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Special Issue Guest Editor Letter

In 2020, the brutal murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery, and the weeks of protest for racial justice that surrounded each event, led a group of public relations scholars and educators in activist public relations to meet on Zoom to discuss how to integrate topics about activism into our classrooms. Many of us felt a deep divide between our activist research interests, our personal commitment to activist causes, and the types of skills-based, corporate-centric content we teach in our public relations courses. While the body of academic literature on the topic of activist public relations grows, we noticed a lack of tangible resources and pedagogical research on how to incorporate activism into public relations education. As our grassroots group compiled resources, we came up with the idea for this special issue of the *Journal of Public Relations Education* to help bridge the gap, and help other scholars and educators feel less fragmented between their research and teaching interests. We hope you find the articles in this issue useful as a way to incorporate activist topics into core public relations courses such as research, writing, and campaigns, or maybe you will be inspired to create a special topics course.

The issue opens with an article "Centering Activism and Social Justice in Public Relations Education: Critical Communication Pedagogy as an Entryway" by Aghazadeh and Ashby-King that presents critical communication pedagogy (CCP) as a framework to meaningfully include activism in PR curricula and the very dynamics of classroom instruction. In addition to their compelling argument for the importance of integrating social justice and activism into the PR classroom, they offer three concrete strategies on how to do this rooted in CCP's guiding concepts of identity, power, and social (re)production. These include considering the influence of positionality on communication, student and educator power dynamics, and critiquing discourses and challenging social (re)production.

While the revolution may not be televised, the article, “Called, Committed and Inspiring Activism: How Black PR Guest Speakers Experienced the PR classroom during the COVID-19 and Racial Reckoning Academic Year of 2020/2021” by Del Rosso and Brown suggests a revolution in the classroom. One way to do this is by embracing activist pedagogy, which is about transforming the classroom into a space that decenters privilege and decolonizes curriculum. The authors interviewed Black public relations professionals about their experiences as invited guests and what professors can do to improve them. Four fascinating themes emerged that speak directly to why Black PR experts go into the classroom. The authors provide a useful guide with actionable suggestions for professors to help prepare guest speakers for the classroom experience.

Teaching activism does not have to be emotionally draining or focused only on confrontational tactics. Hou and Wang’s article, “Creativity is the Key: Incorporating Creative Activism to Public Relations Classrooms through Using Creative Pedagogy,” offers creativity as an entry point for the content, design, and delivery of activist public relations education. Seeing the potential for activism as both joyful and fun, rather than only discouraging and negative, may encourage more students to consider how their public relations skills can be used as part of social change movements. For instructors, creative pedagogy also offers ways to revitalize traditional teaching of activist public relations through playfulness, hope, and possibilities. Hou and Wang offer a variety of case studies and participatory activities for integrating creative activism into PR classes.

The fourth article, “Public Interest Communications in the Classroom: Bringing Activism to Public Relations Education” by Chernin and Brunner introduces readers to a newer area of study, Public Interest Communication or PIC. The authors challenge public relations educators

to use the PIC framework to disrupt the ways in which communication is taught by moving beyond teaching corporate-focused skills to a curriculum that uses skill-based approaches to mold future activists. For example, the PIC framework offers six tactics that, when used as part of strategic communication, can help drive social change. Additionally, Chernin and Brunner offer specific and timely suggestions for how to incorporate PIC into existing public relations programs.

The two teaching briefs in this issue offer activism-focused assignments that can be easily adopted into the public relations classroom. In her article "Vaccinate Against Hate: Using Activism to Teach Applied PR Research and Theory," Rozelle provides an in-class activity where students are tasked to develop a recruitment campaign and educational and awareness campaign for the fictional organization Vaccinate Against Hate. Because this activity can be integrated into an introductory public relations course, it offers an easy entry point for students to begin considering the role of public relations in activist causes.

More than ever corporations are expected to take a public stance on social and political issues. Remaining silent can be a sign of indifference. For example, after the murder of George Floyd, corporations offered statements in support of the Black Lives Matter Movement and/or a call to address structural racism. A major criticism of these statements was a lack of action and follow through. In "Beyond Slacktivism: Lessons for Authentic Activist Messages through Public Relations," Janoske Mclean and Marks Malone offer timely and practical lessons to teach students how to write effective activist statements. Through these lessons, students are encouraged to find the organization's authentic voice as they identify and practice writing activist statements. Further, this brief offers a lesson on how to respond to positive and negative reactions to corporate activist statements from the public.

From navigating through a global pandemic, to parenting a toddler, and having a difficult pregnancy and unexpected early childbirth, our first time editing a journal had its fair share of challenges. A huge thank you to editor Pamela Bourland-Davis (and her editorial team) who worked patiently with us from idea conception to final production of this issue. We are immensely grateful for her kindness and understanding throughout the process. We would also like to thank the reviewers who quickly accepted invitations to review and offered valuable feedback for authors. Through both personal and global challenges, we are extraordinarily proud of this JPRE special issue and hope it jumpstarts conversations about how public relations can and should play a transformative role in society and our role as educators in the process.

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Table of Contents

Book Reviews

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Centering Activism and Social Justice in PR Education: Critical Communication Pedagogy as an Entryway

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ABSTRACT

Public relations (PR) research has centered activism to some extent, though a clear, collective commitment to center activism in the U.S. PR classroom is still lacking. Thus, educators have an opportunity to situate activism and social justice as an integral part of U.S. PR education and effect social change through their teaching. This essay outlines key considerations of activism research and the opportunities to concretize activism in U.S. PR education, presents critical communication pedagogy (CCP) as a framework to meaningfully include activism in PR curricula, and highlights why educators should consider teaching social justice activism topics. Ultimately, we argue that CCP—and its key concepts of identity, power, and social (re)production —provides a theoretical opportunity to purposefully and unapologetically integrate activism into the PR classroom while simultaneously advancing the field to realize its potential for social justice.

Keywords: critical communication pedagogy, social justice, activism, public relations education

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Public relations (PR) scholarship has meaningfully integrated activism into the body of knowledge through a strong line of critical/cultural research (Ciszek, 2015; Weaver, 2019) that transcends activists as organizational opposition. However, PR education in the United States has not followed suit. Many U.S. PR programs do not require or offer activism classes and often focus on technical skills at the expense of exercising these skills for a variety of social justice causes. For instance, Holtzhausen (2011) asserted "the emphasis on writing skills and journalism training is arguably the most dominant concept in the training of undergraduate public relations practitioners in the United States" (p. 112). Somerville et al. (2011), from a U.K. perspective, explained the need to balance the dominant vocational approach to PR education with opportunities to explore social issues through critical approaches so students can appropriately apply those vocational skills to global challenges. With the research developments for activism in mind, we outline a path to meaningfully and systematically center activism in PR pedagogy practices through a critical communication approach and argue that PR education has the potential to effect meaningful change for social justice.

In this essay, we first outline key considerations of activism research and the opportunities to meaningfully integrate activism in U.S. PR education. We present critical communication pedagogy (CCP) as a framework to include activism effectively and consistently in PR curricula and address social justice (Waymer, 2021). We conclude by arguing that PR education has consequences for social justice and provide support for integrating activism into all PR classrooms. Ultimately, CCP—and its key concepts of identity, social (re)production, and power—provides a theoretical opportunity to purposefully include activism into the PR classroom while simultaneously encouraging educators to consider the consequences of their teaching practices for students and society.

Activism in Public Relations Research and Education

In this section, we first present a socio-cultural definition of PR and specific social justice perspective of activism that complement each other and that we take on as educators. We also detail past and current research about activism with the understanding that teaching activism in the classroom should be informed by this body of knowledge. Lastly, we present pedagogical work at the intersections of culture and social justice to acknowledge this related and important work, although examples of teaching activism specifically are scant in PR pedagogy literature. Ultimately, we seek to equip educators with a view of the strengths and limitations of our understandings of activism to inform their teaching and set the foundation for using CCP to integrate activism into the PR classroom.

PR as Socio-cultural: Opportunities for Social Justice in Teaching

Many definitions of PR exist, but broad, non-functionalist understandings of PR allow for a more accessible incorporation of activism into the discipline (Edwards, 2012; Weaver, 2019) and into the classroom. Thus, we take on a socio-cultural definition of PR when considering activism. Edwards and Hodges (2011) described the socio-cultural orientation as one that recognizes PR as "a locus of transactions that produce emergent social and cultural meanings" (p. 4). This socio-cultural perspective of PR does not discount or erase the value of functional approaches to PR, but instead acknowledges the larger, socio-cultural context in which organizations exist (Edwards & Hodges, 2011). A socio-cultural perspective also acknowledges how power and resistance influence cultural meaning in ways that can center social justice as a specific type of social change that some activism seeks to inspire and that instructors can embody in their acts of resistance in the classroom.

Activism has provided PR education and research with an important connection to societal discourse, social justice, and social

change, bringing up questions of power, culture, and resistance. For instance, Zoller (2005) explained health activism as "a challenge to the existing order and power relationships" because it seeks to dispute status quos, existing dominance for groups and norms, etc. (p. 344). However, the nuances of activism are still up for debate and the examples of what counts as activism are sometimes unclear, particularly when "activist" efforts do not advance social justice per se (e.g., guns rights activists, anti-abortion activists, etc.).

We adopt a specific understanding of activism from a social justice perspective—as sustained resistance to and disruption of harmful inequities, norms, and practices that discriminate against and marginalize people to ultimately promote equity (Place & Ciszek, 2021; Weaver, 2019). Consequently, we draw from Demetrious (2013) and conceptualize social movements as "purposeful collective action which advocates with socio-political intent" (p. 34). Throughout this essay, we specifically refer to a type of social justice activism that seeks to intervene in and address inequity, oppression, and discrimination within society.

Conceptualizations of Activism to Inform Teaching

How we conceptualize activism will necessarily influence how we teach it, so we present a summary of the body of knowledge about activism. The state of activism research in PR represents a burgeoning area of study that has evolved from understanding activism from a predominantly managerial perspective to discussing the social and cultural elements of activism for society (Dhanesh & Sriramesh, 2020; Weaver, 2019). Although scholars have highlighted how activists have used PR for over a century (Ciszek, 2015), early PR literature focused on activists as pressure groups that posed challenges for organizations to manage to achieve organizational goals (Grunig, 1992). PR pedagogy often aligns with the latter perspective, while activism research has continued to explore socio-cultural realities.

For roughly two decades, scholars have explored how a variety of advocates and activists employ PR practices and how communication professionals influence social issues (Ciszek, 2015; Ciszek, 2017a; Greenberg et al., 2011). Rather than looking at activism as a separate or antithetical force for organizations, scholars have positioned activists as agents of social change that use PR to realize such change (Ciszek, 2017a). As Greenberg et al. (2011) explained, PR has contributed to a variety of solutions and policy for the climate crisis highlighting how PR is not "merely the handmaiden for corporate power" (p. 67). Relatedly, Smith and Ferguson (2018) described how activists organize and use rhetoric to define and resolve issues, shape identity for individuals and organizations, and establish legitimacy. In this sense, activists are not the opposite of organizations and in fact may be most effective when they fully organize (Smith & Ferguson, 2018).

Yet, the discipline still has limitations in the ways it researches (and consequently teaches) activism. Wolf (2018) pointed out that the move toward activism in PR research is nascent and rarely privileges an activist perspective. Weaver (2019) argued that it is important to avoid conflating activism and PR because activism necessarily includes efforts for social change while PR may not. With this in mind, we may think of PR as a tool used by a variety of groups and for a variety of purposes but should be careful not to conflate all activism as PR practice per se (Weaver, 2019).

Limitations of Activism in PR Education

This move toward including activists as strategic organizational entities and the recognition of PR as a socio-cultural force for social justice begs the question: how does our teaching complement these advancements? We suggest that U.S. PR education has not fully complemented these advancements. Activism and social movement focused classes are not required or even offered in many PR programs

in the United States. Furthermore, U.S. PR has been dominated by a corporate bent for much of its history as early conceptualizations of activism also trickled into PR education. Mules (2019) pointed out that if activism was covered at all, "most of the pre-2000 textbooks position activism and activists from an issues and crisis management perspective as a function of business," though newer texts within this analysis indicate some change in framing activism as liberative (p. 22). Dominant PR theories and paradigms that were developed in the U.S. have focused on how PR, as a corporate/organizational function, can support organizational outcomes and goals (Botan & Taylor, 2004; Edwards, 2012). From this perspective, activists are viewed as a type of public that an organization needs to exert power over to ensure said activists will not create a crisis for the organization (Ciszek, 2015; Ciszek et al., 2021). To earn their paychecks and keep their jobs, PR students—sometimes implicitly, other times explicitly— may be socialized to simply do as organizational leaders and clients ask particularly if their job is framed as a service to the organization first and foremost.

Although activism remains largely under-explored and under-utilized in U.S. PR education, there are instances of PR scholars applying critical perspectives to their teaching practices that connect to the socio-cultural and social justice opportunities we have presented thus far. For instance, Somerville et al. (2011) and Hodges (2013) have both argued for and applied critical pedagogy to their PR teaching. Madden et al. (2019) investigated postmodernism in the PR classroom (which involves a similar critical orientation) and Ju and Kang (2021) presented critical dialogical approaches to teaching cultural competence. However, Somerville et al. (2011) argued that PR education has privileged skills-based learning, which has biased learning resources and practices "to approach the subject from a managerial and technocratic perspective" (p. 549). Furthermore, scholars have argued that PR education is "sometimes

deficient" of critical-cultural perspectives (Hodges, 2013, p. 27) and does not necessarily prioritize activism in curricula.

To question the ways that PR education privileges managerial and skills-based learning in pedagogy, we must interrogate our philosophies about what truth is (ontology), where it comes from (epistemology), and how it is valued (axiology) (Simpson, 2010; Tracy, 2013). Particularly because these philosophical underpinnings privilege certain questions and worldviews (Simpson, 2010), it is important to not overlook the epistemological, axiological, and ontological perspectives of educators. We must consider the underlying assumptions that guide our teaching and consider what theoretical orientations lend themselves to social justice and activist topics to see which orientations align best with the teaching topic and goals at hand. CCP provides a foundational step in questioning some of the assumptions within U.S. PR pedagogy that often keep activism at the educational periphery and appropriately complements a social justice perspective. Next, we explain CCP's assumptions and major concepts, describe its utility in the PR classroom, and suggest that educators have an opportunity to contribute to society by teaching activism in PR classes.

CCP as an Entryway to Activism in PR Education

CCP is a framework that centers social justice in the teaching/learning process (Fassett & Rudick, 2016; Fassett & Warren, 2007; Golsan & Rudick, 2018). As Simpson (2010) explained, "Critical communication pedagogues offer rigorous attention to the ways in which communication is socially constructed, embrace the constitutive and embodied nature of all communication, and foreground the significance of human agency within particular contexts" (pp. 361-362). Instructors working from this perspective challenge the normative banking approach to education that positions students as knowledge receivers that regurgitate information transmitted by their instructors (Freire, 1970/1993). Rather, when employing a CCP approach, instructors seek to collaborate with their

students to create shared knowledge and learn from one another (Fassett & Rudick, 2018). Ultimately, as an approach to teaching and scholarship, CCP seeks to use communication to create spaces of intervention into normative disciplinary and educational structures (Golsan & Rudick, 2018).

CCP represents a form of social justice-oriented teaching and learning (Fassett & Rudick, 2018; Frey & Palmer, 2014) that can cultivate critical thinking and activist skills for students and educators. CCP is social justice oriented because it calls on instructors to intervene in the (re) production of oppressive systems and teaches students to engage in critical reflection to diagnose how socio-historical phenomena institutionalize inequality (Fassett & Rudick, 2018; Frey & Palmer, 2017). Not only can CCP lead to students' understanding of social justice issues, but it also offers instructors the opportunity to support students in creating activist interventions through experiential and case study learning opportunities (Frey & Palmer, 2017). For instance, Kahl (2018) used CCP in a class activity that exposed students to the issue of fracking in North Dakota and encouraged students to consider activism as a potential response to the petroleum industry's hegemony. Thus, CCP offers PR educators a framework to promote understandings of how identity, power, and social (re)production function in PR practices and frames tangible learning opportunities about social justice.

Fassett and Rudick (2018) outlined three CCP commandments: "communication is constitutive," "social justice is a process," and "the classroom is a site of activism and interpersonal justice" (p. 5). Relatedly, Golsan and Rudick (2018) presented three central tenets of CCP based on these formative commandments: identity, social (re)production, and power. Next, we present these three concepts and their relationships to activism and PR, and then provide examples of how to apply these concepts in PR education.

Identity

CCP scholars and educators understand identity as an amalgamation of cultural, historical, and personal positionalities created and negotiated through communication (Golsan & Rudick, 2018). A CCP perspective considers how disciplinary knowledge, histories, and structures undergird course curriculum and that course content is shaped by identity and normative social structures (Golsan & Rudick, 2018; Hendrix et al., 2003). From this perspective, we come to understand ourselves and others in a dynamic, culturally embedded, and social way.

CCP also acknowledges that experiences of marginalization and oppression are not explained by individual, distinct identities but how intersecting identities contribute to specific experiences of marginalization. For example, Black women in the United States are both Black and women all the time and experience racism and patriarchy in ways that cannot be disentangled (Crenshaw, 1991). CCP's focus on identity encourages students and instructors to think about their own positionalities in how they view the world and how people communicate. Because CCP includes a variety of critical sub-pedagogies (feminist, trans-affirming, anti-racist, etc.; Fassett & Rudick, 2018), it allows educators to carve out understandings of how our identities shape what we know, value, and do and how identity intersects with expressions of activism.

Connecting Identity to Activism

In a PR education context, there are multiple, conflicting identities at play (e.g., organizational, practitioner, and public identity). Thus, identity is a complex concept in PR generally and for activism specifically. In the simplest sense, activism helps people make meaning of a variety of identity factors. For instance, Ciszek (2017b) presented activists as "producers" of collective identity for the LGBT community (p. 809). While collective identity remains fluid, activism serves as a mechanism to negotiate that identity (Ciszek, 2017b). Furthermore, researchers

have suggested that activists serve an important role in calling out and providing alternatives for harmful representations of identity (Ciszek et al., 2021).

In line with CCP's foundation of identities as intersectional and layered, scholars have also called for intersectional approaches to the key components of PR and activism (Ciszek, 2020b; Vardeman-Winter et al., 2013). As Ciszek (2020b) argued, organizations must consider a group's "multiple intersecting identities," which includes a range of factors such as gender, race, sexual orientation, education, etc., and establish practices to account for identities as complex and influenced by history (p. 4). Activist organizations, just as corporate and nonprofit, must find ways to navigate and negotiate identity by tending to complex constellations of self-understanding.

A focus on identity also encourages students and instructors to question corporate practices in the context of (mis)representing identity and how activists resist those misrepresentations. For example, Edwards (2018) presented a 2015 case study about Scotland-based brewing company (Brewdog) and recounted its video advertisement that essentially mocked the experiences of unhoused and transgender people. The Scotsman (2015) reported that the actors in the Brewdog video "can be seen begging for cash on the street, selling themselves in a garage sale and cross-dressing as sex workers - soliciting passersby for cash" (para. 6). LGBTQ activists criticized the video and media outlets reported that 25,000 people signed a petition to remove the transphobic advertisement (Morgan, 2015). In response to the offensive advertisement, Brewdog launched "No Label – the world's first non-binary transgender beer" and donated profits to charities that support the LGBTQ community (Brewdog, 2015; Morgan, 2015). While some response to the "No Label" campaign was positive, some people did not appreciate what they saw as a co-optation of their identity for the organization's benefit and/or the lack of

acknowledgement of how binary expectations within society marginalize them (Edwards, 2018). From an activist lens, this example shows the centrality of activism in the negotiation of collective identity by resisting harmful representations of marginalized groups that often shape how their identities are understood in the public sphere.

Power

Central to a CCP approach to instruction is a complex understanding of power that examines how institutional, cultural, and judicial power influence the teaching/learning process, curricula, and perspectives about what counts as knowledge worth learning (Fassett & Rudick, 2016; Golsan & Rudick, 2018). In the classroom, power is about more than just the instructor-student relationship and compliance gaining. Rather, CCP approaches understand how power conserves and consolidates resources to uphold the status quo. Individuals are agents of systems, guided by ideology, who wield the power given to them by the system as they try to gain more themselves (Liu, 2017; Liu & Liu, forthcoming). Therefore, power is contextual, relational, and ideological. When considering power in this way, instructors can help students understand how communication upholds systems of power and how students and instructors can collaboratively critique those systems to (re) define the educational environment (Allen, 2011; Fassett & Warren, 2007; Golsan & Rudick, 2018).

Traditionally, PR has focused on individual/practitioner and organizational power as ways to understand power as ability or "capacity" to influence (Place & Vardeman-Winter, 2013, p. 306). For instance, Berger (2005) provided a functionalist perspective of power and conceptualized three types of power relations all present for practitioners and within organizations: *power over* (control), *power with* (empowerment), and *power to* (resistance). Berger (2005) ultimately argued that the typical technician and managerial roles of practitioners

lacked explanatory power for the organizational activist role that some practitioners may need when balancing a variety of perspectives and interests. While this research suggests that PR professionals can serve as activists internally in an organization, the larger social context and the ways that activism intermingles with discourse, culture, and society are not prioritized from this perspective. In other words, this functional or capacity-based view of power lacks the nuance to prepare students and instructors to engage with power as seeped in a web of complex relations.

Socio-culturally and discursively, power is symbolic and shapes what we know to be true and who can create knowledge (Edwards, 2009; Place & Vardeman-Winter, 2013). From this perspective, the fact that power is relational—that one entity's power influences the position of others (Edwards, 2009)—becomes clearer. Power can be thought of as meaning-centered because resources are valued and distributed based on the meanings that are assigned to them (Heath et al., 2010). In this meaning making process, discourses can become so common place that they go unquestioned and communicators must grapple with how these hegemonic ways of knowing are produced by them and for them (Place & Vardeman-Winter, 2013). In turn, activism can draw from subaltern perspectives, outside of those hegemonic discourses, to push back and produce new ways of knowing (Place & Ciszek, 2021).

Connecting Power to Activism

Social justice activism represents a process to unearth power for marginalized groups and address hegemonic forces within society. While activists may push for more than symbolic power, a large piece of PR activist literature focuses on voice as a form of power and considers how activists gain resources and access spaces to share their perspectives (Place & Ciszek, 2021; Weaver, 2019). Digital and social media have changed the communication landscape and challenged the power that many media outlets and other gatekeepers can use to silence or erase activists.

