
2 Research issues (literature review)

Introduction

The initial research (gathering of literature) for this project proved to be quite difficult because of the scarcity of material available. PR scholars have mostly approached the subject from purely feminist issues (that is, pay, gender, inequality, management). However, there is a great deal of statistical evidence, general as it is, to show that women undoubtedly outnumber men within public relations, both academically (student enrolments) and professionally. Most of the material relating directly to PR is US-centric, simply because there is virtually no literature on the Australian industry, and little on the industry in Europe. In fact, the PRIA does not keep membership statistics, though I was assured in 2005 by the then national president that this would change, as a result of my enquiries.

Other disciplines

Because my study is attempting to discover why women are entering PR in ever-increasing numbers, the simple reliance on PR literature and statistics can not present a full picture. Other works found relevant to my study included references to the ways in which society has changed and the different ways women and men approach the “traditional” PR functions of creativity, written English and verbal presentation. Sociological and psychological literature also proved invaluable. A brief comparison is also made with the highly male-dominated Information Technology (IT) sector in Western Australia.

Immediate discipline – PR literature

Early signs of interest regarding women in PR began in the late 1970s, when Gower (2001) began the process of “rediscovering” women in (US) public relations by examining the *Public Relations Journal* for the presence of

women from 1945 to 1972. Women, Gower found, had always been working in the profession, contrary to popular belief that it was a male-only industry – the preserve of former journalists, who in turn, tended to be mostly male.

Edward L. Bernays, who is widely held responsible for defining the modern function of public relations as 'an advisor to management', had a female business partner. Many historians failed to credit Bernays' wife, Doris E. Feleischman, with any of the credit for their shared accomplishments in public relations. She interviewed clients and wrote news releases, edited the company's newsletter and wrote and edited books and magazine articles, among other duties. (Wilcox, Ault and Agee, 1998, pp 90-91)

An important trend in hiring of women in public relations is that it had happened much more dramatically than the entry of women into all occupations. Reskin and Roos (1990) listed public relations as one of the occupations in the 1970s to show a “disproportionate” increase in female workers, “during a decade in which their advancement into most male occupations was modest at best” (p. 6). One of the biggest factors in the sudden rise of women into the (US) PR workforce was the advent of affirmative action in the 1970s. Legislation forced companies to hire a certain percentage of women. “Employers may have found it useful to place women in visible positions” (Donato, 1990, p. 129).

Recognition of the growing numbers of women in (US) public relations probably came to prominence in the mid-1980s and resulted in the benchmark 1986 report, *The Velvet Ghetto* (now unobtainable). This report, commissioned by the International Association of Business Communicators, concentrated on gender issues, touching on the issues of women’s “over-population” of the profession. Two years later, the report’s authors said that “women working in business communication shows an increase that is wildly out of proportion – 44.56 per cent of the US workforce is female, but the proportion in business communication is over 70.56 per cent” (Cline et al., 1986). This thesis, however, has been recently debunked, with (Hutton, 2005) saying it consists “almost entirely of anecdotal evidence and very

small-scale studies that lacked statistical validity. It included no comprehensive or statistically significant studies capable of providing a benchmark or presenting a scientific argument.” Hall (2005) quotes Hutton: “The academics ... have known full well that the gender ‘research’ has been nothing but propaganda and a disinformation campaign – political correctness run amok.”

Controversial though it may be, Hutton continued:

The majority of [American public relations professors] know almost nothing about business. Therefore, they don’t even understand what Business Week was talking about when it coined the term ‘Velvet Ghetto’ about 25 years ago. ‘Velvet’ did not refer to women being mistreated, but referred to the fact that women were being treated so well in PR; often given preferential treatment as the beneficiaries of affirmative action.

Some early statistical evidence showed how women once were by far the minority; the earliest of these being membership of the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) from 1949 to 1952. Of the new members admitted in that time, only 3.8 per cent were women. Gower’s study of the *Public Relations Journal* showed that from 1958 to 1961, PR was still a male-orientated profession: “The lack of a female presence fitted with the ideal or feminine myth promulgated by the mass media in the 1950s of the married woman happily at home with her children” (Gower, 2001, p. 18).

Women continued to enter public relations, accounting for 25 per cent of its practitioners by 1960. The US Census showed an increase in women in public relations and publicity writing of 263.6 percent from 1950 to 1960. “Public relations student societies started on college campuses in 1968, and women accounted for 34 per cent of the membership in those societies” (Gower, 2001, p. 20).

In the United Kingdom the situation is virtually identical. A study commissioned by the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) and undertaken by the Centre for Economics and Business Research Ltd shows

“Public relations is a female-dominated profession with almost two thirds of workers being women compared to only 46 per cent for the workforce at large” (CIPR 2005).

