MURDOCH RESEARCH REPOSITORY

http://researchrepository.murdoch.edu.au/17819/

Daymon, C. and Demetrious, K. (2013) *Gender and public relations: Making meaning, challenging assumptions.* In: Daymon, C. andDemetrious, K., (eds.) Gender and public relations: Critical perspectives on voice, image and identity. Routledge as part of the Taylor and Francis Group, Abingdon, Oxon, pp. 1-19.

Gender and public relations: making meaning, challenging assumptions

Christine Daymon and Kristin Demetrious

Published in Daymon, C. and Demetrious, K. (eds.) (2014) *Gender and Public Relations: critical perspectives on voice, image and identity.* Abingdon, Oxon: 1-19

The idea of compiling an edited collection around gender and public relations was seeded at the 'Radical Public Relations: alternative visions and future directions' roundtable held at the University of Stirling in 2008. This meeting of international scholars had a shared purpose to paradigmatically challenge dominant positivist understandings of public relations and open new research agendas by paying attention to the social and political contexts in which public relations is conducted. Thematically, the roundtable focused on the cultural effects and critical power relations in and between public relations and society. This book furthers these aims by exploring gender within and through public relations in order to generate new strands of knowledge that will challenge the status quo. As such, the intention is to open new avenues of research and new ways of thinking about public relations.

Over the last fifty years or so, gender research employing critical feminist approaches has theorized women's experiences and elevated the status of this knowledge to destabilize, and at times, rupture hegemonic beliefs that have invisibly systemized inequality and exploitation. With the advancement of women (and also other under-represented groups) as a core objective of feminist research, it has sought to question the sometimes dormant, underlying values and

assumptions that have served to invisibly invest research. In rejecting narrow

absolutism and reductionist science, and in seeking to be open to multiple,

sometimes competing, approaches to understanding (Reinharz and Davidman

1992: 3-4), research inspired by feminism has contributed to the development of

new knowledge and social practices, as well as the nourishment of ideals. In

recent times, these have become embedded to a large extent in contemporary

social life. Thus the impact of feminist activity, with its focus on gender, has been

profound, but at times confronting, and subject to intense resistance and

disapproval. For example, early criticism of feminism was based on arguments

about the extent to which feminist actions helped or hindered women and whether

or not they rotted the social fabric as a consequence. Later criticisms emerged

from within the ranks of feminists themselves who objected to the way that only

some women benefitted from feminism-inspired social change, for example, the

protection of women's sexual rights helped empower white, heterosexual women,

but it didn't help sexual or racial minorities; also, improving access to work helped

childfree or wealthy women, but not those with large families. At times, feminist

activities were subject to considerable entrenched hegemonic resistance, such as

in the early 1980s when there was a move in the USA to introduce an Equal

Rights Amendment (ERA). Although the legislation was designed to elevate the

legal status of women, it was women themselves who spearheaded a campaign to

oppose the legislation. The success of the campaign driven by Phyllis Schlafly

was described by the *New York Times* as a 'public relations coup' (Warner 2006):

When it was approved by the House and Senate and sent to the states for ratification in March 1972, its success seemed assured. Thirty state legislatures ratified the amendment within a year. Presidents Nixon, Ford and Carter all lent their support. Yet in 1982 the ERA died, just a few states short of ratification. By then, it had become linked in the public mind with military conscription for 18-year-old girls, co-ed bathrooms and homosexual rights. (Warner 2006)

Opposition campaigners claimed that sexual 'equality' would lead to a blurring of the differences between the sexes and, amongst other things, remove women's right to stay at home, to be dependent and to devote themselves to raising a family . In contrast, feminists in support of the ERA (including the prominent legal activist, Catharine A. MacKinnon) argued that rather than eradicating gender differentiation in favour of gender sameness, for them equality meant eradicating gender *hierarchy*:

> We stand for an end to enforced subordination, limited options, and social powerlessness – on the basis of sex among other things . . . Our issue is not the gender difference but *the difference gender makes*, the *social meaning* imposed upon our bodies – what it means to be a woman or a man is a social process and, as such, is subject to change. Feminists do not seek sameness with men. We more criticize what men have made of themselves and the world that we, too, inhabit. We do not seek dominance over men. To us it is a male notion that power means someone must

13

dominate. We seek a transformation in the terms and conditions of power

itself. (MacKinnon 1987, 22-23)

The ERA example is of interest because it reveals through the arguments and

counter arguments of the opposing and supporting groups (including their public

relations activities) that the fundamental social rights of women have been hard

fought, and the process of winning has required the careful unpicking of

profoundly entwined discourses, laced, amongst other things, with differing

notions of morality, femininity, race and class. This constructed a powerful

hegemonic acceptance in North American society that rendered the social and

personal wellbeing benefits of the feminist movement not only invisible but

dangerous to and threatening of the social order. It also demonstrates that a deeper

understanding of the communicative process around gender is central to the

renegotiation of the social and strategic role of public relations - a central aim of

this book.

Despite the setbacks, criticism and resistance to the feminist movement over the

years, there is no doubt that gendered power relations were disrupted by feminist

activity, including gender research from a feminist lens, with real social

consequences that impacted on how both women and men lived and worked. Yet

social change that leads to reform is never a closed narrative, nor linear. Fluid and

dynamic, it is interrelated to, and responds with, changing contexts, cultures and

milieus through which new combinations of thought and action emerge,

generating new dilemmas and new challenges. As such, reform is perpetually in

motion and must be subject to revision, because at times, despite appearances, thought that was once subject to interrogation, may merely return to much the same social space from whence it came. While public relations as an occupation in modernity has been socially and culturally situated alongside the broad thrust of the feminist movement (such as the second wave of feminism which saw women's status in areas like pay and conditions upgraded), nonetheless there remain areas of hegemonic assumptions around gender in public relations which continue to be both unquestioned and unchallenged. In this introduction, we identify some of these issues and questions, and note how they are addressed by the various authors in this book.

