Racial and Gender-Based Differences in the Collegiate Development of Public Relations Majors: Implications for Underrepresented Recruitment and Retention

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The current study contributes to the public relations scholarly literature that addresses issues related to the diversity pipeline into the public relations profession. Specifically, the authors seek to determine if public relations students believe that race and gender affected their educational experiences and social development during their collegiate careers. The findings suggest that both race and gender appear to play a significant role in students' undergraduate public relations experiences, with White respondents and female respondents expressing more positive experiences educationally and socially than underrepresented racial and ethnic persons (UREP) and male counterparts, respectively. Practical recommendations for recruiting and retaining underrepresented students within the major are provided based on the findings.

Keywords: diversity, public relations professional pipeline, race, gender, public relations education

More than a decade ago, the Public Relations Coalition, an alliance of 23 industry-related organizations, conducted its first diversity benchmark survey. That survey of senior communication managers revealed that the industry needs improvements in recruiting and retaining women and underrepresented racial and ethnic persons (UREPs) (Grupp, 2006). In the early part of this decade, public relations leaders listed diversity recruitment and top-talent employee acquisition as their top priorities (Berger, 2012), and nearly a decade later, Fortune magazine senior editor Ellen McGirt (2018) is trying to answer the same question: Why is public relations so white? Contemporary public relations practitioners see the advantages of creating a diverse workforce, and as such, these leaders have lamented the lack of diversity and have prioritized diversity in public relations (O'Dwyer, 2018). However, progress in the area of increasing the number of underrepresented racial and ethnic persons (UREPs)[2] working in the profession of public relations has been slow—despite the fact that agencies have attempted to build a pipeline of diverse practitioners. Some would argue that the issue begins in college (underrepresentation in the student body), only to be magnified in practice (see Brown, Waymer, Fears, Baker, & Zhou, 2016; Brown, White, & Waymer, 2011).

With this position in mind, the authors designed this study to examine the collegiate experience of public relations students from an educational and social perspective to uncover any differences students might experience based on their race or gender. The study helps identify areas of need, concern, and opportunity that could improve the academic, professional, and social development of members from underrepresented

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2 For a discussion of why "UREP" is used as opposed to "minority," which is a term under attack in various disciplines, or even the more politically correct "African American, Hispanic, Asian, Native American" (AHANA), which does not account for persons that are the by-product of interracial UREP unions or other UREP groups that might encounter racism in the United States such as Arab Americans, see Waymer (2013).

groups. Such an effort could potentially increase the chances of members from the underrepresented groups entering the profession and advancing to management positions. The authors hope that this study's findings help facilitate more underrepresented practitioners entering the field of public relations by honing in on recruiting and retaining these groups into the undergraduate major.

Literature Review

The Impact of Racial Diversity in Public Relations

While racial diversity recruitment and retention efforts seem well-intentioned, finding examples of ways that the industry has put into practice measurable objectives for increasing UREPs is far more challenging. As indicated previously, the majority of senior communications managers articulated that the industry needs improvement in UREP representation at all levels (Berger, 2012; McGirt, 2018; O'Dwyer, 2018). In fact, some board members of the LAGRANT Foundation, a nonprofit established (in part) to increase the number of UREPs in the fields of advertising, public relations, and marketing, highlight their frustration with the current state of affairs stating that the lack of diversity is "completely intolerable" (Vallee-Smith, 2014, p. 3).

Despite the fact that the people representing these UREP groups constitute around 36% of more than 300 million people in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011), the number of people in public relations from these underrepresented groups falls considerably short of reflecting demographics of the general population. For example, a 2010 census of the Public Relations Society of America's (PRSA) 22,000 professional members showed that only 14% of the organization's membership self-identified as Hispanic, Black, and/or Asian/Asian American (Nguyen, 2015). The aforementioned 14% statistic represents a 100% increase (doubling) of the percentage of PRSA members from underrepresented groups since 2005 (Nguyen, 2015). In short,

racial representation in the public relations industry remains skewed; the Harvard Business Review recently reported that the racial/ethnic composition of the public relations industry in the United States is 87.9% white, 8.3% African American, 2.6% Asian American, and 5.7% Hispanic American (Chitkara, 2018).