According to Zawawi (2000), the first Australian PR business was set up by Asher Joel and George Freeman just after the Second World War. Joel was a former journalist who joined the navy and ended up serving on (US) General Douglas MacArthur’s PR staff (of 35). Freeman was a fundraiser. Joel was also instrumental in setting up the PRIA.

The establishment of the first public relations degree courses in the 1960s (Mitchell College, Bathurst, and the Queensland Institute of Technology, Brisbane) not only allowed businesses to employ trained junior staff but helped open the profession to women. In the early 1970s only around 10 per cent of public relations practitioners were women. It is estimated the ratio of men to women hit the 50/50 mark some time in the early 1980s. In 1997 a survey of Queensland members of the PRIA showed two-thirds were women (Zawawi, 2000).

There appeared to be an absence of research between 1989 and 1993, according to Grunig, Toth and Hon (2001, p. 45). “In 1989, when the *Public Relations Journal* published an article about female practitioners”. The then president of the PRSA was quoted as saying he was not aware of any problems relating to women in PR. However, he acted on the many replies his comments drew, and established a Task Force on women in PR, which was called the Committee on Work, Life and Gender Issues. Grunig et al.’s 2001 book, *Women in public relations: how gender influences practice*, is arguably the main text on female issues in public relations. However, like all texts in this field, it deals mainly with status, salary, equity, gender, gender bias and sexual discrimination: not reasons for the high numbers of women. The issues raised by Grunig et al. certainly have a role to play in some areas of this study, but the book really deals with women's role/s in PR, at a time when little was being done to address the imbalances and issues that women faced within the industry.

One of the central issues raised by Grunig et al. (and others) is the effect of the feminisation of the PR industry. “If women become the majority in public relations, the practice will be typecast as ‘women's work’. It will lose what clout it now has as a management function and become a second-class occupation. In the process, gains made over 50 years to build and sustain the value of public relations will disappear” (Bates, 1983, as cited in Grunig, 2001).

Downturns in wages in industries that become female-dominated professions is also raised by Kimmel (2004). This is often cited as a fear among PR practitioners: that an imbalance will lead to a ‘cheapening’ of the profession. This is a theory put forward by many academics across a wide range of disciplines. Kimmel (2004) cites the changes that have occurred to the clerical profession. Interestingly, the changes to this occupation are similar to what has happened in PR.

Clerical work was once considered a highly-skilled occupation in which a virtually all-male labour force was paid reasonably well. In both Britain and the US the gender distribution began to change and by the middle of the century most clerical workers were female. As a result, clerical work was revaluated as less demanding of skill and less valuable to the organisation; thus workers’ wages fell. As sociologist Cohen notes, this is a result, not a cause, of the changing gender composition of the workforce (Kimmel, 2004, p. 190).

The question is: will this have the same effect on PR?

Kimmel also points to veterinary medicine, which in the 1960s only had about a five per cent female workforce. Today it is closer to 70 per cent. “In the 1970s, when males dominated the profession, the wages of vets and medical practitioners were roughly equal. Today the average wage for a vet is \$70–80,000, while a physician earns double that” (Kimmel, 2004, p. 190).

The opposite happened in computer programming. In the 1940s women were hired as key punch operators (in effect, early computer programming). “It required skills in abstract logic, maths and electrical circuitry. But once

‘programming’ was recognised as ‘intellectually-demanding’ it became attractive to men, who began to enter the industry and drove up wages” (Mimmel, 2004, p. 191).

Dorer (2005) calls this process “re-coding”. According to Dorer, discussion in Germany about the “re-coding” of PR (from a male to female profession) started at the beginning of the 1990s. The profession in Germany and Austria, however, still has balance, but is changing. In Austria in 1993 there was a 36 per cent female representation. In 2003 it had reached almost 48 per cent. “What these figures show is that ... PR is gradually turning into a predominantly female profession in German-speaking countries – a 20-year lag on US developments notwithstanding” (Dorer, 2005, p. 186). The “re-coding” of an industry can work both ways. Female typists became male typesetters, while male secretaries became female. For example, when I think of journalism, it was only recently (probably up to 10 years ago) that women sports reporters were not considered “serious” journalists by their peers. It was only a little after that time that barriers such as female reporters being allowed into rugby teams’ dressing rooms were removed.

While the movement of women into a profession is widely believed to herald a decline in wages and a “de-skilling” of an occupation, Game and Pringle (1983) hold a contradictory view, in that “the reverse is frequently the case – work is de-skilled and then women move in” (p. 18). If this is the case in PR, could it be that the work of the profession has become “trite” and “devalued” due to a variety of factors, including low scores necessary to enter university and the large numbers allowed to study the subject. This then removes the prestige and value of the subject and, in turn, the profession.

In Australia, this problem was highlighted by Pockcock and Alexander (1999). From an analysis of the 1995 Australian Workplace Industrial Relations Survey, it was found that wages fell in professions dominated by women.