We define public relations as a communicative activity used by organisations to socially intervene in and between competing discourses in order to facilitate a favourable position within a globalized context. The definition highlights the political role of public relations in seeking to purposefully influence the meaning making process. As an occupational domain, the public relations industry exerts significant influence and power in society through the production of meaning, the commoditisation of discourse and the creation of consent (Demetrious 2008; Weaver, Motion and Roper 2006). Primarily, it operates on behalf of corporate entities and governments, although it can also be employed by third sector organizations, such as not-for-profits and ephemeral organisations and individuals.

However, its role and relationship to society is not one that is understood
particularly well, either within its own ranks or externally (Demetrious
2013; Coombs and Holladay 2007). Designed to intervene in the decision
making process, public relations is intrinsically political and sits uneasily
with many of the central tenets of democratic society. Thus, when
statements manufactured by public relations circulate invisibly through the
public sphere, working through a growing repertoire of media, modes and
texts, then tensions are manifest. On the one hand they are evident in the
idea of an individual in modern society who has agency to deliberate and
to contribute to public debate and decision making, and on the other, they
are evident in the notion that public relations plays a role in directing
thought, shaping meaning and developing social practice in ways that
might compromise both agency and criticality.

Public relations as a field of academic inquiry has been tightly bound to the

processes of production, the development of useful tools and apparatus, the

planning and allocation of resources in putting together and distributing a text, be

it a brochure, media release, or a tweet and to theorising counter-attack when it

meets resistance. Other research fields centre on the consumption of the text, how

the audience received it, and whether it worked or not. Public relations' focus

tends to benefit large organisations like business and government and often

articulates to the powerful professional associations which accredit its courses. As

a result, academic inquiry in public relations has been accused of anti-

intellectualism and of being overly concerned with vocational outcomes. In

respect to the development of public relations education in Britain, Jacquie

L'Etang has written that: 'Education had the potential to increase respectability

and status which practitioners desired and to provide theoretical knowledge to underpin a specific expertise . . . "education" quickly became synonymous with training (processes, procedures, and routines) and practitioners; interest in education was purely instrumental' (1999:283).

In failing to explain how public relations interrelates and works with the sociological and the cultural and the political, the conventional, positivist knowledge bases of public relations are wanting and limited. Internally, the mainstream lens in public relations is inadequate to excavate meaning that sheds light on its tensions within and between other cultural forms or to interrogate questions about how reform can be achieved to lessen public relations' emphasis on creating consent (often involving the suppression or silencing of certain voices and meanings). When gender issues have been acknowledged (which is rare), researchers have tended to concentrate on the 'feminization' of the occupation and gender inequalities in the workplace. While not dismissing these as unimportant, this narrow field of inquiry overlooks some of the powerful cultural forces and interrelationships that position men and women in relation to the occupation. In effect, conventional knowledge has been on an instrumental trajectory where it has paid little heed to the hidden workings of gender, presenting theories and data as if they were gender-neutral. Numerous books and articles about public relations have masked the ways that gender can and does sometimes shape the type of data that is collected and the empirically-based theoretical conclusions that have been drawn.

The silent acceptance of gender 'neutrality' extends also to the lecture halls and curricula of public relations degree programs. Much public relations education can be viewed as functionalist because it has a predisposition towards 'techne' and the production of useful tools or artefacts to reach 'publics'. For example, public relations education at a university level places great store on students' acquiring technical expertise, which is often validated through positivist quantitative methods (for example, program planning and evaluation, as well as the production of tactical devices such as media releases) rather than a critical examination of their social and political impact and context or how these socially constructed 'objects' link to and limit epistemological possibility (Demetrious 2012, Daymon and Demetrious 2010). Examples are public relations management plans, communication audits, social media releases, and newsletters and the like. The absence of reference to gender in teaching is not actually gender neutrality; instead it reifies an implicit male-biased perspective which is also evident in some other disciplines as well, as Marta Calás and Linda Smircich (1992) have shown. Just think, for example, how the use of supposedly gender neutral language can hide or exclude the voices of those who do not fit the dominant and conventional disciplinary forms of thinking and practice. While there is a place for the instrumental, practical and vocational, when this is the sole focus of the curriculum, graduates are unprepared for the realities of the workplace and unequipped with the critical tools required to resist the gendered lines that may limit or demark their career choices. Greater attention to gender must be

embedded into public relations teaching as it is impossible to adequately understand the social construction of public relations and therefore disrupt its associated hegemonic assumptions without closely examining its gendered nature. If graduates are to contribute as responsible, caring citizens of democratic societies, and also as critically-aware public relations professionals, then it is incumbent on university teachers to develop their understanding of difference, care and equity, not least in relation to gender, in order to nurture the sensibilities of students with regard to the importance of ethical public relations to society.