In sum, the profession of public relations continues to be a "lily-white" field of women (Vardeman-Winter & Place, 2017). This can be deemed a problem of the profession for various reasons. First, research shows that some underrepresented publics, Latinx populations, during times of risk or crisis (e.g., hurricanes, chemical plant explosions, acts of terror), prefer to hear such news from people similar to them (Heath, Lee, & Ni, 2009). Therefore, a practitioner's diversity might be the difference in underrepresented publics receiving and accepting vital safety alerts and messages intended for them in times of risk and crisis. Second, practitioners' social-cultural identities likely affect how they perform as public relations practitioners and the messages they create for vast groups of people (Curtin & Gaither, 2007; Vardeman-Winter, & Place, 2017; Waymer, 2012b), so it is imperative that organizations continue to prioritize a diverse public relations workforce and make it a visible, high-level, organizational objective. To address these diversity issues, it is equally important that the public relations industry, like other professions, such as engineering, intentionally work with K-12 and higher education institutions to increase diversity in schools in hopes of increasing racial and ethnic diversity in the profession (Waymer & Brown, 2018).

Diversity in Public Relations: The Underrepresentation of Men in the Profession and Classroom

While women attend college more overall than men at rates of about 57% to 43% respectively (Kena et al., 2015), an even greater gap exists when comparing the percentage of women and men majoring in the communication subspecialty of public relations. Reports have indicated

that, for more than two decades, there are more women than men pursuing a public relations major—whereby women constitute more than 80% of the students in many PR programs (Bardaro, 2009; Daughtery, 2014); the gap is even greater for the public relations profession with a difference of 85% to 15%, women to men respectively (see Khazan, 2014; Sebastian, 2011). Yet, when considering the imbalance in the distribution of men and the positions they hold in the profession, a paradoxical state becomes apparent. Men dominate top spots, while women are clustered at the bottom (see Pompper & Jung, 2013; Yaxley, 2012). Furthermore, men in the field continue to earn about $6,000 more than women (even when tenure, job type, education, field of study, location, and ethnicity are held constant) (Chitkara, 2018). Indeed, despite their underrepresentation in the field of public relations, men still represent 80% of upper management positions (Sebastian, 2011) and earn more money.

Scholars argue that the paradox of men constituting the numerical minority in the profession of public relations yet holding the majority of power positions in the industry can be explained by (mis)perceptions (Choi & Hon, 2002; Grunig, Toth, & Hon, 2001). Men are perceived as being more apt to self-promote, to be assertive, and to network with other power players, compared to women who are perceived to be more suited for micro-managing duties, efficiency, and sensitivity (Grunig, Toth, & Hon, 2001). These misconceptions have dire consequences as Dozier, Sha, and Shen (2013) found that participation in management decision-making was a key factor contributing to pay inequity between women and men in public relations. Despite these prevailing misconceptions and pay disparity, women are making strides in the profession and experiencing positive change in opportunities for senior-level advancement. For example, "Barri Rafferty of Ketchum was appointed the first woman global CEO among the top 10 public relations agencies. Edelman made Lisa Ross, who is black, president of the company's Washington, DC

office," and in April 2018, "WPP, the parent of Burson-Marsteller and Cohn & Wolfe, named Donna Imperato the CEO of the newly merged agencies, Burson Cohn & Wolfe" (Chitkara, 2018, para 5).

Even with these recent noteworthy promotions of women to top leadership roles in the public relations industry, men still constitute a numerical minority in the profession. Moreover, when students have been asked about positives and negatives of their undergraduate, pre-professional socialization experiences, many women have lamented the fact that their classmates were almost exclusively women (Waymer, Brown, Fears, & Baker, 2018). To address these diversity issues, it is equally important that the public relations industry, like other professions, intentionally work with K-12 and higher education institutions to increase the representation of men studying the subject in school in hopes of increasing men's representation and diversity in the profession, a suggestion consistent with insights gleaned from previously presented public relations education scholarship (Rawlins, VanSlyke Turk, & Stoker, 2012).