However, new forms of media, although accessible, have not fully addressed the issue of expressing voice as a form of power for activists. Place and Ciszek (2021) noted that social media can drown out voices because of the sheer amount of information. Furthermore, the institutional power structures in place can still dictate important events to express voice and power. For instance, civic meetings were offered at times when activists in Place and Ciszek's (2021) study could not attend. Thus, social justice activism still faces challenges in expressing voice and leveraging symbolic power for social change, which serves as an important reality for PR students and educators to consider in their daily roles that often include access to voice and symbolic power.

Despite these challenges, there are examples of activism successfully resisting status quos and pressuring traditional sources of power for change in a variety of global contexts. Vu (2017) explained how grassroots environmental activists in Vietnam challenged governmental dominance in a country where activists are often silenced and oppressed. In this example, activists opposed the government's decision to cut down thousands of trees without consulting the public. In doing so, the activists were able to inspire leaders to change their course of action. Vu (2017) noted the importance of this success in that it allowed activists to critique a non-threatening issue of governmental power and "opened a new avenue for civilians in such authoritarian regimes as Vietnam to exercise contest" (Vu, 2017, p. 1200). Understandings of power that transcend a functionalist view ask for PR researchers and educators to frame power within a societal context and consider the physical, relational, and symbolic ways that we negotiate meaning and value within society. Such examples show the opportunities for marginalized voices and emphasize the responsibility that PR students and educators have to amplify these voices because of PR's proximity to symbolic power.

Social (Re)production

From a CCP perspective, educators consider how everyday, mundane communication functions to both "(re)produce and (de) construct" normative social systems and dominant ideologies (Allen, 2011, p. 106). Thus, it is important to examine how larger institutional and societal structures intersect with their classrooms and consider how the teaching/learning process is "power-laden, identity-driven, and culturally informed" (Fassett & Rudick, 2018, p. 5). Through a collaborative, dialogic approach to teaching/learning, instructors can work to intervene in the social (re)production of hegemonic norms and promote an understanding of knowledge and truth as socially constructed and contextual (Fassett & Warren, 2007). Within the context of PR, both educators and students must consider the roles they play in the (re) production of and/or resistance to harmful expectations, norms, and beliefs. For instance, students and instructors can consider the cultural consequences of communication materials they have produced.

PR is one of several professions that influences culture and shapes what is considered valuable within society via cultural intermediation (Ciszek, 2017a; Matthews & McGuire, 2014). Advertising, branding, PR, and other creative and promotional activities influence what people think is good, right, wrong, trendy, etc. (Hodges & Edwards, 2014). PR scholars have built on Bourdieu's work on cultural intermediation alongside symbolic power and symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1991; Hodges & Edwards, 2014; Wolf, 2018) to consider the consequences of exerting meaning-centered power to (re)produce social reality. Similarly, PR plays a role in the cultural process and has been highlighted in critical-cultural theories such as the cultural economic model, particularly in how it influences the production and consumption of meaning within society (Curtin et al., 2016). Such social (re)production via cultural intermediation influences identity, opinions and beliefs about issues, understandings of

history and a variety of other examples through communication.

Connecting Social (Re)production to Activism

Social (re)production connects to activism by drawing attention to the ways that oppressive practices have been challenged and often changed by the work of activists. Activists often play a role in questioning what remains unquestioned in terms of social (re)production and symbolically violent practices (Wolf, 2018). Awareness builds throughout history and challenges the social (re)production that has indoctrinated certain beliefs and norms within society. For example, Banu Bıçakçı and Hürmeriç (2018) investigated Turkey's feminist movement to understand how activists challenged patriarchal norms. They found that feminist activists used protests, gatherings, and demonstrations to bring private topics into the public realm and encourage social consciousness and awakening about issues such as violence against women (Banu Bıçakçı & Hürmeriç, 2018). Such examples bring to bear the power of PR to produce meaning within a social context while considering dissent as a valuable part of civic life and as a valuable form of communication for students to learn.

The concept of social (re)production spotlights historic trajectories that have shaped the issues that PR practitioners will manage throughout their careers, such as racial justice (e.g., Logan, 2021), and asks how activists can provide alternative interpretations of those histories to intervene in social (re)production. For instance, Black Lives Matter and allies articulate the lineages of police brutality from a U.S. history of slavery that undergirds the oppression of Black people today (Ciszek & Logan, 2018). Understanding how particular ways of knowing sustain over time and how they can be contested helps students and instructors imagine new expectations and norms that disrupt oppressive ideologies (i.e., white supremacy, patriarchy, ableism) to privilege social justice.

The Intersections of Identity, Power, and Social (Re)production

Although we discussed identity, power, and social reproduction

separately, the three concepts are not mutually exclusive. They connect to and overlap with one another. For example, Ciszek and Logan (2018) analyzed Ben & Jerry's Facebook posts supporting the Black Lives Matter movement to understand how dissensus emerged on digital media. They found that Ben & Jerry's disrupted the existing social order, thereby challenging the *social (re)production* of U.S. race relations and the norms by which an ice cream brand participates in social justice issues. The existing social order involved a history of white supremacy, which shows the *power* of white supremacist ideology that undergirded the backlash to Ben & Jerry's support/corporate advocacy. Lastly, the social media users who responded to Ben & Jerry's 2016 post in support of Black Lives Matter communicated conflicting beliefs and understandings of systemic/structural racism (Ciszek & Logan, 2018), which connects to the ways that those users' *identities* and lived experiences have shaped their worldviews. Therefore, social (re)production, power, and identity inherently connect to one another by influencing how one sees their own positionality in the societal web of power relations in which PR plays a meaning-making role.

In the classroom, the analysis above can be shared to articulate identity, power, and social (re)production in a case example and can be taken a step further by questioning how these key concepts challenge existing ideas about "good" PR practice. For instance, Ben & Jerry's approach to anti-racist advocacy on Facebook disrupts the normative logic in U.S. PR classrooms that effective PR should seek dialogue and consensus. As Ciszek and Logan (2018) suggested, centering dissensus in PR practice may foster social change. Using this example as a case study can help instructors intervene in the social (re)production of consensus driven PR and explain how organizations can use their power in the public sphere to communicate alongside activists and challenge whiteness. By engaging students with the concepts of identity, power, and social (re)production, educators can advance more robust understandings of identity

that could help future practitioners humanize and respect publics.

Bringing Identity, Social (Re)production and Power into the PR Classroom

In addition to considering activism and social movement examples and content (as may be inspired from the above discussion), we suggest three key strategies to bring identity, power, and social (re)production into the PR classroom. These three strategies allow the educator to essentially *practice what they preach* by bringing acts of resistance and disruption to their classrooms that exemplify social justice activism.

Considering Positionality and How it Influences Communication

By advancing a CCP approach to identity, instructors and students must grapple with their own identities to critically reflect on their positionalities and privilege to understand the forces that social justice activism seeks to disrupt. As a concrete example, analyzing PR materials to see how people in marginalized groups are portrayed (or missing entirely) may help students and educators question how we have shaped our identities within this larger sociopolitical context. We can ask questions, of our students and of ourselves, that unveil some of the ways that PR has contributed to marginalization when producing materials and campaigns. For instance, asking questions such as: why are all people in the photos of this strategic plan white? Why are all the expert quotes in this news release from men? How has my identity allowed me to ignore such representations? *Or* forced me to notice them? Such reflections may also spark conversations about how PR has, implicitly and explicitly, contributed to systemic racism, sexism, ableism, and other "isms" to work toward more identity conscious, socially just practice in the future (Fassett & Rudick, 2018; Waymer, 2021), and include the work of activists in such endeavors.

Furthermore, CCP advances a nuanced understanding of identity that can help instructors teach several PR topics in ways that

align with social justice activism. For example, segmentation and public characteristics are traditionally discussed as "discrete, single demographics that practitioners assume can be added together and easily separated" (Vardeman-Winter et al., 2013, p. 280). This perspective reduces individuals with complex, multifaceted identities into a single monolithic group, which may also enable communicators to rely on harmful stereotypes and essentialize certain groups based on those discrete demographics. A CCP perspective highlights how our identities influence how we view the world, what we value, and how we communicate. Our identities are contextual and constructed in relation to larger socio-political and historical contexts (Golsan & Rudick, 2018; Hendrix et al., 2003). Students can consider the perspective that identities are not static, and not based on demographics, psychographics, or geography alone.

Changing the Power Dynamic Between Student and Educator

Historically, institutions of higher education have served as spaces that advance hegemony, which compounds issues of patriarchy, race, class, and other issues activists must disrupt when facilitating social change. From a normative perspective, educators are often seen as "experts" that know and produce knowledge that is then transmitted to student learners to be regurgitated (Fassett & Warren, 2007; Freire, 1970/1993). This approach to education has socialized students toward a managerial perspective of education where they function as workers doing what they must to get their degree and a good job post-graduation (Ashby-King & Anderson, 2022). When educating from this perspective, instructors have significant power over their students that can be wielded in ways that remove student agency, limit learning, and hinder exploration in the classroom. CCP serves as an intervention, and an expression of activism itself, that allows instructors to develop shared knowledge with students by allowing students to question where and how knowledge is created and centering their agency in the learning process (Golsan & Rudick, 2018).

One approach to disrupting the educator-student power imbalance is giving students a voice in the process of determining learning outcomes, designing assignments, and deciding how they will be evaluated (Ashby-King et al., 2021; Stommel, 2020). By engaging in *ungrading* practices like these, instructors can give students agency in the process of determining what counts as learning in the classroom. In doing so, educators create classroom and assessment contexts that center students' needs, resist the notion that the instructor is the holder of all knowledge, and provide students with a voice in determining what it means to learn in the course (Ashby-King et al., 2021). Although a power dynamic will always exist between instructor and students, acknowledging it and considering how it may limit student learning allows instructors to reimagine their teaching toward social justice.

Providing Opportunities to Critique Discourses and Challenge Social (Re)production

As education has often constrained students toward specific ways of being and knowing, it has reinforced dominant ideologies and social systems both in the academy and practice. For example, scholars have documented how PR history has reinforced the dominant, managerialist approach, particularly related to the Excellence Theory (Fitch & L'Etang, 2017). Fitch and L'Etang (2017) acknowledged the limitations of this dominant perspective in that, "these ideas, in undiluted and unproblematised forms, have populated and re-populated numerous PR textbooks both in English and in other languages until they have been accepted by some as incontrovertible fact" (p. 116). By utilizing a CCP approach, instructors can intervene in the reinforcement of these perspectives to disrupt these status quos (Allen, 2011) and help students imagine and experience PR as a practice of social change in addition to a corporate or nonprofit practice.

Intervening in social (re)production allows instructors to help

students question assumptions and dominant discourses about race, gender, class, sexual orientation, ability and other facets of identity and work toward breaking the cycle of harmful norms and representations of marginalized groups. In the PR classroom, instructors could call students' attention to the role PR plays in mediating discourse in the public sphere. First, instructors could provide examples of how PR has been used in ways that promote harmful, hegemonic norms by centering some and marginalizing others (Logan, 2021). Instructors could highlight how PR is used during crises to focus on organizations or institutions and often ignores those most harmed by a crisis (Waymer & Heath, 2007). We suggest instructors also offer examples that show how PR practitioners can effectively influence culture to support marginalized people, such as how Alen Nierob constructed a humanizing discourse around Caitlyn Jenner's transition (Ciszek, 2020a). Second, instructors can counter the notion that PR is most effective when it is symmetrical and working toward consensus. By using case studies, such as the Ben & Jerry's example discussed earlier (Ciszek & Logan, 2018), instructors can show how PR can also be used by organizations to participate in democracy and promote social justice through dissensus. By intervening in social (re)production, educators can expand the responsibilities of and opportunities for PR, which offers a clearer avenue for discussing activism in the PR classroom.

A Call to Action: Why PR Educators Should Consider CCP

Throughout this essay, we have presented CCP as an entryway to discussing activism and social justice in the PR classroom and intervening in the reproduction of status quos through teaching. We have outlined how CCP's central concepts of identity, power, and social (re)production connect with activism and social justice and the ways educators can take content and practices into the PR classroom. Now we turn to answering the question, why? Why should PR educators privilege activism in the classroom? And why should they take a CCP approach when addressing

activism? We answer these questions by arguing that 1) PR educators should privilege activism in their classrooms because it can contribute to a more equitable society and 2) CCP is particularly compatible with activism for social justice.

Contributing to Social Justice: Activism in the PR Classroom and Beyond

Because of the inherent power in teaching future agents of social change, PR educators can contribute to a more equitable and just society by integrating activism and social justice into the classroom. Just as there is power in the work of PR professionals in shaping socio-cultural contexts and outcomes, there is power in teaching future communicators who will influence that socio-cultural reality. This point relies on the argument that teaching is not a value-free activity. Educators and the curriculum they teach have a specific "agenda" that privileges certain questions and ways of knowing (Simpson, 2010, p. 367). What we choose to teach and how we choose to teach it will have consequences. We suggest educators can choose topics and dialogues that promote PR as a practice that supports a more just society by amplifying examples of activists participating in social change and providing communication pathways to facilitate such change.

At its very core, activism provides a pathway to citizenship and civic engagement. Students can use the skills they learn to make positive changes to issues that matter to them and society. For instance, students have engaged in activism to protest government in Nicaragua (Witschge, 2018) and sexual assault on college campuses in the United States (Kyaw, 2021). When teaching PR, instructors are not simply preparing students to think about organizational interest. We are guiding them to develop skills that address today's global challenges, such as climate change. We are helping them hone the tools to contribute to the industries, topics, and issues that matter to them. We are encouraging them to think critically

about their own positionalities within a dynamic communication ecology with diverse experiences and viewpoints. We are preparing them to communicate strategically, build relationships, and play an active part in our society's discourses. Centering activism shows students that PR is more than a corporate function and demonstrates the role that the field plays in realizing a more equitable society.

Complementing a Social Justice Perspective

Effectively centering activism in the PR classroom requires instructors to look beyond traditional, functional approaches to PR and consider perspectives that complement social justice topics. Considering the philosophical assumptions embedded in our teaching is important because not all philosophical systems align with all perspectives of PR and the theories within. For example, as Tracy (2013) explained, positivists consider the world "knowable and strive to show the one true world" (p. 47). This perspective cannot be reconciled with the postmodern perspective that "meaning is partial and significant in its own way, but never holds the whole truth" (Tracy, 2013, p. 47). Relatedly, we see managerial and functional paradigms as well-suited for considering organizational effectiveness of any organization (corporate, activist, etc.), but ill-suited for considering activism as an expression of social justice and understanding socio-cultural context. Social justice activism's commitment to addressing inequity and calling out oppressive systems aligns with CCP's commitment to challenging dominant educational structures and giving students tools to engage with activism, if or when they choose to.

CCP and social justice activism challenge educators and practitioners to consider movement toward equity, inclusion, and justice. Activism provides the means to elevate and amplify marginalized and oppressed voices; CCP provides the framework to integrate such topics responsibly and reflectively by promoting reflexive teaching strategies and

nuanced concepts. Because teaching and learning are never neutral or free of consequence, we urge instructors to help students realize the possibility of a more equitable future and fuel this process by teaching PR skills with social justice in mind.

Final Thoughts

CCP is one of many pedagogical approaches instructors can use but it is an approach that provides a pathway to meaningfully discuss activism and PR in both content and praxis. Although useful, CCP has limitations. Simpson (2010) highlighted arguments that CCP does not explicitly critique how communication restricts access to voice, space, and agency. However, we still see great value in the approach, particularly because the key concepts and assumptions of CCP provide an accessible and useful framework for educators to engage with social justice topics. Even if instructors do not have previous experience with social justice or activism, they can invite students to critique how identity, power, and social (re)production influence equity within society and learn alongside students to further challenge traditional approaches to education.

It is also important to note that critical approaches to pedagogy do not remove the practical, skill-based learning that is essential to the PR classroom. As Somerville et al. (2011) clarified, a critical orientation does not mean that technical skills are not central to PR education. Rather, critical perspectives draw attention to the socio-cultural and political issues that frame the practice of PR with the goal of preparing students to use their skills effectively and ethically (Somerville et al., 2011).

We also acknowledge the U.S. and Western-centric nature of this essay. Though we have made a conscious effort to include global perspectives, a significant body of scholarly research and examples often originate from Europe, Australia, the United States, and other Western nations privileging these perspectives. As scholars and educators working in the U.S. context, we can speak most confidently from the perspective

we are embedded in. We encourage scholars and educators working across the globe to critique our perspective and adapt CCP to continue to push PR pedagogy toward social justice-oriented ends.

Conclusion

As activism has gained more scholarly attention in the discipline, PR's educational commitment to activism is still in flux and the time is ripe to expect activism and social justice to be included across PR curricula. We argue that CCP provides a framework and praxis that challenges normative models of PR education and provides key concepts central to integrating activism in the PR classroom. PR educators have an opportunity to privilege activism in their classrooms and contribute to a more equitable society by using CCP as a complementary lens. Ultimately, this essay is more than a call to teach activism topics, but a call to critically evaluate how we teach to continue to push PR education to realize its social justice potential.

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Called, Committed and Inspiring Activism: How Black PR Guest Speakers Experienced the PR Classroom Durng the COVID-19 and Racial Reckoning Academic Year of 2020/2021

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ABSTRACT

Through nine in-depth interviews with Black PR experts, this project explores how public relations professors can support and engage guest speakers from underrepresented communities during traumatic times; specifically the public health and racial violence pandemics during the 2020/2021 academic year. We suggest that by understanding the motivations and experiences of Black guest speakers, public relations professors can (better) implement an activist pedagogy practice.

Keywords: in-depth interviews, black pr experts, diversity, guest speakers, activist pedagogy

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The spring and summer seasons of 2020 were an unexpected time of reckoning for many public relations professors. In March 2020, the coronavirus pandemic forced many educators and students to their home to work, lecture, study, and collaborate; and faculty were regrouping after teaching, researching, advising, and mentoring digitally for the last half of the spring semester. Although the summer brought a degree of uncertainty, there was a familiarity with the accelerated, often already online, summer courses and research agendas.

Unfortunately, along with the familiarity of a faculty summer work schedule was another tragically familiar story for too many in the U.S.: the police shootings and murders of Black Americans. In May 2020, leaked video footage documented the February 23 killing of Ahmaud Arbery, a 25-year-old Black man who was gunned down by two White men while jogging in Brunswick, Ga. (Rojas et al., 2020). On May 11, 2020, Errin Haines (2020) reported on Breonna Taylor, a Black woman who was shot and killed in Louisville, Ky. on March 13 after police executed a search warrant.

The murders of Arbery and Taylor drew considerable traditional and social media attention (Brown & Ray, 2020; Specter, 2020); but the country took to the streets for weeks after George Floyd was murdered on Memorial Day (May 25, 2020) in Minneapolis. Floyd was killed after now former police officer Derek Chauvin knelt on Floyd's neck for over nine minutes.

The public reckoning of these three murders, in addition to the public health crisis, brought a question and call-to-action to the forefront: "What role can, and should communication education scholarship play in this racial justice movement?" (Waymer, 2021, p. 114). Professors, especially faculty of color, have grappled with this question prior to and since May 2020. Overall, many seemed to take Waymer's question as a call to increase diversity, and professors joined institutions in conversation

about how they can incorporate diversity into their own public relations classrooms.

The need to bring more diversity to the PR classroom is spurred by the lack of diversity among PR professors, who overwhelmingly identify as white, so much so that the profession was described as "a lily-white field of women" (Vardeman-Winter & Place, 2017). Many of these summer 2020 discussions concluded that a path to decentering whiteness was through rethinking references and media; and professors were encouraged to be diligent in facilitating relationships among students, guest speakers, and mentors of color. Unfortunately, this often resulted in emotional, unpaid labor for guests, mentors, and panelists.

This project explores how to engage more diverse guest speakers; and suggests that intentionally approaching this relationship can be a form of activist pedagogy. Using in-depth interviews, we spoke with nine Black public relations experts who spoke, taught, mentored, and supported public relations students during the 2020/2021 academic year. We focused on how they are processing the collective and individual trauma of 2020 and 2021, how they experienced the PR classroom, and how they felt PR professors can better support them and their students. These findings, which include templates and suggestions for outreach with guest speakers, will aid professors in creating a more activist-friendly space in the public relations classroom.

Literature Review

Although the inclusion of guest speakers in the classroom helps professors deliver professional world experiences to students (Craig et al., 2020; Davis, 1993), few studies in mass communication explore this topic. This literature review will outline activism and the public relations classroom, our theoretical lens of activist pedagogy, and the research on guest speakers.

Activism in the Public Relations Classroom

A shift in public relations scholarship began in the early 2000s when researchers began to study the relationship between public relations and activism. Holtzhausen and Voto (2002) posit that a postmodern approach helps scholars understand practitioners as organizational activists and change agents. Activists often take-on public relations duties in their work as well (Smith & Ferguson, 2001) and must consider how to budget, communicate, and reach publics (Kovacs, 2001; Taylor et al., 2001).

The scholarship on the role activism plays in public relations and vice versa has influenced and reinforced a need to teach activism and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in the classroom. Scholars have explored activism in the classroom through the teaching of activism scholarship (e.g., Pascual-Ferrá, 2019), campaigns (e.g., Luttrell & Wallace, 2021), and writing assignments (e.g., Flowers, 2020). These activities acknowledge a need to prepare students to talk about social issues, which includes diversity, equity, and inclusion. One way to implement these issues in the classroom is to develop an activist pedagogy.

Activist Pedagogy

The dual crises have continued to expose a violent tendency in the U.S. around the dehumanization of marginalized people. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (2005) writes how dehumanization marks "those whose humanity has been stolen" (p. 44). Around the world, people witnessed activists taking to the streets in the summer of 2020 to fight for their humanity, which was being threatened by police brutality and white supremacy.

Alongside protests on the streets, educators can also approach the revolution in the classroom. For Freire, a humanistic approach to teaching and pedagogy was a solution to the dehumanizing violence. Freire (2005) notes that the way to "surmount the situation of oppression, people must first critically recognize its causes, so that through transforming action

they can create a new situation, one which makes possible the pursuit of a fuller humanity" (p. 47). This idea, in many ways, serves as the foundation for activist pedagogy.