Although gender issues have been segregated from the central intellectual debates in the field of public relations, there is nonetheless a small corpus of published work which shows that gender inequalities do exist in supposedly gender-neutral communication practices, and that gender bias is evident in the assumptions of traditional public relations theorizing. Much of this work emanates from scholars and teachers in North America who include Linda Aldoory (e.g. 2009, 2005; Aldoory and Toth 2002; Aldoory et al 2008), Carolyn Cline (Toth and Cline 1991; Cline et al 1986), Pamela Creedon (1991, 1993), Larissa Grunig (e.g. 1988, 2006; Grunig et al 2000; Grunig et al 2001), Linda Hon (1995; Hon et al 1992; Choi and Hon 2002), Suzanne Horsley (2009), Julie O'Neil (2003, 2004), Donnalyn Pompper (2007, 2011, 2012), Elizabeth Toth (e.g. 2001; Toth and Cline 2007; Toth and Grunig 1993), and Brenda Wrigley (2002, 2006). These researchers have focused their research on issues such as salary discrepancies, the under-representation of women in senior positions, and gender (and racial) stereotyping,

mostly in relation to the workplace. Importantly, they have drawn our attention to relations of inclusion and exclusion which privilege some at the expense of others, such as men over women, and white women over women of ethnic backgrounds.

However, the significance of such work could be strengthened if in future researchers were to question the core concepts embedded in research because this then would lead to the present social order being challenged and potentially destabilized, rather than tacitly accepted. Theresa Russell-Loretz (2008) argues that there is a certain disciplinary myopia in current gender research which could be overcome if researchers were to turn towards other disciplines where feminist theories are well-developed and thus able to yield greater heuristic value. The use of such theories and methodologies have the potential to assist public relations scholars to both challenge and reimagine the notion of gender, to better contextualize the lives of those they explore, and thus raise important new questions and lines of inquiry. We and the contributing authors to this book have sought to undertake this type of feminist-inspired research.

In furthering Russell-Loretz's idea, Lana Rakow and Diana Nastasia (2009) wrote about the power of feminist sociological thinking to analyse public relations. They suggested that gender issues cannot be sufficiently addressed until scholars apply a *critical* feminist lens to their investigation. To do this, they argued that researchers need to uncover and reflect on the assumptions that undergird research, by problematizing concepts such as gender, power and injustice, and

focusing on the political consequences and effects of public relations. A handful of researchers writing from or about regions outside North America have made a start in this direction. We refer here to the work of Romy Fröhlich and Sonja Peters (2007) in Germany; Katharina Tsetsura (2011, 2012), a Russian based in the USA; Christine Daymon and Anne Surma (2012) in Australia, and the Australian, New Zealand and European authors (some of whom feature in this book) who published in the interdisciplinary special issue which we edited in 2010 on gender and public relations in the online journal *PRism*. While some of these scholars might not consider themselves 'critical feminist public relations' researchers, nevertheless, all would claim the moniker of 'critical' scholars. Joanne Martin (2003) has helpfully articulated some of the differences and similarities between feminist and critical lenses, noting that both seek to reveal tacit and obvious gender inequalities, and to reduce or eradicate these. However, put simply, feminist scholars tend to place gender as the fulcrum of their analyses (with race, class, ethnicity as secondary emphases) whereas critical theorists often position class at the crux of their research, giving less emphasis to the others (2003:66-67).

In our editorial for the special issue of *PRism* (Daymon and Demetrious 2010), we outlined a critical feminist lens for exploring the notion of gender which we described not as a universal, fixed, and unchanging demographic status but rather a fluid and negotiated process performed through every social interaction. Thinking about gender in this socially constructed way positioned us to take note

of situated power relations, privilege and struggle, for and by women as well as men, and how these have been and continue to be affected by the interplay of social, cultural and institutional practices. These include public relations in its role of producing meanings, shaping identities and realities and orchestrating consent to domination, subjugation or liberation. As our thinking developed over the course of editing this book, we were compelled to pay more attention to the intermeshing of gender struggles with other hierarchies of power since these too are linked in the lives of individuals and communities who are subject to public relations. In this book, then, we see gender intersecting with and inseparable from race, nationality, ethnicity, class, sexuality, age, ableness and location. But we step back for a moment and explain how we reached this position and some of the work that influenced our thinking.

In 2009, the Australian philosophers Peta Bowden and Jane Mummery made the point that 'feminism has no proper boundaries: as an adaptive responsive movement it is still ongoing, still responding to new circumstances and problems' (p 8). Because of this they suggested that the feminist project may be better understood as consisting of 'multiple feminisms' (p.8) which not only include major, historical, theoretical approaches - such as liberal, socialist, radical, anti-racist and post-modern, as we noted in Daymon and Demetrious (2010) - but which also include dynamic, multi-faceted positions and strategies which are constantly evolving in order to counter the different problems faced by women (and other oppressed groups) in different contexts. This led us to ask the question

'how best might we study this methodologically, and also what could feminism tell us about public relations and its gendered context?'.

To respond to this question we began with the text by Lana Rakow and Diana Nastasia (2009) who had comprehensively outlined how the ideas of the feminist sociologist, Dorothy Smith, might be applied to an analysis of public relations, and the value of doing so. They argued that Smith's work is able to direct the gaze of public relations researchers to how our gendered world is accomplished and the potential role of public relations in that process. Smith's influential book 'The Everyday World as Problematic. A Feminist Sociology' (1987) is a compilation of her thinking over many years. She writes of how she became frustrated through the 1970s and 80s with the exclusion of women from the making of culture. This included their silencing in the intellectual realm of sociology, a discipline in which she was steeped. She asserted that historically in America women have been treated differently from men because of the dominance and authority of 'the male voice' (p.29) which excludes women from the production of knowledge. Masculinized thinking, she claimed, is legitimized and buttressed by society's governing structures. Such pervasive power is a form of 'ruling' which regulates social relations because it shapes social discourse and meaning.