The Importance of Educational Experience for Career Preparation

While it is important to increase the racial and ethnic diversity and number of men in the public relations field, all of these efforts would be futile if students were not prepared academically, socially, and professionally to enter the industry. To pinpoint the overall skills that students entering college are expected to master across programs, Conley, Drummond, DeGonzalez, Rooseboom, and Stout (2011) conducted a national survey of more than 1,800 faculty members representing 944 courses at 1,897 institutions. The researchers found that top-ranked skills, regardless of subject area, included speaking and listening, reading comprehension, writing, and problem-solving. Other important factors the researchers noted related to developing an overall comprehension of life skills and a mature persona. These can be measured in the form of

students adopting effective study habits, managing time efficiently, taking ownership of learning, and demonstrating a variety of cognitive strategies, such as collecting, analyzing, and interpreting information, formulating and relaying ideas, and developing the ability to become more accurate, precise, open-minded, and creative.

The Key to Employability model (Pool & Sewell, 2007) has provided additional insight into the importance of the educational experience of college students and students' preparation for entering entry-level positions. The model builds from five components that provide a foundation for students to adequately reflect and evaluate their readiness for becoming hired within their chosen career fields, which in turn affects their self-efficacy, self-confidence, and self-esteem: (1) career development learning, (2) experience related to work and life, (3) degree-subject knowledge, understanding, and skills, (4) generic skills, and (5) emotional intelligence. While knowledge about the career field is obviously an important part of any academic program, the hard skills included in this area are suggested as only one part of academic preparation (Pool & Sewell, 2007). Pool, Qualter, and Sewell (2014) discuss that a lack of employment opportunities after graduation can be influenced by a deficiency in competencies related to the remaining areas (i.e., "soft" skills and work-based knowledge), which includes a lack of skills that are more likely to be learned in a controlled professional setting (i.e., internships, practicums). These include demonstrating competency and professionalism, demonstrating abilities to cope with uncertainty and pressure situations, developing self-monitoring and time-management skills, and becoming self-confident, responsible, and adaptable.

Because of the importance of gaining skills through educational experiences, whether it is in the classroom or through professional settings, examining the racial and gender differences in these experiences can help provide insight into areas of needed improvement

in order to increase diversity through increasing collegiate success for underrepresented groups. Therefore, the following research questions are posed:

> RQ1: Are there differences in public relations students' educational experiences as they progress in the major based on their racial background?
>
> RQ2: Are there differences in public relations students' educational experiences as they progress in the major based on their gender?

The Importance of Social Development for Career Preparation

Research has been conducted regarding the social development and involvement of students who participate in extracurricular activities on a college or university campus. Previous research examined the correlation of student involvement and its direct effect on students' social development and future career success. For example, Wenger (1998) developed and expanded the Communities of Practice Theory, and this is a useful theoretical framework for people studying the importance of developing social skills (Farnsworth, Kleanthous, & Wenger-Trayner, 2016; Wenger, 1998). Simply stated, communities of practice are groups of people who engage in a process of collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavor. Typically, this group shares a common concern or passion for something the group does and learns to do better through interacting regularly. This would presume that the social learning process is more effective when people are like-minded individuals and share common interests or passions. In sum, socially engaging with a community of members sharing similar interests is beneficial to the individual's social learning and development, which can enhance the potential of future career success (Farnsworth et al., 2016; Wenger, 1998). This is directly applicable to enrichment activities for students that are sponsored by organizations such as Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA).

Several scholars in various disciplines have explored social development and career preparedness for learners (see Bronfenbrenner, 2009; Kolb, 2015; Stahl, Dobson, & Redillas, 2018; Wenger, 1998). Most of these works draw from and extend the seminal work of Vygotsky (1978), who found that social interaction, especially with those who are more knowledgeable about a subject matter, plays an integral role in the process of development—both socially and academically. Whether it be experiential learning (Kolb, 2015) or studying the importance of "demonstration schools," which are communities of learning and applied research inquiry that exist in an integrative designed space (Stahl et al., 2018), they all relate to and extend Vygotsky's (1978) notion of the "more knowledgeable other" (MKO).

Vygotsky theorized that interactions with and exposure to such MKO individuals is vital to one's social development. The MKO concept has clear implications for professional student organizations, such as PRSSA or social organizations like fraternities and sororities that provide students with invaluable leadership experiences. The fact that many departments require students to participate in internships (a form of experiential learning from an MKO) is a testament to the continued applicability of these concepts.

By drawing from diverse theoretical traditions of involvement and social development, one can infer that an important part of college or university students' success is contingent upon their participation in extracurricular activities that are relevant to their career choice or interests. In sum, research supports the premise that being involved in extracurricular activities is a positive investment for students.