Activist pedagogy is the practice in which a professor "exposes, acknowledges and unpacks social injustices… and [commits] to personal and social change both inside and outside the classroom and academy" (Preston & Aslett, 2014, p. 514). This approach transforms the "classroom into a site for 'doing' as well as 'thinking about doing'" (Preston & Aslett, 2014, p. 515). As we outlined in our introduction, scholars called on professors to imagine their classroom as a space to decenter privilege and promote the ideas and experiences related to BIPOC scholars and professionals. As the many workshops, webinars, and readings suggest, this is an active relearning and unlearning for many scholars and professors.

In their study to understand whether scholars and professors are decentering whiteness and promoting a more critical and nuanced understanding of (de)colonization, race, and diversity, Chakravartty and Jackson (2020) studied 25 syllabi and 16 curricula belonging to the top first-year communication and media studies doctoral programs in the United States. Of the 1,070 authors cited on first-year course syllabi, the 16 most assigned scholars were senior or emeritus scholars or had died. Of the top 16 most cited, only one was a woman and one scholar of color (Chakravartty & Jackson, 2020). In addition to these demographics (old, White male), most of these scholars were writing and theorizing on democracy without any attention paid to race or imperialism. This led Chakravartty and Jackson (2020) to conclude that there was a "communication theory whiteout" (p. 6).

What is taught and prioritized in doctoral programs is important to note because these graduate students go on to become journalism, advertising, and public relations professors (Sadler, 2020). As Sadler

(2020) notes, "decolonizing the curriculum is a vital step in giving students access to more scholars of color" and when professors do that, they encourage students to "critically assess the process of media strategy from the position of those it impacts [which] will better prepare [them] for the industry" (p. 60). Given mass communication and public relations' role as culture creators, professors must seek "transformative pedagogical adaptations of course text, deliverables, and discussion" (Sadler, 2020, p. 63).

Embodying an activist pedagogy is embracing the classroom as a constant "work in progress" (Preston & Aslett, 2014, p. 515). Just as assignments and readings must be intentionally crafted, a guest speaker list has an equally important impact on students.

Guest speakers in Mass Communication

As we introduced, the literature on the use of guest speakers in mass communication is limited, although the practice is well implemented (Merle & Craig, 2017). Since Merle and Craig's 2017 article, which originally stated that there are no empirical studies exploring the use of guest speakers in mass communication courses, a few studies have examined the relationship between the students and guest speakers.

Ji et al. (2021) concluded in their review of literature that guest speakers improve teaching outcomes and often lead to mutually beneficial relationships among students and professors (see also Zou et al., 2019). Professors recognize that building guest speakers into a classroom schedule can help bridge academics and industry, motivate students, provide information about positions, industries, and the field; and those guest speakers can go on to serve as mentors (Craig et al., 2020).

Research suggests that strong, successful guest speakers need to wear many hats, and should be smart, committed, and credible (Eveleth & Baker-Eveleth, 2009; Farruggio, 2011). Effective guest speakers often develop their own teaching philosophy, which includes understanding

their audience (students), presentation preparation, and strategies for engagement and motivation (Lee & Joung, 2017). In addition to demographics and pedagogy styles, Ji et al. (2021) discovered that overwhelmingly, students prefer alumni as guest speakers because these guests provide "imagined future professional selves" (Ji et al., 2021, p. 63). The authors noted that international guest speakers were increasingly valued by students due to globalization (Ji et al., 2021).

While the previous study did not explore student perception of guest speakers outside of age and gender, Craig et al. (2020) concluded there was a significant need for faculty to be strategic when selecting guest speakers based on diverse lived experiences. Just as alumni help students "imagine their future selves" through a shared university experience, students are also looking for guest speakers to embody other diverse identities (e.g., racial, gender, first generation) (Craig et al., 2020).

The need for diverse guest speakers. When organizations embrace diversity, it signals to its stakeholders a set of values (Edwards, 2011; Muturi & Zhu, 2019). The 2017 Commission on Public Relations Education (CPRE) report notes that educators are a crucial voice in making diversity central (CPRE, 2018). Professors and lessons must reflect diversity in content and teaching due to the fact there is still a diversity challenge within the field. Public relations professors have a unique responsibility to diversity, given it's a central standard for the two primary accrediting bodies: ACEJMC and PRSA's Certificate in Education for Public Relations (CEPR). The report notes, "to deepen students' understanding and appreciation of diversity, educators can invite speakers from backgrounds that differ in terms of ethnicity, religion, and other demographic and psychographic dimensions" (CPRE, 2018, p. 53).

One of the key recommendations regarding diversity is for professors to find ways to support underrepresented groups. This project takes a unique look at this call by interviewing Black public relations

experts about how professors can create an encouraging and nurturing environment for invited guests. This way of support complements and reinforces other CPRE recommendations such as student retention, teaching diversity and multicultural perspectives, and building and developing thought leaders.

As we outlined in this literature review, the scholarship on guest speakers explores how to best use guest speakers (see Haley & Blakeman, 2008; Spiller et al., 2011) and student perception (see Craig et al., 2020; Ji et al., 2021; Merle & Craig, 2017), but few studies explore the relationship from the guest speaker perspective. Additionally, many of the above cited studies collected quantitative data, which although helpful, lacks a deep, in-depth understanding of experience.

This project has two goals. The first goal explores the guest speaker experience in the public relations classroom during the 2020/2021 academic year and how they feel public relations professors can best support them. Our second goal centers around how these findings can be explicated to help public relations professors create and foster an activist pedagogy practice.

RQ1: How did Black public relations experts experience the 2020/2021 academic year as invited guests in the classroom?

RQ2: How do they feel PR professors can better support them in the classroom?

These research questions will help guide our discussion, which explores how understanding the experiences and motivations of Black PR experts can be viewed as a contribution to an activist pedagogy.

Methods

To understand more about the experiences of our interviewees and how professors can better support Black PR experts and guest speakers, we conducted nine in-depth interviews over Zoom. At first, we wanted to speak with any guest speakers who identified with a marginalized group

(e.g., gender, race, and/or sexual minority), but after realizing the weight of the dual crises (COVID and racial violence) in 2020/2021, we opted to interview Black PR experts to learn more about their specific experiences. The interview allowed us to understand more about the individual experiences in the PR classroom as they are lived and perceived by our participants (Englander, 2012).

Sample and recruitment tactics

After we received IRB approval to conduct in-depth interviews, we used a purposive and convenience sample to recruit our nine interview participants. Given our Broom Center for Professional Development for Public Relations grant, we sent an interview pitch to the Broom Center Speaker Bureau list and recruited from our networks. Participants were asked to fill out a form which focused on demographics (age range, pronouns, region) and guest speaker logistics (e.g., how many invitations, presentations, topics). Twenty emails were sent out and we received 16 interest forms. Taking into consideration gender, age, invites/presentations, and region; we extended the invitation to 10 participants. Of our original 10, we were able to schedule and conduct seven interviews, which we then increased to nine after another round of purposive recruitment via personal networks to increase our gender and age diversity. To maintain confidentiality, all participants were given a pseudonym. In addition to their pseudonym, each participant was situated within a region and age range, but we did use their provided pronouns (Appendix A).

Procedure and Analysis

We conducted semi-structured interviews, with most lasting approximately 60-minutes. Given that we were talking to working professionals, often during lunch hours or right after the workday, sticking to the hour was very important for both researchers. Every interview was conducted over Zoom with both authors joining for the call.

After we recruited and scheduled the interviews, each participant

was emailed the consent form and the list of interview questions. We opted to share the interview questions to build trust and provide the interviewee with the opportunity to reflect on their year before the interview.

The first researcher facilitated the outreach, scheduling, and rapport building portion of the interview. She told the interviewee the goals of the interview and went over key takeaways from the consent form. After the short introduction, she turned off her audio and proceeded to take notes and ask the occasional follow-up question, while the second researcher conducted the interview.

Early in the project conceptualization, we both had an open conversation with our own identities and privileges. The two authors work as public relations professors at two large universities in urban areas, and one identifies as a White woman and the other identifies as a Black man. It was important for us to have the Black researcher conduct the interview with the White researcher observing and taking notes. In addition to building trust, the openness, transparency, and intentionality facilitated a more collaborative space to share stories, experiences, and exchange sentiments of solidarity, empathy, and concern (Holstein & Gobrium, 2003). We recognized that the interview would not have been the same if the White researcher was the one asking the questions.

We recorded each interview and used the Otter.ai app to transcribe the interview in real time. We met after every interview to compare notes and start to develop the list of themes. From there, transcripts were read closely, and we developed more abstract codes and built connections across the conversations (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011).

Findings

Through our interviews we discovered many opportunities for public relations professors to support Black PR experts invited into the classroom. We found that understanding why a guest speaker takes speaking engagements is crucial to understanding the logistics around

support. Guest speakers identified a few key areas for professors, including clear instructions and connections to the course's outcomes and goals, in-depth background on the students' interests and personalities, the opportunity to bring one's authentic self, and approaches to compensation. In addition to these findings, we provided tangible materials for PR professors when working with guest speakers (see Appendix B-D).

"It's been a year"

Three weeks before the interviews began on May 18, 2021; Derek Chauvin was convicted of the murder of George Floyd (Levenson & Cooper, 2021). The anxiety around the possible not guilty verdict—and the following mixed feelings around realizing that Chauvin would be held accountable—was short lived when news broke that Columbus, Ohio, police shot and killed 16-year-old Ma'Khia Bryant that same day (Ludlow et al., 2021). Many guest speakers were still reeling from the aftermath of that, in addition to other personal and collective traumas around the dual crises. To make space for that, the first question posed was, "How are you?" Most guest speakers quipped, "Well… it's been a year."

Danielle launched into the unrelenting events that encapsulated her 2020 and 2021. In addition to COVID and racial violence, Danielle was overwhelmed with the natural disasters and personal challenges so much so that she joked, "I'm waiting for locusts, frogs, and other plagues from the Old Testament to come. We've been through so much; it's just been overwhelming."

Marvin didn't hold back, "Simply put… it mostly sucked." Marvin hit a lot of personal and professional roadblocks in 2020/2021 and it took a toll on his mental health. As part of his reflection of 2020/2021, he did acknowledge that what was keeping him afloat was some of his work with students and universities. Marvin told us, "That would kind of be the highlight of my day even if I was really struggling or had to think about putting on a brave smile and face that day."

For others, 2020/2021 existed in more of a gray area. Ena told us, "I think I'm doing OK." Professionally, she acknowledged that it's "a weird space to be in." She continued:

> As a comms professional, where you're advising leadership to make statements or to take certain action, and then, you know, represent yourself as yourself. There's some tension there and it can be difficult to reconcile. Especially in our job where we're trying to influence and move the needle… you hit a wall with that.

Two of our more senior position interviewees, Wayne and Connie, took a more positive look at the events of the last year. Both held doctorates and worked professionally in leadership positions at their organizations. When asking them, "How are you?" Wayne and Connie talked about what they had done rather than the emotional assessment of the year. Wayne, who received his doctorate while working full time during the pandemic, spoke of that great accomplishment. He told us, "I'm balanced. It's been good. You know, I'm the optimist so my glass is always half full." Wayne did acknowledge that it's not perfect, but overall "it's probably been one of the most rewarding years in my career."

In addition to understanding the experiences facing Black PR experts in 2020 and 2021, we were curious to learn more about their motivations and how they felt PR professors could make the classroom experience more transformative. A few major themes arose regarding how to better support: (1) understanding why Black PR experts go into the classroom, (2) the preparation around "the ask," (3) an acknowledgment of compensation, and (4) the ability to bring one's authentic self.

The Why: Representation Matters

Overall, the Black public relations experts interviewed went into the public relations classroom because they felt they were called, committed, and inspired to do so. This commitment was not to the professor, but rather they felt it was a calling to "be represented and be

counted." April told us when she goes into the classroom, "It's not lost on me that representation does matter. That just my presence, just being there and... having the type of career experience that I've had… the profound impact that has on students of color." April continued:

> When you don't have proper representation, especially in the public relations field, how are our students going to be able to know what jobs are available? So, I think just being in the room… I think says a lot without saying anything.

Jas echoed April's thoughts about the power of being in the classroom and having that influence, "I don't take it lightly the ability to impact someone's life in their trajectory… it's an honor and privilege to be able to help shape opinions and thoughts." Marvin agreed, "It's about making a difference and that's really the whole reason why I got into this profession."

> Wayne specifically talked about his experience as a Black man: Quite simply my motivation was this: I have worked in the field of communications and marketing for the better part of 30 years, and I've always wondered, 'Where are the people who look like me and in particular, where are the Black men?'

Wayne realized that this was due to access and representation, and that Black men weren't taught about strategic communication. Because of this, "I feel a bit of a calling, if you will, to share with anybody who will listen and is interested, but in particular students of color, what this field is all about." Wayne continued, "I think it's important for folks to know that there are men of color—Black men—who work in the field." April mentioned a similar thing and noted that digital and virtual experiences can help, "There's an exposure gap with students of color and through online engagement you can do panels—you can get them [diverse guest speakers] all in the room."

The Ask

One of the most important things that public relations professors can do before their guest speaker arrives in the classroom is give them direction on how to best support the curriculum and information about the students. Overwhelmingly guest speakers shuddered at the "do/talk about whatever you want" approach. In addition to guidance around the professor's agenda, guest speakers want to know more about the students' interests, goals, and the personality of the classroom.

Understanding the course. For Jas it was "imperative that guest speakers support the curriculum." When invited in, she wants to know "how can I support what you guys are working on? Are there any gaps you think I could fill?" Jas sees her role not rooted in personal thoughts, beliefs, or opinions, but rather "I'm here to make sure you are learning [and] that we are meeting the curriculum."

When organizing and scheduling, Wayne wants to know how the professor conceptualizes success. Wayne went as far as purchasing the textbook so he could situate his discussion. Wayne told us, "That's what's always inspiring me anytime I can get in front of young students and say, 'your textbook says this and let me help you bring it to life.'"

Marvin, who took over 10 speaking engagements during the 2020-2021 academic year, said:

> There's a lot of ways I can talk about my career… [what is] most important for me, if I want to keep doing this, is to add an understanding of what the class already knows. If you really want me to talk about how I can be helpful and supportive to the bigger picture, what you want your class to get out of talking to me.

An understanding of what was being covered and how she could best supplement that material was crucial to April, who saw her role as one that can bridge the academy and the industry, especially when it comes to trends and professional development (e.g., salary negotiation and asking

for flex schedules). April told us, "There's a lot of disruption happening. It may not be in the syllabus or the curriculum, but it's probably helpful to ask these guest speakers their thoughts on these things." For Connie, knowing what and whom the students have been exposed to is helpful, especially as a Black woman who feels she surprises the students when her video joins the virtual classroom.

Understanding students. April talked about how professors tend to be too broad when it comes to explaining who their students are. Even if a request is coming early in the semester, April encourages professors to learn about the students, "If you know what your students' interests are, that's a really great time to inform a speaker so they can really read the room and speak to the things that are actually relevant and of interest to the students." In all of April's classroom experiences, missing this step is a lost opportunity and does not make things easier; "Making it generic is making it harder."

Wayne first makes sure that he understands what the professor is looking for when he's invited into the classroom and then his next step is for the professor "to tell me about your students, you know, the makeup of your class, what are they interested in, what are they not interested in. What are they particularly focused on with this class… help me understand the audience."

If the class size and schedule allow for it, Ena prefers to hear from the students themselves: "If the group is small enough to hear who the students are, where they're from, particularly what their interest is, why are you a PR major, where are you from… I always like that." Knowing where the students are coming from helps Ena pick and choose what types of examples and stories to tell. For example, if she learns a student is into sports, she knows to tell her sports story.

Compensation

Overwhelming, guest speakers come into the classroom to give

back to students and to be the person who inspired them (if they had exposure) or to fill a gap (if they weren't exposed to a Black PR expert yet). A lot of the senior experts balked at the idea of being financially compensated for their time in the classroom. Danielle told us about the time she was asked to speak on a panel about compensation. Danielle laughed, "I was like, I can't be on this! I don't ask for money for most of my speaking engagements, I'm a horrible person to have on this panel—I need to be in the audience listening!"

Many of our Gen. Z and young Millennial professionals did bring up some degree of transaction for speaking engagements, with a few participants addressing financial compensation explicitly. Sam was very clear in that compensation (or lack thereof) should be addressed within the initial pitch; "My first question right out the gate is: "what is your budget?" This is all dependent on the work and the labor that you're expecting me to do." Sam likened the practice of not paying speakers to not paying interns.

Alex agreed that "it's a very important question and something I've had to think a little more explicitly about." Alex serves in a leadership role with PRSA which requires that they take engagements within a volunteer capacity. Alex noted, "I think my biggest thing about compensation is being mindful of the time." This means taking inventory of what is the overall ask. Is this person being invited to a small class or is this an event with all the students from the major joining?

Sam had ideas around how to compensate in what they termed "relationship compensation." Relationship compensation is the professor's ability to show up for guest speakers outside of the classroom. This could be recommending the guest speaker for paid speaking engagements or trading lectures, goods, or services. For example, Sam was invited to an unpaid panel with an event photographer. Sam negotiated five new headshots for their portfolio in lieu of financial compensation for

moderating.

Marvin agreed that if a professor can pay a guest speaker that it's the ideal way to compensate them for labor. He did recommend quite a few tangible things professors could do if they couldn't financially compensate for his time, such as writing a testimony or recommendation for his LinkedIn or website, and requiring students to complete feedback forms, which help him develop benchmarks and goals.

Bringing their authentic selves

Marvin recognized quickly into his guest speaking career that the key to a successful speaking engagement is his ability to bring his authentic self. He notes that Gen Z are hyper focused on opportunities that allow them to be their full selves. He said, "Gen Z. really appreciates that people are not sanitized and not being what you think that they should be… telling things like it is and being present with what you have." Sam, who multiple times referenced themselves as an "unapologetically Black, queer nonbinary Southerner," spoke at length about how they couldn't in good faith take on opportunities that didn't embrace who they are.

The topic of authenticity was a theme in our conversation with Alex, too. Bringing their authentic self into the classroom was a way for Alex to disrupt a conditioned urge to not be authentic. Alex told us:

> There are definitely challenges [in bringing one's authentic self to the classroom] and I think that comes for any number of reasons. A lot of times it's just the extent to which you've been conditioned to not be authentic, from elementary school, middle school, high school and at the start of college.

Alex acknowledges that because of this conditioning, for many marginalized identities, bringing one's authentic self into the workplace often results in people leaving or losing their jobs. That said, coming to the classroom wholly and complexly is part of their brand.

To build trust and acknowledge the nuances around bringing one's

authentic self, Alex's approach to creating this empowering space is to be upfront:

> I tend to preface and practice those sorts of things as I am carving this space out for myself. Your professor or instructor invited me here, but you know, I'm not just reading the bullet points they gave me… I am bringing my experience to that.

For Danielle, keeping her authentic self-intact during 2020/2021 was difficult. Her roles and responsibilities had her handling a lot of administrative tasks and she was "putting out fires 85% of the day." At this point of her career, Danielle could be picky about speaking engagements; and as a leader in her organization, she often recommends others for those opportunities.

Wayne wants to know the parameters of the class and he is not afraid to decline invitations if he feels certain important topics, such as race, are off the table:

> I'm at this age… stage… where there are some things that I'm not going to compromise on, and I'm doing the students a disservice if I did. If we can't, for the most part, have free and open dialogue and conversation…, I'm doing them a disservice.

Discussion

By critically examining Black PR professionals' experiences as guest lecturers and asking them how professors might best support them in these educational endeavors, we provide insight for PR educators interested in implementing an activist pedagogy. As indicated above, the emergent themes of authentic self and representation are critical to informing our understanding and practice of an activist pedagogy. This discussion explores how our findings contribute to activist pedagogy scholarship.

In an academy that is largely white, it's important for public relations professionals to continue to not fall into the trap of reacting

to seasonal and situational DEI efforts. Professors must promote and advocate for a diversity of experiences in the classroom. This is crucial to the health of the profession. To see the industry embrace diversity, it first must be intentionally centered in the public relations classroom (Bardhan & Gower, 2020; Brown et al., 2019). Students and faculty alike recognize the importance of guest speaker diversity, and there are considerable efforts to bring public relations faculty and educators together to talk about how to better support faculty and students of color (Bardhan & Gower, 2020; Race in the PR classroom, n.d.).

Our research questions about classroom experience and relationships with professors suggest that the 2020/2021 academic year was complicated for our participants. Many referenced the weight of the public health crisis, in addition to the racial violence, and how those dual crises affected their mental health. That said, the participants also spoke about the importance of meeting with young professionals and sharing their talents. Interviewees spoke about how representation matters and acknowledged the importance of students being able to see intersectional identities in the profession. The nine public relations professionals told us if professors wanted to better facilitate this classroom experience, they should be explicit in their ask (e.g., clearly outline course objectives, student body characteristics), create a safe space for them to be vulnerable and authentic, and consider compensation.

This discussion section explores how public relations professors can use this information to implement an activist pedagogy.

Decentering Privilege

From our conversations with Black PR experts, we concluded that one way to build an activist pedagogy is for the professor to decenter their own professorial and personal privileges. This includes demographics such as race, gender, and sexual orientation, but also includes institutional biases around pathways to expertise and approaches to education.

Freire (2005) critiques how many people come to understand "real" knowledge. This objectification of knowledge privileges institutions and the powerful (i.e., professors). Freire centered critical thinking, emotions, reflection, and experience as important ways of knowing, not just degrees. For public relations professors looking to adopt a more activist pedagogy, providing space for guests to speak authentically about their lived experiences can facilitate this type of humanistic learning.

As we've outlined, participants spoke at length about the value in their ability to bring their true, authentic self into the classroom and students should do the same. To allow a guest to bring their unique experiences to the students is for the professor to come to terms with their own limitations and the privilege associated with imparting knowledge and skills. To cede expertise and provide a space for speakers to talk candidly about their experiences (if they wish), public relations professors can decenter themselves and encourage these dialogues. Additionally, providing guest speakers with the detailed information about the students' lived experiences, acknowledges that this relationship is often about building knowledge and meaning making together.

Authentic selves in the classroom. Freire (2005) calls on educators to blend practice with theory; and intersectionality can serve as a guiding theoretical lens for how and why it is crucial to provide a safe space for marginalized guest speakers to bring their authentic selves and experiences into the classroom. Just as Crenshaw (1991) and Collins (1990) proposed a both/and approach to identities, public relations professors must embrace that guest speakers from underrepresented communities cannot divorce their lived experiences and identities from their profession.

