
The predominance of women in public relations

Central Queensland University
Thesis for Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Submitted by Greg Smith (S0072562)
Faculty of Arts and Humanities
November 2006

Principal Supervisor: Professor Alan Knight
Associate Supervisor: Kate Ames



“We need balance”
(Dan Edelman, 2000)

Abstract

As (almost) everyone in the Australian public relations industry knows, there are more women than men. On average, the numbers in Perth (and nationally) favour women by slightly more than three to one. However, the figures are alarmingly high, and, according to Australian Bureau of Statistics figures, make PR one of the most female-intensive industries in Australia. This growing imbalance may have long-term effects which have yet to be identified. This thesis, however, seeks to consider the reasons for this situation.

The research aims to:

1. Examine the reasons for the growth in numbers of women and numerical decline of men within public relations in Perth, Western Australia, by considering the development of public relations and how it has impacted on the composition of the profession.
2. Examine future trends within the profession for both women and men and what an imbalance may mean.

Patterns in the data clearly show that women outnumber men by almost 3:1, with statistics consistent across all groups surveyed. For example, in government PR practitioners are 71 per cent female, while in private practice (both nationally and in WA) it is 74 per cent. In WA charities the figure is 75 per cent. At the universities it varies between 72 and 87 per cent. This study examines the reason for the imbalance and whether an imbalance is good. Whether the industry (professional bodies, educators, students and practitioners) is concerned is up to it.

This work provides the first study of the gender composition of the industry in Australia. As such, it should be a valuable tool in a number of areas. Like many initial studies, it raises just as many questions as answers, and it provides pathways for future study. It should lead to a wider examination of

further issues. For example: does the predominance of women in PR in university courses cause concern among male students, perhaps leading them to question their continued participation? Do male students wonder whether the female dominance of PR courses will lessen their chances of employment. And what do practitioners think of an industry that is feminine?

Contents

ABSTRACT.....	2
LIST OF TABLES	9
LIST OF FIGURES	11
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	14
STATEMENT OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP	15
1 INTRODUCTION	16
BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH.....	17
RESEARCH OBJECTIVES	22
<i>Summary of Learning Outcomes</i>	23
JUSTIFICATION FOR THE RESEARCH	25
METHODOLOGY	28
<i>The learning journey</i>	30
DEFINITIONS	38
DELIMITATIONS OF SCOPE AND KEY ASSUMPTIONS	40
SUMMARY	40
2 RESEARCH ISSUES (LITERATURE REVIEW)	42
INTRODUCTION	42
OTHER DISCIPLINES	42
IMMEDIATE DISCIPLINE – PR LITERATURE	42
SOCIALISATION.....	49
SOCIETAL CHANGE	61
FEMININITY AND MASCULINITY (MALE/FEMALE VALUES/TRAITS)	69
STEREOTYPING	72
BRAIN FUNCTION	77
GENDER DIFFERENCES.....	82
MORE WORK OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN	101
CONCLUSION.....	103
3 METHODOLOGY	105
INTRODUCTION	105

JUSTIFICATION FOR THE PARADIGM AND METHODOLOGY	107
INSTRUMENT DESIGN	110
LIMITATIONS.....	115
SUMMARY	116
4 STATISTICS.....	118
<i>a. The PRIA (State and Federal bodies)</i>	<i>118</i>
<i>b. National practitioners</i>	<i>118</i>
<i>c. Perth-based PR practices.....</i>	<i>119</i>
<i>d. State Government PR Departments.....</i>	<i>119</i>
<i>e. Registered charities (non, or not-for profit)</i>	<i>119</i>
<i>f. Perth universities.....</i>	<i>120</i>
CONCLUSION.....	127
5 SURVEYS.....	128
5.1 SURVEY OF PR PROFESSIONALS	128
5.1.1 Sex	129
5.1.2 Education	130
5.1.3 Industry sector.....	131
5.1.4 Type of PR practised	132
5.1.5 Years in PR	134
5.1.6 Main role in PR	134
5.1.7 Level of employment/experience	136
5.1.8 Salary	136
5.1.9 Hours worked	137
5.1.10 PR as a career	138
5.1.11 Aspects of PR interest	139
5.1.12 Preferred workplace	141
5.1.13 Building client rapport.....	142
5.1.14 Male/female work differences.....	142
5.1.15 Impact of gender on work performance.....	143
5.1.16 Imbalance.....	144
5.1.17 Should there be a balanced (gender) workforce?	145
5.1.18 Effects of imbalance on industry.....	146
5.1.19 Ethical concerns.....	146
5.1.20 Confidence	146
5.2 ADDITIONAL MATERIAL	147