At this point, we can see that public relations in its corporate guise, is an integral element in society's relations of ruling whereby it uses communication texts to perpetrate ideologies that Smith declares are implicitly gendered. A core problem

for Smith is that this form of knowledge or consciousness represents life as neutral, impersonal and universal, and ignores the 'particularized ties of kinship, family, and household' as well as relationships that are anchored in specific locations (p.3). Women have become used to seeing themselves according to this abstracted male-biased conceptual scheme, and thus their personal autonomy to realize their dreams and desires is limited. At the same time, they live with a different, contrasting knowledge which is grounded in their actual experiences outside the dominant social order. Smith stated that away from her teaching and writing about sociology, her own lived world was like 'coming down to earth' (p.7). Here she was immersed in family relations, leisure relations, emotional ties, friendships and the personal goings-on of everyday living. Here meanings were grounded in experiences. All women, Smith claimed, live with a 'bifurcated consciousness' (p.6), moving in their everyday lives between meaning shaped by the dominant relations of ruling, and meaning that is implicated in the local particularities of home and family. This notion is at the core of Smith's feminist methodology. She advocates doing research from the standpoint of individuals in order to analyse the social relations in which each person's world is embedded including how these have produced contradictions in our ways of understanding ourselves and our realities. Knowledge gained from research of this nature is subversive because it is grounded in the standpoints and actual experiences of actual people and thus contrasts with knowledge which is vested in the relations of ruling.

The writing of North American philosopher, Sandra Harding, also had a significant role in shaping our thinking. A highly influential feminist scholar, she is credited with bringing feminist analyses of how meaning is constructed on to the centre stage for feminist theory (Bowden and Mummery 2009). Like Smith, she asserted that systems of knowledge which traditionally have been seen as universal are in fact biased towards men. For us, the power of her ideas lies with her methodology which promotes the use of individuals' lives as grounds to criticize dominant knowledge claims and thus highlight gendered oppression as it intersects with race, class and cultures within dysfunctional social orders. Notably, she incorporated anti-racist and anti-imperialist analyses into her work (e.g. 1998, 2008) in order to conceptualize an inclusive, democratic understanding of knowledge-making. Harding advocated grounding research investigations in the lived experiences of women because she considered that this would reveal a way of seeing reality that differed from the conventional. In this way, the 'partialities and distortions' (1991: 121) of dominant visions of social reality would be decreased. Doing research from a feminist position, she maintained:

teaches women (and men) how to see the social order from the perspective of an outsider. … Feminism teaches women (and men) to see male supremacy and the dominant forms of gender expectations and social relations as the bizarre beliefs and practices of a social order that is 'other' to us. *It* is 'crazy': we are not (1991: 125, italics in original).

In other words, as Bowden and Mummery have explained, 'the experience of the marginalized can give them an epistemic advantage because their lives spark lines of investigation that are invisible to those in the top strata' (2009:30). Bowden and Mummery have reminded us that if we are to successfully unravel exclusion and disadvantage from a biased social order, then we need to pursue questions about 'who is marginalized, whose experience has been mistakenly interpreted, sidelined or left out of consideration, and whose has dominated and why' (2009: 26). And, we would argue, we need also to question 'what is the role of public relations in promulgating exclusion or inclusion, and on behalf of whom and why?'

By drawing on the work of these scholars, we have come to realize that the principles and methodologies of feminist thinking can apply to the study of any form of disadvantage, not only that of women, as Rakow and Nastasia have indicated:

We can see the contours of a critical feminist public relations theory. It would be concerned with *public relations in the lives of women* rather than with *the lives of women in public relations,* and would be focused on the consequences of all institutional discourses, including public relations, on women and other outsiders, rather than on their proficiency using institutional discourses. It would see power not simply nor only in the relations between individual women and men within an organization, but in the structure of society in which powerful institutions produce

26

and enforce meanings about the social order and the place of groups of people within it. (2009: 272)

Our research and theorizing then must take account of the meanings and experiences of those involved in and with public relations and also the experiences of those who are affected by public relations. Research might start with the interconnection (and consequences) of public relations in and on women's lives, but then again it might use a feminist position to consider the public relations experiences of men who are not members of dominant groups, such as indigenous communities or those steeped in poverty. Further, public relations should be regarded as a discipline that cannot be 'created' in the abstract because its theorizing is not neutral.

Therefore, in selecting chapters for inclusion in this book, we chose authors who were keen to explore how public relations penetrates and organizes the experiences and meanings of individuals and groups, whether they are producers of public relations, publics or others affected in some way by public relations activities. The various chapters employ no single, monolithic perspective but instead draw on a wide range of interdisciplinary feminist positions to express their pluralistic, and sometimes conflicting concerns, despite some similar intentions and inflections in their research. Some of the major feminist thinkers whose works inform the following chapters are Joan Acker, Judith Butler, Carol Gilligan, and Arlie Hochschild, amongst others. Through the accounts presented

by the contributing authors, we seek to offer in this collection a critique of public relations in its corporate guise, but also to show its emancipatory or subversive potential for meaning making (such as when citizen groups or unions employ public relations techniques to call into question that which is 'normal' yet implicitly dysfunctional). In this way, we want to raise awareness of the hegemonic power of society's ruling relations and its inter-relationship with public relations, an occupation which exercizes considerable social and political power and that influences meaning making through its media related and economic status.

SOCIAL TOPOGRAPHIES OF CRITICAL FEMINIST PUBLIC RELATIONS

Without seeking to reify critical feminist public relations as a single homogenous approach or meta-theory, it is important in understanding gendered investments in public relations to outline its emerging contours and some key concepts. Outlining such an approach will also assist future researchers to understand public relations in a critical feminist light. Therefore, this section broadly sets out how research in the book has been situated, its socially transformative cultural effects and what this reveals in terms of the political and social investment in, and implications of, public relations.