For example, activist pedagogy seeks to transform the classroom by exposing, acknowledging, and dismantling inequalities. The professionals we interviewed addressed how important it was to be clear

with the students about what it meant to be both Black and a PR expert at this time in history. As many participants pointed out, going into the classroom under this spatial and temporal context (Vardeman-Winter et al., 2013), these identities shift given what is going on in the world (e.g., pandemics) and when it's happening (e.g., during an election year, while the students are virtual learning).

Professors as allies. As professors decenter themselves, they can more easily move into the role of ally. When this practice happens, students are exposed to new ideas, which can ignite their drive and activism (i.e., helps them see themselves in these roles) and facilitate a growth mindset. Diversity of experiences and approaches can help students inform their ideologies and help build their stories. In this way, DEI can serve as an ethical compass for professors seeking to center authentic lived experiences. This results in the intersection of theory and practice, which is crucial to activist pedagogy.

Tangible Tactics

Freire (2005) writes about how the oppressed struggled between freedom and authenticity; and that without freedom, the oppressed cannot live authentic lives. Freire notes that the tension around authenticity lies in the fact that an authentic human life is one that is created and nurtured through oppression systems and ideologies. As Freire states, "the oppressed have adapted to the structure of the domination in which they are immersed" (p. 47). When professors decenter their privilege and recognize the humanity of themselves, their students, and the guest speakers, it creates a space for oppressive systems, implicit and explicit, to be challenged and disrupted.

As our findings outlined, there are considerable efforts made by Black PR professionals to provide diverse stories, frameworks, and opportunities for public relations students. For many Black PR experts, there is no divide between the politics of the classroom and what's

happening in society. Black PR experts are still facing racism and racial violence as they come into the classroom to talk about, for example, media relations. For public relations professors looking to authentically engage with an activist pedagogy, they must consider the emotional, physical, and mental labor taken on by Black PR guest speakers.

Paying for labor. One way to do this in a very concrete and actionable way is to pay guests for their labor. We make a call on leaders and administrators to support activist pedagogy through systemic change at the department, college, school, and university level, and encourage leaders to take statements of solidarity and put those words into actions. Developing funds and resources for professors to offer financial compensation for guest speakers is a start, in addition to making sure that all courses and educators are prioritizing DEI initiatives, not just the social issue classes. This work often already falls on the shoulders of faculty identifying from underrepresented communities (Madden & Del Rosso, 2021), so there should be incentives and/or consequences to support a department-wide commitment to DEI and activist pedagogical approaches.

In addition to the actionable suggestions provided by our participants that provide direct support to invited guests (Appendix B), professors should see their classroom as a transformative site for justice, which will facilitate the opportunity for more authentic engagement (Preston & Aslett, 2014). In other words, it's not enough to bring in a few underrepresented guest speakers. Professors must radically change what is taught and prioritized, including the required texts, assignments, and the facilitation of discussions and lectures to support guest speakers (Sadler, 2020).

Future studies. In March 2021, after we conceptualized the scope of this study, Asian and Asian American communities experienced a horrific hate crime in Atlanta, which took the lives of six women and two men working at three spas and massage parlors. According to Stop

AAPI Hate, a national database and resource website collecting data on Asian American and Pacific Islanders (AAPI) hate crimes, Asian Americans found the increased hate and racism to be more stressful than the COVID-19 pandemic (Saw et al., 2021). Future studies could look at how Asian and Asian American public relations experts are navigating that dual crises, in addition to adding more intersectional identities into the conversation such as disabled practitioners, LGBTQIA+, international, first generation, and/or undocumented.

Conclusion

If faculty are nervous to ask professionals, especially professionals from underrepresented groups, to come into the classroom, April puts that concern to rest, "I think professionals don't feel like we're asked enough. People don't ask us enough, they're scared that they were too busy or, you know like, it's a burden." For April, this was a great opportunity to reflect on her own journey and pay it forward.

Overall, the 2020/2021 academic year "was a year" for Black PR experts who were invited into the classroom. Many of our participants were working through the joys and challenges cropping up in their professional, academic, and personal lives as they were joining classrooms, and networking and mentoring students. Adopting an activist pedagogy approach can equip professors to transform their classrooms to be an open, welcoming, and productive space for guest speakers. Providing detailed background on the class agenda and students, being upfront about compensation, and allowing guest speakers to bring their true authentic selves into the classroom, helps to humanize and will ultimately better the profession overall.

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Appendix A:

Table 1.

Interview Participants

Participant	Pronouns	Age	Location	Years experience	Presentations during 2020-2021 (invited in parentheses)
Danielle	She/her	36-45	Gulf Coast	16-20	4-6 (11-15)
Alex	They/ them	18-25	Northeast	3-5	1-3 (4-6)
Connie	She/her	Over 56	Southeast	More than 21	4-6 (4-6)
Wayne	He/him	Over 56	Southeast	More than 21	4-6 (4-6)
Ena	She/her	26-35	Mid-Atlantic	11-15	7-10 (7-10)
Marvin	He/him	26-35	Mid-Atlantic	6-10	11-15 (11-15)
Jas	She/her	26-35	Northeast	11-15	4-6 (7-10)
April	She/her	36-45	Southeast	16-20	1-3 (4-6)
Sam	They/ them	26-35	South	11-15	4-6 (4-6)

Appendix B: Actionable Suggestions

Helpful tools or questions when working with a guest speaker:

1. Contextualize the class (Appendix C)
    a. This includes surveying your students before the guest speaker arrives, inquire about:
        i. Interests
        ii. Career goals
2. Compensation (Appendix D)
    a. Be upfront about your budget (or lack thereof)
    b. How can you compensate your guest speaker in lieu of financial compensation?
        i. Recommendations on LinkedIn
        ii. Offer to write a testimony for their website
        iii. Return the favor and offer to speak with their organization on a topic
        iv. Recommend them for paid speaking engagements
        v. Feedback form
3. Establish guest speaker etiquette
        a. Camera policy
        b. Asking questions
        c. Connecting on social media or via email

Appendix C: Contextualizing the class (template and example)

Template:

1. What is the course?
2. Class content
3. How the guest speaker can support the class curriculum
4. Student profiles
5. Classroom atmosphere
6. Students' (dis)interests
7. Follow-up thoughts or expectations
8. How can you support the efforts of the class overall? (e.g., assignments, internship opportunities, tour the workplace, exam)
9. Contact information and headshot

Example:

1. What is the course?
    a. This is an Introduction to Public Relations course (PR 100)
2. Class content
    a. What we've covered so far:
        i. You are joining us week 7 of the semester during the "social media content" week.
        ii. So far, the students have studied:
            1. History of public relations and key figures
            2. Public relations theory
            3. PR ethics
            4. Media Relations
            5. Diversity
    b. What we will cover next
        i. After the midterm (week 8), we start to focus more on industry specific public relations (e.g., sports, entertainment, government)

c. Why & what I'd like you to cover

i. Given your role as social media manager for ABC Industries, I'd love for you to address the following with the students:

1. Social media engagement
2. Brand voice
3. PR wins and fails during your career

ii. Key concepts I'd like you to cover:

1. The students will be assessed on the following concepts and vocabulary…

3. Student profiles

a. There are 40 students in the class. Most of the students are sophomores and most (70% are PR majors). The rest of the students are in PR-adjacent fields such as organizational management, nonprofit administration, and advertising. We have mostly women in the class (about 75%), but there are two students in the class who go by they/them pronouns. About half of the students are white and most of them are first generation.

4. Classroom atmosphere

a. Overall, the class is friendly and chatty. There are a few students who love to dominate the conversation and a few class clowns. A few students sit in the back very quietly. There is no phone or computer policy, but if they are very explicitly not paying attention, I often will cold call on them. Overall, they are a respectful bunch and enjoy the class.

5. Students' (dis)interests

a. Sports, fashion, and nonprofit public relations are likely the top three industries. The students do mini-presentations and many of them on those types of brands and organizations. They love TikTok and celebrity gossip.

b. There hasn't been a lot of energy around global/international

PR or corporate B2B brands. I think that's more due to a lack of exposure (we will cover after midterm)

6. Follow-up thoughts/expectations
    a. There are a few PRSSA students in the class, including our VP of programming. I think they would like to speak with you about internship opportunities and interviewing you for the newsletter if you're OK.
7. How can you support the efforts of the class overall? (e.g., assignments, internship opportunities, tour the workplace, exam)
    a. Overall, I will add parts of your lecture to the midterm. Additionally, the students have a case study group project due at the end of the semester. We have a few students who are seniors in the class, so if you have any job hunt advice, feel free to include that.
8. Contact information and headshot:
    a. Please let me know which of the following I can share with the students and please include a headshot so I can create a promo for you:
        i. Name and pronouns
        ii. Email:
        iii. Phone:
        iv. LinkedIn:
        v. Other social media accounts

Appendix D: Compensation email

Things to consider:

1. If you have a speaker budget:
    a. How much?
    b. What's the time and energy commitment
    c. What are the expectations
2. If there is no budget, what can you offer in lieu of financial compensation?
    a. What's the time and energy commitment
    b. What are the expectations

Example 1: with a budget
Paragraph 1-2: includes the introduction and pitch
Paragraph 3: Budget

Due to a generous grant/department, I have a small budget of $X for each guest speaker this semester that I can offer you for coming to speak with the class. As I outlined above, this is a small seminar class of ten graduate students. Although the class runs from 5:30-7 p.m., I need the first 30-minutes with them, so I only ask for an hour of your time.

Example 2: without a budget
Paragraph 1-2: includes the introduction and pitch
Paragraph 3: Budget

Unfortunately, I do not have the financial resources to compensate you for this speaking engagement. I value your time and labor, so I understand if this prevents you from joining us. If you are open to non-financial means of compensation, I can offer a few things. The first is that I see you have a

website, which includes client testimonials. I would be happy to write you a testimony and even record the video or audio for you. Additionally, I can endorse you on LinkedIn.

I know that you are also an adjunct lecturer at the local community college, so I would like to offer myself as a guest lecturer in your class, too! I am more than happy to talk about the following topics: X, Y, Z.

Again, I appreciate and value your work and time, so please do not feel pressure to take unpaid opportunities.

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Creativity is Key: Using Creative Pedagogy to Incorporate Activism in the Public Relations Classroom and Beyond

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ABSTRACT

This article seeks to remedy a drawback that widely exists in current activist public relations education: the lack of creativity in both content building and delivery. The traditional teaching of activist public relations has focused on confrontational or radical activism that manifests itself in political campaigns, street protests, civil disobedience, or riots, by invoking social movement theories and case studies that may cause despondency. Little educational effort has captured or incorporated the nonthreatening, subtle activism aimed at incremental social changes to public relations curricula. To invigorate the activist public relations classroom, we argue for essential dual creativity: (1) by incorporating creative activism as a content framework (i.e., building content around creative activism and selecting inspirational case studies); and (2) by applying creative pedagogy for activist public relations (i.e., delivering content through participatory play, immersive storytelling, and field studies; and diversifying assessments such as creating case-study portfolios and creative project-making in team). Overall, our research contributes to activist public relations education through offering both theoretically informed and practical insight to developing creativity as a key to student engagement.

Keywords: public relations, activism, creativity, creative activism, creative pedagogy, student engagement

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Introduction: From a historical tension to theoretical conflation

Scholars (e.g., Coombs & Holladay, 2012; Dozier & Lauzen, 2000; Karlberg, 1996) have long criticised a historical tension or division between public relations and activism, with public relations mainly being a corporate function, or an instrument of commerce, to manage activists and pressure groups in favour of organisational interests. Traditionally, activists refer to those who have high levels of conviction and emotional engagement with a single issue and thus challenge the status quo and push for an uncompromised vision (Chua, 2018; Swann, 2014). Derville (2005) exemplifies this activist approach with Greenpeace's refusal to mediate with DuPont (a chemical company). Public relations practitioners need to handle the activist stakeholder who can impede organisational goals either directly through protest, boycott, or indirectly through government regulation (Karlberg, 1996). Accordingly, activism is excluded from mainstream public relations or portrayed as antagonist to public relations (Coombs & Holladay, 2012). Likewise, while activism has historically involved public relations-like activities and strategies (e.g., publicity, media influence), it tends to differentiate itself from public relations by claiming activism creates social changes while public relations maintains hegemony and domination (Choudry, 2015; Holtzhausen, 2012).

To relieve this historical tension, a growing number of theorists have called for an activist turn to public relations (Moloney & McKie, 2015), or theoretical conflation of public relations and activism (e.g., Mules, 2021; Weaver, 2018), mainly inspired by the postmodern thinking (Holtzhausen, 2000; Holtzhausen & Voto 2002; Kennedy & Sommerfeldt, 2015). In contrast to modern Western discourses that are infused with *language games* prescribing rational-critical debate and consensus-seeking (Lyotard, 1984), *postmodernism* prioritises dissensus and plurality of meaning-making arising from activism and resistant social movements (Kennedy & Sommerfeldt, 2015). For example, *differential consciousness*

typifies postmodern resistance by describing activists working with or within dominant ideologies to challenge them and promote diversity (Sandoval, 2000). To this end, activists have increasingly used public relations interventions or hired public relations veterans to promote social causes (Mules, 2019). In this sense, activism can be seen as "public relations in social movements" (Coombs & Holladay, 2012, p. 348), or "the postmodern agency of public relations" (Holtzhausen, 2012, p. 211).

It is in such an activism context that scholars reposition public relations as making changes both within organisations and in society. For example, Holtzhausen (2012) and Pompper (2018; 2021) describe public relations' potential as an insider-activist change agent and ethics guardian to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) within organisations and fight for those less powerful. Pompper (2015) articulates public relations' stewardship role in navigating organisations toward greater corporate social responsibility/sustainability (CSR/S). On a societal level, Karlberg (1996) endorses the social value of public relations in community relations. Inspired by this advocacy, Dozier and Lauzen (2000) recommend expanding public relations from being a professional activity that serves organisations or employers to an intellectual domain that includes alternative perspectives from activism. Additionally, empirical studies have found that activists gradually see powerful organisations more as enablers or support mechanisms than barriers to social causes and thus practice a type of activism called prosocial public relations (Brooks et al., 2018).

While activism is increasingly conflated theoretically with public relations, also known as activist public relations, it is insufficiently involved in public relations education. Activists' voices, practices, and lived experience are under-represented in public relations to the extent of being glaringly omitted or downplayed from U.S. public relations education (Coombs & Holladay, 2012). Similarly, activism is

globally either excluded from public relations curricula or taught from a managerial perspective (Fitch & L'Etang, 2020; Mules, 2019; 2021). Nor do professional bodies acknowledge the significance of activist public relations education. For example, the *Capabilities Framework*[1] established by the Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communications Management in 2018 did not recommend any curriculum development or professional training to realise public relations' social value through developing activism that challenges power inequities and the status quo (Mules, 2021).

Nevertheless, multiple benefits apply to teaching activism in public relations education. Focusing on public relations' social value and legitimising activists, especially subaltern and marginalised groups as a driving force, educators can re-imagine public relations as a progressive field of knowledge and practice (Vardeman et al., 2019). Students can develop a richer understanding of public relations and how activists have contributed to the field. Educators will be able to carve out new curricular territory (i.e., activist public relations) to allay their professional tension: On the one hand, they are obligated to teach students managerial-functionalist public relations (i.e., instrumental knowledge) governed by an economic value to maintain vested interests (Dozier & Lauzen, 2000; Karlberg, 1996); but on the other hand, educators aspire to teach public relations as an ethical and social conscience occupation to promote social justice, economic equality, political freedom, environment sustainability, human rights, or simply a better world for people (Pompper, 2015; 2018;

1 The Global Capabilities Framework for Public Relations and Communication Management underlies how public relations and communication management professionals, educators and employers should perform at their best and reach full potential. It encourages educators to use this framework to base curriculum for educating the future generations of the profession (Institute for Public Relations, 2018).

Sison & Panol; 2019).

Despite both the necessity and benefit of teaching activist public relations, it is unknown how relevant curricula and pedagogical practices have developed across universities. It is also unclear whether existing course offerings and teaching approaches are creative enough to engage students in learning activism within the public relations classroom and beyond. Against this backdrop, this pedagogical article aims to address inadequate or outdated teaching practices in this important area. The remainder of this article thus overviews extant approaches to teaching activism within public relations and identifies a common shortcoming: the lack of creativity in both learning content design and delivery. We then elaborate on the essential *dual creativity* (i.e., using creative activism as a content framework and creative pedagogy as a teaching philosophy or theoretical framework) approach to reinvigorate the traditional public relations classroom, followed by inviting educators to new encounters to make learning happen. Lastly, we conclude that creativity of learning content design and delivery is the key to enriching and revitalising activist public relations education.

Reflecting the approaches to teaching activism in public relations curricula

Based on reviewing the literature we notice that the approaches to teaching activism in public relations curricula follow three stages: (1) Lacking or insignificantly including activism in public relations curricula; (2) Focusing on confrontational or radical activism that involves communicating provocatively to demand more ground than the target organisations are willing to give (Derville, 2005); and (3) Starting to embrace activism in subtle and creative forms.

Lacking or insignificantly including activism in public relations curricula

While critical scholars (e.g., Demetrious, 2016; L'Etang & Pieczka,

2006) propose that public relations curricula be radicalised through including activism, mainstream public relations education continues to focus on corporate and institutional contexts and ignore (possibly less glamorous) activism that challenges societal structure and promotes social justice (Fitch & L'Etang, 2020; Mules, 2019; 2021). Not only do faculties struggle to integrate activism in practical public relations courses, but also few textbooks are available for teaching it (Pascual-Ferrá, 2019). The main reason for this absence is that universities consistently seek to link public relations to employability and equip students with professional skills through work integrated learning (e.g., internship) or hiring industry mentors as adjuncts (Macnamara et al., 2018; Mules, 2021). Consequently, adjuncts rarely seek to innovate curriculum because they are accustomed to teaching vocationally orientated programs to gain positive student feedback that advances their own careers (Pompper, 2011).

Because (as discussed earlier) public relations has been theoretically conflated with activism, there have emerged ongoing efforts to incorporate activism in public relations education. For example, The Museum of Public Relations, a non-profit, educational institution, offers free lectures, documents, books, and artifacts from its digital archives to inform the public of how public relations and its social application have evolved (Bivins, 2015). Especially the Museum's three annual events, Black PR History, Latino PR History, and PR Women Who Changed History demonstrate the power of public relations in inspiring activism and social movements. However, such efforts to integrate activism in public relations curricula in universities globally have not yet reached a critical mass (Fitch & L'Etang, 2020; Mules, 2021).

Focusing on confrontational or radical activism

Notably, public relations history education seems to focus on the confrontational, radical, or sometimes deemed subversive activism for a revolutionary purpose (Derville, 2005). As Wakefield et al. (2011) point

out, *confrontational activism* featuring hostility or complex conflicts to gain power and legitimacy over dominant institutions, is emphasised in public relations in general and social movements particularly. As such, traditional teaching of activist public relations tends to draw on radical activists' militant tactics such as protests, sit-ins, boycotts, sabotage, public shaming, and creating direct pressure without tolerance of compromise (Derville, 2005; Swann, 2014).

Moreover, traditional teaching of activist public relations has relied on orthodox theories such as social movement studies, critical theories of power, hegemony and resistance, and the ethics literature for professional practice (Adi, 2018). Taylor and Das (2010) especially link activist public relations with social movement: "Social movements begin with a group of committed individuals and in order for them to get their definition of the issue and the resolution of the issue onto the public agenda, they need to communicate their issues to broader publics" (p. 14). In other words, activists need to apply public relations to movement building. Parallel to this theoretical orientation is the widely used case study approach to those serious and often heavy-hearted examples, ranging from the London riots of 2011 (Capozzi & Spector, 2016), the public relations battle between Colorado GASP and Philip Morris (Stokes & Rubin, 2010), the American Social Hygiene Association (ASHA) campaign on curtailing venereal disease rates (Anderson, 2017), and the ongoing Black Lives Matter and #MeToo movements on social media (Vardeman et al., 2019).

Regardless of what theories and examples are taught in activist public relations courses, the primary delivery method seems to follow a "banking model," preferably to deposit information into students and view them as receiving it unchallenged (Batac, 2017, p. 140). There is lack of pedagogical discussion on activist public relations to prioritise critical and creative inquiries that are both prerequisites of social and political action. As a result, students may feel disengaged in the traditional activist public

relations classroom as they think learning such content is irrelevant unless they choose to become an activist in future (Eschle & Maiguashca, 2006). Doyle (2020) also cautioned that long-term exposure to heavy-hearted case studies might generate a negative impact on student perception of efficacy—whether they believe activism will (positively) change the world or not—thus discouraging their civic participation. In turn, such pessimism may reinforce student desire to acquire only in-demand public relations skills, such as publicity, media relations, and marketing promotion to meet professional requirements (Batac, 2017).

Starting to embrace activism in subtle and creative forms

Compared to the dominant focus on confrontational or radical activism, Mules' (2019) recent analysis of public relations textbooks has captured an emerging trend to embrace the public relations activism that exemplifies how creative communication successfully facilitate positive social change through, for example, the performing arts, visual communication, and documentaries. However, Mules did not further explore how the inherent and much-needed creativity in activism should be articulated and emphasised to students so that they can develop fuller and more nuanced understandings of public relations as meaningful, imaginative, and impactful activism. Indeed, the preceding review of traditional teaching of activist public relations has revealed such a shortcoming: the lack of creativity in both learning content design (what types of activism would appeal to students) and delivery (how to motivate students to become active learners). Such creativity within activist public relations education is what our article addresses.

Bringing the essential dual creativity to activist public relations education

Public relations educators need to rethink how they transform the teaching of activist public relations, perhaps by advancing it from including activism within mainstream public relations education (Mules,

2021), to bringing creativity to activist public relations education. After all, it is an easy option to fill the gap by uncritically including activism in public relations curricula where some activist tactics, such as cultism, violent resistance, and civil disobedience unsuitably lack integrity and ethics that must be emphasised in public relations education (L'Etang, 2016). We add that, along with critical inquiry, creative thinking is essential to revitalise traditional teaching of activist public relations, and this is not an easy fix.

The essential "dual creativity"

Specifically, we propose to achieve this *dual creativity* by using creative activism as a framework to build content for activist public relations courses that are, fittingly, taught following creative pedagogy. Creative activism and creative pedagogy are two related but different terms. *Creative activism* can be understood as "a kind of meta-activism that facilitates the engagement of active citizens in temporary, strategically manufactured, transformative interventions in order to change society for the better" through creative communication such as performing arts, forum theatre, urban guerrilla gardening, and spatial design (Harrebye, 2016, p. 25). In this article, we recommend building the teaching blocks around creative activism (as elaborated later), a body of scholarship that recognises the subtle, imaginative, but equally effective activism practice.

