfenbein (1986) and Martin and Singletary (1981) indicate that up to 90% of the information that media relations practitioners provide is never used. Whether information that is provided by media relations practitioners is used by journalists is most likely dependent on a variety of factors, including the practitioner's view about what is considered newsworthy, as well

as the relationship between the practitioner and the journalist. However, while these may be the two most important factors, a variety of other factors must also be considered.

Much literature has focused on helping public relations practitioners better practice media relations. Howard and Mathews' (2000) book *On Deadline: Managing Media Relations* is one of the most comprehensive works in the area of media relations. It offers media relations practitioners a helpful guide in dealing with journalists. Howard (2004) offers a succinct list of tips that media relations practitioners must keep in mind. She addresses the importance of the *relationship,* stating that "the emphasis in a media relations program should be on the *relations* aspect – working to build long-term relations with the people who cover your organization" (p. 36).

Beyond the concept of the newsworthiness of the practitioner's information and the actual practitioner-reporter relationship, Howard and others offer tips on the practice of media relations. Howard (2004) summarizes the lessons in the Howard and Matthews' (2000) book as: knowing deadlines for all media that normally cover your organization, timing announcements in order to accommodate various media and remembering that there may be special requirements for your organization (in the case of publicly-held companies) or perhaps special requirements for your media outlet. She also lists the importance of mastering the basic skills of writing and editing, learning to become a "reporter's reporter" – in other words, don't be afraid to ask questions of the reporter, such as what their needs are – and trying to get a good grasp of what reporters need in order to do their job well. She recommends that practitioners take advantage of technology, such as e-mail and Web sites, remembering that accessibility is paramount – that is, you must be available to answer any questions that the media may have – which

may mean matching your work schedule to that of the journalists, keeping key materials at home – if you are to be accessible, then you must have the information you need to answer questions. Howard also writes that the use of internal media may be as beneficial to reporters as it is to your employees. She suggests not being afraid to say no – this is different than saying "no comment" – and when you decline to be a part of a story, it must be for a good reason, such as that what the reporter is seeking involves proprietary information, you don't have the staff to be involved, you are involved in labor relations, etc. And finally, it is important to remember your organization's employees – that they are your best ambassadors, and your commitment to effective media relations should not supersede your obligation to the employees of your organization.

This list, however, is not an exhaustive checklist of good practices in media relations, though it is a good place to start. Other researchers have focused on specific areas of good practices. Kent and Taylor (2003), for example, focus on maximizing media relations through corporate Web sites. Their focus is on the dialogic function of the Internet, that is, the two-way communication aspect that the Internet may have, and how to achieve it through corporate Web sites. They suggest that achieving successful media relations via the Web means maintaining easy-to-use Web sites, making sure that the information on the Web site is relevant to the journalists you are targeting, keeping information updated and generating return visits, and making sure there is the opportunity for interactivity with journalists.

Cantelmo (1994) offers suggestions on the value of targeting. "Targeting means tailoring and directing news releases and other press material to editors and reporters who are most interested in the subjects covered and therefore more likely to give them news

and feature treatment" (p.12). He indicates that there are two basic elements to targeting: first, the fitting of material to the editorial interest of the reporters you are trying to communicate with, and second, localizing the material to fit the geographical orientation of the media you are contacting. He states that "as with all good communications, the more you can tailor your messages to the needs of the receiver, the better your chances for getting their attention and influencing their behavior on your behalf" (p.13).

Other researchers offer different versions of some of these best practices. Duke (2001) concedes that e-mail is an important part of the media relations practice, but warns that "email alone cannot be used to establish and maintain good media relations. Media relations involves good working relationships. Such relationships may include a face-to-face meeting, a phone call, a letter and other communication techniques" (p.20). The findings of her study indicate that while e-mail and technology has made contacting journalists easier, it does not necessarily add to the relationship-building aspect that most researchers and practitioners agree is paramount to effective media relations.

What results from this examination is that there is no definitive way of practicing media relations, in fact, it would be easier to say that there is only a list of what should *not* be done in practicing media relations. Seitel (2007) offers a list of "don'ts" for media relations practitioners. The list includes: don't sweat skepticism (journalists aren't paid to ask easy questions), don't "buy" journalists (bribes are unethical on both sides), don't expect news agreement (this is discussed later with regard to newsworthiness), don't have an attitude with reporters (ultimately they decide what to print), don't lie (Seitel, and others, indicate this is the cardinal rule in media relations), don't "badger" the journalist about your "news," don't send clips of other stories about your client, don't bluff

(admitting you don't know the answer to a question but then reassuring the journalist you will find out the answer will gain you more respect than trying to talk your way through it), don't go "off the record" (if you don't want to see something on the news, don't say it), don't make promises you can't keep (if you guarantee the reporter an interview with your company president, make it happen), don't play favorites (you may have only a few journalists who are your primary targets but you don't want to alienate others, and remember that journalists tend to move around), don't assume that the journalist is "out to get you (treat all questions from journalists with equal respect), don't assume the journalist will use every word you say (only a few words might make it to print or on television, so choose your words carefully), don't let the journalist dominate the conversation in an interview setting (ask for clarification if you don't understand the question), don't say "no comment" (it sounds guilty). While this is not an exhaustive list of things *not* to do, these practical tips are generally found throughout the literature.

Though public relations as a *field* is fairly new, and has only been "established" for the past fifty or sixty years, the constructs of the public relations field have been in place for some time.

In fact, the term public relations has been traced as far back as 1882, when it was used in an address by Dorman Eaton to the Yale Law School titled "The Public Relations and Duties of the Legal Profession" (Pimlott, 1951). Pimlott's description of the development of public relations is at once parsimonious and complete, but his description certainly does not lack one important aspect, that of the role of the media in the development of the public relations profession. From his historical description:

> The legend telescopes and oversimplifies a story which is
> much more complex. It began when men started to get into

the newspapers information favorable to their employers or to
others for whom they were acting as paid or unpaid agents.
Alfred McLung Lee has shown that there have been press agents
almost as long as there have been newspapers. They existed in
the United States during the eighteenth century, and probably
earlier in England. (p. 6)

In fact, Pimlott (1951) indicates that publicity and media relations may have been

the idea behind the first organizations of public relations practitioners. He indicates that

when leading public relations professionals organized for the first time in 1936, they

called themselves the National Association of Accredited Publicity Directors, and it was

not until 1944 that they changed their name to the National Association of Public

Relations Counsel. Also the American College Publicity Association, which started in

1917 as the American Association of College News Bureaus, did not change its name to

the American College Public Relations Association until 1946 (Pimlott, 1951).

Pimlott identifies the change in name from publicity to public relations in the

following passage:

In 1935, there were still only ten public relations counselors
in the New York telephone directory as compared with 76
'publicity service bureaus.' By 1939 there were 74 as compared
with 120, but the publicity category continued to be the more
numerous until the war. In 1948 there were 336 entries under
public relations and 232 under publicity. Both groups had grown
in spectacular fashion, but public relations firms were increasing
in number more rapidly than publicity bureaus. (p. 9)

Too often today, the term publicity has taken on a negative connotation, and

thanks to Grunig's (1984) four models of public relations, the term "press agent" is

viewed as the least beneficial way of practicing public relations. However, even

President Theodore Roosevelt referred to the press as the fourth estate (Pimlott, 1951),

and Rex Harlow, the first president of the Public Relations Society of America, listed

newspapers, magazines, books and other printed materials first before any other means of

communicating to the public. During the same time period Ramsberger (1948), in the

opening paragraph of his book, *How to Make Publicity Work,* clearly states "Publicity is

news. Those who produce or develop it must essentially be reporters. They are reporters

working for the source of news…Publicity should be news and the basic element of news

is fact" (p. 13).

Woods (1941) further defines publicity in terms that we might use today, when he

states:

> Publicity is accepted for dissemination without cost because
> its message is considered of sufficient public interest or importance
> to impel the various media to use it solely on the basis of its value
> to those reached by these media…To succeed in its purpose,
> therefore, publicity must at all times make a strong claim on the
> attention of the public, or to that segment of the public toward
> which it is directed. (p. 4)

So while Grunig's (1984) definition of publicity and the press agent has given us

a negative view of the term, early practitioners and academics understood that the press,

publicity and therefore media relations were – and to this day remain – an integral part of

the public relations practice.

Publicity, early on, and media relations, today, have been and continue to be an

important aspect of society. Awad (1985) indicates that both public relations

practitioners and journalists have a responsibility to the public first, that a commitment to

honesty, fairness and accuracy must be the tenets of both professions. It is no wonder

then, that both the Society of Professional Journalists and the Public Relations Society of

America include similar words and phrases for each profession.

Journalists are increasingly taking on a new, or perhaps returning to an old, role, from that of the objective disseminator of news, to that of the advocate, as were the early journalist-publishers discussed earlier in this dissertation. Goldstein (2004) explains the phenomenon as a "paradigm shift...with repercussions in both the political and corporate arenas" (p.22). He states that journalists have "abandoned their prior standard of providing the public with factual information by credible and verifiable sources to analyze and act upon in their daily lives," instead, opting to give readers a particular point of view in order to brand their product, resulting in the amalgamation of news coverage and editorial, all the while maintaining their "mantle of impartiality" (p.22). Pimlott (1951) also recognized this, making it clear that the press is run for profit, and that this has a tendency to lead to sensationalism, levity and "bad manners" (p. 141).

Seitel (2007) sums up the current state of the media according to public relations practitioners:

> Where once the media were dominated by a handful of
> powerful, truth-minded reporters and editors at a handful of
> newspapers and three national TV networks, today the media
> are fragmented, omnipresent, busy 24 hours a day/ seven
> days a week, and populated by a breed of reporter who is aggressive,
> opinionated, sharp-elbowed, and more than willing to throw
> himself or herself personally into the story being covered…Today,
> more often than not, with competition from thousands of daily
> newspapers, talk radio stations, cable TV channels, and bloggers
> as far as the eye can see, reporters have few qualms about
> using anonymous sources, losing their historic anonymity, and
> becoming part of the story. (p. 173)

So where does this leave the media relations practitioner? First and foremost, it means that the practitioner must keep in mind the changing roles of the media. As is the case in all public relations, but in particular for the media relations practitioner, the public

interest must be kept in mind at all times. Brooks' (1999) discussion of the "media

supply chain" offers the solution for media relations practitioners by clearly delineating

the job of both the media relations practitioner and the journalist. A media relations

practitioner's job is to provide information devoid of "impurities," and the journalist's

job is to transform that material, along with his or her own information, sources and ideas

into a finished product, though Barger and Barney (2004) indicate that there is a greater

moral obligation that lies on the media as trustees of the public trust – even if that trust is

waning (Geary, 2005).

This is not to say that the media relations practitioner is without responsibility, in

fact, it may be necessary for the media relations practitioner to take on even greater

responsibility because of the changing role of the media. Practitioners should recognize

that they are part of the information supply chain, and that in order to ultimately serve

their organizations, they must serve their audiences as well.

No matter the role of media relations in society, or the ultimate purpose behind

why media relations is practiced, of utmost concern to research in media relations is the

relationship between public relations practitioners and journalists. This relationship has

generally been examined from two perspectives.

What makes something worthy of being called news?

The first perspective is what factors are important to each, particularly with regard

to newsworthiness – or what makes something of interest to journalists and therefore may

influence their willingness to disseminate that information through their medium (Abbott

& Brassfeld, 1989; Aronoff, 1976; Cameron, Sallot, & Curtin, 1997; Elfenbein, 1986;

Galtung & Ruge, 1965; Harmon & White, 2001; Kopenhaver, 1985; McCombs &

Winter, 1981; Morton, 1986; Morton & Warren, 1992a, 1992b; Peterson, 1981; Snider, 1967; White, 1950; Zaharopoulos, 1990).

The discussion of what makes something worthy of being identified as news has been a long-standing debate, not only from the public relations perspective, but from the journalistic side as well. The axiom that news is what an editor says it is, may no longer be applicable in a changing media environment. Decisions on what is or is not news still lies, to some extent, with editors, but also with journalists, photographers, bloggers, freelancers, publishers and in some media, the members of the public themselves. While the editor may be the final decision-maker in print news, this may not always be the target of the media relations practitioner.

In a study presented to the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Zoch and Supa (2005) did an exhaustive search of literature in journalism, and broke down their findings to include eight factors of newsworthiness that, according to the literature, should identify what makes news. Those factors identified were: immediacy, timeliness, localness, human interest, cultural proximity, unexpectedness, prominence and significance. They then applied their findings in examining public relations press releases on public and private corporations' Web sites. They found that public relations practitioners – at least those who produced the releases that were part of the study – were not using newsworthiness values identified by the journalism literature.

However, these findings are in opposition to what Kopenhaver, Martinson and Ryan (1984) found. In their study journalists and public relations practitioners agreed "remarkably" on which elements of news are most important. But the authors of this

study do point out that the practitioners were asked to answer questions on elements of news in an abstract way, and that in practice they might behave differently, which would support the findings of Zoch and Supa (2005). In addition the news elements used in the 1984 study were far different than those based on the literature reviewed in the Zoch and Supa study. Kopenhaver, Martinson and Ryan used accuracy, interest to reader, usefulness to reader, completeness, prompt publication, depicts subject in favorable light, mechanical/ grammatical correctness and news story style, which replicated Aronoff's (1975) study.

Baus (1954) states that "news is something that interests *many people* today" (p.451), and that this generally means "many people" according to the publication. Baus continues, "*Every medium has a news standard of its own, and this is the criterion the publicist goes by in attempting to address publicity to the public through that medium.*" In other words "news is something that interests *many of our readers* today" (p.451, all italics in original).

So, then, perhaps news is dependent on the publication (as monthly magazines would necessarily be concerned with different news than would daily newspapers), medium (print versus broadcast), and perhaps even publisher opinion. This is obviously of concern to the media relations practitioner, and has been addressed repeatedly in public relations texts (Cutlip, Center & Broom, 1994; Lattimore et al., 2004; Seitel, 2007; Wilcox et al., 2003) and, specifically, media relations literature (Cantelmo, 1994; Howard & Mathews, 2000; Howard, 2004).