Women in industries that were close to 100 per cent female-dominated earned 32 per cent less per hour than women with otherwise identical characteristics in industries that were close to 100 per cent male-dominated, [with] the penalty for women being in a highly feminised occupation, compared to one that is male-dominated, was 15 per cent (Pockcock, et al. 1999, p. 75).

In a US context, Donato (1990) notes that while PR paid women 60 per cent more than the median female wage in the 1970s, that figure had dropped to 37 per cent in 1980. That it dipped markedly is further evidence that when a profession is feminised, wages drop.

Most recently, Grunig (2001) quotes from a 1993 PRSA monograph, *Ten Challenges to PR during the Next Decade*, in which Challenge Six addressed the problem of the shrinking number of males in the profession.

Much more needs to be done . . . to encourage more men into the field . . . Public Relations is stultified when it reflects a limited slice of a diverse population. Steps should be taken to identify the factors responsible for ... the declining numbers of males entering the field (Grunig, 2001).

In the Australian context, there are indications that the feminisation of PR does not make it an attractive career option. McCurdy (2005) found that:

80 per cent of female practitioners indicated the belief that public relations is viewed as a female industry, with the one female interviewee indicating that the only young male she knew who worked in public relations left because he was told it was a 'girls job'. One of the male interviewees even admitted that he does not tell people he works in public relations because of the negative responses he receives as a direct result of the industry being perceived as a female majority. (McCurdy, 2005, p. 93)

Sha (2001) concluded that feminisation would make public relations more ethical, "not merely in appearance, but in practice" (p. 45). Others, like Larissa Grunig (2001), Dozier (1988) and Rakow (1989) argued the prevalence of women would introduce characteristics such as collaboration, sensitivity towards audiences and better two-way communication. Several

theories on reasons why women enter PR have been put forward. They do not reveal much detail, but are included to demonstrate current thinking:

“Primarily to write and be creative” (Creedon, as cited in Aldoory, 2001).

Women’s interest in more creative pursuits are examples of socialisation (Cline, as cited in Aldoory, 2001).

In summary, there can be no doubt the PR literature on this specific topic is scarce, as Noble, 2004 points out. In her Masters thesis on the same subject, Noble draws on material which focused on the advertising industry. However, I found the findings to be of limited value to this thesis, as these two statements demonstrate.

“Most advertising students at two major universities chose advertising as a major because they found the field of study interesting” (Fullerton and Umphrey, as cited in Noble, 2004, p. 5) ... and

“Students majoring in advertising were drawn to the field because it seemed interesting and challenging” (Schweitzer, as cited in Noble, 2004, p. 5).

Having interest in a subject is, of course, a valid reason, but does not explain why females and males choose the subject.

Socialisation

Socialisation: “The process by which culture is learned” (*Oregon State University*).

Gendered socialisation: “The process by which children acquire the knowledge and internalise the values of socially-determined sex roles (*McGraw Hill Higher Education*).

The issue of socialisation is not covered in any depth by PR researchers with regard to its being a factor in determining career choices. Even the basic question of what type of person practises PR has never been answered. For

the purposes of this study, the term socialisation is taken to mean the learning of a society's customs, attitudes and values. Henslin, as cited in Wikipedia, 2006, contends that "an important part of socialisation is the learning of culturally-defined gender roles". Gender socialisation refers to the learning of behaviour and attitudes considered appropriate for a given sex. The central question that arises is therefore: is the nature of PR shaped by the way our society perceives it? Are certain types of people drawn to PR because of what they have learned about PR and the way they learn it? Learning, of course, comes from a variety of sources – family, peers, work colleagues and the media. All of these will have an effect on the way our society views PR. The subject certainly raises more questions than it answers.

Deaux (1976) looked at how variations in our environment can lead to differences in behaviour. With the PR "environment" changing markedly with regard to gender composition, does this in turn lead to a change in how people in the industry (and those entering it) view it? The core of Deaux's study recognises that "in nearly every area of social behaviour, differences between men and women have been observed" (1976, p. 3). The "environment" is an area that Barnett and Rivers looked at in their 2004 book, *Same Difference: How Gender Myths are Hurting Our Relationships, Our Children and Our Jobs*. Ohlott (2005) noted that "unlike many proponents of currently popular gender theories, Barnett and Rivers suggest we are each a product of many interacting forces, including our genes, our personalities, our environments and chance." This is a theme I follow in more detail further on.

In considering whether gender may play a part in people selecting PR as a career, we should look (from a socialisation perspective) at whether there are differences between males and females. Deaux cites a 1974 study (*Psychology of Sex Differences*) of more than 2000 cases by Macoby and Jacklin, who found solid evidence for only four behavioural differences (aggression, spatial, verbal and maths), only one of which is directly

pertinent to PR, based on the premise that it (verbal skills) appears constantly in the literature. Once again, women were found to be superior to men in verbal ability, while men excel in maths. “In both instances, these differences are not observed in early childhood but show divergence after adolescence” (Deaux, 1976). Macoby and Jacklin (1974) also found men and boys to be constantly more aggressive. However, on their own they do provide a reason why more women than men enter PR. Noble (2004) cites four studies that indicate gender influences subject selection at university: “These studies suggest women choose majors consistent with traditional roles, such as teaching, rather than technology-related careers, such as computer programming and engineering” (p. 6).