Creative pedagogy, also known as creative teaching methodology or philosophy, emphasises developing student creativity through three interdependent elements: (1) creative teaching—using innovative and participatory approaches; (2) teaching for creativity—identifying opportunities for student creativity development; and (3) creative learning—motivating students to learn actively through playfulness, collaboration, possibility thinking, and supportive or resourceful contexts (Aleinikov; 2013; Lin, 2011; Oral, 2008). As a theoretical framework, creative pedagogy can be applied to teaching practices in any discipline

ranging from STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) to arts, humanities, and social sciences, including creative activism. This theoretical framework is of great value to expand the horizon of activist public relations education and make the teaching practice more dynamic and appealing to students.

Integrating creative activism into public relations

To develop creative learning content, public relations educators should learn from both past and contemporary activism practices. For example, in the pre-social media era, activists creatively used different genres of literature (e.g., tales, poetry), the fine and performing arts, happenings, wall doodling, and temporary spatial interventions to convey political messages and pursue social change. The advent of new and social media makes creative activism even easier to raise public awareness, provoke debate, and inspire action, as exemplified by the various virtual museums, digital galleries, hashtag campaigns, and online petitions around the COVID-19 pandemic.

Since contemporary creative activism becomes a category of new media communication, activist public relations courses should be: (1) underpinned by a triad of creative activism, new/social media, and public relations; (2) more process- than result-oriented to enable students to imagine and debate rather than solving problems; and (3) project-based to maximise teamwork and collective action. While promoting creativity, it is not meant to turn a public relations class to an artistic one, nor to prevent students from acquiring public relations knowledge or developing professional skills. Rather, universities and/or educators may consider offering the study of creative activism within an established public relations degree, or a program that is part of a nonprofit or social transformation certificate.

Integrating creative activism in the art (not just management science) of public relations offers a new alternative to ignite student

interest, curiosity, and enthusiasm about learning public relations for social change. Through showcasing creative examples in a relaxed and friendly atmosphere while maintaining academic rigour, educators can ease students in learning and inspire them to envisage other ways of living and being that are not constrained by the dominant power. Through exposing students to a "longer lens" (L'Etang, 2015, p. 31) of creative activism, we facilitate their multi-dimensional thinking of social justice issues so they appreciate the collaborative effect of creative expressions and public relations. More importantly, we can transform the public relations classroom from a safe space characterised by normative theories and instrumental rationality to advance organisational interests, to a fun and challenging environment where students are guided to reflect on everyday activism critically and creatively.

Applying creative pedagogy to teach creative activism

To teach creative activism effectively, it is necessary to adopt creative pedagogy as a guiding framework that focuses on cultivating students' awareness of current events; encouraging them to be life-long creative, to value individual interest and agency, and to actively develop ideas into action (Hay et al., 2020, Hou, 2021). Taking such a focus, public relations educators should see students as both co-creators of learning and active citizens, with their ideas welcomed, their concerns about issues acknowledged, and the creativity behind problem-solving appreciated. Students in the activist public relations classroom are no longer deemed to be silent observers of teaching like spectators in a grand theatre. They are motivated to interrogate the public relations strategies of creative activism, analyse the creativity of activist public relations in their own language, and imagine alternatives to how things can be done to be otherwise (Desai, 2017). Public relations educators who are interested in what is possible for creative activism to counter hegemony should particularly strive for student-centred, eye-opening, minds-on and hands-on learning, and active

participation. One way to achieve this is not to impose predetermined moral positions but, in Ellsworth's (2005) words, to use "a pedagogy of the unknowable"— encouraging exploration but not dictating "the final correct answer" (p. 76).

Among the many forms of creative pedagogy, we highlight two that are suitable to public relations education. One is the *pedagogy of playfulness* that fosters participation, enjoyment, and deep learning through affective practice (Facer, 2019; Hay et al., 2020), such as games, role-plays, and mini-theatre performance. Through playful and affective practice students may see activism as less daunting and distant from their everyday lives and thus be willing to learn more about it, take risks, explore new ideas, or even direct themselves to learn. Creative pedagogy is crucial to relieve students from feeling overwhelmed or apolitical when activist public relations is taught in a theory-heavy and meantime heavy-hearted manner. The pedagogy of playfulness also corresponds to Duncombe's (2016) using affect to create effect within education. Three principles apply to designing enjoyable learning activities (Kolb & Kolb, 2010): (1) balancing between "playful and serious, imaginary and real, and arbitrary and rule bound" (p.28); (2) emphasising play as a learning process that "facilitates the expression of positive and negative emotions through engagement in fantasy and play" (p. 29); and (3) making a specific time and space for the play to help the behaviours associated with it thrive.

Another useful form of creative pedagogy is Freire's (2004) *pedagogy of hope*, or what Simon (1992) calls, a *pedagogy of possibility*. In a public relations context, a *pedagogy of hope* means educators "unveil opportunities (possibilities) for hope, regardless of the obstacles" to social changes (Freire, 2004, p. 9). Its purpose is to empower students to develop the sense that they can make a difference in helping resolve social justice issues in either big or small, incremental or revolutionary ways. The pedagogy of hope also reflects the mentality of creative activists who

create arts and communication not hoping to eradicate racism, sexism, and homophobia directly. Rather, they tend to relentlessly struggle to fight all forms of inequalities in society, while "keeping their unwavering hope and desire to dream of a more equitable and just future" (Desai, 2017, p. 143). The pedagogy of hope or possibility entails three practices: (1) listening to students as co-creators of learning; (2) unknowing—no wrong answers—as central to teaching; and (3) fostering dreaming as part of student imagination of hopeful images—"images of that which is not yet" (Simon, 1992, p. 9).

Invitation to a few encounters: *Making learning happen*

Considering the preceding theoretical review and creative pedagogical framework, we propose some specific dimensions on how to apply the dual creativity approach mentioned earlier to the teaching of activist public relations. In this section, we invite public relations educators to consider a few ideas that may help them improve the appeal of an activism course to students and motivate them to learn activist public relations in the classroom and beyond. We have also built and reflected on our own experience of teaching relevant activism courses (e.g., Creative Citizenship, Political Advocacy) to make the following recommendations.

Learning content design

Content building for a creative activist public relations course can be challenging firstly because it involves cross-disciplinary knowledge, but also because integrating different elements requires thoughtful planning. Depending on the varying expectations and needs of educators, students and institutions, the *broad learning objectives* can be set from three aspects: (1) conceptual understanding, whereby students learn about what is involved in activist public relations and creative approaches to it, and how to be digitally literate on new media; (2) capacity building, so students acquire strategic public relations skills for activism and expertise in identifying and appreciating the creative forms, styles, and expressions

involved in activist public relations; and (3) critical and creative evaluation, to enable students to think critically and creatively so they might evaluate global activism practices or initiatives.

Following Duncombe's (2002) four analytical dimensions of activism, we suggest four building blocks or learning rubrics, to develop and frame the learning content:

(A) The *topics or issues* of creative activism. Educators can choose a wide array of eco-political, socio-cultural, and environmental issues targeted by activism, ranging from poverty, speech freedom, gender equity, indigenous culture, climate change, and eco-fashion, to attract and resonate with students from diverse backgrounds.

(B) The creative *forms* activism takes. This responds to Morrow's (2007) call for a shift from activism as protestation and confrontation toward activism as redefining issues creatively. Students will benefit from such a wider angle of creative activism as meta-activism in discursive, subtle, and artistic forms in everyday encounters. This notional shift offers opportunities to immerse students in an unexpected world of activism filled with delights and inspiration from creative arts and communication, such as poetry, music, painting, drama, dance, documentary, TV/film, theatre performance, and social media memes. This is where interdisciplinary resources and inputs are needed. One possible way to build such a "creative wonderland" is to collaborate with colleagues from other schools or faculties with institutional support. For example, we used teaching resources from our Faculty of Creative industries, Education, and Social Justice for course design and delivery.

(C) The *ways* creative activism is received or interpreted. This points educators to theories of audience segmentation, agency, reception, and participation especially in social media that offer new conditions for developing creative activism (Harrebye, 2015). Most contemporary

activism is not built around a stable political organisation, with reference to party membership or a well-defined repertoire of protests (Harrebye, 2016). Instead, many who participate in activism often gather in creative events or even Facebook group pages. Students need to understand that creative activism is temporal and flexible, in contrast to the stability and stubbornness required in mass social movement.

(D) The *process* and *strategies* of creative activism communication. This is where core public relations theories and principles help students understand why activism and public relations are conflated, and how public relations strategies, tools, and interventions are useful for creative activism to boost impact, engagement, and empowerment, all essential to mobilising social action. The relevant public relations theories can be chosen from persuasion, influence, advocacy, campaigns, ethics, narrative building, media relations, relationship management, community engagement, transmedia storytelling, and social media communication. Students need to develop confidence and pride that when strategic planning and communicating activism is infused with creativity and art, and facilitated by wide-ranging traditional and new media, the social impact and contribution of public relations will reach a new height.

Activism theories for consideration

Regarding activism-related theories, we recommend that classical theories of political act, citizenship, and social movement, such as collective behaviour theory (e.g., Lofland, 1985; Melucci, 1996), rational choice theory (e.g., Herrnstein, 1990; Scott, 2000), resource mobilisation theory (McCarthy & Zald, 1987), and political opportunity theory (Meyer & Minkoff, 2004) remain useful for building a fundamental understanding of what activism is and how it works. However, they are insufficient to explain creative activism that operates in non-traditional forms,

and which often lacks basic components of social movement, namely, collective challenge, a common purpose, social solidarity, and sustained interaction (Harrebye, 2015). Therefore, we recommend that public relations educators draw on everyday creative activism such as irony or parody (i.e., to laugh at power and imagine alternatives), utopianism (i.e., an ideological critique of dominant systems), and culture jamming (i.e., resisting and re-creating commercial culture) (see James C. Scott's, 1990, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*). Non-traditional ways of civic participation online (e.g., using irony, parody, or satire) have unfolded a "postmodern-social-media-world" that departs from rational-critical discourses but appeals to participants' and audiences' emotions even on non-public matters (Kennedy & Sommerfeldt, 2015, p. 39).

Given the wide spectrum of creative activism, it is hard to develop a coherent theoretical framework to cover the variety of practices. However, remember that the central goal of adding creativity to activist public relations curricula is to create an eye-opening, minds-on, experiential, joyful, lively, and relevant learning experience for students, and help them to become resilient, entrepreneurial, and innovative changemakers in society. Creative courses like this serve to guide students into a new territory. At the end of this article, we append a list of diverse teaching resources, including textbooks, The Conversation essays, TED talks, and YouTube links for educators seeking to integrate creative activism in public relations classes (see Appendix 1).

Case studies

To mitigate the potential negative impact of heavy-hearted case studies on students' perceived efficacy of activism, that is, whether they believe activism makes a difference (Doyle, 2020), we suggest public relations educators incorporate cheerful examples of creative activism. This is to enact the pedagogy of hope (Freire, 2004), to facilitate students' positive thinking, imagination of alternatives, and creative

problem-solving. As the previous U.S. President, Barack Obama (2011), commented on the booming youth creative activism after the Arab Spring: "Above all, we saw a new generation emerge—a generation that uses their own creativity, talent, and technology to call for a government that represented their hopes and not their fears" [emphasis later added]. What follows are some case studies of creative activism around the world:

- **Australian** youth activists initiated a #ClimateStrikeOnline campaign, by creating music in their own YouTube channels, sharing artistic posters on Twitter, and creating choreography on TikTok, to increase the appeal of climate change messaging among young people around the world and sustain the movement in a light-hearted way. This case study is likely to resonate with many student audiences.

- The **American** iconic poster of the "Ballerina and the bull" is another example of creative activism. The thought-provoking artwork created by Micah White through his anti-consumerist magazine Adbusters played a significant role in leading the Occupy Wall Street movement against economic inequality.

- The **Danish** Roskilde Festival Creative exemplifies resisting the existing hegemony of market-managerialist organisations through its More Than Music initiative. Each year, this festival amasses creative professionals, activists, and social entrepreneurs to function as an open and co-creative laboratory to challenge those politically restrictive parameters and enable the testing of new ideas (Harrebye, 2015).

- **Macau's** "The New Centre for Arts, Culture and Research of Milan" represents creative activism emerging as an organisation and cultural institution to engage in broad political, social, and

cultural issues in all aspects using creative and discursive practices.

- In addition, two resource centres provide ample case studies of digital creative activism: one is The Commons Social Change Library, an online collection of educational resources on creative activism and social movements; the other is the Actipedia of The Centre for Artistic Activism, a research agency specialised in creative activism.

Creative participatory activities

In addition to the above case study approach, we recommend a few (co-)creative and participatory activities adaptable to different class settings such as tutorials, workshops, or field studies outside classrooms (e.g., visiting museums, art galleries and creative spaces). The activities suggested below embody the theoretical essence of creative pedagogy that empowers students to co-create and co-own learning, unleash creative potentials, and become confident, engaged, and progressive thinkers (Hay et al., 2020). Specifically, these activities have applied the creative pedagogy of playfulness, hope, and possibilities to build an enjoyable, delightful, and meaningful learning environment for serious topics like activism and social justice. From the feedback we received from prior students, the activities that follow have generated increased motivation, purposeful engagement, experiential learning, and social empowerment over time.

- ***If You Are a Superhero***: This is an individual activity. Educators ask each student to imagine him/herself as a superhero who can save the world from a deep trouble. The superhero identifies a big problem within society that threatens citizens or public interest, but s/he has superpower to transmit (communicate) his/her thoughts to other people's minds and influence them to join allies for collective

action. Educators then ask students to note their imagination on paper, for example, drawing him/herself a heroic image in a unique outfit, explaining the issue (why it matters), and mapping out their approaches, strategies, tactics (where PR theories apply) and channels (e.g., social/digital platforms) to magically disseminate the key message(s) in creative formats (e.g., texts, posters, poems, songs, symbols, memes).

- ***Imagining Roads to Utopia***: This is designed as a group activity. Educators advise students that to change the world we live in we need to be able to imagine an ideal world we desire. Then divide students in groups of four or five. In each group, members brainstorm and rank the issues that concern them. Targeting each issue, the team collectively imagines innovative ways to raise public awareness, influence their attitudes, and mobilise the desired behaviour change. In this process, educators guide students to sketch their visions, review the professional communication and creative skills of each member within the team, help them to agree about an actionable plan and turn at least part of their utopian dreams into reality.
- ***Everyday Life Performance (mini-theatre play)***: While this group activity combines the creative teaching methods of dramatising and role-play, its development needs collaboration and support from colleagues with diverse disciplinary backgrounds in creative practices. Educators ask students to set a scene of everyday life, for example, at the bus top or on a dinner table with family, and then students play different roles, speaking in others' voices about a common issue/topic (e.g., vegetarianism, animal rights). The performance is process-oriented to show how students use different resources and communication techniques to persuade, influence, and engage others in a negotiated, collective action.

This activity requires a few weeks for students to plan together and co-write the performance scripts for different characters and roles. It is both a challenging and rewarding experience for students to explore different ideas for an activism cause.

- Speculative Fiction/Storytelling: This activity idea was inspired by Doyle's (2020) study into creative education about climate change. Speculative fiction is used as a narrative framing device to help young people develop their stories about promoting a social cause (e.g., climate change) based on their current perceptions of the issue (i.e., what needs to be changed) and imaginative future-thinking (i.e., what the future would look like after activism). For example, *FutureCoast Youth* is a UK-based creative climate project inviting 14- to 15-year-old high school students to use participatory play and imaginative storytelling to create their own ideas of current and future climate issues. Using such speculative fiction, students develop and visualise scenarios of climatically altered futures and thus prepare for future climate changes (see details of the *FutureCoast Youth* project, in Doyle, 2020).
- Field/Ethnographic Studies: This activity should be planned as a pedagogical event for a few days or weeks to take students outside the classroom to real-world creative spaces, such as cultural centres or local communities, so that students can learn creative activism everywhere (Hay et al., 2020). As part of experiential learning, those events provide students with real-life opportunities to be involved in activism and community action projects and gain experiences that last long after the semester ends. To be sustainable, this activity is best if institutionally sponsored.

Public relations educators can refer to the two models House of Imagination and Cambridge Curiosity and Imagination for resource

implications (Hay et al., 2020).

Diversify evaluation/assessments

In line with creative pedagogy, we recommend diversifying assessment types, structures, and evaluation criteria to nourish student curiosity and creativity when they are educated about public relations as activism. Apart from informative assessments such as weekly reflective journals, critical essays, small games, or quizzes, we also suggest two summative assessments:

- *Creating a case study portfolio* of activist public relations (individual assessment). This assignment can be divided to two parts: (1) Ask students to choose a case study of issue-based creative activism and collect as many proofs and artifacts (e.g., posters, images, videos) as possible to build a portfolio; and (2) Ask students to write an evidence-based report to critically evaluate both pragmatic and aesthetic impacts of the case study, and reflectively suggest future improvement.
- *Collective project-making* of creative activism, with guidance from external advisors (e.g., artists, activists, cultural curators, public relations practitioners) (groupwork). This involves collaboration between universities, arts/culture centres, and public relations agencies. Each project should be led by a small group (5 or 6 students) working with an assigned advisor in a specific location. Students collectively develop an activism campaign proposal based on public relations knowledge involving issue management, SWOT analyses, audience segmentation, key messaging, relationship building, promotional mix, creative tactics (e.g., animation, comics, storytelling), social/digital platforms, implementation techniques, timeline, budget, and evaluation. In addition to the written project, students will also have opportunities to showcase their works in cultural venues (e.g., in an art gallery

as a partner organisation) facing external audiences. If funding is available, universities or culture centres can create a website to host student works and boost their visibility and social impact.

Concluding remarks: *Creativity is key*

As one of the first attempts to explore the intersection of public relations, activism and creative pedagogy, our article contributes to addressing a shortcoming that exists commonly in activist public relations education: the lack of creativity in both learning content design and delivery. We note that, although public relations is increasingly conflated with activism, the research into teaching activist public relations is at an early stage of identifying the gap or calling for action. For example, Coombs and Holladay (2012) articulate the absence of activism from public relations history education as a glaring omission. Fitch and L'Etang (2020) find little growth in universities adding activism to public relations education in that it remains largely concerned with graduate outcomes, industry trends and future demands. Mules (2019; 2021) thus argues that activism studies should have a space in public relations curricula. Given the traditional teaching of activism as confrontation and protestation based on orthodox theories and case studies that can be emotionally draining, educators need to explore creative ways and practical steps to make the learning of activist public relations more appealing and engaging.

We contend that the dual creativity applied to both learning content design (what to teach) and delivery (how to teach and facilitate learning) is essential to motivate students to learn and value activism within public relations classrooms and beyond. On the one hand, we recommend that public relations educators adopt creative activism as a content framework, which is crucial to help students extensively understand activism as an important discursive marker of varying creativity. Applying creative activism to public relations course content may not necessarily equip students with artistic skills but will expose them to the means of locating

a rich, diverse, and dynamic world of activism to eventually apply to achieving positive social change. At university, once a semester ends and all the applied learning within one's degree is covered, we should still leave room for students to continue imagining, exploring, and dreaming of their desired world of social justice (Alexander et al., 2021).

On the other hand, we encourage public relations educators to experiment with creative pedagogy to not only effectively deliver the creative content but more importantly, to make available a collaborative and enjoyable learning environment. Within such a setting, student curiosity, risk-taking, positive thinking, and problem-solving can encourage them to approach and appreciate activism for social change. Specifically, the creative pedagogy applicable to activist public relations education includes a pedagogy of playfulness, exploring play and fun as a way of deep learning, and using student emotions to improve learning (Duncombe, 2016). Another useful idea is the pedagogy of hope and possibilities that unveils different opportunities, regardless of the obstacles to social change (Freire, 2004). Such creative pedagogy that develops students as co-creators, co-enquirers, and co-owners of learning is useful to overcome such potential negative impact as students' reduced sense of efficacy after long exposure to heavy-hearted and violent case studies from radical activism (Doyle, 2020).

Informed by the creative pedagogical framework mentioned earlier and what we have learned from our own teaching experience, this article invited public relations educators to conduct a few experiments to make learning happen. We suggested applying creativity to teaching and learning when building the course content by selecting inspirational case studies, designing enjoyable activities, and assessing students in ways conducive with creative learning content. We hope that the examples provided in this article will become useful resources adaptable to different contexts, or at least spark thoughts and imagination from educators around the world.

Also, we must admit that those creative pedagogical approaches require substantial time and resource investment to build trust and creativity, and overcome challenges in interdisciplinary collaboration, especially when building partnerships between universities, culture centres, activist groups/organisations, and local communities.

Nevertheless, we should trust that adding creativity to the teaching of activism within public relations classrooms and beyond will facilitate more "knowledge construction that is necessary for disciplinary progress" (Macnamara, 2015, p. 344). This will offer the wider community greater access to the emancipation possible through activist public relations. Through educating young generations of the relevance and significance of activism, we empower them to imagine and explore new alternatives, to question society's discrimination and inequality, and thus reshape their own identities and futures. We seek to cultivate students to be the future leaders and changemakers, rather than merely public relations technicians or managers. As public relations educators, we may continue to be bound by different rules and institutional constraints, but we can still exercise our own agency to reconcile multiple conflicting values to find feasible and creative ways of teaching activism. Taking this point of departure, we call for future empirical research to test and evaluate the efficacy of the theoretically informed, creative pedagogical practices mentioned in this article. Creativity is key.

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Appendix 1. An initial list of teaching resources and recommended readings

Textbooks:

Rubin, R.L. (2018). *Creative activism: Conversations on music, film, literature, and other radical Arts*. New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic. https://www.bloomsbury.com/us/creative-activism-9781501337215/

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Frey, L. & Palmer, D. (2014). *Teaching communication activism: Communication education for social justice*. New York: Hampton Press Inc. http://www.hamptonpress.com/Merchant2/merchant.mvc?Screen=PROD&Product_Code=978-1-61289-134-7

The Conversation essays:

Suwito, K.A. (2020). Art and online activism amid the pandemic: Lessons from around the world. Retrieved from https://theconversation.com/art-and-online-activism-amid-the-pandemic-lessons-from-around-the-world-140161

Case study books:

Adi, A. (2018). *Protest public relations: Communicating dissent and activism*. Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge. https://www.