What is clear is that media relations practitioners must take into account the needs of individual media vehicles in disseminating news, and understand that each vehicle

may in fact have individual needs or individual values of what constitutes news. This is

an axiom of media relations that is a recurring theme in both academic and practitioner

literature, that the media relations practitioner must know the media they are targeting,

both in style and in newsworthiness values.

<u>The public relations – journalist relationship</u>

The second area where research has examined the relationship between public

relations and journalists focuses on the relationship itself (Adams, 2002; Aronoff, 1975;

Bishop, 1988; Carter, 1958; Dansker, Wilcox & Van Tubergen, 1980; DeLorme &

Fedler, 2003; Feldman, 1961a, 1961b; Gieber & Johnson, 1961; Janowitz, 1975; Jo,

2003; Kopenhaver, Martinson & Ryan, 1984; Lynch, 1993; Paletz & LaFiura, 1977; Park

& Berger, 2004; Pincus, Rimmer, Rayfield & Cropp, 1993; Ryan & Martinson, 1988;

Sachsman, 1976; Singletary, 1976; Spicer, 1993; Turk, 1985, 1986a, 1986b; Womack,

1986). Voros and Alvarez (1981) wrote the following regarding the relationship between

public relations practitioners and journalists:

> News media relations is something like baseball. On the
> field of play, there's an adversary relationship that must be
> understood. The 'hardball' nature of both endeavors is
> evident from time to time, and both are governed by rules –
> written and unwritten – and tradition. There are many positions
> to be covered and varying degrees of skill among players.
> Calls of 'foul' and 'fair' are subjective, and knowing how to
> win and lose gracefully means a lot to the reputation of the
> 'team.' The performances of public relations managers and
> those in the dugouts affect whether or not they are eventually
> labeled 'major league.' And in both cases, consistency and
> evenhandedness win respect and pennants. (p. 41)

DeLorme and Fedler (2003) indicate that the hostility between journalists and

public relations practitioners began at the end of World War I. "Journalists feared that

publicists' efforts to obtain free publicity would reduce newspapers' advertising revenue"

(p. 102). This history has today turned into more of a tradition than anything else. But

whether the adversarial relationship is in fact only tradition, or whether it is actually a

relationship that has been irrevocably marred because of historical and modern-day

happenings is uncertain. Certainly, there is no doubt that public relations practitioners

have (in the past?) used unscrupulous means of garnering media attention. DeLorme and

Fedler (2003) provide several examples of this behavior, one of which is here:

> On the evening of July 18, 1920, a man walking through
> New York's Central Park said he heard a splash and found
> a woman's handbag and hat on the ground near a large lake.
> The woman was named 'Yuki Onda,' and a letter in her hotel
> room seemed to explain why she committed suicide; she
> had fallen in love with a U.S. Navy officer who would not
> marry her. Using lanterns, spotlights, and rowboats, police
> dragged practically every square inch of the lake but failed to
> find her. On July 26, a critic for The World suggested that police
> looking for Miss Onda should drop in at the Astor Theater and
> watch a movie titled "The Breath of the Gods." The critic had gone
> to review the movie and discovered that Yuki Onda was the name
> of its leading character. "It appears from The Breath of the Gods
> that Yuki did not commit suicide in New York at all," he reported.
> Rather, she had returned to Japan and married a prince. (p. 124)

It would be easy to say that this type of behavior is no longer practiced, but this is

not the case. A recent example of a public relations stunt gone awry occurred in Boston

in 2007, where, in an attempt to promote "Aqua Teen Hunger Force" for the Cartoon

Network, multiple lit-up signs were placed around the city. Unfortunately for the

Cartoon Network executives, in the post-9/11 world the populace of Boston was scared

by the signs, which showed a cartoon character holding up its middle finger. What

resulted in the next few hours was mayhem in downtown Boston. While this was not

specifically a media relations event, the mayhem that resulted generated much national

media attention, and while the ratings for "Aqua Teen Hunger Force" did rise, it cost the general manager of Cartoon Network his job (Zeima, 2007).

Stories like this support Grunig's (1990) claim that "many [media relations practitioners] will do whatever it takes to gain exposure for their client organization" (p.18). Based on these examples, perhaps journalists have an inherent distrust of public relations practitioners for a reason, and it is in fact justified.

Cameron, Sallot, and Curtin (1997) determined that media personnel are reluctant to use public relations information subsidies because of this adversarial relationship. In their analysis of studies that examine the public relations practitioner as a news source, they conclude from the literature that there is much room for improvement in media relations practices. They suggest that more research, employing diverse methods, would greatly enrich both the practice of media relations and also the body of knowledge surrounding public relations.

 Multiple studies have examined the dynamic of the public relations practitioner as a source for journalists. The first major study to examine the relationship between journalists and public relations practitioners was done in 1961 by Feldman. It found discrepancies between the two groups on dimensions such as credibility, occupational status and professionalism.

Aronoff 's (1975) study built on Feldman's work, but focused only on one region of the country. His findings included that journalists hold negative perceptions about public relations practitioners, and that in fact journalists felt that public relations practitioners as a source of news had very little credibility. However, the feeling was not reciprocated by public relations practitioners, who ranked themselves fourth out of 16

professions with regard to credibility, and ranked journalists third – thus giving an early indication of one discrepancy between the professions.

Jeffers (1977), though, found a possible loophole in Aronoff's study. Jeffers found that the more familiar the journalist was with the public relations practitioner, the more credibility the journalist gave to the practitioner. He further suggested that the "newsman – source relationship" was not as adversarial as previously thought. However, subsequent studies have shown that Jeffers' study may be the exception, not the rule.

Kopenhaver, Martinson and Ryan (1984) found that while public relations practitioners and journalists generally agreed on which elements of news were most important, journalists were unable to gauge that public relations practitioners would agree with them regarding those news elements. In other words, public relations practitioners know what journalists think is important in news, they are just not practicing their source relationship according to those elements. Kopenhaver, Martinson and Ryan's (1984) study also disagreed with Brody's (1984) findings that the adversarial relationship was less serious than had been previously thought. Cameron, Sallot and Curtin (1997) attribute this to journalists perceiving a self-interest aspect on the part of the public relations practitioner.

Kopenhaver (1985), using the data from the 1984 study, reported that news values from both the public relations practitioners and journalists were similar, but that journalists saw public relations practitioners as obstructionists, and as seeking to gain publicity. Kopenhaver concludes that public relations practitioners should practice the dissemination of information keeping in mind the elements of news they claim to know.

Stegall and Sanders (1986) sought to replicate Kopenhaver et al.'s (1984) study utilizing Q-sort methodology. In fact, the 1986 version did replicate the 1984 study, but added a new dimension to findings, that of profiling public relations practitioners into one of two types. The first type is those practitioners who feel a responsibility to society as well as the institution for which they work, and generally consider themselves to be journalists. The second type see themselves as business people first, and have a greater loyalty to the institution.

Finally, Sallot (1990) conducted a study that sought to replicate both Kopenhaver et al's (1984) and Aronoff's (1975) studies. Using two regional audiences, Sallot conducted a survey of both public relations practitioners and journalists. Sallot argues that because journalists do not value public relations practitioners' perceptions of what can be considered news, they do not in turn assign the practitioners much credibility.

With the exception of the Stegall and Sanders (1986) study, all of the others used survey methodology to reach their conclusions. In fact, with the exception of the Brody (1984) and Jeffers (1977) studies, they all used the same survey instrument. Other methods employed by researchers have been content analysis of newspapers (Bishop, 1988; Spicer, 1993) or content analysis of news releases and articles coupled with interviews of journalists (Turk, 1985, 1986a, 1986b). This type of triangulation is important in determining what is actually occurring, and in all of these studies, findings were discovered similar to those that used survey methodology exclusively.

Cameron, Sallot and Curtin (1997), in their summary of Sallot's (1990) study, sum up the totality of the studies with regard to public relations as a source for journalists:

> The two groups agreed that journalists believe their work is
> more important to society than is public relations, which may
> account for some of the journalists' antagonism. The journalists
> also believed that PR practitioners bear part of the responsibility
> for journalists' negative attitudes because practitioners are
> responsible for policing the peripheral "bad apples." But the
> practitioners attributed journalists' negative attitudes toward
> public relations to the journalists' inflated views of their own
> status and their negative experiences with the few "bad apples"
> in public relations. (p. 153)

Curtin (1999) suggests that changes in the newspaper industry are changing the

constructs of the relationship between the reporter and the public relations practitioner.

She writes that factors such as ownership of newspapers moving toward publicly-owned

corporations, the drop in advertising revenue, and the overall loss of profit for

newspapers have driven the newspapers to adopt what McManus (1994, 1995) have

labeled market-driven journalism. This new journalism abandons traditional news

values, and, according to McManus (1994), utilizes more public relations information

subsidies.

Curtin's (1999) study seeks to examine this new journalistic tendency. In order to

investigate this, Curtin used both in-depth interviews and surveys to investigate how

journalists view public relations information subsidies, and whether or not they are

important in the construction of news. Curtin found that in her in-depth interviews,

editors were reluctant to admit to using public relations information subsidies. Curtin

found that, with regard to public relations materials, journalists often had difficulty

separating the material from those who produced it, and that perceived motivation of the

groups or organization behind the information subsidies often played into the decision as

to whether or not they were used.

Curtin (1999) also found that the most frequently used reason for rejecting information subsidies from public relations practitioners was a lack of news value. However, Curtin also found that even though journalists were averse to using public relations produced materials, they did in fact use the material, though seldom ran it directly. She writes:

> Many of the participants who reported not using public relations materials would reveal in the course of the interview that they actually used them in a number of ways. One was to spark story ideas. Many participants would categorically state that they did not use public relations material in their papers, yet later in the interviews say things such as "Press releases have become a really important source for story ideas" and "I think we're typical of most newspapers in that we use PR mailings strictly for ideas." (1999, p.64)

Curtin further discovered in her interviews that journalists and editors were using information subsidies produced by public relations practitioners in other ways as well.

> A second confounded sense of "use" of public relations materials that emerged from the interview data was that of content for special sections. Participants believed the advertising recession of the mid-1980's had led the industry to turn to advertiser-friendly content as a way to attract more advertiser dollars, resulting in a proliferations of special sections [such as automotive, food, real estate, etc.] All interview participants mentioned special sections as a proactive move their organizations had taken to retain and increase advertising revenue. (p. 64)

Curtin further indicates that while editors were not receptive to using copy written by the advertising staff to fill these special sections, they were willing to use public relations information subsidies for that purpose.

Journalists prefer to use information that they gather themselves (Turk, 1985, 1986a, 1986b), but Curtin (1999) shows that in the era of market-driven journalism, they may be more likely to accept public relations information subsidies to provide story

ideas, fill special sections, or otherwise fill small gaps in the news hole. However, she states that the concept of market-driven journalism is not necessarily causing journalists to give greater credence, at least by managing editors, to public relations information subsidies, and that the information provided by public relations practitioners is still viewed as suspect, motivated more by the organization and less by intrinsic news value.

Research Questions

Based on the literature that addresses both news value and public relations practitioners as sources, and the fact that the last major study to examine both public relations practitioners and journalists (replicating Aronoff's 1975 study) occurred in 1990; the following research questions are posed for this study.

RQ1a: What changes have occurred in the past 23 years regarding public relations and journalists views of each other with regard to information dissemination?

RQ1b: Have changes in the media landscape (e.g. decreased credibility, the rise of alternative media) led to changes in how public relations practitioners view newspaper journalists?

RQ1c: Have changes in the media landscape led to changes in how newspaper journalists view public relations practitioners?

RQ1d: Have changes in the media landscape affected the credibility assigned to public relations practitioners by journalists?

RQ2a: Are public relations practitioners producing information subsidies that are of greater value to journalists than they were in the past?

RQ2b: How do journalists decide what information subsidies to keep, and what to throw out?

RQ3a: Are the news values that Zoch and Supa (2005) found in the journalism literature actually being used as classifications of news by journalists and public relations practitioners?

RQ3b: What constructs of news are most important for journalists and public relations practitioners?

RQ3c: What constitutes the production of an information subsidy for the public relations practitioner?

RQ4a: What do journalists feel could be strengthened in the relationship between themselves and public relations practitioners?

RQ4b: In what ways could public relations practitioners make their information subsidies more useful to journalists?

RQ4c: What are the agreed upon standards between newspaper journalists and public relations practitioners for what makes information newsworthy?

The next chapter, "Methods," describes the data collection method for this study. It addresses the generation of the sample, how the depth interviews were conducted and how the data gathered was analyzed

CHAPTER 3
METHODS

This study seeks to identify modern trends in the relationship between journalists and media relations practitioners. It examines that relationship from two standpoints: (1) what are the elements of news and how are they important to each field, and (2) what is the nature of the relationship between journalists and media relations practitioners with regard to their perceptions of occupational status between the two groups and their attitudes toward public relations and those in public relations.

The medium used in this study is the newspaper, for three reasons. First, in order to compare this study with previous similar studies, it is necessary to use a similar group of journalists. The second reason is that as new media take hold, newspapers are the most likely to have to change in order to adapt and to compete with new media technologies and the Internet. At the same time the tradition of journalism, and likely the tradition of the adversarial relationship with public relations practitioners is strongest among those working for that medium. Finally, newspapers are still recognized as the most targeted by media relations practitioners, and still maintain their foothold as the most recognized form of the media (Howard & Matthews, 2000).

Compared to others, however, this study is unique because of its methodology and sample. Previous studies that have examined the relationship between journalists and public relations practitioners have used surveys (Aronoff, 1975; Brody, 1984; Jeffers, 1977; Kopenhaver, Martinson, & Ryan, 1984; Sallot, 1990), Q-sort (Stegall and Sanders, 1986), content analysis (Bishop, 1988; Spicer, 1993), or interviews (Curtin, 1999). However, no study to this point has been done that includes both media relations

practitioners and journalists, and that also uses the combined methods of surveys and depth interviews.

The research for this study was conducted using a two-step process. The first step was to conduct depth interviews with senior media relations practitioners and senior editors, the second was to administer a survey using a previously established instrument (Aronoff, 1975, Kopenhaver et al., 1984) in order to make the results comparable to those studies. The sample for both phases was drawn from the state of Florida, and used a stratified sample of both media relations practitioners and journalists from the seven major regions in the state (Tallahassee and northwest Florida, Jacksonville and northeast Florida, Tampa / St. Petersburg and the Treasure Coast region, Miami, Fort Lauderdale, Palm Beach area, and Orlando and central Florida). The hope was to draw a representative sample from the entire state.