At this point in time I think it necessary here (rather than in the literature review) to mention the more recent (2005) research by Noble into US students’ reasons for studying PR. Noble surveyed 159 PR students at one university. While this certainly limits that study, as only one university was sampled, the work is highly relevant. It is one of only a few pieces of literature that started to appear (all about the same time) a year into my study. Noble sought not so much to focus on gender, but to more broadly understand why students enter PR, their misconceptions, and ways of developing methods to correct those misconceptions. Once again, Noble reinforces the frustration I (and one of two others found): “A review of literature reveals virtually no research related to the specific reasons why public relations students select the major” (Noble, 2004, p. 5).

While surveys have been undertaken to determine whether students select a course major in line with traditional gender roles, the findings are consistently contradictory. Noble (2005) pointed to research by Eide (1994) which said students did not choose courses that were in line with gender roles, and that of Dawson-Threat and Huba (1996) who refuted this.

Because there is almost no research on why more women than men study PR, it helps to look at other careers where research has been done. The gender balance in the sciences and maths is the opposite to PR, in that they

are male-dominated. By looking at how researchers have approached the socialisation of maths and science, we may better understand the situation in PR. In 2005, Harvard University psychologist Elizabeth Spelke debated the notion of how great a part socialisation plays in why males or females take up careers in the sciences and maths. In a 2005 debate with colleague Steven Pinker, Spelke made mention of the Macoby and Jacklin research, saying nothing much had changed. Taking the “nurture” stance, Spelke is adamant that the “gap” is caused by social factors. “There are no differences in overall intrinsic aptitude for science and mathematics between women and men,” she says (Pinker, 2005). So if differences in intrinsic attitudes don’t cause a gender imbalance, what does? According to Spelke, gender stereotypes influence the ways in which males and females are perceived. Spelke believes:

Knowledge of a person’s gender will influence our assessment of factors such as productivity and experience, and that's going to produce a pattern of discrimination, even in people with the best intentions. Biased perceptions earlier in life may well deter some female students from even attempting a career in science or mathematics (Spelke, 2005).

When analysing why more women than men choose a certain career, there should also be consideration of what Spelke termed the *snowball effect*, which is when we “imagine ourselves in careers where there are other people like us. If the first two effects perpetuate a situation where there are few female scientists and mathematicians, young girls will be less likely to see math and science as a possible life” (Pinker, 2005). Others have also adopted this mantra.

The key lies in the perceptions of the qualities and work values of different occupations. I stress the word 'perceptions' because I do suspect that these are stereotyped views, which are not necessarily based on realization. (Cumming, 1997, p. 9)

Using this rationale, it follows that biased perceptions (of potential male students) may deter them from attempting a career in PR. Similarly, if there

are few male PR professionals, the idea is perpetuated that PR is a female profession, and males will not see it as a viable career choice. This is supported by many of the comments from both males and females in this thesis's interviews, focus groups and survey responses. Cumming (1997) and Couch and Sigler (2001) found that perceptions about occupations continue to be a determining factor in students' choice of occupation. In reference to the continued perception that "occupations are associated with a particular sex, one answer lies in the representation of professions in the media." Certain occupations are portrayed in a stereotyped way. "Professions such as lawyers, government officials, physicians, etc, continue to be masculine-oriented." Similarly, Gottfredson, as cited in Glick, Wilk and Perrault (1995), found that "people perceive occupations similarly, no matter what their sex, social class, educational level, ethnic group, area of residence, occupational preferences or employment, age, type of school attended, political persuasion, and traditionality [sic] of beliefs". This suggests that people organise their images of occupations in a highly stereotyped, socially-learned manner – a point I will explore, and argue for, later. This is particularly apt with regard to PR – an industry that bases much of its success on portraying a certain perception of a client. This notion is also supported by Anne Parry, IPR Midlands group chair and deputy MD of Quantum PR in Birmingham, who said in a 2004 interview with *icBirmingham* (a UK-based web business site): "The root cause of the problem is perhaps the perception of PR, which is still not being taken seriously enough and is often viewed as a bit girlie in certain quarters" (np).

In her Honours thesis, McCurdy (2005) highlighted the role that perception of the industry plays in attracting people, and of how the community perceives an industry, in this case, PR.