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Swann, P. (2020). *Cases in public relations management: The rise of social media and activism* (3rd ed). New York; Oxfordshire, England: Routledge. https://www.routledge.com/Cases-in-Public-Relations-Management-The-Rise-of-Social-Media-and-Activism/Swann/p/book/9781138088870

TED talks and YouTube links:

TED talk: How to Start a Social Movement | Tamara Richardson | TEDxUQ

Changemaker Chat with Jeremy Heimans

TED talk: What new power looks like

Changemakers #21: The People v Twitter trolls

Building 21st Century Movements

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Public Interest Communications in the Classroom: Bringing Activism to Public Relations Education

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ABSTRACT

Public interest communications, an emerging field that implements strategic communications in an effort to drive sustainable social change that advances the human condition, provides an opportunity to create a foundation to incorporate activism in the public relations classroom. This paper highlights why a PIC curriculum is ideal for Generation Z students given their desire to make an impact and utilize technology in meaningful ways. In addition, this paper outlines a possible PIC curriculum that aligns with current public relations standards while discussing the field's interdisciplinary benefits. Public Interest Communications offers a skillset for future activists.

Keywords: curriculum development, critical pedagogy, public interest communications, activism, ethics

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On February 14, 2018, people were notified of yet another mass school shooting in Parkland, Florida. As always, there were "thoughts and prayers" Tweets that followed the event. Pundits along with ordinary citizens assumed that the media attention and calls for gun reform would die down after a week. However, the student survivors of the Parkland shooting, high school students who had just experienced a profound tragedy, mobilized and started the March for Our Lives Movement (Jones, 2018). These young activists were not alone. Their peers began environmental organizations and collectives such as the Sunrise Movement and young activists also became involved with Black Lives Matter in the summer of 2020. These same young activists are now sitting in university classrooms eager to engage with social causes. While public interest communication (PIC) is still an emerging field, it offers a flexibility that has the potential to engage a new generation of public relations students and to incorporate existing fields of study in an interdisciplinary manner.

Although the concepts and theories within PIC are still being explored, the most common definition is "the development and implementation of science-based strategic communications with the goal of significant and sustained positive behavior change or action on an issue that transcends the particular objectives of any single organization" (Christiano & Neimand, 2017a, p. 38; Fessmann, 2016). PIC also focuses on human rights and "communication that advances the human condition" (Hon, 2016, para 1).

As such, this emerging field presents a unique opportunity to integrate activism into public relations curriculum. Most public relations curricula are typically aligned with corporate structures and founders such as Edward Bernays; however, campaigns like the early labor movement also utilized many of the same skill sets taught in foundational public relations courses, yet receive little mention (Ciszek, 2015; Pomper, 1959).

Journalism and public relations are both areas that teach students essential skills they will need to be successful in the industry. However, PIC has the potential to teach students the skills necessary to be an activist. Currently, classes that are taught about activism tend to focus more on theory. Students learn about collective action (see Olson, 1965) and the importance of community-based social networks (see Tilly, 1978), but learn very little about how to apply these skills. Subsequently, public relations courses offer a variety of skills-based courses, with minimal emphasis on activist movements. Introducing PIC as a class in an existing PR program or as part of a larger, more focused curriculum provides today's students with a skillset that will teach them to be impactful activists.

The aim of this article is to introduce PIC as a new area of study similar to the initiatives established by feminist scholars in the 1970s as they attempted to introduce Women's Studies as a distinct academic and scholarly topic. Today, many universities have gender and women's studies programs. We are not introducing new theories or data; instead, we are trying to introduce a new area of study that, while related to current programs of study such as public relations, offers something different—something essential to the betterment of our educational institutions and our society. This article thus examines why the behaviors of this current generation provide a strong foundation for the introduction of PIC; PIC's unique characteristics and how these features can enhance current curricula by introducing an activist skill set; and how practitioners and scholars can implement past models of curriculum development to build PIC as an important area of study. In addition, we will also provide suggestions for how PIC can be incorporated into existing PR curricula based on CPRE guidelines and offer syllabi and program recommendations based on an analysis of currently available PIC syllabi and programs of study.

Important Role of Generation Z

Generation Z (Gen Z) is the group of students most likely to be found in today's college classroom. Gen Z follows the Millennial generation and is defined as those born between 1997 and 2012 by the Pew Center (see Dimock, 2019). Others define the generation as starting in 1995 and ending in 2010 (Seemiller & Grace, 2016). While we recognize that using terms like Gen Z has the potential to stereotype a diverse group of people, it is still common practice among researchers and to organize generations based on birth year and shared characteristics (Wang & Peng, 2015). Gen Z makes up roughly 20% of the entire current U.S. population (Frey, 2020) and is considered the most diverse generation yet. This group is said to be very accepting of diversity and inclusion (Canvas Blue, 2018; Robinson, 2018). Gen Z members aged 18 to 21 are more likely to attend college than their Millennial or Gen X counterparts (Parker & Igielinik, 2020). Members of Gen Z are also the population who will make up the cohort of traditional-aged college students for the next decade and a half (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2019). They have been profoundly affected by the wars, financial ups and downs, terrorism, school shootings, social causes, and social media that have been ever-present in their lives (Adamy, 2018). Often these concerns have manifested as forms of activism for members of this generation as discussed earlier in this piece.

The connectivity afforded by social media has made their world smaller. Gen Z has been heavily influenced by technology and globalization (Abdullah, et al., 2018) because both factors have been a part of their worlds since day one. They have always had technology and information at their fingertips (Schwieiger & Ladwig, 2018; Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2021). Some even say this generation uses their digital and tech savvy to recreate what activism is and drive change; as one Gen Z member said, "At the click of a button, we can start a movement" (Ziad Ahmed as cited in Cohen, 2020). Members of Gen Z use social media

such as Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok to find their communities, to share their thoughts, and to organize (MacColl, 2019). In other words, members of Gen Z use social media to be activists. While some may dismiss these efforts as clickivism, defined by Oxford Language as, "the practice of supporting a political or social cause via the internet by means such as social media or online petitions, typically characterized as involving little effort or commitment" (n.d., para. 1), social media are important ways for people to organize around the causes about which they care (MacColl, 2019).

Youth-led activism is not a new phenomenon. In the 1960s, high school and college-aged students often led the charge for civil rights. In the 1970s, youth advocated for women's rights and protested against the Vietnam War. Some even say the punk movement of the 1970s was a form of youth-led activism against the status quo (Pekacz, 1994). In more recent times, youth have been involved in the DREAM act, gay-straight alliances, the #BLM movement, addressing climate change, and the movement to end sexual assault.

A campus is often an important place for youth-led activism because students have greater proximity to each other due to dorm and apartment living; they also have down time between classes in which they discuss and engage with one another (Enriquez, 2014; Van Dyke, 1998; Zhao, 1998). College is also often a transformative and transitional time for many students which brings about changes in their routines, and peers and affords the opportunity to explore activism (Munson, 2010). In addition, students in college are typically unmarried, childless, and often do not have jobs making it easier to participate in activism because they have fewer obligations (McAdam, 1998; Earl et al., 2017). Although some may argue today's youth are not as involved as those of the past (See Delli Carpini, 2000), others say these notions are incorrect (See Henn et al., 2002; Strama, 1998) and the ways in which youth choose to be active

has changed. "Just as the student activists of the 1960s were concerned with the issues that had a direct (negative) effect on their lives, so are today's young activists. And just as their predecessors had used the media available to them to further their cause, so too do today's young activists" (Teruelle, 2011, p. 204). While Gen Z may not rely as much on traditional media for their activism, they are still activists. They just choose to use social media because it is familiar to them. In this process, this generation is redefining what activism can look like.

The causes about which Gen Z cares about are many. Gen Z is known to advocate for fairness and equal treatment for all; other issues of importance to this generation include healthcare, mental health, higher education, economic security, civic engagement, race equity, and the environment (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2021). Gay marriage, climate change, and gender identity are also issues this generation is more likely to support than other generations (Biedermen, et al., 2020). Another description of significance is that this generation is very we-centric rather than me-centric (Mohr & Mohr, 2017; Seemiller & Grace, 2016) meaning that Gen Z thinks about others and wants to better society for all.

Irregular Labs, a learning network and innovation lab that helps its clients connect with Gen Z, conducted a study of 2,013 members of Gen Z worldwide. From this study, it was learned that close to 75% of the respondents, not only believed being politically and socially engaged was important to their identities, but they also believed such engagement was the hallmark of a good citizen (Irregular Labs, 2019). These findings seem to suggest PIC might be an area of great interest to today's college students. Whether it is hyper-local activism such as the student-organized Bucks Students for Climate Action and Protection of the Environment whose members raised money, took part in forums, and initiated climate strikes (Biederman, et al., 2020) and the graduation speech given by Paxton Smith, a Dallas-area valedictorian, who spoke out against the new

Texas heartbeat ban law (Zdanowicz & Johnson, 2021), or activism on a national or international level such as March for Our Lives or the Sunshine Movement, Gen Z is talking more, seeing more, and doing more about issues such as climate change than the older generations (Tyson, et al., 2021). Members of Gen Z are not afraid to call out what they see as unfair, and they are not afraid to drive change. While most people know the work of Greta Thurnberg, it should be noted that Gen Z people of color, such as Mari Copeny who has fought for clean water in Flint, Michigan; Amelia Telford who works against global heating and fossil fuels in Australia; and Elizabeth Gulugulu who has put a focus on climate issues in Zimbabwe, have sustained such movements (Clauson-Wolf, 2021).

Gen Z wants to be more involved with and participate in political, social justice, and humanitarian causes beyond clicktivism, "they just need to know how" (MacColl, 2019, para. 4). It is with the ability to explain the hows of activism, social justice, and advocacy along with preparing students with a skill set for how to be activists and advocates that a PIC curriculum could strongly connect with members of Gen Z. Perhaps the time has come for educators to disrupt how communication fields are taught so students have options beyond a curriculum that is corporately focused.

Public Interest Communications' Role in the PR Classroom

For public relations programs seeking to introduce an activist toolkit, PIC has the potential to provide a framework for PR professors to still teach essential industry skills while providing a curriculum more suitable for Gen Z learners and future activists. While the overall aim is to build PIC as a unique field of study, PIC was initially introduced within PR and communication classrooms, and still serves an important function as either a unit in an ethics course or as a special topic for PR and journalism majors interested in social change (Fessmann, 2017; Fessmann, 2018a; Fessmann, 2018b).

In addition, PIC frameworks highlight six spheres through which strategic communication could drive change using PIC tactics: media; policy, communities of influence, the market, activism, and behavior change marketing (Christiano, 2017). While activism is only one of the spheres mentioned, an understanding of all six spheres opens the possibility to create a more sustainable platform to drive change and gives students an opportunity to explore a variety of interests and disciplines. As noted previously, this generation of students is adept at utilizing social media; this PIC framework gives Gen Z students multiple avenues to utilize the technologies they grew up with in ways that can create meaningful change for everyone, while still sitting in a classroom. Essentially, these spheres help to provide future activists with a toolkit as they enter society beyond the classroom. Public relations teaches students valuable skills that have been successfully used to promote various brands; however, these same tools can also be used to create a better, more inclusive world (see Weibe, 1951; and Hon's (1997) work on how public relations tactics were utilized during the Civil Rights Movement). Creating this better and more inclusive environment is what PIC aims to do, and as such, PIC offers a valuable outlet to introduce social justice into the PR classroom.

As the notion of introducing activism into public relations classrooms becomes more widely discussed (Mules, 2021), PIC has the opportunity to bridge the divide among professors more interested in the functionalist approach, a pedagogical theory that teaches students skill sets that will later benefit the entirety of society, and those more entrenched in activism or critical cultural studies. PIC provides a framework for sustainable social change and provides a new lexicon for those who may want to explore activism in the PR classroom, but fear the stigmatization of such terms. Similar to traditional journalism and public relations, PIC has a theoretical foundation; however, PIC, like the other

two fields, should also teach students necessary skills. Functionalists, those who wish for a field to remain neutral, tend to use case studies and corporate structures. In contrast, activists, and professors with critical cultural backgrounds, tend to problematize these structures as sites of oppression (Ciszek, 2015). Given these tensions, creating a space where both of these ideas are welcome within the public relations curricula has proven difficult. PIC has the ability to create a space where both of these avenues can reside. Activists need to learn about messaging, and audience engagement using skills-based approaches, skills that can still be taught by functionalist professors or those with a more traditional PR background. Just as theory and practical skills are complementary in traditional PR curricula, PIC serves as a complement to this same curricula for students who are more interested in social causes. Hou (2019) notes the importance of "rejecting a 'false binary of public/private'" remarking that what is in the public interest is complicated and not within the domain of any particular group. The tensions between the "state vs. collective, government vs. corporate, commerce vs. public are considered not as mutually exclusive but interwoven as potentially competing forces to shape the public interest in different directions" (Hou, 2019, p. 159). Although Hou is discussing the role of public interest in China, this same idea can be applied to how professors discuss similar tensions within PR. Corporations can participate in PIC initiatives so long as their actions transcend doing more than merely promoting the bottom line (i.e. DICK's Sporting Goods and the decision to stop selling guns. See Gaither et al., 2018).

Given that this generation of students is leading the effort to ensure that retail is more sustainable (Petro, 2020), and that companies using pride as a marketing strategy are authentic and not just implementing rainbow-washing approaches (Wolny, 2021), PIC is a valuable area of study that does offer a different approach to traditional CSR approaches

that some of these students may see as inauthentic.

Johnston and Pieczka (2019) view the public interest as the foundation of democratic governance and public policy stating that it should incorporate "political reflection on how the relationship between the individual and the state should be managed" (p. 9). We can see this also being applicable to public relations education in the sense that managing and maintaining relationships between the public and organizations is a central tenet of the field. "Public relations shares a common link with public interest through valorization of publics" (Gaither & Curtin, 2019, p. 124). As areas such as journalism and public relations struggle to reexamine the nature of objectivity and the relevancy of a functionalist approach to pedagogy while these fields are contemplating how to combat misinformation, PIC offers a potential structure to move beyond the confines of "neutrality and impartiality" (Campbell & Marshall, 2002). Given that PIC utilizes science-based strategic communication strategies, PIC instruction teaches students how to define what is considered the public good by using an evidence-backed approach. When faculty use PIC's body of knowledge to examine and evaluate how social movements have used strategic communication, students interested in activism will better acquire the necessary skills to be successful than if they took traditional public relations courses.

Connections to Critical Pedagogy

Teaching activism is not a new concept and is most associated with the notion of critical pedagogy. Critical pedagogy has been a part of curriculum discussions since the 1970s. Freire (1972) first introduced the view that students should have a voice in their own education. This change was proposed as a way to move past the banking model of education where students were expected to passively listen to lectures and recall facts for an exam. Freire noted that this was a form of educational colonialism that silenced diverse voices and experiences in the classroom.

Freire's views on liberating education are applicable to PIC curriculum building in that it helps students understand how to not only express their own views and take ownership of their own educational process, but also amplify the voices of those they serve in the hopes of creating a more just society. The action-reflection framework proposed by Freire teaches students how to incorporate the importance of genuine and effective dialogue where both action and reflection are essential components (Freire, 1972). Giroux (1997) later added to the notion of critical pedagogy stating that it provided a "language of possibility" Today, critical pedagogy is "concerned with the elimination of oppression, the resurgence of hope and possibility--in short, with the making of a better world in which to live. A better world for all" (Shaw as cited in Tintiangco-Cubales, et al., 2020 p. 26). The perspective of making the world a better place to live directly aligns with many of the same PIC goals.

Traditionally, academia has favored "objective" knowledge; however, this perception is often tied to our notions of objectivity defined by white knowledge construction. Recent events have shed light on the fact that many of our institutional structures, education included, have ignored the voices of marginalized peoples (Tintiangco-Cubales, et al., 2020). As such, there has been an increased push to decolonize syllabi, meaning attempts have been made to bring in more readings from authors from different backgrounds (Ahadi & Guerrero, 2020). In addition to bringing in material sourced from authors of different genders, sexual orientations, races, and ethnicities, critical pedagogy values the first-person accounts of students. "Pedagogy takes into account the critical relationship between the purpose of education, the context of education, the content of what is being taught, and the methods of how it is taught. It also includes who is being taught, who is teaching, their relationship to each other, and their relationship to structure and power" (Tintiangco-Cubales, et al., 2020, p. 22). In the past, education has relied heavily on

the banking model, alienating students from being active participants in their own education. The banking system is a model that at best encourages thinking, but does little to foster engagement. However, critical pedagogy encourages students to not only be active participants in the classroom, but teaches them to be active members within their own communities.

Similar to PIC, critical pedagogy is still an emerging field that is constantly being redefined. For public relations, implementing a critical pedagogical approach would mean moving away from the traditional corporate case studies or campaigns and incorporating more cases that look at how activist groups have utilized similar PR tools in their endeavors. Ciszek and Rodriguez (2020), write about the importance of "decentering whiteness and heteronormativity, and [how] it works to disrupt the problem of homogeneity in public relations research and practice" (p. 537). If the field of public relations wants to move forward in an ethical way, it will become increasingly more important for public relations curriculum to adopt a more critical pedagogical approach in an effort to train students to be more aware of the current social and political space they will enter once they join the workforce; a PIC curriculum provides such a foundation. Fessmann (2017) argued that the social activism of the Millennial generation gave reason for further developing PIC. Downes (2017) suggests that by having an understanding of PIC, college students would not only be able to hear the call to promote social change, but also have the ability to follow through and create social change upon graduation and their subsequent employment. We believe the increase in social activism shown by members of Gen Z demonstrates the need for a PIC curriculum is even greater now. Without such a move, public relations and other communication fields may lose students interested in activism and advocacy to other fields and disciplines.

Creating a New Field of Study

The process of creating a new academic field is no novel task. Academia is generally steeped in tradition and while fields and disciplines may adapt to changing times, the introduction of new disciplines is not common and takes effort from various stakeholders and institutions. Currently, graduate-level PIC programs are offered at the University of Florida, Florida State University, and West Virginia University. Additionally, faculty from other institutions are introducing and have taught PIC as units in other classes, special topic courses, or potential electives. Researchers are also including PIC as part of their program of research as is evident by the growth of the field's flagship journal *The Journal of Public Interest Communications*. However, a formal systematic framework for building this field on a larger scale does not yet exist. Looking at the evolution of Women's Studies in the 1960s and '70s and beyond provides a rough framework as we seek to build PIC as a unique and significant academic discipline.

Ginsberg (2008) wrote that Women's Studies development "mirror[ed] larger changes in both American and academic politics, culture and history" (p. 1). The same can be seen with the development of PIC and the importance of teaching young activists essential skills. While social movements and activism are not new concepts, climate change and racial injustice are no longer issues that interest and impact a select few. The killings of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor led to massive protests throughout the United States. Young activists such as Greta Thunburg speak out at climate summits attended by world leaders. Students can learn the skills to be architects, doctors, and journalists, but there is currently no field that teaches a unique skill set to our future activists.

The work of curriculum building should employ a diverse perspective in content, thought, and lived experiences (Kvam et al., 2018). In Martin et al.'s (2020) recent study, they found that including topics

surrounding diversity not only helped students expand their viewpoints, but also helped explain key media concepts as well. PIC has the same opportunity to bring concepts such as activism into the public relations classroom, while expanding student viewpoints and also explaining key public relations concepts such as two-way symmetrical communication or the importance of stakeholders.

Like Freire's contributions to critical pedagogy, early Women's Studies scholars and educators "were actively *creating and owning* knowledge based on their own personal and political experiences" (Ginsberg, 2008, p. 10). PIC, like the beginnings of Women's Studies, is in the process of simply being recognized as a legitimate discipline. There are a few spaces where scholars can meet to discuss research at conferences (for example Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC), International Communication Association (ICA), and frank gathering), but there has yet to be a designated avenue to share syllabi and pedagogy. Although we do review existing PIC syllabi and programs of study in a subsequent section, we hope that this is the start of a larger movement to discuss more comprehensive goals of systematic PIC education. However, we are still building PIC based on personal experience as we create and own its body of knowledge.

In the 1980s, Women's Studies experienced conservative backlash. Even today, there are critics of gender equality initiatives such as Title IX (Ginsberg, 2008). However, despite this reaction there was an increased effort to focus on efforts to examine the nature of intersectionality in the field. During this time, Women's Studies programs worked on establishing core courses, minors, and even BA programs. These programs had to contend with defining theory and curricula, while defending themselves against internal academic forces and external political forces (Ginsberg, 2008). Given the current political environment, these challenges exist for

the early stages of PIC curriculum development as well.

Much of the academy is siloed based on expertise. Even within communication disciplines you will often see journalism, public relations, advertising, and cultural studies separated into areas or departments. While these areas are unique and important, the communication industry is becoming increasingly hybridized and expects recent graduates to be able to adapt to new positions that often blur the lines among these fields. PIC's interdisciplinary nature gives students an opportunity to explore many of these avenues beyond the typical silos of traditional programs. In the past, public relations students would not always be exposed to critical cultural ideas, which have a strong foundation in promoting more ethical systems. PIC curriculum can bridge the gaps among many of these areas giving students a more robust understanding of communication. Furthermore, theoretical understandings within PR would be enhanced by a more diversified curriculum and PIC would give students within cultural studies, postcolonial studies, ethnic studies, and queer studies the ability to develop a practical and applicable skill set (Ciszek & Rodriguez, 2020).

In addition to providing public relations students with a more critical perspective, PIC provides a space to discuss and push back against the similar backlash experienced by Women's Studies development in the 1980s. PIC's interdisciplinary nature draws on other areas and provides new ways of speaking about race and gender in a critical way that may provide a more secure avenue for teachers to introduce concepts such as diversity and inclusion into the classroom. One activity presented in current PIC classes and trainings is the "back -of- the- envelope guide to communications strategy[1]" Students are asked to think of a social issue and how to create change within that context. They are then asked "who

1 The back-of-the-envelope guide communications strategy can be found in Christiano & Neimand (2017b)'s Stanford Social Innovation Review.

has to do something they're not doing now (or stop doing something) for you to achieve that goal?" (Christiano & Neimand, 2017b, para 15). Given the number of proposed bills against Critical Race Theory require that educators "who discuss ugly episodes in history, or controversial events [...]explore 'contending perspectives without giving deference to any one perspective" (Florido, 2021, para 13), this activity could possibly allow PR educators to look at "contending perspectives'" in a way that could teach students to think about changing the minds of those who hold on to problematic beliefs that promote white supremist mentalities.