Researching lived experiences

Critical feminist public relations research is both 'critical' (in terms of power relations) and 'political', by speaking about and to the lived experience rather than a theoretical ideal. As scholars working from this position, our role is to make visible and audible the personal and collective, gendered meanings and experiences of those involved in, with and who are affected by public relations, including those previously invisible or silenced who are often women. And because it is important not to assume *a priori* ideas about women and men but instead to acknowledge the nuances, complexity and inter-relationships of gender, we begin by problematizing the concept of gender instead of taking it for granted. For example, Lana Rakow and Diana Nastasia (2009) urge us to challenge the woman/man dichotomy which has been presupposed in previous research, when the status of women has been contrasted with that of men, and subsequent recommendations made for more equal opportunities for women. In contrast, they point out, 'there are women as well as men who willingly or unwillingly contribute to the reification of patriarchy, capitalism, Western racism, and colonialism, and there are women as well as men who do not support or accept these' (p.267). Scholars then need to present a more critical awareness of gender, acknowledging that gender is much more complex than a simple dichotomy, and that there are differences between and amongst women, as well as men.

This subtlety is illustrated by Kristin Demetrious in Chapter 2 of this book where she investigates how the sexual aspects of gender performance link to sexual harassment in the lived experiences of practitioners in public relations

workplaces, especially young women and gay men. In exploring this theme, she investigates the clothes-body complex as a text to reveal hidden relations of power and sites of meaning. The chapter sheds light on the different forms of social sexuality that are promoted but can work against career advancement. In a similar way, Anne Surma and Christine Daymon (Chapter 3) disrupt the binaries of gender stereotypes when they examine the interrelationship of work and home in the lives of public relations practitioners, in particular the acute pressures for workers in public relations emanating from the neo-liberal project. They argue that this is evident in Western Australia where an economic boom is in full swing and which in turn dictates an uncritical approach from practitioners. Their chapter analyzes the effects of this between men and women and in doing so they open up new ground for public relations practitioners as cultural intermediates to engage with the 'ethics of care' on two levels: first with their client and community stakeholder relationships, and second with their own lived experiences.

By delving into the personal, emotional and everyday experiences of individuals, as authors contributing to this book have done, we are able to come to a greater understanding of how social and organizational discourses, such as public relations, must change if women and men are to be freed from the discriminatory structures, social relations, and meanings under which many of them, particularly women, suffer. We are also able to see – through the narratives of those involved in the production and consumption of public relations – how, in certain instances,

public relations has already changed in order to provoke and rupture discrimination and bring about reformation.

By delving into the personal, emotional and everyday experiences of individuals, as other authors contributing to this book have done, we are able to come to a greater understanding of how social and organizational discourses, such as public relations, must change if women and men are to be freed from the discriminatory structures, social relations, and meanings under which many of them, particularly women, suffer. We are also able to see – through the narratives of those involved in the production and consumption of public relations – how, in certain instances, public relations has already changed in order to provoke and rupture discrimination and bring about reformation.

As critical feminist public relations researchers, our interests do not align with the conventional contemplation of corporate discourse as a means of garnering consent. Instead, our responsibility is to illuminate the processes and assumptions through which public relations employs discourses to influence certain values, opinions, images and ways of speaking and acting, and take an interest in how and why these have become commonsense and ubiquitous (Rakow and Nastasia 2009). In concerning ourselves with the effects and consequences of public relations on and in individuals' lives, including women and excluded or marginalized groups, we might present, for example, accounts of how meanings can be disrupted through subversive accounts of individuals' experiences.

For example, in Chapter 5, Liz Yeomans explores what happens on 'the inside'
and how public relations practitioners in consultancies experience, practice and
understand work-based relationships as 'emotion work' and how this links to
identity and empowerment. In particular, her work focuses on the ways that
workplaces work within a service culture to socially position women and men in
hidden and inflexible ways. In an insightful chapter on corporate and personal
identities, Jane Arthurs (Chapter 7) discusses the experiences of aging women TV
presenters at the BBC. The exposure of their personal narratives led to the
emergence of a social movement that subverted the discriminatory meanings,
norms and professional practices of the BBC's organizational culture and internal
communications. Arthurs' research highlights how public relations practices can
be employed for domination - to reinforce masculinized corporate and
professional norms – but also for reformation and liberation when used
successfully by social movements and activist groups. Focusing on the notion of
exclusion in public relations, Kate Fitch and Amanda Third inChapter 12 examine
the interplay of the competing discourses of feminization and professionalization
in the historical context of the 1980s. They reveal how women in Australia
responded to the hegemonic notions of professionalism that shaped their
professional identities and disadvantaged their careers throughout their working
lives.

Researching the transformative

Advocacy often seeks to overcome major structural (as opposed to individual or behavioural) barriers to reform. In bringing these activities to light, this book seeks to give voice to the communicative activities and campaigns, often by marginal groups, around gendered issues that are transforming people's lives. Not only does the book raise these as new issues of difference and inequality, but the ways in which these issues are described in relevant chapters opens up far more nuanced understandings of discourse and how it works through different modes and trajectories. From the margins, patterns of discourse begin to emerge that challenge the status quo and thus advocate more caring and equitable social and cultural relations. The transformative effects of public relations are thus canvassed for their empowering effects, disarticulating the discussion from corporate sites as is so often the case.

In Chapter 8, Ian Somerville and Sahla Aroussi discuss the effective lobbying strategies of a transnational advocacy network of women's and human rights' non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in bringing about the passage of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1325 in October 2000. As well as showing the communicative processes involved in pushing for policy change, and the complexities and assumptions entwined within various discourses, they explore what these have meant for women in war zones and in post-conflict reconstruction. Importantly, their study reveals how public relations enabled women's voices to be heard (and gendered norms to be reformed) at one of the most powerful and traditionally masculinized spaces in global politics.