5.2.1 Common themes.....	147
5.2.2 Female skills/traits	148
5.2.3 Qualities	149
5.2.4 Age.....	150
5.2.5 Drawbacks	150
5.2.6 Historical aspects	151
5.2.7 Image and perception of PR	152
5.2.8 General concerns	153
5.2.9 Would they do it again?	154
5.3 STUDENT SURVEYS.....	155
5.3.1 Perceptions of PR.....	156
5.3.2 Forging a career	156
5.3.3. How students view PR as a subject	157
5.3.4 Perceptions of teaching.....	160
5.3.5 Technician roles	160
5.3.6 Imbalance.....	161
5.3.7 Pay discrepancies.....	161
5.3.8 Socio-economic group.....	162
5.3.9 Traits	162
5.3.10 Type of student in PR	162
5.3.11 Favourite (school) subject	163
5.3.12 Influence on PR study	163
5.3.13 People's views of PR.....	163
5.3.14 Is PR 'fuzzy'?.....	164
5.4 SECOND STUDENT SURVEY	164
5.4.1 Gender and university breakdown	164
5.4.2 Gender and socio-economic group	165
5.4.3 Personal traits	166
5.4.4 Subject at school.....	170
5.4.5 Influence to study PR	172
5.4.6 Gender and the way people view PR.....	173
5.4.7 Gender and preferred work situation.....	174
5.4.8 Is PR 'fuzzy' in its logic?	175
5.4.9 Students' (pre-study) perception about PR.....	176
5.4.10 Does perception of PR influence students to study it?.....	176
5.5 COMMON (SURVEY) QUESTIONS	177
5.5.1 PR sector specialisation/interest	177

5.5.2 Areas of interest.....	179
5.5.3 Preferred workplace (sector).....	181
5.5.4 Influence of gender.....	182
5.5.5 Awareness of imbalance	183
5.5.6 Ability to build rapport	185
5.5.7 Qualities of PR practitioners	186
5.5.8 Reasons for entering and working within PR.....	186
5.5.9 Career barriers.....	190
5.5.10 Suitability for PR.....	191
5.6 CONCLUSIONS	192
6 FOCUS GROUPS AND INTERVIEWS.....	193
6.1 STUDENT FOCUS GROUPS	193
6.1.1 Focus group 1, ECU	193
6.1.2 Student interviews.....	193
6.2 PROFESSIONALS' FOCUS GROUP AND INTERVIEWS	196
6.2.1 Focus group – professionals.....	196
6.2.2 Professionals' interviews	197
6.3 CONCLUSIONS	202
7 SUMMARY	203
8 CONCLUSIONS.....	206
8.3 CONCLUSIONS FROM STUDENT SURVEYS	215
8.4 RECOMMENDATIONS AND OBSERVATIONS.....	218
BIBLIOGRAPHY	232
ANNEXES.....	241
INTERVIEW 1, PH, 21 November.....	324
INTERVIEW 2, IW, 22 November.....	326
INTERVIEW 3, AH, 30 November 2005	327
INTERVIEW 4 KS, 6 December 2005	329
INTERVIEW 5, Dan Edelman, 8 February 2006	330
INTERVIEW 6, MR, 22 March 2006.....	331
INTERVIEW 7: JW, 22 March 2006	331
INTERVIEW 1: LS, 24 November 2005	334
INTERVIEW 3: EP, 7 December 2005.....	336
INTERVIEW 4: SW, 16 December 2005	338

<i>INTERVIEW 5: ZM, 11 JANUARY 2006</i>	<i>339</i>
<i>INTERVIEW 6: FM, 16 December 2005.....</i>	<i>340</i>
<i>INTERVIEW 7: SD, 6 February 2006.....</i>	<i>342</i>
<i>INTERVIEW 8: Leigh, 15 April 2006.....</i>	<i>343</i>
<i>Journal articles</i>	<i>345</i>
<i>Industry magazine articles</i>	<i>345</i>
<i>Third-person articles</i>	<i>345</i>