The benefits of such participation enable students to gain higher levels of self-esteem, self-confidence, and leadership abilities, which are all essential skills to master before entering the professional working world (Astin & Sax, 1998; Maruyama, Furco, & Song, 2018).

Extracurricular activities also provide college and university students with a network of peers and professionals who share common interests and goals. Students that are involved have the opportunity to gain real-world experiences, which essentially serve as a form of preparation for their futures (Hardin, Pate, & Bemiller, 2013). Students also have the opportunity to work in team settings and foster the ideas of commitment and responsibility while ultimately developing a work ethic. Several research studies in journalism, mass communication, and public relations support this line of research, suggesting the essential nature of extracurricular activities to student development and success (Nadler, 1997; Todd, 2009; Waymer, 2014).

Because of the importance of developing social skills through interactions with peers, educators, and current professionals, examining the racial and gender differences in these experiences can also provide insight into areas of needed improvement at the collegiate level to increase diversity. Therefore, the following research questions are posed:

RQ3: Are there differences in public relations students' social development as they progress in the major based on their racial background?

RQ4: Are there differences in public relations students' social development as they progress in the major based on their gender?

Method

This study extends the work of Waymer, Brown, Fears, and Baker (2018); those authors used interviews and other qualitative approaches to uncover themes related to a diverse sample of young professionals and their collegiate experiences, specifically their educational experiences and social development. Based on those findings, the current authors designed this survey for current public relations majors to uncover racial and gender differences in public relations majors' collegiate experiences. To measure these differences, an online questionnaire was distributed through the use

of Qualtrics, a web-based survey research company.

Participants

A convenience sample of 294 current public relations majors was collected from eight colleges and universities: 48 males (16.3%) and 246 females (83.7%). Table 1 provides a description of the eight colleges and universities and the number of participants from each one.

The majority of the sample was white (196 participants, 66.7%), with 28 African-American participants (9.5%), 49 Hispanic or Latinx participants (16.7%) and 21 participants of other races (7.1%). The average age of the participants was 22.3 ($SD = 3.57$). All students were of at least junior standing and had completed a Public Relations Writing course, or the equivalent, in their curriculum.

Variables

Researchers created a seven-point Likert scale to measure aspects of students' collegiate experiences based on qualitative research conducted previously by the authors (Waymer, Brown, Fears, & Baker, 2018). The scale items (provided in Appendix A) measured the degree to which the participant agreed with the statements provided. An exploratory factor analysis with a Varimax rotation was conducted to group the scale items, and three factors were extracted: (a) classroom educational experiences, (b) on-the-job educational experiences, and (c) social experiences. Appendix B provides the factor loadings for each scale item, with 51.07% of the variance explained by the three scales. Because the depth of the study relied on specific aspects of students' collegiate experiences, not a composite satisfaction score for students' educational and social experience, scale items were analyzed as individual variables. Cronbach's (1951) alpha was used to measure the reliability of the scales, and all scales were considered reliable (Classroom $\alpha = 0.828$, On-the-Job $\alpha = 0.864$, Social $\alpha = 0.872$).

Table 1

Universities Used in the Study

Region	Type	Participants
Southeast	Four-Year Public University	87
Midwest	Four-Year Private University	38
Midwest	Four-Year Private Liberal Arts College	27
Southeast	Four-Year Private Liberal Arts College	33
Southeast	Four-Year Public University	21
West	Four-Year Public University	36
West	Four-Year Public University	22
Northeast	Four-Year Private Liberal Arts College	30

Questionnaire and Procedure

Once IRB approval was granted, the questionnaire was uploaded to Qualtrics. The researchers contacted representatives from a national sample of universities that offer public relations as a major. Representatives interested in participating in the study were given a web address to distribute to their students. Participants that completed the questionnaire were entered into a drawing to win either a $50 or $100 VISA gift card.

Students that visited the distinct web address were directed to a five-part questionnaire. Section A provided the informed consent form and screening questions. Participants that were not of at least junior standing and participants that had not completed the Public Relations Writing course or its equivalent did not proceed to the questionnaire. Sections B and C provided the collegiate experience scale items. Scale items in each section were randomized to prevent priming effects. Section D provided a thank-you statement and demographic questions. Section E prompted

students to provide an email address for the VISA gift card, as well as any additional information for contacts that were providing extra credit for participating in the study.