Depth Interviews

In her explanation of the use of depth interviews, Curtin (1999) explains that they are used because "they yield the most information concerning participants' meanings and can uncover relational patterns and concentrate on the processes involved" (p. 58). Following Curtin's (1999) example, questions were asked about both personal experience and also about knowledge of other cases. Because only senior level practitioners and journalists were used for the depth interviews (at least 10 plus years experience as a journalist, preferably at the editor level, and at least at the level of manager of media relations for practitioners), it is likely that a breadth of knowledge was attained. Interviews were conducted with three senior-level public relations practitioners and four senior journalists. Each interview followed an interview guide, and the average interview

length was approximately one hour. Three interviews were conducted in person, while the remainder took place over the phone. In-person interviews are preferred because they may result in a greater level of disclosure and trust on the part of the interviewee. However, because of time and location constraints by the interview participants, phone interviews were predominant. The interview schedule was pre-tested using graduate students with experience in professional journalism, and was tested for time, clarity and for problems with reactivity.

The interview guide questions were generated based on previous studies, and also based on the current research questions. The purpose of the interview guide was to provide some structure for the interviews, however, the questions served as a guide only, and many of the interviewees provided much additional information, both related and unrelated to the guide questions. A copy of the interview guide is included in Appendix A, "Interview Schedule Guide."

Survey Instrument

Following the depth interviews, a survey of both media relations practitioners and journalists was conducted, using the same basic instrument that has been used in past studies (Aronoff, 1975; Kopenhaver, Martinson & Ryan, 1984) to measure the nature of the relationship between journalists and practitioners with regard to perceived occupational status and attitudes toward public relations and the people who practice it. The survey consisted of one mailing, using the cover letter and the instrument, and was accompanied by a return pre-paid envelope so respondents did not have to incur any financial cost themselves. A copy of the letter sent to survey respondents is included as "Sample letter to survey participants" in Appendix B.

The survey instrument used a 7-point Likert scale throughout, ranging from 1 (*strongly agree*) to 7 (*strongly disagree*) in order to replicate the Kopenhaver et al. (1984) study. The only modification made to the 1984 instrument was with regard to values of newsworthiness, which is similar to the modifications that Kopenhaver et al. (1984) made to Aronoff's (1975) instrument. These statements assessed newsworthiness factor values based on the respondent's personal views. The purpose of these questions was to test Zoch and Supa's (2005) list of eight factors of newsworthiness. Kopenhaver et als. list of news values was concentrated on the actual production of news, that is, the correct grammar, syntax and readability of news subsidies. The Zoch and Supa values were used here because they better addressed the conceptual aspect of preparing information subsidies. A copy of the survey instrument is found under Appendix C "Survey Instrument."

Unlike the 1975 and 1984 study, this study did not ask respondents to rank order a list of professions based on their perception of credibility for those professions. It was decided that this was not a necessary part of this survey instrument, and was omitted so as not to make the survey instrument longer than two pages.

Question Reliability

The generation of the first 25 statements on the survey was done by Aronoff (1975). In discussing his development of the questionnaire he wrote that he had started out with 43 statements, and that "the 25 statements with the highest F and t scores and item-total correlations were retained and used in measuring the attitudes of working journalists and public relations practitioners. In all cases, significance associated with F,

t, and correlations exceed the .01 level" (p. 48). Kopenhaver et al. (1984) did not report reliability coefficients for their questionnaire.

Generation of Survey Sample

Undergraduate students enrolled in an introductory public relations course generated the survey sample. Students were broken into groups and assigned to compile a list of journalists and public relations practitioners practicing in one of the seven previously mentioned regions of Florida. Each group was assigned to compile a list of 70 journalists and 70 public relations practitioners. The purpose of the assignment for the students' learning was to show the class the variety of jobs available in public relations, and the types of media outlets with which practitioners had to interact. There were seven groups of students, resulting in a list of 490 journalists and 490 public relations practitioners. The lists were then combined and cleaned (checking for duplication, individuals no longer in the field, etc.) by a graduate student, resulting in 669 usable names and addresses. Interviewees from the first part of the study were excluded from the mailing list of the survey. This form of establishing the sample was chosen over using professional society lists (Public Relations Society of America, Society of Professional Journalists) because there is no requirement for those in practice to join those societies, and the purpose of the sample was to include a broad spectrum of those in journalism and public relations.

Institutional Review Board Approval

The researcher in this study is a CITI-certified researcher, and approval from the IRB at the University of Miami was obtained prior to the commencement of this study.

<u>Data Collection</u>

Once the study obtained IRB approval, the scheduling of interviews began and the initial mailing list for the study was finalized. The interview period took place from June 8, 2007 to July 12, 2007. Because of the extended time for interviews, the survey mailing was sent out on June 18, prior to completion of all of the interviews. Interviews proceeded after the survey had been sent. This was done to save time, and also because the survey instrument was using a pre-established instrument and was not based on the interviews.

The survey responses were collected over a period of two months. This was longer than originally anticipated, but allowed for the return of 221 completed surveys. Once the surveys were collected, they were entered into SPSS 11 for Mac OS X in August, 2007. The data were analyzed during the same time period. Interview transcripts were also completed during August, 2007 and were coded and analyzed at that time.

<u>Interview Data Analysis</u>

The interviews were transcribed by the researcher, and were coded following similar steps to those that Curtin (1999) used in her analysis – that of open, axial and selective coding. The unit of analysis for this process was the sentence.

During open coding, the data were analyzed and compared for similarities and differences, and also for concepts that were relevant to the research questions. The units were then categorized by their characteristics. Axial coding revealed additional subcategories, while during selective coding those categories were collapsed, and core relationships were developed based on the collapsed categories. This was done

separately for the interviews with practitioners and for journalists, and then the two categories were compared with each other to find similarities and differences.

Permission was gained at the conclusion of each interview to conduct a follow-up phone call to clarify any questions that may have arisen, whether from technical problems in recording or from understanding the concepts raised in the interview process. One follow-up phone call was used to clarify information provided by a public relations practitioner.

Analysis of Survey Data

Data from the survey were entered into SPSS 11 for Mac OS X. Data were examined for statistically significant differences between responses from journalists and practitioners through the use of a *t* test, which is consistent with the analysis used by Kopenhaver et al. (1984). This allowed a direct comparison between the two studies, which was important since very similar populations were used. This also allowed comparisons to be drawn to the Aronoff (1975) study, completing a 30-year cycle of data that can be compared against each other.

The questions on newsworthiness factors were also entered into SPSS 11 for Mac OS X, though these were compared only against the counterpart response (practitioner – journalist) found in this study, as these news values have not previously been studied.

Data were analyzed and compared against the previous studies that used this instrument, particularly the Kopenhaver et al. (1984) study as very similar populations were being sampled. Cameron, Sallot and Curtin (1997) point out that no survey using this instrument has ever garnered 200 responses from either practitioners or journalists, so that was an additional goal of this study. The benchmark of success was to have

comparative numbers with the Kopenhaver et al. (1984) study which collected 47

responses from editors and 57 responses from practitioners; however, the current study

exceeded expectations, and garnered 221 responses (95 public relations practitioners, 122

journalists, and 4 undetermined).

The next chapter, "Results," describes the results found from this study. Because

many of the research questions were focused on comparing the results from this study to

previous studies, the research questions will not be answered until the last chapter.

CHAPTER 4
RESULTS

Because the nature of the research questions were comparative to results found in previous studies, the research questions will be addressed as part of the discussion for this dissertation. Therefore, the results discussed here will address only the current study and findings not related to earlier comparable studies.

<u>Study Demographics</u>

A total of 669 surveys were mailed to journalists and public relations practitioners in the state of Florida. Of those, 41 envelopes were returned as undeliverable, leaving a total of 628 surveys successfully delivered, and thus serving as the final population of the study. Of those successfully delivered surveys, 221 were completed, for a return rate of 35% of the modified population, or 33% of the original population. Of those 221 surveys completed, 95 (43%) of the respondents self-identified as public relations practitioners, 122 (55.2%) identified themselves as journalists, and 4 (1.8%) of the respondents either did not indicate a profession or selected "other" as an option.

One goal of this study was to identify the current nature of how journalists and public relations practitioners in the state of Florida view each other. In order to effectively discover this, it was necessary to identify public relations practitioners and journalists who would have a working knowledge of the other's profession. This was gauged by asking how long each respondent had been practicing their profession, with the assumption that the more time they had been practicing, the more likely they were to have formed a generalized opinion about the other's profession.

For the current study, the mean number of year's experience a respondent who self-identified as a public relations practitioner had was 12.5. The number of years

experience ranged from 10.82 years on the lower boundary to 14.18 years as the upper boundary. For those who identified themselves as journalists, the mean was 16.3 years, with a range from 14.31 years on the lower boundary to 18.28 years as the upper boundary

Additionally, 130 of the 221 respondents (58.8%) self-identified as holding a managerial role. This was positively correlated with years of experience at the p<.000 level. Eighty-nine respondents (40.3%) indicated they did not hold management positions, while two respondents (.9%) did not respond.

One question inquired as to whether or not the respondent, who had indicated a profession (either public relations or journalism), had ever practiced the other profession during their career. Seventy-two respondents (32.6%) indicated they had practiced the other profession at some point in their careers, while 121 (54.8%) indicated they had not. Twenty-eight (12.7%) did not respond to the question.

Figure 4.1 shows a breakdown of where in Florida the respondents indicated they primarily practiced their professions.

Fig. 4.1 Breakdown of Respondents by Area

Primary Area of Practice	Respondents			
	Public Relations	Journalists	Total	%
Miami Area	18	14	32	14.9
Ft. Lauderdale Area	0	10	10	4.5
Palm Beach Area	24	7	31	14
Tampa/ St. Petersburg Area	16	27	43	19.9
Orlando/ Central Florida	2	21	23	10.9
Jacksonville Area	13	21	34	15.4
Tallahassee Area	12	15	27	12.2
Multiple Areas/ Other	10	7	17	8.1

A total of 86 of the 221 respondents (38.9%) indicated they were male, while 129 (58.4%) indicated they were female. Six respondents (2.7%) did not indicate a sex. Of those who indicated their primary profession as public relations, 27 (28%) were male, and 66 (69%) were female. Two respondents who indicated public relations as their primary profession did not indicate sex. Of those respondents who indicated journalism as their primary profession, 59 (48%) identified as male, while 61 (50%) identified as female. Two respondents who indicated that journalism was their primary profession did not identify their sex.

<u>Study Findings</u>

A main focus of this dissertation was identifying whether both public relations practitioners and journalists recognized common elements of newsworthiness identified through the communication literature. Thus, respondents were asked their opinions about the importance of public relations items sent to the media containing these news elements. The newsworthiness factors were breaking news, timely information, local news, "should know" material, information about prominent people, human interest elements, news that if it is not local is written to pertain to a local audience (cultural proximity) and unexpected information.   Respondents were asked to rate each of the elements on a 1 to 5 scale with 1 being very important and 5 being not important at all. Figure 4.2 indicates the mean scores given to each of the items based on the respondents' profession.

Fig. 4.2: Comparison of Means for newsworthy items in public relations materials

Public Relations material should contain	Mean Scores	
	Public Relations Practitioners	Journalists
Breaking News	2.59	2.5
Timely News	1.43	1.57
Local News	1.96	1.67
"Should Know" Information	1.72	1.88
Prominent News	2.55	2.75
Human Interest	1.9*	2.21*
Cultural Proximity	1.54	1.66
Unexpected Information	2.6	2.6

* ANOVA indicates significance at $p < .007$

Comparison to Kopenhaver et al. 1984

Survey participants were also asked to rate their level of agreement with statements that had been used in the Kopenhaver et al. (1984) study. Respondents were asked to read the statement, and then indicate their level of agreement based on a seven-point scale (1 being "strongly agree" and 7 representing "strongly disagree.") Figure 4.3 represents the mean scores of those responses broken down by profession, and indicates the ANOVA score for each of the statements.

A discussion based on the comparison to the Kopenhaver et al. (1984) study appears in the following chapter, however, based on the ANOVA scores, we can be confident that the basis for answers in the current study are dependent on the profession

of the respondent. Individuals who did not indicate a profession or indicated other (N=4) are excluded from this analysis. Study participants who did not indicate their level of agreement with specific statements are also excluded from the analysis of that particular statement. All study respondents answered at least 20 of the 25 statements; therefore, no surveys were discarded as being incomplete.

Because the research questions for this study were mainly focused on comparing results from this study to those of previous studies, the final chapter, "Discussion," contains the answers to the current research questions. The next chapter also contains implications for future research, and implications for professionals in both journalism and public relations.

Fig. 4.3 Mean Scores

	Mean scores		ANOVA
	PR practitioners	Journalists	Sig. (p<)
PR and the press are partners in the dissemination of information.	2.29	3.73	.000
PR practitioners are basically competitors with the advertising departments of newspapers rather than collaborators with the news staff.	5.53	4.69	.000
PR practitioners too frequently insist on promoting products, services and other activities which do not legitimately deserve promotion.	4.68	2.75	.000
PR is a profession equal in status to journalism.	2.84	5.07	.000
PR practitioners often act as obstructionists, keeping reporters from the people they really should be seeing.	5.53	3.17	.000
PR practitioners have cluttered our channels of communication with pseudo events and phony phrases that confuse public issues.	5.18	3.02	.000
The abundance of free and easily obtainable information provided by PR practitioners has caused an increase in the quality of reporting.	3.37	4.41	.000
PR material is usually publicity described as news.	4.43	2.57	.000
The PR practitioner does work for the newspaper that would otherwise go undone.	3.13	4.41	.000
PR practitioners too often try to deceive the press by attaching too much importance to a trivial, uneventful happening.	5.23	3.15	.000
The PR practitioner serves as an extension of the newspaper staff, covering the organization for which he is responsible.	3.63	5.41	.000
PR practitioners are just "gophers" for whomever hires them.	5.85	3.57	.000
PR practitioners are people of good sense, good will, and good moral character.	2.58	3.66	.000
It is a shame that because of inadequate staff, the press must depend on information provided by PR practitioners.	5.22	3.92	.000
PR practitioners understand such journalistic problems as meeting deadlines, attracting reader interest, and making the best use of space.	1.94	3.30	.000
You can't trust PR practitioners.	6.20	4.07	.000
Journalists and PR practitioners carry on a running battle.	4.70	4.03	.005
PR practitioners are typically honest.	2.41	3.45	.000
The massiveness of the impact of PR makes it harder for the average citizen to know when he is being sold a bill of goods.	4.75	3.17	.000
PR practitioners help reporters obtain accurate, complete and timely news.	2.12	3.47	.000
PR practitioners frequently use a shield of words for practices which are not in the public interest.	5.27	3.12	.000
PR practitioners are necessary for the production of news as we know it.	2.77	4.34	.000
PR is a parasite to the press.	6.27	4.74	.000
PR practitioners typically issue news releases or statements on matters of genuine news value.	2.54	3.98	.000
The primary function of PR is to get free advertising space for the organizations they represent.	4.82	2.87	.000

CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION

Because the research questions in this dissertation call for a comparison of results between the current study and previous studies of a similar nature, this final chapter will be divided into two sections. The first section seeks to answer the research questions set forth at the conclusion of the literature review, while the second section will focus on a more traditional discussion and implications for future research. It is the hope of the researcher that this format will better provide a clear picture of how the current study stands in relation to other studies, and also make the discussion more relevant to the current practice of media relations, particularly the nature of the relationship between public relations practitioners and journalists.