Students want to learn more about events such as the Tulsa massacre and Japanese internment camps (Florido, 2021). Events such as the killing of George Floyd have prompted this generation of students to want to learn more about these issues. However, parents, conservative administrators, and politicians present a major barrier to incorporating these topics into the current curriculum. In addition, the traditional silos often present in communication departments and colleges give power to those forces that do not want to consider the importance of change. However, incorporating PIC's interdisciplinary approach to public relations curricula could be a way to incorporate the back-of-the-envelope guide to our own educational system. By examining the process of Women's Studies curriculum development, who also faced a similar challenge with regard to negotiating traditional academic structures (Ginsberg, 2008), in addition to critical pedagogy, PIC can use a similar approach of development, adaptability, and perseverance to create a space where both meaningful dialogue is promoted and practical skills are taught. The evolution of Women's Studies programs over the past 50 years demonstrates how similar fields can be developed in the wake of political tensions in an effort to create change. This context provides some comfort that the same is possible for PIC.

Potential PIC Benefits and Curriculum

While we recognize that PIC is a unique field that can be applicable to a variety of different areas from journalism to health communication, we have chosen to focus specifically on how PIC can be incorporated into public relations programs. We follow the work of Taylor (2001) and Hutchison (2002) who examined ways to incorporate internationalization and ethics respectively into the existing public relations curriculum. They did so by making suggestions for how to bring these concepts into the existing coursework established by the The Commission on Public Relations Education (CPRE) as well as sharing ideas for standalone courses focused on these topics.

Members of the CPRE are mindful that public relations curricula should be flexible and adapt to societal and professional changes while also allowing students to take courses or even pursue minors in other areas of interest to better prepare them for the workplace (Duhe et al., 2018). While the CPRE suggests some content areas that might enhance a student's learning experience include social media, business literacy, analytics, and digital technology (Duhe et al., 2018) and Krishna, et al. (2020) add listening, digital storytelling, and leadership to this list, the authors of this manuscript believe educators could add to interdisciplinarity within public relations curricula by adding coursework related to PIC as electives for PR majors. Further, they believe a PIC-focused curriculum could be built by following the guidelines of the CPRE and making adjustments to them much as Taylor (2001) and Hutchinson (2002) did in their work. The following sections look at PIC curriculum building from a micro to macro perspective starting with an examination of current syllabi followed by an exploration of current programs of study and our suggestions for a potential curriculum based on CPRE guidelines.

A Review of existing PIC Syllabi and Programs of Study

Similar to the early introduction of Women's Studies programs

in the 1970s, PIC classes appear to be offered at only a few institutions[2]. This review is by no means exhaustive, but does attempt to cover key learning objectives, major assignments, and required readings. Five PIC class syllabi were examined; four focused within PR/PIC and one focusing on journalism and PIC. One of the major similarities across all the syllabi examined was the emphasis on discussion. This discussion-based emphasis appears to align with Freire's (1972) pedagogical principle of giving students and future activists ownership of their own education and compliments the nature of the course content, which predominantly emphasizes relevant and timely case studies focusing on social justice campaigns. In addition to implementing discussion, there are a number of skills building activities and learning goals including campaign analyses and overviews for developing strategic plans. For example, one activity that gets students to learn the complexities of trying to build activist movements within the policy sector breaks the class into different interest groups. Student groups are given different organizations and have to come up with a strategic plan to persuade one group of students, who are assigned to be government officials up for re-election, to develop a policy that will align with their interests. For the duration of class, students meet with other groups with a similar interest to form coalitions. The instructor also serves as the scheduling assistant for the elected official student group and can halt or grant access to these policy makers in a way that reflects the power the various interest groups may hold within our political system (i.e., a group representing a powerful lobby would get more access

2 It is difficult to know the full scope of PIC's current reach because there are likely professors and instructors working in this area who are not aware of the growing PIC academic and practitioner community. However, we received syllabi from five universities, including those from the authors, and spoke to PIC educators currently working on developing curricula standards for the field. Both authors are part of a group of educators currently working to establish a more standard PIC curricula.

than the group of concerned parents). At the end of the activity, students have the opportunity to discuss what they learned with regard to policy, activism, persuasion, and coalition building. Students who took part in the activity said it helped them learn how to compromise with various stakeholders in order to create meaningful change that would benefit the most people.

The Intro to PIC syllabi for the University of Florida Master's program, as well as a forthcoming undergraduate PIC class taught at Auburn University, require *New Power* by Jeremy Heimans and Henry Timms as required reading. This book is not a traditional textbook potentially highlighting how PIC does attempt to bridge scholarship and practice. Other required readings include texts and articles related to relevant movements such as March for our Lives. *Glimmer of Hope* by the March for our Lives founders was also a commonly utilized text. Although there were a number of similar readings, there were also a number of readings that focused on specific social movements like Hong Kong's Umbrella Movement and Black Lives Matter. Professors also brought in readings to emphasize important activist skill sets like community organizing, the importance of storytelling and using metaphors, and audience engagement. The University of Washington's journalism/PIC course assigned *Community-Centered Journalism* and *Reporting Inequality* along with the Associated Press Stylebook. These texts again highlight the importance of combining skill building (AP Stylebook) with theory. The two other texts, while more focused on social justice issues pertaining to journalism and not PR, also demonstrate the importance of community building and understanding your publics in a more comprehensive and just manner.

Another way professors can bring activism into the PR classroom through PIC is to utilize guest speakers. At the University of Florida, guest speakers from Participant Media, Burness, and other PIC-

related organizations have come to classes to give students networking opportunities and first-hand knowledge with regard to working in the PIC field beyond the classroom. Professors doing PIC related research can also provide useful insights for students. Providing a mix of practitioner and research focused guest speakers helps to promote the idea of using scientifically grounded strategies to promote social change. Guest speakers and partnerships with local non-profits and activist groups would also provide students with relevant hands-on experience.

West Virginia University is also in the process of developing an Advocacy and PIC class with the intent of also creating a stand-alone MA program. While WVU is currently in the process of creating PIC classes and programs, they do promote the Public Interest Communication Research Lab which "work[s] to train leading undergraduate and graduate students to continue the legacy of pursuing social science for social change" (West Virginia University Media Innovation Center, 2021, para 2). These research-based institutions help students learn and apply various skills they can utilize in future careers as advocates and activists much as our proposed PIC curriculum would.

Suggested Program Curriculum

Following Taylor's (2001) and Hutchison's (2002) examples, we offer suggestions for how educators could incorporate PIC into existing public relations programs. From a larger program view, the ideal PIC curriculum would include 45 hours comprised of PIC, PR, journalism, mass communication, and/or communication courses and would be filled out with electives from other disciplines beyond those found in communication schools and departments. Any programs accredited by ACEJMC would also need to be certain any program course hours do not exceed the limits imposed by the accrediting body. By allowing such flexibility, the addition of a PIC curriculum or track would be fairly easy and also cost efficient as few new courses would be needed. In addition,

the curriculum would allow students to build a major to fit their unique interests as they pertain to the public interest such as interests in social justice, racial equity, sustainability, gender studies, social movements, peace and hunger studies, health, science, ecology, etc.

The PIC curriculum would need to have a theoretical basis that might include coursework in public relations, mass communication, communication, and/or rhetoric. The PIC curriculum might be set-up with choices from which students could select the course or courses of most interest to them or it could be set-up to match the strengths and abilities of the current faculty. Similarly, a PIC curriculum should include a research course. Again, PIC students could pick from courses such as survey research methods, qualitative research, quantitative research, critical perspectives, and/or rhetorical methods based on their interests and/or the offerings of their respective departments. A writing course would also be necessary for the PIC curriculum. This course could also come from a program's existing coursework as a public relations writing or a news writing course would suffice.

This suggested PIC curriculum should also include PIC-specific content. In place of the introductory public relations or similar course, a new course that introduces students to PIC, advocacy, activism, and cause communication could be added. If the addition of a new course is not feasible, the addition of a PIC, advocacy, activism, and cause communication unit to an existing introduction to public relations course could be implemented until the new PIC-focused course could be created. While it would be ideal if a PIC case studies course built on content related to PIC could be offered, infusing PIC-related cases into an existing case studies course would be acceptable until an independent PIC case studies course could be developed. Similarly, the PIC curriculum would be best suited with a PIC campaigns course that allowed students to work with community partners who worked and advocated for the public

interest. Such a course could also tie-in well with any civic engagement work the department, school, college and/or university was actively supporting and could build better relationships with entities across campus. Again, if a separate PIC campaigns course could not be offered, faculty could include a PIC-related community partner as one whom students could work with for their semester project.

Another required course in a PIC curriculum would be an ethics class. Again, if there is an existing public relations ethics class, PIC-specific content could be added to it if resources did not allow for a stand-alone PIC-specific ethics course. However, either course should include the ethics of care perspective because such a worldview to ethics would be most appropriate for budding PIC professionals. Much of PR's ethical perspective, especially in times of crisis, is influenced by an ethics of justice perspective where legal obligations and an effort to maintain or rebuild reputation are emphasized (Tao & Kim, 2017). In contrast, an ethics-of-care perspective would bring a more humanistic approach to ethics. Ethics of care derives from the work of Gilligan (1982) and shifts the focus of ethical responses to accountability to those people affected by the situation from a focus on legal rights (Bauman, 2011; Simola, 2003). Such a shift in ethical perspective puts the public interest in the center of any communication efforts (Fraustino & Kennedy, 2018). As Madden and Alt (2021) simply state, "care should come before image" (p. 38). By adding ethics of care to coursework, academics would be fostering Gen Z students' orientation of being we-centric.

The PIC curriculum should also include an internship experience for students so that they could apply their knowledge and skills in a professional setting. This step might require a conversation between PIC faculty and internship directors to be sure the experience would allow students to work within PIC, advocacy, activism and/or cause communication and to help internship directors to better recognize what

would constitute PIC-related internships.

Finally, students should have the ability to pick from a range of courses for electives. PIC faculty might have to work with faculty in other departments to make agreements for PIC students to take courses in these other areas to ensure there are enough seats in these outside courses. Some areas in which students might take electives include sociology, sustainability, science communication, health communication, ecology, gender studies, climate, sociology, social movements, diversity, political science, nonprofit management, civic engagement, social media, digital storytelling, leadership, organizational communication, rhetoric, business, marketing, management, crisis communication, foreign languages, and corporate social responsibility. Courses outside of communication divisions such as ecology, sociology, health, science, climate, social movements, diversity, civic engagement, foreign languages, peace and conflict studies, hunger studies, and political science would help students to build the interdisciplinarity of their knowledge and allow them to pursue their interests as they relate to the public interest. Similarly, courses in areas such as nonprofit management, leadership, organizational communication, crisis communication, corporate social responsibility, management and business would help students to understand how to manage and maintain organizations devoted to PIC and advocacy. Further courses in social media, digital storytelling, rhetoric, foreign languages, and marketing would help students to build persuasive promotional materials and develop better programs for PIC organizations.

Innovative Solutions for Student Engagement: Suggestions for Instructors interested in PIC

In addition to utilizing resources that incorporate interdisciplinary learning, PIC gives students the opportunity to pursue civic engagement in the classroom. In 2006, The Carnegie classification system for higher education included a "Community Engagement Classification." This

Table 1

Suggested Curriculum Based on CPRE Standards

Intro	Theory	Research	Writing	Ethics/Law	Campaigns/Case Studies	Electives
PR Principles	PR Theory	Survey/ Quantitative	Newswriting	Intro to PIC	Case Studies	Social Movements/Social Justice
Mass Comm	Mass Comm	Qualitative	PR Writing	Comm Law	PIC Campaigns	Social Media/ Digital Media Storytelling
Interpersonal Comm	Interpersonal Comm	Critical		Ethics of Care	Campaigns	Health Comm
Rhetorical Studies	Rhetorical Studies	Rhetorical		Comm Ethics		Ecology/ Environmental Comm/ Sustainability
						Organizaitonal Comm
						Business/ Marketing
						Leadership

Note. *The internship/hands-on experience CPRE standard was omitted from this chart due to the already flexible nature of most university internship programs*

classification was meant to incorporate service-learning "to the primary systems and structures of higher education" (Saltmarsh & Zlotkowski, 2011, p. 3). Civic engagement is closely tied to the goals of higher education and PIC and is meant to encourage students to become democratic citizens (Saltmarsh, 2011). Civic engagement incorporates service-learning initiatives which move us beyond the banking model of

education (Freire, 1972) and teaches students to be advocates and active members of the community.

When thinking of the sustainability of a movement, a central PIC tenet, recent Gen Z-led movements offer ample opportunity for student engagement in the classroom as well as throughout the university and local community. For example, the Sunrise Movement allows participants to join hubs, which offer new opportunities to collaborate with local communities. Similarly, March for Our Lives has various local and university chapters. The localized focus of these movements not only helps to sustain the movements encouraging long-term action and change, but also gives students an opportunity to become involved at a reasonable entry point.

Students can feel overwhelmed by massive social issues such as racial injustice, gun control, and climate change. Larger movements might also present a barrier to entry for those who do not live in urban areas. Brewer and Roccas (2001) suggest that individuals need to feel connected to a movement, while also feeling as if they are contributing in a unique way. The simple act of discussing activism and advocacy in the context of something such as the Sunshine Movement, when talking about climate change, or March for Our Lives, if discussing public relations and policy, can spark student interests enough for them to consider becoming involved in local chapters beyond the classroom. The initial act of joining a local chapter might even prompt students to become involved in national chapters once they graduate. Heimens and Timms (2018) refer to this phenomenon as moving up the participation ladder, which increases participation in social causes. Additionally, such involvement allows students to realize the political and social engagement that members of Gen Z equate with being good citizens (Irregular Labs, 2019). The participation ladder also provides a low-stakes entry for professors who might feel more comfortable casually discussing social causes, but might

be less inclined to directly bring in activist community partners and projects.

Conclusion

While PIC is still an emerging field, some scholars (Christiano, 2017) believe that it has the potential to make inroads in curtailing inequities and addressing social justice issues. While PIC is grounded in the public relations discipline and its scholarship, PIC courses and curricula differ in both content and in the students that they attract – those students "who are interested in social activism but who are not comfortable with the corporate focus of PR (Fessmann, 2017, p. 27). This proposed PIC curriculum would allow Gen Z students, those who will be the generation of traditional college-aged students for the next decade and a half (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2019), to pursue their passions and interests in ending inequities and social injustices. It allows for interdisciplinarity and flexibility to best suit student, faculty, and program needs and resources. PIC-centric courses could easily support students who wish to apply their learning to societal issues.

In sum, the PIC curriculum could be one through which members of Gen Z learn how to use their energy, passions, and knowledge of social media to do more and be more engaged with social justice, politics, and other causes so that they are no longer accused of being slacktivists. "Thus, PIC ultimately hopes to train and empower a new generation of communication-savvy social change activists" (Fessmann, 2017, p. 27). During the 1970s, the original pioneers of Women's Studies found the interdisciplinary nature of this new discipline difficult based on their more traditional trainings. However, with the introduction of graduate programs, the field's unique nature became normalized and Ph.D. programs in the area trained a new generation of scholars interested in changing views of gender and societal power (Ginsberg, 2008). PIC development is in a similar stage, and we hope this first step is just the start of growing

a rigorous and distinct field of study that has the opportunity to teach future activists. As Downes (2017) states, PIC curricula should "empower others who can rally around causes leading toward the good" (p. 39). When educators introduce PIC to students, they ultimately introduce PIC to organizations as students educated in PIC will soon move up into management roles and will have the opportunity to work for the public good directly.

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TEACHING BRIEF

Vaccinate Against Hate: Using Activism to Teach Applied PR Research and Theory

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ABSTRACT

The social and political tensions of 2020 exposed an increased threat by hate groups attempting to spread extremist ideologies. Today, words have become weapons on social media and across all corners of the internet to persuade, recruit, mobilize and motivate. As undergraduate college students may seek to participate in activist work to combat hate and extremism, public relations research and theory can provide a roadmap for strategy.

Activism as a broad topic may pique the interest of many students and can be used to demonstrate the application of strategies, tactics, messaging and more. This activity attempts to situate activism into an existing introductory public relations course, by using it as the lens through which students examine the application of research and theory.

In this activity, students are given a fictional scenario: they have joined an anti-hate group on campus called Vaccinate Against Hate, which seeks to educate campuses across the country about hate groups and ways to fight the threat of extremist propaganda, conspiracy theories and calls to action. As a public relations student, they've been asked to work on developing a recruitment campaign, as well as an educational and awareness campaign for Vaccinate Against Hate.

Students will identify the research methods needed to craft Vaccinate Against Hate's first campaigns. Then, they draw on public relations theories to guide their strategy. Through this activity, students are introduced to and apply a myriad of research methods and public relations theories, as well as the role of public relations in an activist context.

Keywords: teaching brief, in-class activity, activism, research, theory, public relations

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The social and political tensions of 2020 exposed an increased threat by hate groups attempting to spread extremist ideologies. Today, words have become weapons on social media and across all corners of the internet to persuade, recruit, mobilize and motivate. As undergraduate college students may seek to participate in activist work to combat hate and extremism, public relations research and theory can provide a roadmap for strategy.

As noted by scholars like Mules (2021), there is increased discussion about the relationship between public relations practice and activism. But this discussion has not made its way into public relations curricula, other than in reference to activists being seen as oppositional to the objectives of an organization (Coombs & Holladay, 2013). Given that activists have successfully applied public relations strategies and tactics to achieve their objectives for at least 100 years (Ciszek, 2015), the study of their work can make a positive contribution to public relations curricula (Mules, 2021).

And, as Coombs and Holladay (2012) see the incorporation of activism studies into the curriculum "as central to broadening students' education, it also holds promise for re-imagining the field and legitimizing the works of activists as an important component in public relations theory and research." (p. 347)

While the addition of activism studies to public relations curricula may take time, or simply not be possible for many programs, one step that can be taken now is to incorporate assignments or activities with a focus on activism into existing courses.

Activism as a broad topic may pique the interest of many students and can be used to demonstrate the application of strategies, tactics, messaging and more. This activity attempts to situate activism into an existing introductory public relations course, by using it as the lens through which students examine the application of research and theory. As

noted in the 2017 Commission on Public Relations Education report *Fast Forward: Foundations and Future State*. *Educators and Practitioners*, "Theory can get a bad rap because it sounds like all the stuff that never changes. In fact, public relations and public relations education, with our core commitment to research, are a master class in continually observing, questioning and adapting the theoretical drivers of what we do in practice. The world, the profession and education never stand still; our theory is in a similar state of adaptation." (p. 16)

In this activity, students are given a fictional scenario: they have joined an anti-hate group on campus called Vaccinate Against Hate, which seeks to educate campuses across the country about hate groups and ways to fight the threat of extremist propaganda, conspiracy theories and calls to action. As a public relations student, they've been asked to work on developing a recruitment campaign, as well as an educational and awareness campaign for Vaccinate Against Hate.

Using Kathleen Kelly's (2001) ROPES planning process (research, objectives, programming, evaluation, stewardship) as a starting point, students will identify the research methods needed to craft Vaccinate Against Hate's first campaigns. Then, they draw on public relations theories to guide their strategy. Through this activity, students are introduced to and apply a myriad of research methods and public relations theories, as well as the role of public relations in an activist context.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES: This activity was used in Introduction to Public Relations and was created to align with the learning outcomes stated below. The student learning outcomes for this activity also correspond with selected student learning outcomes for the course:

- Develop an awareness of the role that public relations plays within an organization and its key publics
- Understand communication terms, theories, concepts and issues as

they relate to public relations

- Explore a range of real-life public relations scenarios through readings, discussions and assignments
- Enhance communication skills as well as the ability to work individually and as part of a team
- Demonstrate learning through discussions and assignments

EVIDENCE OF STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES:

This activity was created to align with the learning outcomes stated above. Here is a brief sampling of responses to a post-activity survey:

- *Did this activity help you to develop an awareness of the role that public relations plays within an organization and its key publics?* Response: 100% YES (26 responses)
- *Did this activity help you understand communication/public relations terms, theories and models?* Response: 100% YES (26 responses)
- *Did this activity help you better understand how theory applies to public relations?* 100% YES (26 responses)

What did you learn about public relations from this activity?

- "One thing that I learned about public relations from this activity was how different qualitative and quantitative research methods might be used to help inform a campaign."
- "I learned more in-depth about the theories behind the practice of PR and how they are utilized."

"That research is really important before starting any type of PR campaign."

- "I learned about the specific research methods in a more in-depth way. Terms like two-step flow were introduced in a deeper way as well."

- "A better understanding of applied theory."

As part of the assignment, students were also asked to identify a key takeaway, which they delivered at the end of their group presentations. Comments ranged from noting increased knowledge about public relations overall to a better understanding of the theories they had read about. Students also reported a more in-depth understanding of the importance of research to inform public relations campaigns, and that they developed a better understanding of how different qualitative and quantitative research methods might be used in practice.

Finally, students reported that this activity introduced them to the role of public relations in activism – something many stated they had not considered.

CONCLUSION: The introduction and application of research and theory in an ungraded assignment may have helped students to think critically and creatively about the content and assuaged fear about "getting a bad grade." Theory tends to be a tough pill for many students to swallow but students were generally enthusiastic about participating in this activity.

Most groups had an easy time applying appropriate research methods and could quickly distinguish between qualitative and quantitative methods. Persuasion models were applied mostly accurately with most groups identifying inoculation theory as one of the most applicable theories to the assignment. Given the relevance and prevalence of social media influencers today, it came as little surprise that students were interested in the two-step flow theory. Other media and mass communication models were applied with varying degrees of understanding. Management theories proved confusing, which was expected, given that this assignment was deployed in an introductory course.

Overall, students dove into this assignment with energy and enthusiasm despite any challenges due to participating via Zoom. Using

Google Slides, they created presentations that were well organized and demonstrated curiosity, critical thinking, and creativity. Ample time was provided for students to collaborate in class, which allowed them to adequately articulate their findings and present them to the class. As a result, most presentations exceeded expectations.

Future recommendations include providing students with an opportunity to conduct secondary research about activism prior to class in order to better prepare them for the assignment. Additional recommendations include adding details about the intended audience to the written directions, and revising the menu of theories provided to students, which notably did not include theories directly related to activism. Consideration may be given to remove the management models from the menu and replace them with activist theories. The addition of theories surrounding race, including Logan's (2021) Corporate Responsibility to Race (CRR), may also be added as appropriate to the course.