Once it was designed, the questionnaire was reviewed by a panel of public relations professionals and scholars. Once revisions were made, the survey was pretested among 30 students. The pretest data was used to edit question order and language, as well as functional changes. Statistical analyses of the data were computed using IBM SPSS Statistics, version 21.

Results

A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used to analyze the research questions. RQ1 asked if there were differences in public relations students' educational experiences based on their racial backgrounds. The MANOVA revealed significant differences among the 18 statements addressing classroom and on-the-job educational experience between white respondents and UREP respondents (Wilks' Lambda = 0.872, $F(1, 292) = 2.25$, $p = 0.003$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.13$). Further analysis revealed significant differences in 6 of the 18 statements addressing educational experience:

- The project-based courses I have taken in college prepared me for my professional goals [$M_W = 5.95$ ($SD_W = 0.97$); $M_U = 5.68$ ($SD_U = 1.24$)] [$F(1, 292) = 4.18$, $p = .042$].
- I have been able to find multiple internship opportunities [$M_W = 4.95$ ($SD_W = 1.7$); $M_U = 4.48$ ($SD_U = 1.82$)] [$F(1, 292) = 4.86$, $p = .028$].
- I am actively involved in student organizations that have helped my professional development (i.e., PRSSA, Ad Team, Bateman, etc.) [$M_W = 4.57$ ($SD_W = 2.21$); $M_U = 4.01$ ($SD_U = 1.86$)] [$F(1, 292) = 4.66$, $p = .032$].
- I have been provided opportunities to gain leadership experience

from the organizations I joined [M_W = 5.52 (SD_W = 1.68); M_U = 5.09 (SD_U = 1.67)] [F (1, 292) = 4.17, p = .042].

• The professionals I have met in college gave me valuable insight into the PR profession [M_W = 5.66 (SD_W = 1.38); M_U = 4.91 (SD_U = 1.64)] [F (1, 292) = 17.21, p < .001].

• I regularly seek career advice from a public relations professional [M_W = 4.73 (SD_W = 1.67); M_U = 4.26 (SD_U = 1.8)] [F (1, 292) = 5, p = .026].

RQ2 asked if there were differences in public relations students' educational development based on their gender. The MANOVA revealed significant differences among the six statements addressing social development for male and female respondents (Wilks' Lambda = 0.873, F (1, 292) = 2.23, p = 0.003, η_p^2 = 0.13). Further analysis revealed significant differences in 11 of the 18 statements, with females having a higher level of agreement than males in all 11 statements:

• The writing-intensive courses I have taken in college prepared me for my professional goals. [M_M = 5.21 (SD_M = 1.50); M_F = 5.76 (SD_F = 1.04)] [F (1, 292) = 9.74, p < .01].

• The project-based courses I have taken in college prepared me for my professional goals [M_M = 5.44 (SD_M = 1.44); M_F = 5.95 (SD_F = .97)] [F (1, 292) = 9.28, p < .01].

• My previous courses helped me understand the importance of ethics and codes of conduct for my profession [M_M = 5.42 (SD_M = 1.37); M_F = 6.04 (SD_F = .96)] [F (1, 292) = 14.67, p < .001].

• My previous courses taught me how to effectively manage communication on social and digital media platforms [M_M = 4.90 (SD_M = 1.78); M_F = 5.44 (SD_F = 1.35)] [F (1, 292) = 5.84, p < .05].

• I have been able to find multiple internship opportunities [M_M = 4.06 (SD_M = 1.69); M_F = 4.94 (SD_F = 1.73)] [F (1, 292) = 10.39, p < .01].

• Other organizations, besides PR and communication-related organizations, have provided me opportunities to practice my professional skills [M_M = 4.54 (SD_M = 1.77); M_F = 5.34 (SD_F = 1.64)] [F (1, 292) = 9.23, p < .01].

• I have been provided opportunities to gain leadership experience from the organizations I joined [M_M = 4.88 (SD_M = 1.65); M_F = 5.47 (SD_F = 1.68)] [F (1, 292) = 5.1, p < .05].

• I have been able to build a professional network of PR and communication professionals [M_M = 4.00 (SD_M = 1.89); M_F = 4.87 (SD_F = 1.63)] [F (1, 292) = 10.8, p < .01].