It could be assumed that although public relations students and practitioners do not state a direct belief that a female majority has caused a threat to the overall status of the public relations industry, the negative viewing of the industry in the general community may dictate that a female majority has posed a threat rather than contribution. In order to help change the negative view of the industry currently held by the general community, public relations has to be redefined and definable. Once people can understand the functions undertaken by practitioners they may then understand the value of the industry not only towards the business community but also the general community. Secondly, public relations has to “get out there”. In other words, advertising should be conducted in order to educate (McCurdy, 2005, p. 94).

Research shows that perceptions about certain occupations develop well before university. Levy et. al., (2000) cite research by Huston, 1983; Ruble and Martin, 1998, which shows “preschoolers and primary school children demonstrate substantial knowledge of gender-typed occupations”. Specifically, girls choose significantly more feminine occupations (for example, teaching, nursing), while boys chose significantly more masculine occupations (for example, police officer, truck driving). “Thus, it appears that young children hold strong gender-typed perceptions of adult occupations and presumably use these standards when contemplating future work choices” (Levy, Sadovsky and Troseth, 2000).

The fact that women are better in spoken (and written) English is a point continually raised by many of the subjects surveyed and interviewed in my study. On university entrance tests, for example, “verbal aptitude test scores for women are consistently higher than those for men” (Deaux, 1976, p. 7). The fact that these differences develop in adolescence indicates that social conditioning comes into play (that is, we are a result of our social surrounds). If that is the case, it stands to reason that an individual’s and, in turn, a society’s opinions of PR (indeed, any career) can be shaped progressively through time.

Kimmel (2004) says the reason why girls outpace boys in English is “not the result of ‘reverse discrimination’ but because boys bump up against the

norms of masculinity (of what we regard as masculine or feminine). Boys regard English as a feminine subject. Kimmel pointed to research in Australia by Wayne Martino and colleagues, who found that boys are uninterested in English because of what it might say about their masculine pose.

‘Reading is lame, sitting down looking at words is pathetic,’ commented one boy. ‘Most boys that like English are faggots’, commented another. Boys tend to hate English for the same reasons that girls love it. In English they observe, there are no hard and fast rules, but rather one expresses one’s opinion about the topic and everyone’s opinion is equally valued. ‘The answer can be a variety of things; you’re never really wrong,’ said one boy. ‘It’s not like maths or science, where there is one set answer for everything,’ another noted (Kimmel, 2004, p. 170).

Compare this to the response of some of this Study’s subjects, and the answers are remarkably similar. Male students simply feel ‘out of their comfort zone’ with English. As one male student said to me in an interview:

To be honest, one thing that has turned me off PR is that it seems ambiguous compared to marketing and advertising. It’s hard to measure PR, and you don’t know if the work you are doing is working or not.

There are conflicting views on whether or not gender differences are part of our biology, or just a result of ‘socialisation’. That we are a result of our social conditioning is made clear by Deaux (1976, p. 6), who argues that “if a difference between men and women is found consistently across a variety of societies, then we can have more faith in a biological component [being responsible for behaviour and attitudes].” For example, not every society on earth is aggressive, so aggression can not be a result of biology. Therefore, humans’ traits must be a result of social processes. On the other hand, Moir and Jessell (1996) argue that “the differences between the sexes are biological, not sociological” (pp 5-17). They say that aggression is a result of our biological makeup. “We do not teach our children to be aggressive – indeed, we try to vainly un-teach it. This is a male feature and one which can not be explained by social conditioning” (p. 7).

From a socialisation perspective, Deaux (1976) says “young boys are given more physical stimulation, while young girls are given more vocal stimulation” (p. 7). The fact that most parents expect boys should not be feminine and girls should not be masculine would indicate that sociologically males would not be attracted to a career that appears feminine.

I found illuminating the study cited in Moir and Jessell (1996) of an Israeli kibbutz which tried to eliminate stereotyping (clothing, hairstyles, toys, behaviour). Despite the efforts, boys still went on to study physics and engineering. The girls went on to study sociology and became teachers. Moir and Jessell saw that as proof that “the minds of men and women are different, and that ultimately boys and men live in a world of things and space; girls and women in a world of people and relationships” (1996, p. 154). In exploring the lack of women within IT in Australia, Walters (2006) said: “Women approach design of technology in a different way from men.”

The question of whether gender (and differences) plays a part in determining someone’s entry into PR may, for the moment, remain elusive. Tavis (1992) notes that this type of research “can not explain, for instance, why if women are better than men in verbal ability, so few women are auctioneers or diplomats, or why, if women have the advantage of making rapid judgments, so few women are air-traffic controllers or umpires” (p. 54).