List of tables

Table 1: Female participation (fulltime and part-time) as a percentage of the Australian workforce, 1995–96 to 2003–04. Source: ABS, April 2005.	63
Table 2: Summary of Tymson’s views on male/female gender differences.	66
Table 3: Comparison of male and female values (Chater and Gaster, 1995)	69
Table 4: The way we perceive the most common traits of men and women (Chater and Gaster, 1995).....	70
Table 5: The key differences between male and female communication patterns.....	74
Table 6: Summary of the different thought patterns in men and women (Chater et al.,1995).	78
Table 7: Key characteristics of the brain’s left and right hemispheres.	79
Table 8: There has been a steady increase in number of women entering PR from 1950–2004 (Source: US Dept of Labor).	90
Table 9: Perth news media employment (journalists only). These include chiefs of staff and news editors. Source: direct from each organisation.....	93
Table 10: ABS Census figures for PR Officers (national and WA) 1996 and 2001.....	100
Table 11: Combined PR enrolments at Curtin and Edith Cowan Universities.	123
Table 12: Percentages of females in PR in the US and Australia	126
Table 13: Breakdown of professionals’ education levels. Percentages shown reflect the breakdown for a specific gender.....	130
Table 14: Predominant PR work sectors.....	132
Table 15: Main roles practised in PR.	135
Table 16: Percentage breakdown of professionals’ level of employment.	136
Table 17: Professionals’ salary levels.	137
Table 18: The hours PR practitioners work.	138
Table 19: Areas of most interest to professionals.	140
Table 20: Breakdown of where practitioners prefer to work.....	142
Table 21: Levels of concern regarding industry imbalance.....	145
Table 22: Ethical concerns of professionals.	146
Table 23: Response rate for student survey.	155
Table 24: Gender breakdown of how students perceive PR.....	156
Table 25: Gender breakdown of how students rate their chances of obtaining work in PR.....	157

Table 26: Proposition A – that PR is an easy study option.....	157
Table 27: Proposition B – I am mildly interested in PR.	158
Table 28: Proposition C – PR will suffice until other opportunities arise.	159
Table 29: Proposition D – PR allows me to be creative/inventive.....	159
Table 30: Proposition E – PR offers good practical skills.....	159
Table 31: Perceived differences between male and female tutors.	160
Table 32: Students’ views on being hired for “technician” roles.	161
Table 33: Awareness of imbalance.	161
Table 34: Students’ levels of awareness regarding pay discrepancies.....	162
Table 35: Socio-economic group origins of PR students.....	162
Table 36: Students’ views on PR’s ‘fuzzy’ logic	164
Table 37: Socio-economic background of students.	165
Table 38: Students’ overall views of their personality traits.	167
Table 39: Comparison (in percentages) on how male and female students perceive their personalities.	169
Table 40: Students’ best subjects at school.	170
Table 41: Male and female breakdown of best subject at school.....	171
Table 42: Reasons why male and female students choose PR.	173
Table 43: Areas of PR influence to male and female students.....	173
Table 44: Students’ preferred method of work.....	174
Table 45: How each gender feels about PR being ‘fuzzy’.	175
Table 46: Perception of PR prior to study.	176
Table 47: There is an even split among males and females on perception as an influence.....	176
Table 48: Type of PR in which students would prefer to specialise.....	177
Table 49: PR sectors of interest to students, expressed as a percentage of the gender group. .	180
Table 50: Students’ and professionals’ opinion on gender as an influence into PR.	183
Table 51: Students’ and professionals’ awareness of gender imbalance.	183
Table 52: Professionals’ awareness of imbalance.	184
Table 53: Level of awareness of imbalance.....	185

Table 54: Students' and professionals' opinions on building client rapport.	185
Table 55: Summary of reasons why students study PR; expressed as a percentage of the population.	188
Table 56: Students' reasons for studying PR (by university).	189
Table 57: Professionals' opinions on what makes a good PR career, expressed as a percentage.	190
Table 58: Respondents' concerns about career barriers.....	191
Table 59: How students and professionals ranked each gender's suitability for PR. Results are expressed as a percentage of the group.....	191