• The professional network I am developing in college will be beneficial for my career [M_M = 5.02 (SD_M = 1.55); M_F = 5.54 (SD_F = 1.38)] [F (1, 292) = 5.57, p < .05].

• The professionals I have met in college gave me valuable insight into the PR profession [M_M = 4.65 (SD_M = 1.85); M_F = 5.56 (SD_F = 1.39)] [F (1, 292) = 15.45, p < .001].

• I regularly seek career advice from a public relations professional [M_M = 4.10 (SD_M = 1.68); M_F = 4.66 (SD_F = 1.73)] [F (1, 292) = 4.25, p < .05].

RQ3 asked if there were differences in public relations students' social development based on their racial backgrounds. The MANOVA revealed significant differences among the six statements addressing the social development of White respondents compared to UREP respondents (Wilks' Lambda = 0.816, F (1, 292) = 3.7, p = 0.001, η_p^2 = 0.07). Further analysis revealed significant differences in five of the six statements addressing social development.

• I have been comfortable interacting with other students in the classroom [M_W = 6.2 (SD_W = 1); M_U = 5.9 (SD_U = 1.37)] [F (1, 292) = 4.74, p = .03].

• I have been comfortable interacting with other students in PR and

communication-related student organizations [M_W = 5.94 (SD_W = 1.27); M_U = 5.58 (SD_U = 1.46)] [F (1, 292) = 4.67, p = .032].

• I have built a strong support group of fellow PR students (i.e. study group, social group, etc.) [M_W = 5.4 (SD_W = 1.71); M_U = 4.84 (SD_U = 1.84)] [F (1, 292) = 6.83, p = .009].

• Interacting with other students in PR classes is important to me [M_W = 5.81 (SD_W = 1.3); M_U = 5.46 (SD_U = 1.53)] [F (1, 292) = 4.25, p = .04].

• Other students seemed to value my contributions in a PR setting (classes, student organizations, group projects, etc.) [M_W = 5.82 (SD_W = 1.13); M_U = 5.44 (SD_U = 1.47)] [F (1, 292) = 6.11, p = .014].

RQ4 asked if there were differences in public relations students' social development based on their gender. The MANOVA revealed significant differences among the six statements addressing social development for males and females (Wilks' Lambda = 0.954, F (3, 290) = 2.320, p = 0.033, η_p^2 = 0.05) Further analysis revealed significant differences for four of the six statements, with females having a higher level of agreement than males in all four statements:

• I have built a strong support group of fellow PR students (i.e. study group, social group, etc.) [M_M = 4.71 (SD_M = 1.85); M_F = 5.31 (SD_F = 1.74)] [F (1, 292) = 4.75, p < .05].

• Interacting with other students in PR classes is important to me [M_M = 5.23 (SD_M = 1.69); M_F = 5.78 (SD_F = 1.31)] [F (1, 292) = 6.553, p < .05].

• Interacting with other students in PR and communication-related student organizations is important to me [M_M = 5.19 (SD_M = 1.83); M_F = 5.65 (SD_F = 1.42)] [F (1, 292) = 3.929, p < .05].

• Other students seemed to value my contributions in a PR setting (classes, student organizations, group projects, etc.) [M_M = 5.19

$(SD_M = 1.63)$; $M_F = 5.79$ $(SD_F = 1.15)]$ $[F (1, 292) = 9.508, p < .01]$.

Discussion

The authors surveyed 294 current undergraduate public relations students. The authors sought to determine if race, gender, or both constructs affected public relations students' educational and social experiences during their collegiate career. The findings suggest that both race and gender play a significant role in students' undergraduate public relations experiences.

Findings showed that UREPs were less likely to build a professional network in PR, build a strong support group among other public relations students, and experience comfort interacting with other students in the classroom and in extracurricular activities. These findings have implications for increasing the presence of UREPs in the public relations profession—especially if access to a professional network (or even a social network of peers) is a means for students to gain entry into the profession.

Significant differences between men and women were also found. Women were more likely than men to experience greater satisfaction in both their educational and social experiences, with results showing that female student typically get more out of classroom experiences, have more opportunities to network and intern, and gain more valuable leadership experiences. Perhaps the most telling finding is that UREP respondents and male respondents felt that their peers valued their contributions in a PR setting less than their white respondents and female counterparts. These findings along racial and gender lines have implications for UREP recruitment and retention into the discipline of public relations. If targeted strategies are developed to help increase social development for males (an underrepresented group in the major), as well as UREPs, then their satisfaction with the major increases.