Grunig, Toth and Hon (2001) argue that public relations is an industry founded on feminine values, such as honesty, justice, and sensitivity, which will enhance the symmetrical communication patterns of public relations. Furthermore, the two-way symmetrical model of public relations requires resolving conflict and building relationships, which are intrinsically feminist values. “Feminist theorizing about public relations proposes that the profession is inherently feminine in nature because of its purposes, practices, and attributes” (Childers-Hon, 1995). Only four (industry) areas (of 11 put forward) were significantly more male- than female-oriented, and those specialties entail areas of expertise that have traditionally been male – technology, finance, sports, and industry. These findings support comments

found in previous interviews with PR practitioners regarding gender segregation in the field. According to Aldoory (2001), the proportion of practitioners not only favours women, but younger women. This is supported by figures from PRSA and IABC surveys.

Much discussion in the mid-80s to 1990s was on the feminisation of PR. Fears were held that this trend would lead to a drop in status and salaries. Sha (as cited in Aldoory, 2001) concluded that feminisation would make public relations more ethical, “not merely in appearance, but in practice”. Others, like Larissa Grunig and Dozier (1992) and Rakow (1989) said the prevalence of women would introduce characteristics such as collaboration, sensitivity towards audiences and better two-way communication. Certainly PR has become more open and two-way. But perhaps this may be just a result of media fragmentation and the development of the Internet, which encourages PR practice to be more “in tune” with its target audiences.

There are other less-scholarly views. Richard Brandt, editor-in-chief of *Upside*, said: “I have this uneasy feeling that the reason there are so many women in PR is that it's a form of journalism that's less respected and therefore easier for them to get ahead” (Brown, 1998). Perhaps wanting to protect himself from the avalanche that would follow that statement, Brandt continued: “But I have also seen the profession increase its role, its influence and its importance very dramatically over the last couple of decades. And at the same time that's when a lot of women have gotten into it.”

Hutton (2005) dealt with the issues of the often-raised issue of salary discrimination in PR. In doing so, he touched on what was assumed to be the early research on gender issues and finds the methodology to be wanting. For example, he debunked the findings of the 1986 *Velvet Ghetto* report in a number of areas, mostly in salary, finding little discrimination (this is covered in the conclusions to Chapter Seven). Hutton also found that gender discrimination work presented through the PRSA was also flawed, with “the claim of pervasive discrimination was based on the opinions of a single, non-randomly selected, four-woman focus group, whose views were directly

contradicted by a single, 11-man focus group. In other words, “the authors of the monograph completely dismissed the comments of the 11 men, while extrapolating the comments of four women to the entire US PR profession” (Hutton, 2005).

One interesting aspect to the study is reverse discrimination – a byproduct of the changing nature of PR. The issue was raised by two senior male practitioners and one student and warrants discussion, as it may become a growing problem of a reshaped profession. In such a small study it is enough to be flagged as a warning in any future discussion on the gender composition of the industry. The fact that a senior government (male) PR officer alleges bias in employment against males, and there is discrimination against a male PR student is cause for concern.

With regard to the impact on individual males, a British study by Cross and Bagilhole (2002) reports on a small-scale, qualitative study of 10 men who have crossed into what are generally defined as ‘women’s jobs’. In doing so, one of the impacts on them has been that they have experienced challenges to their masculine identity from various sources and in a variety of ways. This aspect briefly reared itself in the case of the second-year male PR student. However, I believe, as do most in the profession, that this aspect is of concern at this point in time. It may, however, remain an influencing factor on students, who are still, by and large, conditioned by society to believe in what constitutes men’s and women’s work. This perception, fuelled by the media, is enough to guarantee the continued increasing entry of females into PR.

While this study does not (and should not) attempt to dwell on the issue of discrimination in PR, it should outline an associated phenomenon which could be taking place in tandem with the rise in the number of women in PR. Discrimination against males (reverse discrimination) is something that came to my attention in October-November 2005. Firstly I received an unsolicited e-mail from a male PR student at the Canberra Institute of Technology. The

student (Bill – not his real name), who had almost completed his studies, was one of two males in a class with 28 women. In Bill's own words:

I have actually been faced with a lot of issues that relate to my gender in this industry. I am judged by people outside the industry as strange, being a male studying PR. By teachers, I have been ignored or had ideas put down. General thoughts that I have shared with the rest of the class, have been put down and stated as sexist, purely because they come from my mouth. My theories and skills have been questioned due to my gender. The list goes on, but overall I have come across quite a few boundaries placed up against me due to my gender. I have even had my sexuality (questioned) several times because I am studying a female-dominated industry (*Student 2005*).

As a result of this contact, Bill was 'dismissed' by the PR firm he sent the e-mails from, and failed his professional placement: something I felt was outrageously unfair. The last message I had from him was on 6 December:

A package was sent to them (the consultancy) from the internship boss with a letter of complaint for me making contact with you. So it all ended in disaster, but I have no regrets on making the contact. She has just proved that I really do have something to be concerned about as I go into the industry.