Some of the research questions for this study focused on changes in the relationship between public relations practitioners and journalists over the past 17 years, particularly with regard to perceived credibility and the use of information subsidies. Other questions focused on the factors that cause information subsidies produced by public relations practitioners to be considered newsworthy by the journalists who are their intended recipients. The questions were addressed using a survey that contained a series of statements identical to those used by Kopenhaver et al. (1984) and earlier by Aronoff (1975). For this dissertation the researcher was able to make a direct comparison with the Kopenhaver study because the target audience for both studies is the same – public relations practitioners and journalists in the state of Florida.

In addition to the survey, interviews were conducted with senior-level public relations practitioners and journalists in the state of Florida. The goal of these interviews

was to glean more in-depth information than the surveys could provide. In addition to the interview transcripts, several survey respondents also included unsolicited comments on their returned surveys. Both the interviews and the comments on the surveys are used in answering the research questions.

<u>Comparison between Kopenhaver et al. and the current study</u>

No two studies conducted 23 years apart can be identical. It is important, however, to understand specifically where the differences lie so that a better understanding of the answers to the research questions can be realized.

All three studies utilize survey methodology. The Kopenhaver et al. (1984) study replicated the Aronoff (1975) study exactly, asking respondents to rate their level of agreement with 25 statements concerning the relationship between public relations practitioners and journalists. The same series of statements and the same Likert-type scale was also used in the current study.

However, the Kopenhaver et al. (1984) study also asked respondents to rank order public relations practitioners and journalists along side 14 other professions, for a total of 16 professions, to determine perceived status ranking of both of the target professions. The current study did not ask its respondents to rate their professions. The researcher determined that rank-ordering professions was not an effective way of determining perceived status, and instead chose to approach the issue from a qualitative standpoint, specifically through the interviews.

That is not to say that perceived occupational status is not an important factor to consider when addressing media relations, but it may not provide a definitive answer to why the relationship between public relations practitioners and journalists exists as it

does. The author of this study determined that other factors are most likely more important, and that perceived status could be addressed through the interviews, and also through extrapolation from the survey statements. This topic will be discussed later in the chapter.

The final aspect of the Kopenhaver et al. (1984) study was a section that asked respondents, both public relations practitioners and journalists, to rank their own perception of news values, and also to rank what they thought the other group would rank as being most important. Those eight news values were accuracy, interest to reader, usefulness to reader, completeness, prompt publication, depict subject in a favorable light, mechanical and grammatical construction, and news story style. The first six of these were replicated from the Aronoff (1975) study, with the final two being added by Kopenhaver et al.

The current study also asked respondents to indicate how important they felt eight factors of newsworthiness are. However, it did not ask respondents to rank the items as they felt their counterparts would answer. Also, the eight factors of newsworthiness differed from those the previous studies had examined. The current study utilizes the eight factors found by Zoch and Supa (2005) to be the most prominent in the journalism literature. Those are immediacy, timeliness, localness, cultural proximity, significance, human interest, prominence and unexpectedness. The purpose in asking respondents how important these eight factors are was to determine which factors might be most important in the construction of information subsidies produced by public relations practitioners, and also to determine which factors might lead to a greater acceptance of those subsidies by journalists. The reason for the departure of the current study from the two previous

ones is that the eight values presented before do not necessarily reflect on the newsworthiness of the information subsidies. While the two lists have some similarities, the factors used in the current study more accurately break down which constructs of news are most important. Also, the current study did not ask respondents to rank the factors, but instead sought the level of importance assigned to each of the factors by the respondents.

These differences between the Kopenhaver et al. (1984) study and the current study do mean that minimal comparison can be made between the two studies with regard to perceived status and news value, however, we can compare the two with regard to the 25 statements that are being measured in both studies. We can do this because the two studies both have similar respondent populations, public relations practitioners and journalists in the state of Florida.

Each of the studies utilized a single mailing of a survey. The sample populations were established similarly in both studies. The Kopenhaver et al. (1984) study utilized a stratified random sample of both the 1983 directory of the Florida Press Association and the 1983 Public Relations Society of America directory to generate its sample of 101 newspaper editors and 100 public relations practitioners. The response rate for the 1984 study was 51% (journalist n=47, public relations n=57).

The current study also utilized a stratified random sample of both journalists and public relations practitioners in the state of Florida. The list was generated by first-year public relations students enrolled in an introductory class taught by the researcher. The survey was mailed to 669 potential respondents; 41 envelopes were returned as undeliverable, leaving a total of 628 surveys successfully delivered. Of those, 221 were

completed for a return rate of 35% (journalist n=122, public relations practitioners n=95, unidentified n=4). Thus, with nearly twice as many public relations practitioners responding, and nearly three times as many journalists returning completed surveys, the mailing itself was more than three times larger than the 1984 Kopenhaver et al. study.

While the response rate in the Kopenhaver et al. study was higher, the response rate for the current study is considered sufficient for a mail survey (Dillman, 2000). Also important is the number of respondents. While there were not a large enough number of respondents to generalize to an infinite population, we can be confident that the findings of the current study are generally representative of the opinions of both public relations practitioners and journalists across the state of Florida. This was achieved by stratifying the sample by seven regions in the state of Florida, and the responses from each of these areas is represented in the previous chapter by Figure 4.1.

Because research question one and all of its subsets can be addressed by either the series of 25 statements or by analysis of the transcription of interviews with respondents who are familiar with practices both in 2007 and 1984, it is possible to have a direct comparison between the current study and the Kopenhaver et al. (1984) study, thus accomplishing the goal of the first research question.

In order to best address the remaining research questions, it is necessary to examine them in the order presented at the conclusion of the literature review. In this way, a comparison will be made first between the two studies, and then an analysis of the new data presented in the current study will be presented.

<u>Research Questions</u>

Research Question 1a: What changes, if any, have occurred in the last 17 years regarding public relations practitioners' and journalists' views of each other with regard to information dissemination?

Items 1, 9, 11, 14, 20, 21 and 22 address the first research question. Figures 5.1 and 5.2 show the differences in means between the 1984 study and the current study. By using a comparison of the mean scores between the two studies, we can identify what differences have occurred in the last 17 years. For the purposes of the first 25 statements on the survey, 1 indicates "strongly agree" while 7 indicates "strongly disagree."

Based on the comparison of means between the two studies, we can see there is very little difference between the answers given by respondents in the Kopenhaver et al. (1984) study and the current study. Because the subset population numbers are different, it is inappropriate to run a t-test to determine significance values, however, a face inspection of the numbers indicate they are, in fact, very similar. Therefore, we may deduce that, solely based on attitudes regarding information dissemination (and not attempting to explain differences in the *process* of information dissemination) there has been very little change over the past 23 years in the relationship between public relations practitioners and journalists.

Of particular interest with regard to this research question is the first statement: "Public relations and the press are partners in the dissemination of information." This item speaks directly to answer the research question, though the other statements provide much support for answering the questions as well. There is very little change between

the earlier study and the current study. Public relations practitioners generally agree with

the first statement and journalists are generally neutral regarding the statement.

Fig. 5.1 Comparison of means for journalists between 1984 and 2007	Mean scores	
	1984	2007
1. PR and the press are partners in the dissemination of information.	3.9	3.73
2. PR practitioners are basically competitors with the advertising departments of newspapers rather than collaborators with the news staff.	4.3	4.69
3. PR practitioners too frequently insist on promoting products, services and other activities which do not legitimately deserve promotion.	2.6	2.75
4. PR is a profession equal in status to journalism.	4.8	5.07
5. PR practitioners often act as obstructionists, keeping reporters from the people they really should be seeing.	3.1	3.17
6. PR practitioners have cluttered our channels of communication with pseudo events and phony phrases that confuse public issues.	3.5	3.02
7. The abundance of free and easily obtainable information provided by PR practitioners has caused an increase in the quality of reporting.	4.2	4.41
8. PR material is usually publicity described as news.	2.8	2.57
9. The PR practitioner does work for the newspaper that would otherwise go undone.	3.8	4.41
10. PR practitioners too often try to deceive the press by attaching too much importance to a trivial, uneventful happening.	3.2	3.15
11. The PR practitioner serves as an extension of the newspaper staff, covering the organization for which he is responsible.	4.9	5.41
12. PR practitioners are just "gophers" for whomever hires them.	4.1	3.57
13. PR practitioners are people of good sense, good will, and good moral character.	3.4	3.66
14. It is a shame that because of inadequate staff, the press must depend on information provided by PR practitioners.	4.4	3.92
15. PR practitioners understand such journalistic problems as meeting deadlines, attracting reader interest, and making the best use of space.	3.8	3.30
16. You can't trust PR practitioners.	4.5	4.07
17. Journalists and PR practitioners carry on a running battle.	4.6	4.03
18. PR practitioners are typically honest.	4.7	3.45
19. The massiveness of the impact of PR makes it harder for the average citizen to know when he is being sold a bill of goods.	3.4	3.17
20. PR practitioners help reporters obtain accurate, complete and timely news.	3.9	3.47
21. PR practitioners frequently use a shield of words for practices which are not in the public interest.	3.5	3.12
22. PR practitioners are necessary for the production of news as we know it.	4.4	4.34
23. PR is a parasite to the press.	5.0	4.74
24. PR practitioners typically issue news releases or statements on matters of genuine news value.	4.2	3.98
25. The primary function of PR is to get free advertising space for the organizations they represent.	3.6	2.87

Fig. 5.2 Comparison of means for public relations practitioners between 1984 and 2007	Mean scores	
	1984	2007
1. PR and the press are partners in the dissemination of information.	2.4	2.29
2. PR practitioners are basically competitors with the advertising departments of newspapers rather than collaborators with the news staff.	6.1	5.53
3. PR practitioners too frequently insist on promoting products, services and other activities which do not legitimately deserve promotion.	4.0	4.68
4. PR is a profession equal in status to journalism.	2.2	2.84
5. PR practitioners often act as obstructionists, keeping reporters from the people they really should be seeing.	5.3	5.53
6. PR practitioners have cluttered our channels of communication with pseudo events and phony phrases that confuse public issues.	5.1	5.18
7. The abundance of free and easily obtainable information provided by PR practitioners has caused an increase in the quality of reporting.	3.0	3.37
8. PR material is usually publicity described as news.	4.8	4.43
9. The PR practitioner does work for the newspaper that would otherwise go undone.	2.9	3.13
10. PR practitioners too often try to deceive the press by attaching too much importance to a trivial, uneventful happening.	5.0	5.23
11. The PR practitioner serves as an extension of the newspaper staff, covering the organization for which he is responsible.	3.2	3.63
12. PR practitioners are just "gophers" for whomever hires them.	6.4	5.85
13. PR practitioners are people of good sense, good will, and good moral character.	2.7	2.58
14. It is a shame that because of inadequate staff, the press must depend on information provided by PR practitioners.	5.9	5.22
15. PR practitioners understand such journalistic problems as meeting deadlines, attracting reader interest, and making the best use of space.	2.0	1.94
16. You can't trust PR practitioners.	6.4	6.20
17. Journalists and PR practitioners carry on a running battle.	5.0	4.70
18. PR practitioners are typically honest.	3.3	2.41
19. The massiveness of the impact of PR makes it harder for the average citizen to know when he is being sold a bill of goods.	4.8	4.75
20. PR practitioners help reporters obtain accurate, complete and timely news.	2.0	2.12
21. PR practitioners frequently use a shield of words for practices which are not in the public interest.	5.2	5.27
22. PR practitioners are necessary for the production of news as we know it.	3.0	2.77
23. PR is a parasite to the press.	6.5	6.27
24. PR practitioners typically issue news releases or statements on matters of genuine news value.	2.4	2.54
25. The primary function of PR is to get free advertising space for the organizations they represent.	6.0	4.82

This implies that public relations practitioners continue to view themselves as valuable and equal contributors (or disseminators) of information, while journalists may or may not necessarily consider public relations practitioners as equals, or partners, in information dissemination. It also shows that, although two decades have passed, public relations practitioners have not improved journalists' impressions of practitioners with regard to information dissemination, that is, public relations practitioners have been unable to change or influence the attitudes of journalists about public relations as an equal contributor in information dissemination.

This may indicate one of two things. It is possible that public relations practitioners *have* become more valuable and are on an equal level with journalists with regard to information dissemination, but that journalists have an innate distrust of public relations practitioners, and that the statement (the first item) has an inherently negative connotation that journalists find offensive. Or, it may be that public relations practitioners *have not* become more valuable to the media as disseminators of information in the past 23 years.

One possible explanation for this is that public relations practitioners continue to distribute their information in the same way that they have always done, but journalists do not value the contributions because of the manner in which the information is presented, that is, journalists do not feel as though there is actual news value in the information being disseminated. While the use of information subsidies is addressed further in a later research question, it is important to begin that discussion here, as it may lead to an understanding of why journalists do not value public relations information contributions.