Continuing with the theme of transforming discourses, Marianne Sison (Chapter 9) draws on post-colonial theory to analyze the actions and reactions between the Catholic Church, the State and within women's groups in the passage of a Reproductive Health Bill in the Philippines. In studying loud and absent voices at the point where empowerment, politics, commerce and morality intersect, she focuses on a dynamic issue that has important ramifications not only for the health of individual women, but also for the health of Filipino society as a whole. In similar vein, Kay Weaver (Chapter 6) investigates a provocative activist campaign in New Zealand which raises questions about how the female body can be a powerful site for domination and control and, indeed, condemnation and censorship, when it is used to challenge dominant discursive framings of issues. In arguing that activist communication is gendered, she illustrates how the terms 'woman' and 'mother' are highly politicized and that challenging normative understandings of them is contextual, complex and socially contested.

The above chapters focus on social change and reform, and reveal something of the interplay between global actors and public relations in reshaping understandings of and interactions with community groups. The findings of these chapters indicate that social conditions of late modernity are changing and are distinct from those of early modernity of which mainstream public relations literature, with its entrenched hostility towards activism, is an expression. The changes demonstrated by these empirical studies reveal that new relations between advocates for social change and state and business organisations are

possible to achieve in ways that alter the relations of power and agency.

Generated by multiple and diverse voices and experiences, which may include

nationality, race, ethnicity, class, age, ableness, and sexuality, studying people

from their own experiences is important so that they can understand themselves

and the worlds in which they exist.

Researching the gendered and political in public relations

In turning our gaze towards the shaping of understandings and meaning making,

we are compelled to acknowledge the existence and effects of power which are

manifest in the relations between individual women and men as well as in the

structure of society. Powerful institutions produce and enforce meanings through

public relations about the social order and the place of people within it (Rakow

and Nastasia 2009). This in turn influences the self-image of individuals and

publics and their various communicative relationships which are rarely

unproblematic. As critical feminist public relations scholars, our research efforts

focus on how public relations affects those who are subjected to its practices and

discourses, whether they are publics or practitioners, individuals or organizations

and societies. Our responsibility is to illuminate this process from the perspectives

of those at the margins as well as the centre of power. This means taking note of

voices that are excluded from institutional discourses, and illuminating injustice

or inequity where it exists, especially where voices are suppressed or points of

view are ignored.

Maree Keating's study (Chapter 10) of migrant women workers who have lost their jobs and subsequently their engagement from workers' rights reveals the distress and 'invisibility' felt by those whose voices are so overlooked that they could be described as 'beyond marginal' (Rakow and Nastasia 2009: 269). Keating claims that public relations carried out by trade unions has transformatory potential to empower such marginalized stakeholder groups and thus assist in rectifying their position. She demonstrates this through a case study of a union campaign to build worker voice and visibility which raises issues of gender as it relates to both class and race. Her study highlights the responsibility of critical feminist public relations scholars to highlight the gendered domination, 'blindness' or liberation that public relations practices and various contexts inspire.

Consciousness of power hierarchies brings us back to a point we made earlier regarding the need to acknowledge that the terms 'woman' and 'femininity' are not homogeneous concepts. This is a common criticism of mainstream feminist research: that there are many differences among women and their experiences cannot be essentialized. Yet much research continues to be under-pinned by false generalizations which imply that the same experiences, aspirations, emotions and values are common to all women. Unsurprisingly, this has 'reflected the situations of privileged white women: those with the power to have their voices heard' (Bowden and Mummery 2009: 99). Thus, whiteness is 'the unmarked but dominant term' (p. 104). In such cases, black women and those from ethnic

groups are considered 'the other' and thus their voices, experiences and contexts are excluded.

Two chapters in this book highlight this particular issue. Donnalyn Pompper's ten year study of women and men working in public relations (Chapter 4) points to the way in which gendered disadvantage cross-cuts with race and age, thus further discrediting a generalized notion of gender and feminism in relation to public relations. She draws on critical race theory to theorize about the embeddedness of both privilege and disadvantage in the public relations workplace, notably in relation to career in/equalities linked to social identity intersectionalities. At the end of the chapter, she offers practical intervention strategies to inspire change in public relations theory building. In Chapter 11, Jennifer Vardeman-Winter, Hua Jiang and Natalie Tindall present a study of the implications of gendered health communications and policy making on the multiple, intersecting identities of publics. They argue that public relations is a gendered industry that aids the creation of policies which have inequitable consequences, and thus they highlight how public relations plays into the consolidation of racial 'blindness' with gendered discrimination.

In summary, critical feminist public relations research seeks to illuminate or subvert public relations practices which are discriminatory, as well as motivate more equitable and caring public relations practices, education and research. The focus of this research is on the gendered 'self' leading towards the uncovering of

multiple voices and narratives of personal, lived experiences which, in turn, illuminate public relations' powerful but less understood political role in meaning-making and the shaping of social and global contexts and relations. Each chapter in this book has sought to situate itself in the lived experiences of its research participants. It has sought to examine the socially transformative cultural effects of public relations. And it has sought to reveal what this means in terms of the political and social investment in and implications of public relations. These various research trajectories outlined over the previous pages can be seen to overlap, intersect and mesh through the various chapters of this book.

CONTOURS AND FUTURES

In this book, the contributors have concentrated primarily although not exclusively on the notion of gender as it has developed in the Western intellectual traditions. This is not surprising, given that all the writers have been schooled in Eurocentric systems of thought. To further critical feminist public relations research, we would encourage researchers, especially those from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, develop research strategies, analytic techniques and gender-focused theory which are empirically grounded in and pertinent to *local* systems of thought, so that questions of gender are considered alongside questions of culture, sex, race and location.