The issue became apparent again a month later, after I interviewed a leading Perth (male) PR practitioner, who mentioned a colleague who had misgivings about the way the industry might be heading, due to the gender imbalance. I obtained the colleague's thoughts on the issue. While in some parts they are quite scathing about the way he perceives many females operate in PR (he labels the current crop of female practitioners 'Grimbos' [that is, no sense of humour, hence grim] and with a take on the word bimbo), there were pertinent points about concerns for males in the industry. Agree or not, the practitioner has more than 20 years experience with major corporations and government departments.

I believe it is unstoppable (female predominance) now, and difficulties for males in PR will continue to grow as many key marketing and HR executives are now female and make up the panels one fronts for both jobs and also when you pitch for a PR account. You can tell you're dead in the water as soon as you walk through the door. It is especially prevalent in my field, tourism and hospitality, where, for example, most hotel GMs now see PR exclusively as a young/blonde/female role. I've been in PR for more than 20 years ... (and) the past five years has been the most difficult because, I firmly believe, of this growing gender bias, which of course one can never prove (practitioner, 2005).

Wilcox et al. (1998) also points to this 'reverse discrimination'. "Some men have complained about 'reverse discrimination' because some companies are seeking women. A 70-30 ratio [of women to men] in fields that virtually demand a university education is exceptionally high." I mention it principally because it resulted (un-announced) directly from this study. Obviously, there is room for specialised research in this topic.

Wilcox, et al., (1998) was one of the few scholars to mention reasons for the predominance of women in PR. However, Wilcox's brief reference is a succinct précis of what many of this study's subjects, both male and female, believe.

Public relations attracts well-educated women for several reasons. The availability of its jobs is better than in the mass media; salaries and career advancement opportunities are relatively good, and the work is widely regarded as glamorous. Women bring to PR an instinct for building personal relationships and a sensitivity towards social problems. (pp 90-91)

Some of these points are raised further in my study by professionals and students: particularly the issue of glamour being an incentive to pursue PR as a career, and the general notion that women "have the instinct" for PR.

I make mention of what is (apart from Noble, 2004) the first detailed attempt to define the phenomenon. In 2005, The University of North Carolina's Janie Folmar presented her Masters thesis, titled, *Why are more women than men attracted to the field of public relations? Analyzing students' reasons for*

studying PR. As I was halfway through my research it came as a godsend, though I felt slightly “beaten to the punch”. Folmar was most cooperative and provided the thesis. Like Noble, and others, she also was stymied by the lack of research, and proceeded down the gender path as a way of trying to obtain some answers. “The conceptual framework supporting this study revolves around gender” (Folmar, 2005). She concluded:

Specifically, women’s reasons for being attracted to public relations included: it is a profession for which they feel well-suited, allowing opportunities for relationship-building, interpersonal communication, and creativity; and it is a broad, portable career path that allows opportunities for advancement, as well as flexibility for family demands. (Folmar, 2005)

These finding are similar to the views expressed by Wilcox et. al., 1998.

Societal change

The so-called traditional system of dads who go out to work every morning, leaving mum to stay at home with the children, a fulltime housewife and mother, was an invention of the 1950s, and part of a larger ideological effort to facilitate the re-entry of American men back into the workforce and domestic life after World War II, and to legitimate the return of women from the workplace and back into the home (Kimmel, 2004).

History shows we are a male-dominated culture (patriarchy). Stereotypes have been, and continue to be passed through the generations. Women served Australia’s industrial society well up to the Second World War, when they increasingly took on hard labour (farming, manufacturing) traditionally the preserve of their menfolk, who were fighting overseas. Now, with the expansion of technology we have changed our needs again, although our work values are still, to a large extent, locked into a bygone era. “Success in dealing with continuing accelerating change will be our ability to make decisions and to modify our values, beliefs and attitudes” (Chater et al., 1995).

Widespread change became apparent in the 1970s, with the advent of the feminist movement. This led to the entry of more women into the workforce. In the US, “more than 50% of American women [joined] the work force by 1980, while the largest increase of working women due to the women's movement was, not surprisingly, white, middle-class, well-educated females” (Reciniello 1999). What was once a phenomenon of women entering the workforce is now commonplace.

Wooten (1997) points to the following factors which have contributed to the ever-increasing numbers of women entering the workforce:

- The advances of the women’s movement,
- The enactment of laws prohibiting sex discrimination,
- Increases in female enrolment in higher education and professional schools,
- The steady increase in women’s labor force participation, and
- Reductions in gender stereotyping in both education and employment.

Figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) clearly show women’s participation rates advancing over men’s during the 1990s. “In Western Australia, since 1984–85, the number of women employed has almost doubled, increasing by 94.2 per cent to reach 445,381 in 2004–05” (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006). According to the ABS, factors that have contributed to the State’s labour force growth over the past two decades include:

- A doubling in the number of women employed (from about 229,000 in 1984–85 to 445,000 in 2004–05),
- More than half of women in WA are now participating in the labour force (58% in 2004–05 compared to 48% in 1984–85).