Some practitioners have recognized that changes have occurred in the way journalists want to receive information. A senior level public relations practitioner remarked during an interview that "we don't do much with press releases; journalists are inundated with them." When asked to further explain why this important form of information subsidy is no longer being used, the practitioner states:

> Mostly, we use telephone and e-mail pitches to promote our stories. We've found that most of the larger media won't even use news releases, so we don't really send them anymore…Working with community newspapers is different though. We will still send them press releases, because some of them will use them verbatim. We also use them when we want coverage of an event, like a new building opening, but press releases are used for very specific purposes. (June 12, 2007)

This use of information subsidies seems to suit the journalists as well. During one interview, a senior reporter stated that "ninety-five percent of the time I do not even so much as open the press kit or press materials at all. I find them incredibly self serving and a waste of time" (June 25, 2007). These statements coincide as far as uses of information subsidies are concerned. It would seem, then, that it is appropriate to suggest that if public relations practitioners were more thoughtful in their use of information subsidies, that journalists might be more likely to accept the practitioners as equals in the teamwork that it often takes to disseminate accurate information. According to the survey results, however, this is not occurring on a large basis. One survey respondent, a journalist, even included an example of an information subsidy in his or her survey that, according to the journalist, was "an example of a 'press release' that went into my trash can within 30 seconds." Also in an unsolicited comment, another respondent, this time a public relations practitioner, wrote that "public relations has a handful of 'professionals'

that will try to pass off <u>everything</u> [underline in original] as news. It's they who make it so challenging for the rest of us." It seems that public relations practitioners still have a long way to go when it comes to being considered effective disseminators of information, even among themselves.

Research question 1b: Have changes in the media landscape (decreased credibility, the rise of alternative media) led to changes in how public relations practitioners view newspaper journalists?

Because none of the survey statements addressed this issue directly, it is best answered by examining the results of the interviews with public relations practitioners. There is little doubt that the last 23 years have seen many changes in the media landscape. Much of this change has come about due to the rise of the Internet and, subsequently, the rise of alternative media such as blogs, wikis and "citizen journalism." However, the rise of the Internet is not the only remarkable change that has occurred. Ethical failures, such as that of Jason Blair with the *New York Times*, have called into question the credibility of journalists. Decreased credibility, or at least the perception of decreased credibility, may have affected not only how public relations practitioners view journalists, but also how the public at large views journalism as a whole.

In addition to the rise of the Internet and the possibility of decreased credibility by readers or viewers, the shrinking news hole (that is, less space for news stories in both print and television news - due mostly to shrinking budgets) may have an impact on how public relations practitioners view journalists. A good example of this comes from an interview with a senior level public relations professional, who stated:

> I've found that generally there has been a decline in the
> quality of reporting, especially with regard to television

> news. They just don't have the time to spend on getting
> the whole story, and what they end up presenting usually
> doesn't include all of the information. This can be a real
> problem sometimes. (June 11, 2007)

While the practitioner specifically mentioned television news, the same holds true for print media as well. Due to the shrinking news hole, journalists are often unable to devote the necessary space to cover all facets of a story, which may lead to public relations practitioners who feel similar to the interviewee. In other words, it may be that public relations practitioners view changes in the media landscape, which include a shrinking news hole, as problematic for journalists' ability to cover the whole story.

For these reasons, the second research question is important. Understanding how public relations practitioners' perceptions of journalists has changed leads to a better understanding of the relationship between the two professions.

While none of the survey items address the question directly, that does not mean there are no items that speak at least indirectly to the issue. Items 4 (public relations is a profession equal in status to journalism) and 17 (journalists and public relations practitioners carry on a running battle) both indirectly relate to changes in how public relations practitioners view journalists, since both items ask practitioners to compare the journalism profession to their own. Therefore, we can get a general impression about how public relations practitioners view journalists, at least in comparison to their own profession.

Unfortunately, these items show little change in the past 23 years. Public relations practitioners generally agree that public relations and journalism are equal in status. In the Kopenhaver et al. (1984) study, when public relations practitioners were

asked to rank order a series of 16 professions, the practitioners ranked journalists ninth, five steps below themselves. Because the current study did not employ the status ranking the only direct comparison can come from the survey statements, where the public relations practitioners indicated they see the two professions as equal in status.

Item 17 asked public relations practitioners the level to which they agree with the statement "public relations practitioners and journalists carry on a running battle." According to a comparison of the mean scores, public relations practitioners generally disagree with this statement, with little change taking place over the past 23 years, at least within the respondents from this sample of Florida journalists and practitioners.

Analysis of the responses to these two survey items indicates that the perception of the relationship between public relations practitioners and journalists, according to the practitioners, has changed very little. Public relations practitioners continue to hold journalists in fairly high regard and feel that the two groups work well together. This feeling was also found in item number one on the survey, where public relations practitioners generally agree that public relations and the press are partners in the dissemination of information.

These responses should not come as a surprise since public relations practitioners who practice media relations often rely on journalists to communicate with their audiences. However, responses to the survey items do not indicate how public relations practitioners feel about changes in the relationship, only that there has been little change in practitioners' perceived status of journalists, and journalism as a profession. In order to better understand changes perceived by public relations practitioners over the past 23

years, it is necessary to review the interviews, as they provide more in-depth understanding, and will be better suited to answering the current research question.

Interviews with public relations practitioners regarding their perception of journalists was revealing in that they were able to address changes in these perceptions, as well as the current state of the relationship between themselves and journalists. Practitioners were also able to comment on their general impression of news as a whole. Each of their perceptions provided important insight into the changes in the relationship between public relations practitioners and journalists.

One public relations professional remarked that some practitioners have difficulty in relating to journalists, particularly with regard to changing journalistic needs. "I think some practitioners have a basic ignorance of how the media works…(they) need to understand that the rules are different." When queried about these changing rules, the practitioner responded:

> With the growth of online journalism…deadlines are no longer static. It used to be that you talked with a journalist and you would see the story the next day or on the evening news that night. Not anymore. With online journalism, you might see the story go online an hour after you talk to someone, and it might not appear in print at all. That's been the biggest change. (June 8, 2007)

Another senior level public relations practitioner gave a very similar answer when questioned about how changes in the past 17 years have affected the job of the public relations practitioner. This practitioner stated:

> You've got to think about the different mediums [*sic*] to which you are pitching your story and make it work for as many as possible. This includes, even if you're pitching say the (newspaper) you may end up with a story and a photo for the print edition, a story for their television media partner,

their radio media partner, as well as supplemental material
that could work for the online version. You've also got
to think about whether our information could be used, if not
in a story, then perhaps on a reporter's blog. (June 12, 2007)

These changes in modern media have affected changes in message strategies, as the two practitioners stated in their interviews. Today, messages contained in information subsidies must be ready for print, broadcast and online content. While the specific message doesn't change, practitioners can no longer rely on disseminating information to a print media outlet, and expect only to see that information in print. Partnerships between media outlets, such as between a newspaper and a television station, take on special meaning for public relations practitioners. For the practitioner, it may mean that a well-crafted message targeted toward one particular outlet may actually work for several different outlets. Public relations practitioners should take advantage of this, and keep this in mind when crafting messages for the media.

There is another change, however, inherent in media changes. The relationship between the public relations practitioner and the journalist also changes. The basic tenet of media relations, that public relations professionals have information that they wish to distribute to a larger audience, and journalists have a news hole to fill, has not changed. However, at the heart of media relations, or the practice of media relations, is the concept of the relationship, or the basic interaction between two or more people, or groups of people. It is the changes in this basic tenet that research question 1b addresses.

One of the interviewed practitioners stated, with regard to the relationship aspect of media relations, "the key is understanding that you have to develop long-term relationships with journalists, and (those) relationships need to have mutual respect at

(their) core. Without understanding and respect, it is difficult to conduct media relations"

(June 8, 2007). It is likely that with all the changes taking place in the ways that people

communicate, and the ways that journalism is converging, that in the modern era of

public relations the need to develop relationships is more important than it has ever been.

However, because no interviews were conducted during the 1984 study, we do not know

from that study whether public relations practitioners at that time held similar sentiments.

But a seminal public relations book, the famous Grunig and Hunt *Managing*

Public Relations, was published in 1984. In it the authors espoused the importance of

relationships in public relations, particularly the two-way symmetrical model of public

relations that, at its core, is about public relations practitioners developing relationships

with their audiences. It is possible that these models have so permeated the public

relations profession, either through publications, education or a combination thereof, that

the concept of developing relationships is now inculcated into the profession. Grunig and

Hunt (1984) indicate the relationship aspect of public relations is what set it apart from

press agents and publicists, and is the strength of public relations. However, they also

indicate that the relationship aspect of public relations, which is constantly changing, is

often what makes it difficult to define public relations.

One public relations professional, remarking on the changing nature of

relationships in public relations said,

> I think (public relations) people are more about forming
> long-term relationships with (journalists) and not just
> expecting…a quick fix. Public relations people are doing
> more homework. They're more thorough in the background
> work that they're doing because they know they have to deliver.
> (June 11, 2007)

Research Question 1c: Have changes in the media landscape led to changes in how newspaper journalists view public relations practitioners?

Items 2, 4, 12, 15, 17, 23 and 25 in the questionnaire most directly address this question. Specifically important would be changes between the 1984 study and the current study in how journalists responded to these items. However, we see very little change in the means between the Kopenhaver et al. study and the current study, indicating that journalists continue to hold the same attitudes about public relations practitioners that they previously held.

Of particular interest is survey item number 25: "the primary function of public relations is to get free advertising space for the people they represent." This particular statement reflects a stigma that public relations as a profession has had to contend with for a long time. Journalists, however, for the most part agreed with the statement, to a higher (though not significantly) level than they did in 1984. This indicates that public relations practitioners have not done a good job changing the perceptions of journalists over the past 23 years.

Another item of interest on the survey for this research question is item number four: "public relations is a profession equal in status to journalism." Although public relations practitioners generally agree with the statement, journalists generally disagree with it, indicating that they do not feel as though public relations, as a profession, is equal in status to their own. This also supports the finding that public relations practitioners have not improved their perceived status with journalists. This is problematic for public relations practitioners. The first step in creating effective relationships is to foster trust and credibility, in other words, respect. It would appear, according to the survey results,

however, that public relations practitioners have not gained much respect from journalists in the past 23 years.

We can get a more generalized impression of how journalists perceive the status of public relations practitioners by examining how journalists ranked public relations as a profession in 1984. When Kopenhaver et al. asked journalists to rank 16 professions in order of status, journalists ranked public relations professionals second to last, coming in only ahead of politicians. This was only slightly better than the Aronoff (1975) study where journalists in Texas ranked public relations last out of the 16 listed professions. If these standards were applied as a starting point, then it would seem public relations practitioners could only improve their perceived status with journalists. This may, then, be good news in disguise.

Items 2, 12, 17 and 23 indicate that very little change has taken place. Journalists in both the Kopenhaver et al. study and the current study were generally neutral with regard to the statements. While this does not speak well for public relations practitioners improving their relationship with journalists, it at least shows that practitioners have not regressed in the relationship.

Item 15 is of interest to the current research question, though there has been little change in the answers given in the current study when compared to the previous one. It is important, however, given the change in the media landscape. Those changes (the rise of the Internet, decreases in perceived credibility) were explored previously, and will not be reiterated here, except to say that they are important with regard to item 15. The item states: "public relations practitioners understand such journalistic problems as meeting deadlines, attracting reader interest and making the best use of space." While both means

fall in the "slightly agree" to "neutral" range, the 1984 study skews more toward "neutral" and the current study skews more toward "slightly agree." However, because of the difference in respondent numbers, we cannot say with certainty that there is a statistically significant difference between the two studies. On the surface, however, it would seem that there *is* a slight difference.

What should alarm public relations practitioners is the discussion that this very slight difference between the means might incite. Someone with a positivistic view might argue that this marks an improvement for public relations practitioners. A more realistic view questions why journalists note only a slight agreement with the statement, perhaps particularly in the modern era. There are several possible explanations as to why journalists might feel this way.

The first is an inherent distrust of public relations practitioners by journalists, which most likely stems from the early (and some modern) practitioners who used unscrupulous tactics to gain the attention of the media. For example, when in 1951 St. Louis Browns owner Bill Veeck wanted more attention paid to his financially imperiled team, he hired midget Eddie Gaedel to take the field wearing the number 1/8. Soon after, midgets were banned from playing professional baseball, but Veeck, with a simple stunt, was able to renew interest in his team, keeping the franchise alive for another year. While most public relations practitioners today understand the importance of developing relationships, telling the truth and being open, these "bad apples" of public relations continue to cause journalists to mistrust practitioners, and to feel that practitioners do not understand their needs. This is one possible explanation for why journalists' answers in both the Kopenhaver et al. study and the current study remained the same. Of course, the

problem for public relations practitioners may be larger than simply inherent distrust by journalists.

A second possible reason may not be related to any preexisting suppositions by journalists. While journalists may have an innate wariness of public relations practitioners, it does not explain away why they felt as though practitioners do not understand journalistic problems. What is more likely is that public relations practitioners are not doing an effective job of addressing journalistic needs. This is especially disturbing in the modern media era, when journalists are expecting information on a 24-7 basis.

When asked about what things public relations practitioners could do better with regard to media relations, one journalist remarked, "I think we both respect the fact that we both have jobs to do. But points of contention arise when I learn about … (information) that I wasn't told for whatever reason" (June 25, 2007). This comment alone indicates that some public relations practitioners are not doing a good job of being open with journalists, which would go a long way toward explaining why journalists do not trust public relations practitioners.

When questioned about their general impression of public relations practitioners, another journalist responded:

> The general impression is that they will tell me what I
> want to hear or need to hear in order to keep me happy
> because they realize that they need me again just as
> much as I need them. And there are a lot of occasions,
> … when I truly feel like I am told by public
> relations people what they think I want to hear, just to
> placate me, knowing that down the line they will
> ultimately get me what I want and what I need in order
> to do the story…Now if someone was really up front
> and said, "Look, this is how it is, and this is what's going

> on," I would respect that a lot more.
> (June 25, 2007)

This is problematic for public relations practitioners, and speaks volumes about the nature of the relationship between themselves and journalists. Public relations practitioners need to do a better job of being open and honest with all of their audiences, but especially the media. The proliferation of information, because of changes in both the media and the technological landscape, means that journalists have more access to more information, and it's available to them immediately. This means public relations practitioners can no longer push their "negative" news to a late in the day release, or hope to keep information from "leaking" to the media. According to the current study, journalists do not feel as though public relations professionals are adapting their practices, and little has changed in their perception of public relations practitioners over the past 23 years. One survey respondent, a journalist, drove the point home by writing on the back of the returned survey, "public relations is to journalism what stick figures are to art."