When taking the findings on gender into account and coupling them with the preceding findings on race, these findings continue to support the fact that majority status (white students and female students, in this case) plays a significant role in students' ability to build social and professional networks and find greater success in the curriculum. The silver lining and key finding, however, is that the negative effects associated with numerical minority status appear to be mitigated if students are able to find and take advantage of adequate means of social development. With that said, greater efforts should be made by public relations education administrators and faculty to ensure that men and UREPs are provided and encouraged to pursue key social development activities. We recognize that this recommendation is idealistic for the following reasons: (1) PR professors are likely taxed with teaching, service, and research obligations; therefore, asking them to inform men and UREPs of specific opportunities might be an unrealistic request. (2) PR professors also have very little say over who registers for their classes, making control over the composition of their classes difficult. Thus, a more feasible strategy might be to talk to men and UREPs who are already in PR classes, and then incentivize them to then encourage peers in these demographic groups—through word-of-mouth—to join them in the public relations courses. The gender and racial/ethnic diversity of the public relations profession depend on such proactive strategies and tactics. The discipline needs to practice what it teaches. Setting clear, definable, and measurable goals and objectives is a cornerstone of public relations campaigns courses, and that knowledge should be transferred to address diversity issues in the student body, which is the pipeline to the discipline.

Recommendations for Public Relations Educators

Based on the findings, the researchers provide six practical recommendations for educators to help progress racial and gender diversity in the field. First, male students and UREPs, once in the major,

must be informed of the opportunities available to gain professional experience and guidance. Based on the responses to the survey, White students overall (regardless of gender) indicated higher success levels in professional network building. Similarly, female students (regardless of their race or ethnicity) indicated higher success levels in professional network building. White students and female students constitute a numerical majority in the public relations major. Because of this disparity, male and UREP students must be better informed of their opportunities for professional growth.

Second, diversity must start at the classroom level in order for emerging practitioners to embrace diversity at the professional level. Based on the responses to the survey, students in the aforementioned racial and gender numerical majority groups indicated that they have strong peer support groups. Moreover, these students also indicated higher levels of comfort interacting with other peers and students in comparison to UREP and male students. Finally, when compared to UREP and male students, students in the racial and gender numerical majority also indicated that other students are more likely to value their contributions in class and in service. There is an obvious disconnect here, and professors, instructors, and advisors must work to increase diversity in the classroom composition and more holistically embrace diversity education via the curriculum, classroom content, and discussions. This could work by weaving difficult discussions about identity and diversity into mainstream public relations courses, by recruiting male and UREP students to join extracurricular groups, as well as by making groups for classroom projects more diverse.

Third, communities of practice and experiential learning are powerful ways to reinforce learning and for students to develop a sense of belonging as they learn. Programs could create Bateman case study competition teams or host PRSSA activities that might be attractive for men and equally attractive for UREPs. In this way, having students wrestle

with the public relations challenges that might resonate with them, such as the recent protest cookout case in Oakland, CA (see Holson, 2018), could attract students because they can learn strategies and tactics to address potential issues of interest.

Fourth, diverse professionals must be more visible to all public relations majors, and they should be asked to proactively mentor and network with male and UREP students. Male and UREP students scored lower in "agreement that they have built a network of professionals" and "seek career advice regularly from professionals" compared to their counterparts. These differences illustrate a need for a more visible presence of UREP and male professionals, as well as a need for these professionals to be more willing to mentor and network with male and UREP students.

Fifth, colleges and universities should help proactively encourage socialization among students of different genders and racial backgrounds. Results showed that male students, compared to their female counterparts, and UREP students, compared to their white counterparts, not only felt less comfortable interacting with other students, but also did not see the importance of interacting with other students. Providing subtle opportunities to have students of diverse backgrounds interact could help combat these issues, such as creating diverse groups for group projects and leadership committees for extracurricular groups.