An important area for future research which cross-cuts with gendered disadvantage and public relations is disability. For example, future work which

builds on extant studies of hegemonic practices concerning gendered embodiment and adornment in public relations might question the pervasiveness of cultural norms concerning the physical and mental capabilities inherent in our notion of 'the body'. If, as Wendell (1996, cited in Bowden and Mummery 2009) states, the dominant societal culture is unable to genuinely understand and engage with disability, then surely there is a role for critical feminist public relations scholars to attempt some form of societal transformation in this regard.

Although a focus on gender, especially one that employs a critical feminist perspective, usually sets out to highlight women's oppression specifically in relation to men (Bowden and Mummery 2009), there is no reason why research should not take account of the ways in which public relations practices and contexts may also subjugate or empower men. The experiences of men alongside those of women are noted in a number of chapters in this collection. However, a lacuna in this book and in public relations generally is reflexive writing by men about men. Recently, Paul Elmer (2010) brought the masculine voice and identity to the fore in an amusing and provoking autoethnographic account about his encounters with professional expectations of physique, adornment and age in public relations consultancy. Gender research can only be enriched by more of this type of writing.

In presenting this collection of international research writings, we are seeking to position the legitimacy of gender as a topic for exploration in public relations and

further the agenda set in 2008 at the Radical Public Relations Roundtable. The upcoming chapters present empirically-based studies with new, creative theorizing that concern the ways in which publics and public relations practitioners respond individually and collectively to the hegemonic processes and gendered consequences of public relations in its connection to society's 'ruling relations'. For those interested in understanding the complex interconnectedness of public relations with powerful social forces, this book opens a social space that deserves further exploration. By encouraging future researchers to focus on the gendered 'self' as central to research in public relations, the book offers a methodology for understanding the cultural effects and critical power relations in and between public relations and society. By deconstructing and rebuilding knowledge, the book prepares the groundwork to locate and identify gender inequalities, disadvantage and abuse in public relations - as well as pursue its potential to empower and transform.

References

Aldoory, L. (2005) 'A (re)conceived feminist paradigm for public relations: A case for substantial improvement', *Journal of Communication*, *55*(4): 668-84.

Aldoory, L. (2009) 'Feminist criticism in public relations: How gender can impact public relations texts and contexts', in R.L. Heath, E.L Toth and D. Waymer, (eds) *Rhetorical and Critical Approaches to Public Relations II,* New York: Routledge: 110-123.

Aldoory, L., Reber, B.H., Berger, B.K. and Toth, E.L. (2008) 'Provocations in public relations: A study of gendered ideologies of power-influence in practice', *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, 85: 735-50.

Aldoory, L., and Toth, E.L. (2002) 'Gender discrepancies in a gendered profession: A developing theory for public relations', *Journal of Public Relations Research,* 14.2: 103-126.

Bowden, P. and Mummery, J. (2009) *Understanding Feminism.* Stocksfield, UK: Acumen.

Calás, M. and Smircich, L. (1992) 'Rewriting gender into organizational theorizing: Directions from feminist perspectives, in M. Reed, and M. Hughes, (eds.) *Rethinking Organization: New Directions in Organization Theory and Analysis*, London: Sage: 227-53.

Choi, Y., and Hon, L.C. (2002) 'The influence of gender composition in powerful positions on public relations practitioners' gender-related perceptions', *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 14(3): 229-63.

Cline, C.G., and Toth, E.L. (1993) 'Re-visioning women in public relations: Practitioner and feminist perspectives', in P.J. Creedon (ed.) *Women in Mass Communication* (2nd edition), Newbury Park CA: Sage: 183-198.

Cline, C.G., Toth, E.L., Turk, J.V., Walters, L.M., Johnson, N., and Smith, H. (1986) *The Velvet Ghetto: The Impact of the Increasing Percentage of Women in Public Relations and Business Communication*, San Francisco: IABC Foundation.

Coombs, W. T., and Holladay, S.J. (2007) *It's not just PR: Public relations in Society*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Creedon, P.J. (1991) 'Public relations and 'women's work': Toward a feminist analysis of public relations roles', *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 3(1-4): 67-84.

Creedon, P.J. (1993) 'Acknowledging the infrasystem: A critical feminist analysis of systems theory', *Public Relations Review*, 19(2): 157-166.

Daymon, C. and Surma, A. (2012) 'The mutable identities of women in public relations', *Public Relations Inquiry,* 1(2): 177-96.

Daymon, C. and Demetrious, K. (2010) 'Gender and public relations: Perspectives, applications and questions' *PRism* 7(4): Online. Available HTTP: <http://www.prismjournal.org/fileadmin/Praxis/Files/Gender/Daymon_Demetrious.pdf> (accessed 4 December 2012).

Demetrious, K. (2013) *Public Relations, Activism and Social Change: Speaking Up*. New York: Routledge.

Demetrious, K. 2012. 'Media effects: e-simulations and authentic 'blended' learning', in D. Holt, S. Segrave and J.L. Cybluski (eds) *Professional education using e-simulations: benefits of blended learning design.* Hershey, PA: IGI Global: 255-70.

Demetrious, K. (2008) 'The object of public relations and its ethical implications for late modern society – a Foucauldian analysis', *Ethical Space: The International Journal of Communication Ethics,* 5(4): 22–31.

Elmer, P. (2010) 'Re-encountering the PR man' *PRism* 7(4): Online. Available

HTTP:

<http://www.prismjournal.org/fileadmin/Praxis/Files/Gender/Elmer.pdf>

(accessed 29 November 2012).