Research Question 1d: Have changes in the media landscape affected the credibility assigned to public relations practitioners by journalists?

While the issue of credibility was mentioned in the previous questions, survey items 3, 5, 13, 16 and 18 address the current question directly. While none of the items mention credibility directly, each deals with certain aspects of credibility. An analysis of the answers by journalists is most valuable in gauging credibility of public relations practitioners in the eyes of journalists, but the answers provided by practitioners are also helpful in examining how practitioners view themselves. Items 13, 16 and 18 are

especially relevant as they ask respondents their level of agreement on factors such as

trust, morals and honesty. Items 5 and 10 are also important, as they ask about practices

in media relations that may lead to decreased credibility in the public relations –

journalist relationship. Since we have already concluded that the relationship is

paramount in the practice of media relations, any factors that seek to undermine that

relationship should be of concern to both public relations practitioners and to journalists.

Item 13 (public relations practitioners are people of good sense, good will and

good moral character), item 16 (you can't trust public relations practitioners) and item 18

(public relations practitioners are typically honest) all show very little change from the

Kopenhaver et al. (1984) study to the current study. In fact, the only noticeable

difference between the two studies was the journalists' answers to item 18. In 1984, their

mean score indicated a general consensus of "agree," while in the current study the

journalists' score was skewed toward "slightly disagree." Though these numbers are not

necessarily significant, the change is encouraging to public relations practitioners.

However, one would think it is far from where practitioners would want to be,

particularly considering the statement was not concerned with their professional practice,

but rather a personality trait.

Items 3 and 5, however, are concerned with the activities of public relations

professionals in the field of media relations. Item 5 states "public relations practitioners

often act as obstructionists, keeping reporters from the people they really should be

seeing." This statement, on the surface, has little to do with credibility, but in reality is

indicative of a practice that could play an important role in establishing credibility. If

public relations practitioners continuously block journalists from meeting with the people

they need to, thus blocking them from the information they might need, then credibility for the public relations practitioner is in danger. This practice, in essence, is no different from trying to hide information from the media, and has the ability to damage credibility in the same way.

However, there has been no change in the mean scores for either journalists or public relations practitioners between the Kopenhaver et al. (1984) study and the current study for item 5. Journalists in both studies "slightly agree" with the statement, while public relations practitioners "slightly disagree" with it. What is perhaps even more disturbing for public relations is not that the journalists' attitudes haven't changed, but that practitioners only indicated that they "slightly disagree" with the statement. It does not bode well for public relations practitioners as far as credibility is concerned if they are unsure of their own strategies and tactics.

Item 3 states "public relations practitioners too frequently insist on promoting products, services and other activities which do not legitimately deserve promotion." While this item also does not, on the surface, appear to deal with credibility, it does in fact speak to the relationship between the professions. If practitioners continually attempt to publicize information that does not deserve promotion, journalists will soon tire of the practitioners' antics. Again we find answers to item 3 similar to what we saw in item 5. Journalists in both studies "slightly agree" with the statement, while public relations practitioners "slightly disagree" with the statement. The question arises again as to why public relations practitioners are only slightly disagreeing with the statement. It would seem to indicate that at least some practitioners feel, at least in some small part, in partial agreement with the statement. Again, this does not bode well for practitioners.

If public relations practitioners cannot engage in effective and ethical tactics when communicating with journalists, then the level of credibility assigned to practitioners will remain at the same level that it currently does which, coincidentally, seems to be at the same level it was in 1984. However, before change can be affected with journalists, public relations practitioners must affect change within themselves.

Research question 2a: Are public relations practitioners producing information subsidies that are of greater value to journalists than they were in the past?

Items 6, 8, 19 and 24 most directly address this research question, although there is also valuable information to be gleaned from the interviews with journalists and public relations practitioners as well, since both groups seemed particularly interested in discussing the information subsidies produced by public relations professionals. This is not surprising, as the production of information subsidies is an important aspect of media relations for practitioners and is often a point of contention for journalists who may feel inundated with public relations materials. While some opinions expressed in the interviews have already been shown in answering previous research questions, it is again important to consider those attitudes and opinions here, along with the responses to the survey items.

The answers to item 8 (public relations material is usually publicity disguised as news) and item 24 (public relations practitioners typically issue news releases or statements on matters of genuine news value) are especially interesting when considering the current research question. Neither item showed much change between the 1984 Kopenhaver et al. study and the current study, however, the differences in answers

between the two groups across time may provide some insight into the relationship between journalists and practitioners, as does the lack of change itself.

Public relations practitioners, both in the Kopenhaver et al. study and the current study, indicated that they "somewhat disagree" with statement 8, while journalists in both studies tended to "agree" with the statement. Again, we are faced with the similar two-fold dilemma – that journalists' attitudes have not changed, and that public relations practitioners only "slightly disagree" with a statement about which one might have suspected them to be very opposed. We seem first to be seeing a failure in the ability of public relations practitioners to change journalistic attitudes, and second the indication that perhaps practitioners, at least in some small part, are admitting that they are in fact disseminating publicity disguised as news. Neither possibility should be considered satisfactory by public relations practitioners, as both inflict damage to the practitioner-journalist relationship.

We see more encouraging results with item 24. Again, however, there has been little change between 1984 and 2007, either in responses from journalists or from public relations practitioners. Public relations practitioners generally agree with item 24, while journalists in both studies indicated their response as "neutral." The journalists' response is somewhat surprising, given that they generally agreed with item 8. However, the means from both studies remain consistent, which may indicate a potential problem with the two statements on the instrument, resulting in possible confusion from respondents.

Based on the survey, the simple answer to the current research question is no, public relations practitioners are not producing information subsidies that are of greater value to journalists than they were in the past. According to the journalists who

responded to the survey there has, in fact, been little change in public relations materials,

at least its usefulness for journalists, in the past 23 years. This should be of great concern

to public relations practitioners. Since information subsidies are oftentimes the crux of

media relations, they should be considered very important to public relations

practitioners. Particularly, it should be important to public relations practitioners to make

those subsidies useful to the media. It is appropriate here, then, to examine some of the

comments of journalists with regard to information subsidies gleamed from the

interviews. Although some of the journalists' statements regarding public relations

materials were used in answering previous research questions, they still should be

considered important in addressing the current question. The topic of materials produced

by public relations practitioners was a topic of great interest to journalists, and they were

eager to discuss the topic from multiple perspectives.

When asked about press releases, the "workhorse" of public relations (Bivins,

1999), and perhaps still one of the most popular outputs of public relations practitioners,

one journalist commented:

> I think that as far as the writing of the press release… I
> have a lot of criticism. I think that whatever respective
> industry they're in, people too frequently rely on
> industry jargon, too frequently rely on clichés. I
> oftentimes get the feeling when I read a press release
> that I've already read it before. They're not compelling.
> It doesn't jump out at me, I find them to be dry. But
> I think that press releases for the most part tend to be
> run of the mill… I have a lot of friends who work in
> public relations and I've sat through some of the primer
> sessions given by different agencies and its pretty run
> of the mill, pretty basic. I think a lot of work needs to
> be done there. (June 25, 2007)

Journalists, according to the survey and the interviews, do not feel as though public relations practitioners are providing them with materials that are necessarily useful. While this obviously does not apply to every practitioner or journalist in every situation, it does seem to be the consensus of journalists. When asked how public relations practitioners could best provide information through their materials, one journalist responded, "something that will get our attention, that we can skim through, get the most important facts that we're actually going to need for the story and write it" (July 5, 2007). It would appear that writing concise, factual information that journalists can use – in other words, what educators in public relations have been trying to teach for many years – is not occurring in all instances. At least for some of the respondents and interviewees, practitioners are not necessarily practicing what is currently being taught in public relations education.

There are several possible reasons that this may be the case. The first is a lack of formal public relations education by the senior public relations managers of organizations that practice public relations. Because many of these senior-level practitioners are generally older, their formal education experience may not lie in public relations, which has burgeoned relatively recently in higher education, compared with journalism or business. Thus, the expertise of these senior practitioners comes from on-the-job experience, and while the practitioners may be successful in their field, that success does not necessarily equate to success in media relations, or at the very least, success in establishing good relationships with journalists.

Unfortunately, it is not difficult to see how this lack of training about the needs of, and how to communicate with, journalists, leading to potentially poor media relations

practices, begets a cycle of the same behavior. Younger practitioners coming into the field who may have had formal education in public relations, and therefore are knowledgeable about good media relations practices, may not have the opportunity to put those skills into practice, as they fall into the "this is how we've always done it so why should we change" cycle. Over time, those "traditions" are adopted, and then passed on as the younger practitioners move up in management, causing the cycle to begin anew. This explains why there may be little change in journalistic attitudes about information subsidies, and even about public relations as a whole.

A second possible reason behind the lack of progress for public relations practitioners in the production of information subsidies is, as previously mentioned, the possible innate distrust by journalists of public relations as a field. Again, this may be plausible as a generalization, however, there are obviously examples where, at least on an individual basis, public relations practitioners are able to overcome this intrinsic bias with journalists. It stands to reason, therefore, that public relations as a field could also overcome this bias.

While information subsidies produced by public relations practitioners have not, at least according to the scope of this study, become more valuable to journalists, we see that it is possible to change this perception. Therefore, public relations practitioners need to make a concerted effort to improve their information subsidies in order to make them more useful to journalists.

Research Question 2b: How do journalists decide what information to keep, and what to throw out?

None of the 25 statements in the survey address this research question. However, the survey also included a list of questions asking journalists and public relations practitioners to indicate how important it was for public relations materials to contain certain aspects, or factors, of newsworthiness. Those factors of newsworthiness come from a study (Zoch & Supa, 2005) that examined journalism literature over the past 90 years in order to determine if there were factors of newsworthiness that consistently appeared. The eight factors extracted from the literature were immediacy, timeliness, localness, significance, prominence, human interest, cultural proximity and unexpectedness. These factors were used instead of the eight values used in the Kopenhaver et al. (1984) study, which were accuracy, interest to reader, usefulness to reader, completeness, prompt publication, depicts subject in a favorable light, mechanical/grammatical aspects and news story style. While there are similarities between the two lists, the researcher decided that, because of the in-depth literature review and length of the time period reviewed, the list provided by Zoch and Supa was more descriptive and inclusive of what journalists look for in news materials.

As stated previously, the Kopenhaver et al. (1984) study asked respondents (both journalists and public relations practitioners) to indicate which elements of news were most important to them, and also to rank their perception of how respondents from the other profession would respond. Kopenhaver et al. reported in the conclusions:

> Results reported here suggest that journalists and public
> relations practitioners agree remarkably about which
> elements of news are most important, and that
> practitioners perceive journalists' state positions

> accurately. Journalists, on the other hand, do not perceive practitioners' stated positions about the news elements at all, and they perceive a large gap (which apparently does not exist) between their views and practitioners' views…Whether the gap between journalists and practitioners exists or not, the editors' *presumption* that a gap exists can have an important impact on the communication process. Depending on one's viewpoint, that finding may be gratifying or disturbing. (p. 884)

In order to best answer the current research question, to not duplicate discussion, and also to maintain clarity, it is best to combine the current research question with research question 3b: *What constructs of news are most important for journalists and public relations practitioners?*

However, before addressing either of these questions, it would flow more logically to determine first whether the factors of newsworthiness used in the current study are appropriate. Therefore, it is necessary to answer research question 3a: *Are the news values that Zoch and Supa (2005) found in journalism literature actually being used as classifications of news by journalists and public relations practitioners?* It is then possible to address research questions 2b and 3b, and also allow for a more direct comparison of the mean scores of both journalists and public relations practitioners. That is, if both groups agree that the factors set forth are indeed standards for newsworthiness, then it is possible to compare each group's answers to the other.

This is only possible, though, if the list of factors is universally understood across the two groups. From the surveys it would seem that this is indeed the case, indicating that the answer to research question 3a is affirmative, that both groups understand the factors of newsworthiness set forth by Zoch and Supa (2005), though neither of the

groups may use the specific terminology. While the study cannot determine with

certainty that journalists or public relations practitioners actually define or classify their

news materials using the eight factors, we can at least be confident that both groups

recognize the factors as being indicators of newsworthiness. During the interviews,

journalists and public relations practitioners were asked to add any other factors of

newsworthiness they felt were important. None of the participants added to the list,

indicating that, at least for the participants in the study, the list was comprehensive

enough to cover most news items. Also, in the survey where respondents were asked to

indicate the level of importance assigned to each of the factors, there were no unsolicited

comments indicating confusion with the factors, as there were in the series of 25

statements that preceded the newsworthiness factors. Finally, none of the mean scores

for either group indicated that any of the factors presented were unimportant to either

profession. Altogether, this indicates that both journalists and public relations

practitioners understood the news values as presented, and generally agreed that those

factors were indeed indicative of newsworthiness.

Research question 4c: *What, if any, are the agreed upon standards for what*

makes information newsworthy between newspaper journalists and public relations

practitioners? is also able to be addressed from the survey data collected. In fact, it may

be necessary to address that question before answering the others.

Figure 4.2 indicates the mean scores of both journalists and public relations

practitioners when asked whether or not each factor of newsworthiness was important in

public relations materials. The scale (1= *very important*, 5= *not important at all*) shows

that public relations practitioners and journalists generally agree on which factors of news

are most important, as they did in the 1984 Kopenhaver et al. study. According to the respondents of the survey, timely news was ranked highest (journalist mean= 1.57, public relations practitioners mean= 1.43), followed by news that is culturally proximate (journalist mean= 1.66, practitioner mean= 1.96) and local news (journalist mean= 1.67, practitioner mean= 1.96). At the other end of the continuum, the least important factors according to the respondents were prominent news (journalist mean= 2.75, practitioner mean= 2.55), breaking news (journalist mean= 2.5, practitioner mean= 2.59) and unexpected information (journalist mean= 2.6, practitioner mean= 2.6). As stated earlier, none of the mean scores from either group of respondents indicated that either profession found any of the eight factors to be unimportant, again indicating that all eight of the factors contained at least some value with regard to newsworthiness.