ASSIGNMENT:

Vaccinate Against Hate: Applying Research and Theory to the Fight Against Extremist Ideologies

This activity was created for an Introduction to Public Relations course in an online setting (Zoom) but can be adapted for upper-level research and theory classes, and/or to a course related to public relations and activism. It can also be easily adapted for use as an in-classroom activity.

Prior to class, students are asked to prepare for the activity by reading Page & Parnell chapter 4, and by listening to the segment "Neutralizing Hateful Propaganda," from "No Silver Bullets," an episode from WNYC's *On the Media* podcast (2021). The episode features Kurt Braddock, author

and professor of communications at American University, in a discussion about strategies and tactics to prevent radicalization before it happens.

In class, students are given the following fictional scenario:

Following a series of racist incidents involving members of the campus community, a student group has formed to combat hate and the proliferation of hate groups on college campuses across the country. The group, Vaccinate Against Hate, seeks to educate students about hate groups and works to find ways to combat the threat of extremism.
Vaccinate Against Hate needs communicators to help them recruit new members. As a student studying public relations, you have joined Vaccinate Against Hate to provide your expertise. You have been assigned two very important projects:

1. Develop a recruitment campaign in order to increase membership for the organization.
2. Research, plan and execute Vaccinate Against Hate's first educational and awareness campaign to combat extremist ideologies. Your campaign will involve strategic messaging, media outreach, and elements of media literacy training.

Using the ROPES planning process as a starting point, you will identify the research needed in order to craft these campaigns, drawing on public relations theories to guide your strategy. Once you have identified the research and theories needed, you will present your findings to the class to make connections between research, theory, and practice.

Students are then placed in breakout groups of 4-5 students per group (40 minutes):

Step 1: In your group, discuss the fictional scenario and apply the podcast

and fictional scenario to your readings.

Step 2: Discuss what strategies and tactics might be involved in the two campaigns for Vaccinate Against Hate.

Step 3: Create a slide deck that you will present to class. Required slides:

> **Slide 1:** *Identify the primary research methods* that you would use in order to inform your initial recruitment campaign. Using the "Common Public Relations Research Methods" table (Page & Parnell, 2019, pg. 85) as a starting point, you will first consider the two type of research most appropriate: quantitative and/or qualitative. Then you will determine the appropriate method(s), which many include surveys, content analysis, digital analytics, focus groups, in-depth interviews and/or participant observation. Be specific in your responses and provide a rationale for using each method.
>
> **Slide 2:** *Identify public relations theories* that will guide the strategy for your initial recruitment campaign. Using the "Ten Theories for Public Relations" table (Page & Parnell, 2019, p. 91) as a starting point, be specific in your responses and provide a rationale for using each theory.
>
> Media and mass communication models include: Agenda Setting/Framing, Two-Step Flow, Spiral of Silence, Diffusion of Innovations, Uses & Gratifications. Persuasion models include: Elaboration Likelihood Model, Inoculation, and Cialdini's Principles of Influence. Management Models include: Excellence and Image Restoration Theory.

Slide 3: *Identify the primary research methods* that you would use in order to inform your educational and awareness campaign. Using the "Common Public Relations Research Methods" table (Page & Parnell, 2019, p. 85) as a starting point, be specific in your responses and provide a rationale for using each method.

Slide 4: *Identify public relations theories* that will guide the strategy for your educational and awareness campaign. Using the table "Ten Theories for Public Relations" (Page & Parnell, 2019, p. 91), as a starting point, be specific in your responses and provide a rationale for using each theory.

Slide 5: Each team member will identify one key takeaway. What did you learn about the role of public relations in activism?

Step 4: Present your slide deck. Each team member must present one slide to the class. Each team has five minutes to present.

Additional Teaching Notes:

Suggested time allotment for an 80-minute class:

- Activity introduction: 5 minutes
- Group work: 40 minutes
- Presentations: 30 minutes
- Final remarks: 5 minutes

Suggestions for further reading for upper-level courses: These readings may provide useful for upper-level students and classes seeking to dive deeper into the application of attitudinal inoculation as well as the applied

use of persuasion in radicalization and counter-radicalization.

Braddock, K. (2019). Vaccinating against hate: Using attitudinal Inoculation to confer resistance to persuasion by extremist propaganda. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, *33*(7), 1-24. http://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2019.1693370

Braddock, K. (2020). *Weaponized words: The strategic role of persuasion in violent radicalization and counter-radicalization*. Cambridge University Press.

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2022, Vol. 8, No. 2, 158-171

TEACHING BRIEF

Beyond Slacktivism: Lessons for Authentic Activist Messages through Public Relations

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ABSTRACT

This teaching brief looks at two aspects of public relations work for organizations who wish to make issue/activist statements: how to write an effective statement that is followed by action, and how to engage in ethical conversation with publics about the statement. The brief also addresses what happens if there are no follow up actions, and how to build relationships with the dominant coalition in order to aid in writing statements that will match organizational actions. These two lessons each include a discussion of purpose, materials, objectives, activities, and assessment (including ACEJMC assessment format and terminology) for easy adaptation into the public relations classroom.

Keywords: brand activism, corporate activism, activist statement, ethics, activism, public relations

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Building relationships with an organization's or client's publics often occurs through the writing and dissemination of statements. Historically, these statements are distributed through traditional news outlets but more and more often, they are also being shared via social media.

These statements are going beyond announcing new products or changes in organizational leadership; organizations are also offering statements of opinion and belief, especially about social issues, social policies, and social change, and publics are watching very closely. This teaching brief will look at how PR professionals can help clients make corporate social activism (CSA) count through writing effective statements that are followed-up by action, incorporating organizational values into the statement and supporting their organization's or client's beliefs.
It's important to note that the vocabulary for these types of statements and actions by organizations is developing with some referring to it as advocacy (Dodd & Supa, 2014) and some as activism (Chatterji & Toffel, 2018; Hambrick & Wowak, 2019; Oikkonen & Jääskeläinen, 2019). With the increased emphasis on an organization's actions (Bhagwat et al, 2020) – both stand-alone and in support of statements – corporate social activism is the term used in this teaching brief.

While understanding how to write these statements effectively is important, it is also important for PR professionals to understand that not every public will agree with them all the time. PR professionals need to be prepared for backlash on these statements from publics who disagree with them. This lesson will look at how to acknowledge and work through their anger or vitriol with the organization or individual and to ethically communicate with these publics, and potentially make them allies.

Follow through must play a role here. Organizations offering statements supporting a social issue or policy must be ready to follow-up with actions that also support it. This lesson will address what happens

if that doesn't occur, and how to write statements that will match organizational actions.

Public relations practitioners need to be able to write these activism statements, make sure their organization is supportive of the words and the necessary actions, and engage in ethical communication with their publics about the statement and the actions of the organization. Therefore, this teaching brief will include two lessons: 1) recognizing and crafting an effective activist statement and 2) building ethical and activist relationships, as well as a case study. Each lesson includes learning objectives, activities, and assessments.

Lesson #1: Identify & Practice Writing Activist Statements for an Organization

Purpose:

To help students understand how PR professionals can craft effective social activist statements for sharing on a client's or organization's social media channels by studying and writing similar statements.

Materials:

A variety of social activist statements posted on social media channels or website from organizations, including Ben & Jerry's (to complement the case study below), Peloton, Nordstrom, Dove, Uber, and Gushers. We also recommend the professor look to see if their own university/college/department wrote statements for analysis.

Objectives:

At the end of the lesson students will be able to:

1. Discuss the differences between corporate social responsibility and corporate social activism.

2. Recognize corporate social activism messages.
3. Identify an organization's values from their written social activism statements.
4. Build connections between an organization's stated values and social causes through their actions.
5. Understand how to communicate authentically during times of heightened uncertainty.

Body of Lesson:

This lesson should start with a discussion of effective public relations writing and writing for activism and the differences between corporate social responsibility and corporate social activism.

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) can be defined as "*business firms contributing in a positive way to society by going beyond a narrow focus on profit maximization*" (McWilliams, 2015, p. 1). CSR focuses on an organization's actions that "advance social good beyond that which is required by law" (Kang et al, 2016, p. 59) and the strategies organization's take to demonstrate that it is operating ethically.

Activism is defined as "*the activity of working to achieve political or social change*" (Oxford Dictionary, 2020). In the past, activism has been viewed by public relations scholars and practitioners from an organization-centric point of view (Ciszek, 2015) because PR professionals typically find themselves in the position of responding to activism directed at the organization. Smith (2005, p. 6) defined activism as a process where pressure is exerted on organizations (or other institutions) to change policies and practices. Today, stakeholders expect an organization to demonstrate its values through public support for or against public policies on social or moral issues through both statements and actions. Bhagwat et

al (2020) call this phenomenon "corporate sociopolitical activism (CSA) also referred to as corporate social activism.

The main difference between CSR and CSA is that the focus of CSR efforts and initiatives are typically widely accepted and can be said to work within the framework of society's *current* value system while CSA efforts and initiatives are typically polarizing and partisan (Bhagwat et al, 2020). An example that helps drive home the difference between CSR and CSA is Walmart. In 2015, Walmart stopped selling rifles commonly used in mass shootings, engaging in corporate social responsibility and distancing itself from the controversial firearms industry (Bhattarai, 2019). In 2019, following a mass shooting in one of its stores, Walmart CEO Doug McMillan urged lawmakers to enact stricter gun control measures, moving the retail giant from CSR to CSA (Tensley, 2019).

Important questions to ask and answer during the lesson include: What does persuasive writing look like in times of heightened uncertainty (typical during activist moments)? How do you humanize your communication efforts to demonstrate authenticity? How do you make sure a statement reflects corporate values and actions? How can you encourage publics who agree with you to extend their support via social media?

Key Concepts:

- Persuasive writing
- Communicating authentically
- Organizational values
- Uncertainty
- Corporate social activism vs corporate social responsibility

Activities:

1. Have students read and evaluate a variety of statements from organizations, including Ben & Jerry's and, if available, their own institution. What were the goals/objectives of these statements? What are the organizational values evident in the writing? How do they address their publics? Can students find evidence of the organization taking action to back up their statements? If not, what action(s) can they suggest? Why?

2. Then have students practice writing their own statement for an organization and issue of their own choosing. How will they make sure it reflects organizational values? Who are the main publics they are trying to reach? Who are the stakeholders that may and may not support the organization's statement and actions? How will they balance writing to those who support them with those who may not? Have students plan out at least one follow-on action that the organization can take after the statement is released to back up their words.

Evaluation:

- Student understanding of concepts will be demonstrated by their contributions to the discussion.
- The in-class writing exercise (Activity #2) will be peer reviewed and edited, and then their statements and recommended actions will be shared with the class for analysis and discussion.

How assessment of student learning will be met:

Awareness

- Learn about corporate social activism and the role that public relations plays in helping an organization demonstrate its values to

stakeholders.

- Learn the importance of an organization backing up social activism statements with action.
- Analyze existing content on popular social media platforms to determine an organization's or brand's values, goals, and objectives.

Understanding

- Given social media content, distinguish the differences between corporate social responsibility and corporate social activism.
- Recognize social issues and policies that align with an organization based on the organization's stated values.

Application

- Improve persuasive writing and authentic communication skills through written corporate and brand social activism statements.
- Choose appropriate actions for an organization to take in support of social activism statements.

Lesson #2: Ethical Activist Communication with Publics

Purpose:

To understand how to ethically communicate with and engage with publics regarding comments resulting from social activism statements, especially with followers who disagree with them or shame the organization for past actions or lack of action that supports the organization's stand.

Materials:

Access to Ben & Jerry's, Peloton, Nordstrom, Dove, Uber, and Gushers social media pages (Facebook, Twitter and Instagram), with a focus on the content announcing corporate social activist statements and/or actions.

Again, if their university/college/department issued a corporate activist statement and/or took action, this should be included as well. These posts should include access to a sample of comments and responses that agree and disagree with the organization's statements/actions.

Objectives:

1. Explain the differences between bandwagon activism and social activism.
2. Identify techniques and language to humanize responses to hostile followers on social media platforms.
3. Create authentic messages to effectively engage with hostile followers on social media platforms.
4. Discuss the differences between audiences and communication strategies on popular social media platforms.

Body of Lesson:

This lesson will start by reviewing best practices for engaging with audiences on social media - from followers who applaud your brand to followers who are critical, emotional or abusive. For examples of best practices see Social Media: How to Engage, Share, and Connect (Luttrell, 2016) and Social Media for Strategic Communication: Creative Strategies and Research-Based Applications (Freberg, 2019). Additionally, the importance of organizational accountability (sharing about the action behind the words) and 'owning' past errors (apologizing for past organizational mistakes), will be emphasized. Students will discuss and evaluate the responses of organizations to both positive and negative comments to their statements on different social media platforms. Different types of activism (bandwagon and corporate social) will be looked at, discussed and differentiated.

Bandwagon activism happens when an organization's social activist statements aren't seen as genuine and authentic and aren't followed up by action. When an organization's statements are viewed by the public as "jumping on the bandwagon" and only one-time opportunities to employ temporary tactics, CSA can backfire (Sakoui & Faughnder, 2020). An example of this is when Amazon faced scrutiny for sharing statements supporting Black Lives Matter wihout implementing any real changes to reflect the statements into their internal policies and business practices (Paul, 2020).

Key Concepts:

- Bandwagon activism versus corporate social activism
- Humanizing the message
- Adapting strategies for audiences on different platforms
- Actions speak louder than words

Activities:

1. Have students look at an organization's social activist statements on social media and find examples in the comments section of these posts that are in support of and against the organization's shared statement to compare and discuss. Students will present their examples of negative and positive comments to the organization's activist statements on social media to the class and discuss why the organization's statement is successful or not, based upon the comments. (Was the statement deemed inauthentic? Did commenters see it as organizational bandwagon activism? Did the organization either not have or forget to mention potential actions to support message? Was it not aligned with the organization's stated values?)

2. Then, ask students to craft responses to both positive and negative

social media comments on the organization's social media activism content.

Evaluation:

- Student understanding of concepts will be demonstrated by their contributions to the discussion.
- The in-class writing exercise (Activity #2) will be peer reviewed and edited, and then their responses will be shared with the class for analysis and discussion.

How assessment of student learning will be met:

Awareness

- Learn the differences between bandwagon activism and social activism.
- Learn how to humanize messages with authentic language and empathy.

Understanding

- Given social media content, distinguish the differences between bandwagon activism and corporate social activism.
- Understand the effective use of empathy to humanize an organization's response to negative or hostile comments on the organization's social justice statements.

Application

- Analyze existing social activism content on popular social media platforms to determine appropriate strategies for different channels.
- Improve writing skills and humanizing messages through written responses to positive, negative/hostile, and/or emotional comments on social media platforms.

Case Study

A useful case study for organizational issue activism focuses on Ben & Jerry's ice cream, and their social justice/Black Lives Matter (BLM) activism on social media. They are unabashed in their beliefs and stances, take proactive action to support those beliefs, and encourage people to both agree and disagree with them on social media.

Some of the actions they have taken to support their statements include creating the Ben & Jerry's Foundation (launched 1985), which distributes money ($2.8 million in 2018) to support grassroots organizing for social and environmental justice. They have also created multiple new flavors to support their issues, including a Colin Kaepernick Change the Whirled Non-Dairy pint.

Additionally, Ben & Jerry's supports issues that are relevant and important to their customers, employees, and leadership, allowing for a variety of issues and ways to support the causes. In 2016, when Ben & Jerry's announced their support for BLM on social media, they had the largest reaction in their organizational history, including everything from cheering them on to announcing the customer was boycotting their product (Ben & Jerry's, 2016; Ciszek & Logan, 2018).

Rob Michalak, Ben & Jerry's Director of Social Mission Special Projects, said that "We respect that some people will have a set of values that are meaningful and important to them, and we may lose some customers. But what we've also learned is that those who share those values are more deeply loyal" (Forbes, 2020, para. 8). Fans on Facebook (one of their main platforms) support this: "I think I just need to buy another deep freezer for all the ice cream I'm gonna have to buy to counter everyone that claims

they are gonna quit buying Ben & Jerry's because wait for it...they speak out on injustice."

Finally, Ben & Jerry's believes that "purpose-driven companies really are the companies of the future; they're profitable and more sustainable" (Forbes, 2020, para. 12). This belief, along with the idea that it's simply the right thing to do, is clear through all their messaging, and that confidence is perhaps unique to their presentation and statements.

Ben & Jerry's offers an interesting perspective on making social justice statements on social media, and they back up their words with clear and concrete actions. They also have a fun and yet sincere approach to engaging publics in conversation on social media. These qualities combine to make them an excellent case study for this module and for student learning.

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BOOK REVIEW

What Does Injustice Have to Do with Me? Engaging Privileged White Students with Social Justice

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What Does Injustice Have to Do with Me? Engaging Privileged White Students with Social Justice
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Background

In the wake of social unrest after the murder of George Floyd in 2020, some educators began to question how they might infuse topics related to race, equity, inclusion and justice in the classroom. Specifically, educators were beginning to ask, what is the role of the white educator in using their power and privilege to advance social justice conversations in the classroom? Some white educators began seeking resources to become better allies while engaging in teaching and learning.

Scholars suggest that true allyship is best defined as people who work for social justice using their positions of assumed power which requires continual reflection, examination of history, personal perseverance, and moving beyond words (Reason and Broido, 2005). Using this definition,

allyship is wrought with difficulties when done purposefully. When teaching white students about historic injustices, the greatest fear of white allies is the risk of students shutting down and parents reacting negatively to the topic. Further, many allies fear being personally ostracized by family, friends and colleagues who believe that we live in a post-racial world. Others may even fear acts of violence against them for attempting to provide an anti-racist education. These are merely a few of the difficulties that help explain why so few earnestly engage in dismantling systems of oppression by teaching white students about their role in helping to create a more just society.

In his 195-page book, *What Does Injustice Have to Do with Me? Engaging Privileged White Students with Social Justice*, the author, David Nurenberg, immediately discloses his identity as a white, privileged, cisgender, Jewish, male who possesses assumed power and privilege in society. He deftly introduces that his motivation for writing the book was the result of an experience with a student who, for a writing assignment wrote a well-constructed essay critiquing the use of Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech in class because it was not relevant for a white audience. Nurenberg reflects that in that moment he realized there were deficits in how white students were being taught about social movements and their role in systemic injustices. Nurenberg further cites his 2018 TEDx talk in Washington, DC as a pivotal moment that convinced him there was a demand among white teachers for information on teaching topics of privilege, power and racial inequity.

Since the work of educating white allies often falls to students and teachers of color, Nurenberg decided he would use his shared identity to write and speak to white teachers of privileged students. Citing the work

of Matthew Kay, Nurenberg rationalizes that it takes more than "pop-up race conversations" for white educators to teach and lead discussions.

Content and Organization

The book is organized in seven chapters with compelling titles that include: 1) Who are the Privileged Students and How should they be taught? 2) Warming up the Room, 3) Self and Other, 4) What does Injustice Have to Do with Me, 5) Privileged Victims, 6) Struggling to be the Change: Allyship, Activism and the Dangers of the Savior Trap, 7) Choosing Between What is Easy and What is Right. Before immersing the reader in a cultural competency framework, Nurenberg uses chapters one and two to offer context, theory and his thoughts on practical preparation for teachers who seek to undertake meaningful non-toxic conversations about race and privilege. Each chapter is written to offer pointers to white allies on how to use their privilege and power to amplify social justice learning in the classroom.

The overarching framework of the book is arranged around Diane Goodman's, Cultural Competence for Social Justice. There are seven competencies that inform the range of awareness, knowledge, and skills necessary to conduct ally-related teaching. The competencies include 1) Self-awareness, 2) Understanding and valuing others, 3) Knowledge of societal inequities, 4) Skills to interact with diverse people, and, 5) Skills to foster equity and inclusion.

Before going in-depth into using the competencies, the author's acknowledgements and introduction are worth reading since these sections offer profound insights into Nurenberg's identity, personal motivations, and his in-depth understanding of the delicate ecosystem of privilege, power and teaching. He describes that he seeks to model norms for

teachers and students to establish as they learn more about social justice while allowing "permission to fumble."

Chapters 2-7 use Goodman's competencies to help educators navigate their role as an ally with colleagues and then go on to create lesson plans, lead classroom activities and facilitate discussions. Throughout the book Nurenberg is mindful to acknowledge the contributions of scholars of color, white scholars, teachers and activists who have produced work related to critical race theory, education and anti-racism. He further admits that he has personally made mistakes in his efforts to engage in social justice work, which credibly humanizes him.

Contributions of this Book

This book would not be considered a textbook that contributes to public relations education in the traditional sense. It is best described as a toolkit to help white educators navigate their teaching and learning on matters of race and social justice. The author openly admits this book is primarily written for white educators. However, as universities and corporations endeavor diversity, equity and inclusion courses or initiatives, this book could be a useful resource for white employees, parents, staff, and students to cultivate self-awareness and learn from Nurenberg's personal stories, practical advice and teaching tools.

Strengths/Weaknesses

Since the summer of 2020, the work of defining social justice became a greater burden to people of color as allies sought out resources. The strength of this book is that Nurenberg has well-researched each chapter, offers actionable, practical tips to white allies willing to engage in self-examination. The book is written in a conversational, instructional tone and may lessen the fear of making mistakes. One difficulty with this

book is that Nurenberg refers to his own anti-Semitic experiences which could be viewed as yet another white liberal seeking to center himself in the narrative of a timely societal topic. When white allies write about social injustice, it is difficult to avoid being viewed as a performative ally. It will be Important for Nurenberg to continue his work on advancing an authentic anti-racist agenda in his own teaching, learning and speaking.

Conclusion

In summary, *What Does Injustice Have to Do With Me?* is a book as much about pedagogy as it is about self-awareness, shared power, and authentic allyship. Overall, the author effectively analyzes the need for white educators, especially those who teach white students, to learn more about unequal systems and outcomes of oppressive systems on society. Nurenberg pragmatically argues that social justice education is critical to not only advance society but it affects everyone. He alludes that this learning will help white students emerge from a lack of empathy and the cynicism that surround topics of race. This book is useful for white educators because it is written from the perspective of a white educator who has personally experienced, researched and fumbled with the iterative process of social justice work. Perhaps Nurenberg's identity will resonate with other white educators and help avoid performative allyship.

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