Fröhlich, R. and Peters, S.B. (2007) 'PR bunnies caught in the agency ghetto?

Gender stereotypes, organizational factors, and women's careers in PR

agencies*, Journal of Public Relations Research,* 19(3): 229–54.

Grunig, L.A. (1988) 'Women in public relations: An overview', *Public Relations

Review,* 14: 3–5.

Grunig, L. A. (2006). 'Feminist phase analysis in public relations: Where have we

been? Where do we need to be?', *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 18(2):

115-40.

Grunig, L., Toth, E.L. and Hon, L.C. (2000) 'Feminist values in public relations',

Journal of Public Relations Research, 12: 49-68.

Grunig, L.A., Toth, E.L., and Hon, L.C. (2001) *Women in Public Relations: How

Gender Influences Practice,* New York: Guilford Press.

Harding, S. (1991) *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking from Women's

Lives.* New York: Cornell University Press.

Harding, S. (1998) *Is Science Multicultural?: Postcolonialisms, Feminisms and

Epistemologies*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Harding, S. (2008) *Sciences from below: Feminisms, Postcolonialities, and

Modernities*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Hon, L.C. (1995) 'Toward a feminist theory of public relations', *Journal of Public Relations Research*, *7*(1): 27-88.

Hon, L.C., Grunig, L.A., and Dozier, D.M. (1992) 'Women in public relations: Problems and opportunities', in Grunig, J. (ed.) *Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management,* Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum: 419-38.

Horsley, J.S. (2009) 'Women''s contributions to American public relations, 1940-1970', *Journal of Communication Management*, 13(2): 100-15.

L'Etang, J. (1999) 'Public relations education in Britain: An historical review in the context of professionalisation', *Public Relations Review*, 25(3): 261-89.

MacKinnon, C.A. (1987) *Feminism Unmodified. Discourses on Life and Law.* Harvard, Harvard University Press

Martin, J. (2003) 'Feminist theory and critical theory: Unexplored synergies', in M. Alvesson and H. Willmott (eds) *Studying Management Critically*, London: Sage: 66-91.

O'Neil, J. (2003) 'An analysis of the relationships among structure, influence, and gender: Helping to build a feminist theory of public relations', *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 15(2): 151-79.

O'Neil, J. (2004) 'Effects of gender and power on PR managers' upward influence', *Journal of Managerial Issues*, 16: 127-144.

Pompper, D. (2007) 'The gender-ethnicity construct in public relations organizations: using feminist standpoint theory to discover Latinas' realities', *The Howard Journal of Communications*, 18: 291-311.

Pompper, D. (2011) 'Fifty years later: mid-career women of color against the

glass ceiling in communications organizations', *Journal of Organizational*

Change Management, 24: 464-86.

Pompper, D. (2012) 'On social capital and diversity in a feminized industry:

Further developing a theory of internal public relations', *Journal of Public*

Relations Research, 24(1): 86-103.

Rakow, L.F. and Nastasia, D.I. (2009) 'On feminist theory of public relations: An

example from Dorothy E. Smith', In Ø. Ihlen, B. van Ruler, and M.

Fredriksson, (eds) *Public Relations and Social Theory. Key Figures and*

Concepts, New York: Routledge: 252-77.

Rineharz, S. and Davidman, L. (1992) *Feminist Methods in Social Research*.

Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press.

Russell-Loretz, T. (2008) 'Working the system: The evolution of feminist

perspectives in public relations scholarship', in T.L. Hansen-Horn and B.D.

Neff, (eds.) *Public Relations: From Theory to Practice,* Boston: Pearson: 317-

342.

Smith, D. (1987) *The Everyday World as Problematic: A Feminist Sociology.*

Boston: Northeastern University Press.

Toth, E.L. (2001) 'How feminist theory advanced the practice of public relations',

in Heath, R.L. (ed.) *The Handbook of Public Relations,* Thousand Oaks, CA:

Sage: 237-246.

Toth, E.L. and Cline, C.G. (1991) 'Public relations practitioner attitudes towards

gender issues: A benchmark study', *Public Relations Review*, 17(1): 161-174.

Toth, E. L. and Cline, C. G. (2007) 'Women in public relations: success linked to organizational and societal cultures', in P.J. Creedon and J. Cramer (eds) *Women in Mass Communication*, 3rd ed., Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage: 85-96.

Toth, E. L., and Grunig, L.A. (1993). 'The missing story of women in public relations', *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 5(3): 153-75.

Tsetsura, K. (2011) Is public relations a real job? How female practitioners construct the profession', *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 23(1): 1-23.

Tsetsura, K. (2012) 'A struggle for legitimacy: Russian women secure their professional identities in public relations in a hyper-sexualized patriarchal workplace', *Public Relations Journal*, 6(1)

http://www.prsa.org/Intelligence/PRJournal/Archives/

Warner, J. (2006) 'She changed America', *New York Times*, 29 January. Online. Available HTTP:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/29/books/review/29warner.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0> (accessed 30 December 2012).

Weaver, K., Motion, J. and Roper, J. (2006) 'From propaganda to discourse (and back again): truth, power, the public interest and public relations', in J. L'Etang and M. Pieczka (eds) *Public Relations: Critical Debates and Contemporary Practice*, M. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates: 7–22.

Wrigley, B.J. (2002) 'Glass ceiling? *What* glass ceiling? A qualitative study of how women view the glass ceiling in public relations and communications management', *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 14(1): 27-55.

Wrigley, B.J. (2006) 'Bumping their heads: A study of how women public

    relations and communications management view variables contributing to the

    glass ceiling', *Journal of Human Subjectivity*, 4(1): 33-47.