List of figures

Figure 1: The rise of women in PR in the US, from 1950–2000 (US Dept of Labor, 1980, and Toth 2001).	20
Figure 2: Summary of research learning outcomes.....	24
Figure 3: My learning journey.....	31
Figure 4: Process for developing the central question.	32
Figure 5: The second part of the learning journey and the process involved.	32
Figure 6: Investigative process of information-gathering.....	33
Figure 7: Comparison of female and female employment (fulltime and part-time) growth rates from 1995–96 to 2003–2004. Source: ABS, April 2005.	63
Figure 8: Brain functions.	80
Figure 9: Rise of American women in PR from 1960–2000. Sources: US Dept. of Labor and PRSA. Gap in years due to lack of statistics.	90
Figure 10: In the US, there has been a steady increase in women entering PR, and a leveling of male entry. Source: US Dept of Labor.	91
Figure 11: Journalism enrolments at Curtin University. Source: Curtin University.....	93
Figure 12: Percentage of women and men enrolled in undergraduate communication courses at all US universities 1996–2003 (Becker, et al.).	98
Figure 13: The rise of female enrolments in PR courses at US universities from 1993–95.....	99
Figure 14: Rapid increase of female graduates at RMIT, 1993–95.	99
Figure 15: Australian Bureau of Statistics Census figures for public relations practitioners in Western Australia. Source: ABS 2005.....	100
Figure 16: Target population and sub-groups.....	108

Figure 17: An overview of the way the research was structured.	117
Figure 18: Gender breakdown of national PRIA membership, 2005.....	118
Figure 19: National private PR practice professionals.....	119
Figure 20: Private practice professionals in Perth.	119
Figure 21: Murdoch University PR/journalism enrolments from 2001–2006.	120
Figure 22: “Communications” (PR/journalism) enrolments at four Perth universities, 1992–2004.	121
Figure 23: Enrolments in PR courses at Perth universities, 2004.	121
Figure 24: PR enrolments at Edith Cowan University, 2001-2006.....	122
Figure 25: Communication enrolments at Curtin University, 2000-2005.	122
Figure 26: Combined PR enrolments at Curtin and Edith Cowan, 2002–2006.	123
Figure 27: Gender breakdown for Perth university communications enrolments 2001–2004..	124
Figure 28: Proportion of PR practitioners (private practitioners, government non-profit in Perth. Source: Author, 2005.	125
Figure 29: Distribution of males and females across all Australian sub-groups.	125
Figure 30: US and Australian employment figures for males and females in PR.....	126
Figure 31: Gender breakdown of responses (females in pink).	130
Figure 32: Male/female practitioners’ educational levels.....	131
Figure 33: Where PR practitioners are working.....	132
Figure 34: Professionals’ level of employment.....	136
Figure 35: Average daily hours worked by professionals.	138
Figure 36: Reasons for choosing PR as a career.	139
Figure 37: Work areas of most interest to professionals.....	140
Figure 38: Females are more interested in events management. The inner circle is the sample population, and the outer circle is the level of interest in events.	141
Figure 39: Professionals’ perceptions of work differences between gender.	143
Figure 40: Professionals’ levels of concern about imbalance.	144
Figure 41: Practitioners’ views on whether there should be a balanced (gender) workforce.....	146
Figure 42: How students (male and female) rate their chances of obtaining work in PR.	157
Figure 43: Level of student perception about teaching differences.	160

Figure 44: Breakdown of students' socio-economic groups.	166
Figure 45: How students view their personality traits.	166
Figure 46: Self-defined personality traits.	170
Figure 47: English stands out as PR students' best subject at school.	171
Figure 48: Most influential sources of information about PR.	172
Figure 49: Students' beliefs on the way the public perceives PR.	174
Figure 50: Students, PR and 'fuzzy' logic. Half agree PR is 'fuzzy'.	175
Figure 51: Female students' industry sector of interest.	178
Figure 52: Male students' industry sectors of interest.	179
Figure 53: Professionals' areas of interest.	181
Figure 54: Students' preferred workplaces.	182
Figure 55: Level of students' and professionals' confidence in the ability of males or females to build rapport with clients.	186
Figure 56: Students' reasons for studying PR.	187
Figure 57: Professionals' views on what makes a good career.	190
Figure 58: Most talked-about professional interview and focus group topics.	197

Acknowledgments

My wife, Jeanette. For setting me on the path to study and then putting up with countless hours at the keyboard. Vroom. Let's go for a ride.

To my Dad, who encouraged me for almost the entire journey, but did not live to see the final product.

My supervisors, Alan Knight and Kate Ames.

Vince Hughes, who supplied constant valuable advice.

Paul 'Alfonse' Ellercamp, one of the 'good things', whose industry knowledge was invaluable, particularly in the survey phase.

Rebecca Folmar, Gina Noble and Fiona McCurdy, who were on the same path, and provided their work.

To the professionals and students who participated in the study; in particular, those who provided their time in focus groups and interviews. Without you there would be nothing.

Statement of original authorship

I certify that the material contained in this thesis is entirely my own work. Where references have been made to the work of others, such references have been duly noted. This material has not been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma at any other university.



Greg Smith
November 2006