Finally, professors and instructors must proactively discuss racial and gender differences related to the public relations industry in the classroom (see Waymer, 2012a; Waymer & Dyson, 2011). Both UREP and male students scored less in agreement than their counterparts in the dimension of "Other students seem to value my contributions in a PR setting." Part of this could stem from a lack of substantial focus in the classroom on the racial and gender disparities in the industry. Discussing these differences in major courses could help to balance classrooms and

remove this stigma of disrespect.

Limitations and Future Research

This study only considered race and gender as factors for increasing diversity. Obviously, there are other cultural and social factors that play a part in building a diverse profession. Studies that look at other forms of diversity (e.g., disability, sexual orientation, international origin) could offer more insight into this need. In addition, this survey treated all non-White races and ethnicities as one group. Future studies should attempt to gather a larger sample size and a more racially/ethnically representative sample in order to examine specific differences among races and ethnicities and pinpoint specific challenges and issues facing these groups as well—as opposed to grouping them into one category.

This study only looked at students that were advanced in the public relations major, targeting students that have taken at least PR Writing. It would be helpful to interview or survey incoming students to see if there are initial challenges that they face while adjusting both to college and to the public relations major.

This study also gathered respondents from predominantly White institutions (PWIs). Future research should compare the underrepresented populations at these institutions to similar populations at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). There could be potential differences in the educational and social development among students at these two types of institutions. In addition, it would be interesting to see the educational and social development among White students at HBCUs to see if they experience the same issues that underrepresented students experience at PWIs.

Despite these limitations, this study uncovers substantial racial and gender differences in the development of public relations students and helped identify areas of growth to improve the diversity of the profession's workforce. It is the hope of the researchers that these findings will help

provide insight into the best ways to recruit and retain a more diverse group of majors, which would proactively increase diversity in the public relations field.

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Appendix A

Scale Items: Collegiate Development

Classroom Educational Experience

A1: The writing-intensive courses I have taken in college prepared me for my professional goals.

A2: The project-based courses I have taken in college prepared me for my professional goals.

A3: My previous courses helped me understand the importance of ethics and codes of conduct for my professional.

A4: My previous courses taught me how to conduct research properly.

A5: My previous courses taught me how to effectively manage communication on social and digital media platforms.

A6: My previous courses taught me to honor the uniqueness of each individual.

A7: My previous courses taught me the importance of cultural sensitivity and inclusion.

A8: My previous courses taught me the basics of business and financial literacy.

On-the-Job Educational Experience

P1: I have been able to find multiple internship opportunities.

P2: I am actively involved in student organizations that have helped my professional development (i.e. PRSSA, Ad Team, Bateman, etc.)

P3: Other organizations, besides PR and communication-related organizations, have provided me opportunities to practice my professional skills.

P4: I have been provided opportunities to gain leadership experience from the organizations I joined.

P5: I have taken advantage of the professional development opportunities that my school or department provided (i.e. workshops, resume and portfolio help, etc.)

P6: I've had exposure to professionals in the public relations field through visits to agencies or corporations, or interactions during campus visits.

P7: I have been able to build a professional network of PR and communication professionals.

P8: The professional network I am developing in college will be beneficial for my career.

P9: The professionals I have met in college gave me valuable insight into the PR profession.

P10: I regularly seek career advice from a public relations professional.

Social Development

S1: I have been comfortable interacting with other students in the classroom.

S2: I have been comfortable interacting with other students in PR and communication-related student organizations.

S3: I have built a strong support group of fellow PR students (i.e. study group, social group, etc.)

S4: Interacting with other students in PR classes is important to me.

S5: Interacting with other students in PR and communication-related student organizations is important to me.

S6: Other students seem to value my contributions in a PR setting (classes, student organizations, group projects, etc.)

Appendix B
Factor Loadings for Collegiate Development Scales

	Factor A Classroom	Factor B On-the-Job	Factor C Social
A1	0.664		
A2	0.578		
A3	0.636		
A4	0.672		
A5	0.647		
A6	0.709		
A7	0.662		
A8	0.690		
P1		0.648	
P2		0.572	
P3		0.647	
P4		0.733	
P5		0.591	
P6		0.591	
P7		0.706	
P8		0.668	
P9		0.621	
P10		0.577	
S1			0.680
S2			0.723
S3			0.771
S4			0.839
S5			0.773
S6			0.686
Eigenvalue	2.029	7.469	2.758
% Variance	8.46	31.12	11.49