In answering research question 4c, then, we can say that journalists and public relations practitioners agree that all eight factors of newsworthiness have some value in public relations materials, and both agree that timeliness, cultural proximity and localness are the most important factors in public relations materials. This also provides the answer to research question 3b, that is, that both public relations practitioners and journalists find that timeliness, cultural proximity and localness are agreed upon as being the three most important factors of newsworthiness. Furthermore, the answer to research question 4c also helps us answer question 2b. While we cannot say with certainty that if an information subsidy contains certain elements of news, it will be retained and used by the journalist, we can posit that there is a greater *likelihood* of a journalist using an information subsidy that fits into their criteria of news. As one journalist indicated in their interview, "I am most likely to use information supplied by a public relations

practitioner if it works with what I am writing about" (personal interview, July 12, 2007).

So while we cannot determine with certainty what specific factors will cause a journalist

to use an information subsidy, we can determine that certain news elements contained

within the subsidy will increase its value to journalists. It appears, however, that

journalists often make judgments about the value of an information subsidy based on the

information it contains. Therefore, although the current study was unable to indicate

what causes a journalist to keep and use an information subsidy, it was able to show

which elements of news are most important to journalists.

However, this does not explain why journalists do not feel as though public

relations material is useful to them. It would stand to reason that if both groups agree on

what is important as far as news is concerned, that public relations practitioners should be

considered a valuable source of information to the media, so long as the news they are

providing is of interest to the journalist. Since it is probable that neither group is

purposefully lying in their responses to the question about what is important in news

materials as far as the elements of news are concerned, there must be an alternative

explanation.

We know that simply because people think in a certain way, they do not

necessarily act in accordance with those thoughts. This is likely the case with public

relations practitioners and the concept of newsworthiness. Public relations practitioners,

at least according to the results of the survey, understand news and know which factors

contribute to material being considered newsworthy. However, journalists do not feel as

though public relations material is valuable to them (the journalists) in doing their job.

The Importance of Client Expectations

It is likely, then, that the disconnect between practitioner thoughts and action, at least with regard to producing information subsidies and other public relations materials, must come from an outside influence.   According to one senior practitioner, who specializes in media relations, part of that disconnect comes from client expectations. During an interview, the practitioner indicated that much of the time information that is sent to the media is often directed from another source in the organization, such as senior management. Straightforwardly, even though the practitioner often does not feel as though producing an information subsidy is worthwhile, they are told to produce the information anyway. The practitioner remarked that part of the job of the public relations department was to manage expectation from within the organization about what is possible when dealing with the media. At times, however, practitioners are directed to send out information to the media whether that information is newsworthy or not. When asked further about this phenomenon, the practitioner stated:

> In my experience, others in the organization need to
> respect media relations folks as professionals who
> understand the intricacies of dealing with the press.
> Our job is one in which everyone thinks they can do
> it better, but in reality, they don't follow the news and
> what makes news and the proliferation of media outlets
> that closely. They have to trust us as professionals,
> and bring us to the table when key decisions and
> strategies are decided. We are the people who have to
> deal with the media day in and day out, so others need to
> not just expect us to execute when it comes to dealing
> with the press. (June 8, 2007)

Often, however, that is all that is expected of public relations practitioners – the execution of a strategy that they had little or nothing to do with planning. This problem

may be a common one for many practitioners, and explains, at least in some part, the

discrepancy between what public relations practitioners think about news materials and

the actions they take with regard to dealing with journalists.

<u>The "tradition" trap</u>

Another possible trap that public relations practitioners may fall into is the

aforementioned "tradition" of practicing media relations. That is, younger public

relations practitioners coming out of college with a formal education in public relations

may in fact know what journalists want as far as news value is concerned, but are unable

to deliver those items because of "traditions" within the media relations department of

organizations. These habits are most likely passed on from media relations managers,

who may or may not have an education in effective media relations. Certainly this is not a

worthwhile use of media relations, and actually may damage the public relations-

journalist relationship.

Therefore, answering research question 3c: *What constitutes the production of an*

information subsidy for the public relations practitioner? is difficult. Obviously, the

reasons behind producing information subsidies are as individual as the practitioners and

their organizational needs. However, from interviews with public relations practitioners,

it may be possible to understand some of the reasons behind the production of

information subsidies.

Earlier in this discussion it was stated by one practitioner that information

subsidies had taken the form of pitching stories to journalists, and there is currently less

reliance on press releases except for dealing with community newspapers. This

practitioner stated that most major media no longer even use the press release, so their

organization relies mostly on e-mail and phone pitches to promote their information. The practitioner indicated that press releases and other traditional public relations information subsidies are used only for very specific purposes, such as special events or the opening of a new building.

During the interviews other practitioners echoed this approach to the production of information subsidies. All of the public relations professionals indicated that the trend has been to move away from sending press releases and more toward pitching the media. In fact, all of the interviewees indicated that the press release was no longer an *effective* tactic in communicating with their target media audiences. However, all of the practitioners also indicated that they had personal experience with other public relations professionals who still focus on the production and dissemination of press releases.

Another practitioner was surprised that the current form of information subsidies is the same as it has been for as long as that person could remember, particularly given the current state of technology. The practitioner remarked:

> If somebody said to me in 1997…ten years from now
> press releases are still going to be the same, they're
> still going to be text-based, I would say 'no way. So
> much is going to happen in ten years.' And, I really
> can't believe it happened. And again, there are
> some interesting things but it definitely hasn't become
> mainstream. It's a bit surprising to me that we still
> are where we are as far as how the whole issue of
> press releases go. (June 11, 2007)

One interesting development of technology with regard to information subsidies is where and how the subsidies are disseminated. According to one public relations interviewee, who practices in a corporate setting, not every information subsidy produced is necessarily "sent" to journalists. Rather, some subsidies are only posted on the

corporate Web site, where journalists are able to access them. This development seems
to serve both the journalists and organization's needs. The downside, however,
according to the practitioner, is the inability to determine if journalists are in fact
accessing the information and using it. However, the practitioner further stated that many
times the information subsidies on the Web site are referenced in later conversations with
journalists (personal interview, June 11, 2007).

Unfortunately, the current study was unable to determine, in any definitive sense,
what determines the production of information subsidies by public relations practitioners.
"Whenever we have some information that we would like to share" was the response of
one interviewee, and that seems to be the case with many practitioners. It seems that the
production of information subsidies is dependent on the individual practitioner,
organization or a combination thereof. The scope of this study does not allow for any
generalized answer to become apparent. While this study fails to answer this particular
question, it does not necessarily fail in its goal of discovering how public relations
practitioners use information subsidies in their relationships with journalists.

Research Question 4a: What do journalists feel could be strengthened in the relationship
between themselves and public relations practitioners?

Research Question 4b: In what ways could public relations practitioners make their
information subsidies more useful to journalists?

Because the answer to research question 4a is linked closely to the answer to
research question 4b, for the purposes of clarity of the discussion these final research
questions will be discussed together.

The answer to these two research questions is linked because improving the information subsidies produced by public relations practitioners was one of the major components of the answers given by journalists when they were questioned about how the relationship between the two professions could be strengthened. The major complaint about public relations practitioners expressed by journalists involved in this study was that practitioners do not understand what the journalists' work entails. The statement "public relations people don't do their homework" was found on one survey as an unsolicited comment, and was echoed in other survey comments and during interviews with journalists.

Journalists involved with this study feel that public relations practitioners need to have a better understanding of how media organizations operate, including management structure, job assignments and deadlines. They also expressed the need for practitioners to have generally a better understanding of what the individual journalist covers on a regular basis. Many of the journalists indicated that they had, however, had positive experiences with individual public relations practitioners, but for the most part their impressions of public relations practitioners was negative, indicating that public relations practitioners who were effective at media relations are the exception, not the rule.

In an unsolicited letter that accompanied a returned survey, one journalist turned public relations practitioner offered interesting insight into the relationship that has bearing here:

> Good public relations professionals, by in large, have
> good relationships with journalists, or they don't do
> a good job for their clients. Journalists who are good
> at their work have many more sources for "truth" than
> public relations professionals. When "expectations" are
> realistic on the part of both journalists and public

> relations professionals good, accurate, truthful information
> is the result. Both industries have their "bottom feeders."
> Journalism has the "paparazzi." Public relations has the
> "spin doctors."
> (letter from study participant, received August 21, 2007)

It is perhaps these experiences with the "bottom feeders" of public relations practitioners that journalists most often think of, or at least did so in responding to both the survey and the interview questions. If these experiences are most salient in journalists' minds, then there is little wonder that journalists, for the most part, do not feel as though public relations practitioners understand them. The "spin doctor" or "hitchhiker" approach to public relations taken by some "professionals" seems to have a negative impact on the field as a whole. Reasons for this type of professional behavior by public relations practitioners have been explored already, but are relevant in answering the current research question as well.

The answer to the current research questions, then, seems to be that a greater understanding of journalistic work by public relations practitioners would greatly improve journalists' perceptions of the relationship between the two groups. Journalists want public relations practitioners to consider the information they are disseminating, and target it directly toward the appropriate individual. What journalists do not want, according to the current study, is to receive large amounts of information for which they have little use. Journalists also want public relations practitioners to do their "homework," both on the information they are disseminating, as well as on the individual to whom the information is being sent. This seems to be the major complaint of journalists about public relations information subsidies, and this researchers also feels

that this is the greatest weakness for public relations practitioners when it come to managing the media relations relationship.

Conclusions

The current study revealed several interesting findings beyond the scope of the research questions. Though these were not anticipated, they may prove valuable in examining, and hopefully improving, the relationship between public relations practitioners and journalists.

Managing Expectations

Perhaps the most prevalent issue to arise throughout the study was the concept of managing expectations. This concept took different forms for the different groups of people being examined. Many of the journalists felt that public relations practitioners need to manage their expectations for their own information subsidies and the role they will play for the media. Public relations practitioners indicated that it is necessary for public relations professionals to manage their clients' or organizations' expectations of media relations, particularly with regard to what information is newsworthy, and what is not. Both groups indicated that a failure to manage expectations often leads to disappointment or resentment. These feelings, in turn, may affect the relationship between the public relations practitioners and clients and, more importantly for the purpose of this study, the relationship between practitioners and journalists.

According to the practitioners in the study, managing client expectations is integral to practicing good media relations. Practitioners during the interviews indicated that in order to better control the output of information from their organizations, they need to make others in their organization, specifically senior management, understand

what the media is looking for with regard to information. Practitioners need to inform

senior managers within their organization of the "ins and outs" of the media, for example,

their needs, deadlines, and management structure. Of course, in order to do this,

practitioners must first understand the media themselves.

Journalists, on the other hand, feel that public relations practitioners need to better

manage their expectations of the journalists. The journalists involved with the study felt

that public relations practitioners may feel as though members of the media, in a sense,

work for them. Journalists resent this attitude, and it negatively affects the relationship.

Journalists in the study want public relations practitioners to better understand the role

their information subsidies may play in the media, in other words, a *realistic*

understanding that not all information sent out by public relations practitioners will be

useful in the media. Journalists feel that public relations practitioners do not understand

journalistic challenges, or problems. If practitioners did understand these problems,

journalists feel that the relationship between the two groups might improve.

Positive Relationships

One finding that was encouraging with regard to the public relations practitioner-

journalist relationship was that each group indicated that they had indeed had positive

relationships with members of the other group. This should not be surprising. However,

given the results of the survey, positive relationships seem to be the exception, not the

rule.

Many of the journalists interviewed in this study indicated that positive and

effective relationships with public relations practitioners *are* possible, and indeed do

happen when practitioners understand the journalists' needs. Item 15 in the survey

shows, however, that this is not occurring on a large scale.

While these findings are likely not groundbreaking, or perhaps even unique to this

study, they are nevertheless important in understanding how the public relations-

journalist relationship can be maximized. It is essential that public relations practitioners

manage expectations on multiple levels, and at the same time both journalists and

practitioners need to remember that effective, positive relationships between the

professions is possible, but requires work from both sides. The key, as one journalist

stated in an interview is "understanding that we both have a job to do."

Maximizing media relations

 It appears there has been very little change in the relationship between public

relations practitioners and journalists over the past 23 years. This is perhaps the most

surprising conclusion of this study, given advances in education and technology. In an

era when people are more closely connected through technological innovation, it seems

as though the relationship between public relations practitioners and journalists has

remained static. This is, and will remain, a problem for both groups until they each make

the effort to better understand the other's role.

As mentioned earlier, inherent distrust of public relations as a profession by

journalists may only play a small role in the relationship between the two groups.

Because findings in this study have shown that members of each group have overcome

this obstacle to some degree and established good relationships with members of the

other profession, any such feelings must play only a marginal role, if any at all. What is

more likely is that negative perceptions of practitioners and journalists by the other are born out of experience, rather than inherited from professional to professional.

Since contact between public relations practitioners and journalists is often initiated by practitioners, it is likely that feelings of distrust and skepticism are caused because of the actions (or sometimes inactions) of the practitioner. This study has revealed several historical examples of public relations attempting to garner publicity utilizing tactics with questionable, or no ethical standards; public relations practitioners who engage the media to cover their organization without regard to newsworthiness. In order to practice effective media relations, it is imperative that public relations practitioners commit themselves to providing information that is valuable to journalists. This includes utilizing the newsworthiness factors explicated by Zoch and Supa (2005), being open and honest with journalists, and taking it upon themselves to manage the expectations of their clients. Once public relations practitioners adopt these principles for communicating with the media, the relationship will improve. However, it is clear that this is not currently the case.

Journalists, for their part, can be more open with public relations practitioners with regard to how the practitioners' information could be made more useful to them. Rather than ignoring public relations information, the journalist should attempt to work with the practitioner to improve the usefulness of their information subsidies, or at least respond to the information presented with reasons why the information is not useful or appropriate. If journalists do nothing, then practitioners will only continue to send them information that is not useful.

One potential solution to discrepancies in the relationship is education. This would need to start in higher education, where students from both public relations and journalism should be required to learn about and experience the other field. However, education should continue into the professional ranks as well. Professional seminars and informational sessions would be able to educate each of the groups on the others' profession. Beyond these educational opportunities, journalists and public relations practitioners must also attempt to get to know each other on a personal basis. This does not mean that the groups necessarily need social interaction, but efforts toward actually knowing each other would go a long way toward improving the relationship. This is especially the case where the practitioner and the journalist will be working together repeatedly.

A common theme throughout the interviews, for both practitioners and journalists alike, was the current state of the press release. It is time for the "work horse" (Bivins, 1999) of public relations to be put out to pasture. Public relations practitioners who continuously send out press releases, or even worse, only post releases to service wires such as PR Newswire, are not practicing effective media relations. This "hitchhiker" model of public relations will not be successful now, or in the future. As the mass media becomes increasingly targeted, public relations practitioners must follow suit, and likewise target their information toward specific journalists. Only when public relations practitioners begin to effectively target their information to gatekeepers will they overcome the stereotype of being "publicity-mongers."

This is not to say that the press release should be abandoned completely. There are uses for the press release in the modern world. Many organizations currently put their

press releases on their own organization's Web sites, in order to provide background information to those who are seeking it. Similarly, offering to provide RSS (really simple syndication) feeds to journalists who request them is another effective way of sharing information with journalists who are interested in the organization. A public relations practitioner should also have press releases ready when they are requested, so long as those releases adhere to standards of newsworthiness. However, public relations practitioners need to accept that the more traditional forms of media relations, such as crafting a press release and then sending it to a journalist (in many cases, a multitude of journalists), are becoming out of date, and putting the practitioners out of touch with the media. These tactical changes need to extend beyond the press release, as public relations practitioners should ask themselves whether or not it is "worth it" to send out any information subsidies. While the answer will continue to be "yes" sometimes, more often than not it is likely that contacting a journalist directly will have the same effect, without expending the effort of crafting an entire subsidy.

While pitching stories has always been a part of media relations (Nolte, 1979) it is becoming increasingly important today. Journalists expect to be targeted by public relations practitioners, and so long as the practitioner understands the needs of the journalist, is open and honest with them, and provides them with valuable information, the practitioner will not "fail" with regard to the relationship. However, practitioners need to keep in mind the aforementioned management of expectations, not only for their clients, but for themselves as well. This means that practitioners should not oversell their ability to put their clients' names on the front page of major newspapers, or to get mentioned on a major television show. Public relations practitioners instead need to

adopt the strategy, both personally and with their clients, of practicing effective, targeted media relations that will result in *meaningful* publicity. The axiom of quality over quantity would serve many public relations programs well.

Much can be done to improve the relationship between journalists and public relations practitioners; however, in order for any changes to occur, they must be undertaken by professionals from both sides. Positive and effective relationships are indeed possible, but work from both sides must be performed. In order to effectively change stereotypes, it would be necessary for these changes to take effect through the work of large numbers of people. However, until this occurs, the individual practitioner has an opportunity to make him- or herself stand out as a responsible and qualified partner in the dissemination of information in the eyes of journalists.

Limitations of this study

This study does not presume to hold all of the answers, or serve as a how-to guide for the practice of media relations. The goal of the study was to better understand the public relations-journalist relationship and the challenges it presents, and hopefully draw some conclusions based on those findings. However, it is important here to point out what this study does not accomplish.

The first limitation of this study is its inability to broadly generalize the findings. While the findings of the study are indicative of public relations practitioners and journalists in the state of Florida, those results are in no way definitive about how all practitioners and journalists in the state would respond. Similarly, there is no way to generalize the findings to practitioners or journalists on a large scale. In other words, the only population to which the results can be generalized are the participants of the study.

Because of their qualitative nature, the results of the interviews are similarly unable to be generalized. In fact, the results of the interviews aren't even generalizable to practitioners and journalists in the state of Florida. Rather, the interview results are simply reflective of those individuals being interviewed. However, this does not mean that the interview findings are unimportant, as all of the interviews took place with senior public relations practitioners or journalists, in the hopes that more experience would make them "leaders" in their field.

Another limitation of this study is that the researcher did not actually observe either public relations practitioners or journalists while they were working, and therefore it is impossible to know whether the participants actually act according to their stated thoughts and perceptions indicated in the research. While it is fairly unlikely that any of the participants were purposely deceptive while participating in the study, it is uncertain how the individuals actually act with regard to the public relations-journalist relationship.

Finally, this study makes no attempt to predict how journalists or public relations practitioners will respond to the relationship between the two groups. The results of this study are unable to tell public relations practitioners how to produce information subsidies that will be accepted by journalists, nor does it attempt to predict how journalists or public relations practitioners will respond to each other. Instead, the results of this study are a reflection of the individuals who participated in the study.

Implications for future research

While this study is comprehensive in its view of the relationship between public relations practitioners and journalists, there is much room for improvement in investigating the relationship. First, since this study only examined practitioners and

journalists in the state of Florida, the first step would be to repeat the study in other areas

of the country, or to do a nationwide study. In this way, results could be generalized to a

greater extent, and the nature of media relations

 would be possible, as practiced across the U.S., might be revealed.

Another future step would be to take the information found in this study and apply

it to both professions in an experimental or observational setting. A participant-

observation would allow for direct observation of media relations at work, and allow for

a greater understanding of the media relations process. A Q-sort analysis may also be

effective in understanding why journalists select certain news items. This would help in

determining the subjectivity of news choices and interpretations of journalists.

Although an experimental research study would be difficult to accomplish, it

could be realized through a controlled experiment where information subsidies are

produced and sent to journalists, to determine their use. In this way, predictions about

journalists' acceptance of public relations material could be achieved.

Implications for practitioners

This study holds importance for practitioners of both public relations and

journalism. One concept that is important to reiterate here is the similarities the two

professions share, particularly with regard to news values. This finding is not surprising

considering the study sample, which included many people who had practiced both

public relations and journalism.

One question that arises, however, is how people who have practiced both public

relations and journalism still have such an adverse reaction to each other. This is

counterintuitive to what one might think should be happening. Further interviews with

practitioners who have practiced both public relations and journalism may be necessary to understand this conundrum.

The implications of this study are perhaps most important for public relations practitioners, in that they are better able to understand the attitudes journalists hold. It is clear that journalists no longer wish to be a part of mass mailings, or e-mailings, to receive public relations information. Practitioners of public relations, according to the journalists in this study, need to better understand the needs of the journalists with whom they are trying to communicate, and also target journalists specifically with information that will be valuable to them. It may take as few as one attempt at communication for a journalist to view a public relations practitioner as a disseminator of "junk," so practitioners must be attentive at all times to the information they are sending out. Practitioners need to understand that building an effective relationship with the journalists with whom they most frequently work is of paramount importance. Conversely, when a public relations practitioner is dealing with a journalist for the first time, the practitioner must do his or her homework to understand what the journalist writes about, and to decide if the information they hold will truly be beneficial to the journalist. In this way, public relations practitioners will be viewed as valuable partners, rather than adversaries in the dissemination of information.

Overall, public relations practitioners and journalists can partner in the basic function of the media – to provide the public with information (news) that is important, relevant and significant to their lives. This study provides a mechanism of understanding for both public relations practitioners and journalists in order to accomplish that task. It shows that, to this point, little improvement has occurred in the relationship between

public relations practitioners and journalists over a long span of time, but that the

relationship can be improved if the proper steps are taken.

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1. Give me a general impression of the nature of media relations.
     a. What kinds of personal experiences have you had?
     b. How would you describe the nature of the relationship between public relations
     practitioners and journalists?
     c. What things are being done well with regard to that relationship?
     d. What things need to be done better?

2. Give me your impression of materials produced by public relations people for the
media.
     a. How often are materials being produced/ received by your organization?
     b. How can public relations materials be best used to communicate with
     journalists?
     c. What kinds of things should be included in public relations materials?

3. A researcher in public relations once said "many practitioners will do whatever it takes
to gain exposure for their client organizations in the media." What are your thoughts?

4. Another researcher compared the public relations – journalist relationship to a baseball
game; with an adversarial relationship with managers strategizing, utilizing many
positions and varying degrees of skills among players. Consistency and evenhandedness
win respect and pennants. What are your thoughts?

5. How important is it for public relations people to include news in their materials that is
immediate? timely? local? culturally proximate? unexpected? prominent? significant? of
human interest?

DATE

ADDRESS
ADDRESS

Dear XXXX,

      Greetings! My name is Dustin Supa and I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Miami in Coral Gables. As part of my dissertation research, I am examining the relationship between journalists and public relations practitioners, and I am asking for your help.

      I have enclosed a survey that asks questions on your thoughts of public relations practitioners, in particular, the relationship between public relations practitioners and journalists. The survey should take between 10 and 15 minutes, is completely voluntary, and I have enclosed a return envelope for your convenience.

      Your name was generated from a stratified sample of journalists and public relations practitioners in the state of Florida. Your answers are completely confidential, and your contact information will be destroyed at the conclusion of this study.

      Understanding the relationship between journalists and public relations practitioners is a matter of interest both to practitioners and academics. I would like to offer you an executive summary of my findings, which I will gladly send to you at the conclusion of the study.

      Please contact me with any questions or concerns you may have regarding this study. I can be reached at (305) 284-2138 or via email at dsupa@umsis.miami.edu. If you choose to participate, thank you. If you choose not to participate, I thank you for your time and wish you luck in all future endeavors.

                                          Much regards,

                                          Dustin W. Supa
                                        Doctoral Candidate
                                          University of Miami

Survey Instrument

Thank you for your participation in this survey. The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between public relations practitioners and the media. Please answer the questions to the best of your ability. You may stop at any time. By returning this survey, you are giving your consent that your answers will be included in the study data.

 Your responses will be kept confidential. Please answer the questions to the best of your ability. This survey has three sections and should take about 15-20 minutes. If you have any questions regarding this survey, please contact Dustin Supa at dsupa@umsis.miami.edu. If you would like an executive summary of the findings, please email me and I will be happy to send it to you at the conclusion of the study. Thank you for your participation.

Section 1

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following 25 statement with regard to the public relations and journalism profession. A 1 indicates "strongly agree" while a 7 indicates "strongly disagree." Please answer to the best of your ability by circling the number following the statement.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Slightly Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

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

   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

2. Public relations practitioners are basically competitors with the advertising departments of departments of newspapers rather than collaborators with the news staff.

   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

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

   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Strongly Agree	Agree	Slightly Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

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

   1   2   3   4   5   6   7

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

   1   2   3   4   5   6   7

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

   1   2   3   4   5   6   7

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

   1   2   3   4   5   6   7

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

   1   2   3   4   5   6   7

9. The public relations practitioner does work for the newspaper that would otherwise go undone.

   1   2   3   4   5   6   7

10. Public relations practitioners too often try to deceive the press by attaching too much importance to a trivial, uneventful happening.

   1   2   3   4   5   6   7

Strongly Agree	**Agree**	**Slightly Agree**	**Neither Agree nor Disagree**	**Slightly Disagree**	**Disagree**	**Strongly Disagree**
1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**

11. The public relations practitioner serves as an extension to the newspaper staff, covering the organization for which he is responsible.

   1   2   3   4   5   6   7

12. Public relations practitioners are just "gophers" for whomever hires them.

   1   2   3   4   5   6   7

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

   1   2   3   4   5   6   7

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

   1   2   3   4   5   6   7

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

   1   2   3   4   5   6   7

16. You can't trust public relations practitioners.

   1   2   3   4   5   6   7

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

   1   2   3   4   5   6   7

Strongly Agree	Agree	Slightly Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

18. Public relations practitioners are typically frank and honest.

    1   2   3   4   5   6   7

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

    1   2   3   4   5   6   7

20. Public relations practitioners help reporters obtain accurate, complete and timely news.

    1   2   3   4   5   6   7

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

    1   2   3   4   5   6   7

22. Public relations practitioners are necessary for the production of news as we know it.

    1   2   3   4   5   6   7

23. Public relations is a parasite to the press.

    1   2   3   4   5   6   7

24. Public relations practitioners typically issue news releases or statements on matters of genuine news value and public interest.

    1   2   3   4   5   6   7

Strongly Agree	Agree	Slightly Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

25. The prime function of public relations is to get free advertising space for the companies they represent.

    1   2   3   4   5   6   7

Section 2

Please indicate how important you feel it is that public relations material that is sent to journalists contains the listed characteristics. Please answer each statement to the best of your ability. You may stop at any time. Please indicate how important each item is, with 1 being "very important" and 5 being "not important at all.

Very Important Important	Important	Neutral	Not Important	Not at all
1	2	3	4	5

1. How important is it that public relations material contain news that would be considered "breaking"?

    1   2   3   4   5

2. How important is it that public relations materials contain news that is timely?

    1   2   3   4   5

3. How important is it that public relations materials contain local news?

    1   2   3   4   5

Very Important	Important	Neutral	Not Important	Not Important at all
1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**

4. How important is it that public relations materials contain "should know" information for a journalists' audiences?   1   2   3   4   5

5. How important is it that public relations materials contain news about prominent people or events?   1   2   3   4   5

6. How important is it that public relations materials contain a human interest element?   1   2   3   4   5

7. How important is it that, if public relations materials does not contain local news, it should be clear that it relates to a local audience?   1   2   3   4   5

8. How important is it that public relations materials contain unexpected information?   1   2   3   4   5

Section 3

This section contains questions about you. This information will in no way be used to identify you, it is simply used for classification purposes. This information will be useful in better understanding the public relations – journalist relationship. Please provide the best answer possible to each question.

1. In what profession do you practice?   ___ public relations
                                               ___ journalism

                                               ___ other: please clarify _____

2. How long have you been in   ___ years
   this profession? (years)

3. Would you describe your current   ___ yes   ___ no
    position as managerial?

4. If you are in journalism, have you   ___ yes   ___ no
   ever practiced public relations – or if
   you are in public relations, have you
   ever practiced journalism?

5. In what geographic region are you   ___ Miami area
   currently practicing?   ___ Ft. Lauderdale area
                                               ___ Palm Beach area – including
                                                        Gold Coast
                                               ___ Tampa/ St. Pete area – including
                                               Treasure coast
                                               ___ Orlando/ Central Florida
                                               ___ Jacksonville/ Northeast Florida
                                               ___ Tallahassee/ Northwest Florida
                                                        - including Panhandle