Year	Female workforce participation (000s)	Female growth rate (as % of workforce)	Male growth rate (as % of workforce)
95-96	3.59	3.4	1.5
96-97	3.63	1.2	0.9
97-98	3.69	1.4	0.9
98-99	3.77	2.3	1
99-00	3.89	3	0.4
00-01	4.03	3.1	1.3
01-02	4.06	1.3	1.5
02-03	4.2	3.3	1.1
03-04	4.25	1.2	1.5

Table 1: Female participation (fulltime and part-time) as a percentage of the Australian workforce, 1995–96 to 2003–04. Source: ABS, April 2005.

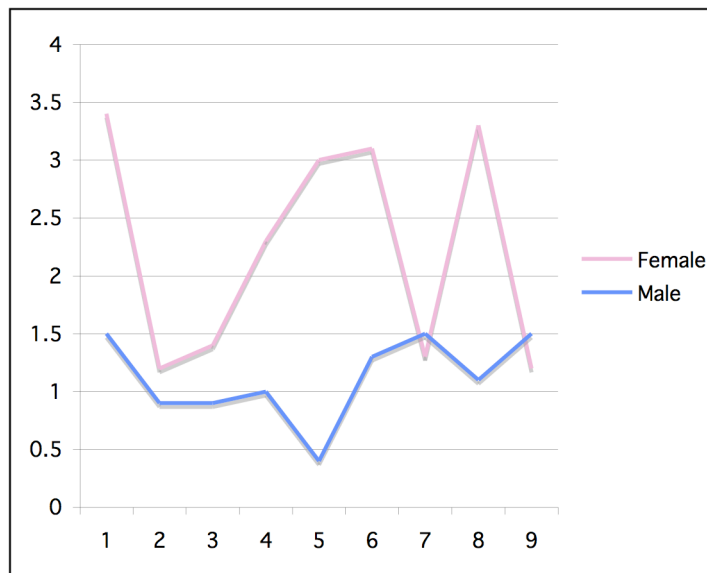


Figure 7: Comparison of female and male employment (fulltime and part-time) growth rates from 1995–96 to 2003–2004. Source: ABS, April 2005.

Added to this change in workforce participation rates, is the fact we are now living and working in what everyone regards as the “Information Age”. We (in Australia) have passed from being an industrial society to a technology society, characterised by the exchange of information. Previously, males dominated the workforce because their contributions were seen as more valuable than females. However, the changes brought about by the information age can be seen as favourable to women, as “the needs of the information age are inconsistent with the structures, bureaucracies and rules of the industrial era” (Chater and Gaster, 1995).

Chater and Gaster (1995) noted that the way business is done today is markedly different from previous eras. The most notable impact of change is the increased emphasis on ethical practice. This includes attention to the environment and the proper treatment of staff. The emphasis on these values can be seen to be more compatible with the way women work, presenting an ideal opportunity for women to take the lead in these areas. It is interesting to note the traditional “male-dominated” industries of finance and technology, previously referred to by Hon, are not attracting females. The nature of the work and traditional values associated with these industries works against them. Reciniello (1999) refers to a 1995 study of the information technology industry conducted by accounting firm Deloitte and Touche in explaining why women are held back in certain industries. Three myths held by men were identified as major contributors to the women’s lack of advancement in that industry:

- women lack technical competence compared to men;
- women lack the toughness to compete, and
- women will not work the long hours required (*A Woman’s Place*).

Taking the opposite views of some these results may yield a partial explanation (or at least provide theories) why women succeed in PR: (a) women can be technically-competent in a industry (PR) which does not favour numerical skills; (b) women do not need to be as “financially tough” to compete in PR.

In Western Australia, the IT industry has a shortage of personnel which, according to O’Neill and Walker, 2001, “mirrors the declining trend in the representation of women in the IT industry”. O’Neill and Walker cite several reasons why women are not attracted to the industry, including long hours and the masculine image of IT (“a lads’ network”). As with PR, in IT “there certainly is no physical barrier to females being able to undertake any aspect of the work” (O’Neill and Walker, 2001). Interestingly, women have made

strong inroads in PR within the IT industry. “It’s the only area, actually, where the plaudits go more often to women than men” (Brown, 1998).

While the industrial society was created by men for men, the information society needs people, both male and female, who are well educated and technically trained. This has created a unique opportunity for women, as all levels of business are now potentially open to us. (Chater and Gaster, 1995, p. 8)

Added to this is the way business must now respond rapidly to changing economic conditions.

It may be that the predominance of women in PR is simply a response to the traditional ways we have viewed different occupations, such as engineering (male), nursing (female), economics (male) and social work (female). According to Aires (1997):

A division of labor in contemporary society allocates different work and responsibilities to men and women. Overall, men are allocated roles with greater power and status. Likewise, women are believed to be communal and emotionally expressive because they are assigned to domestic roles and occupations that require these traits. (p. 92)

Traditional hierarchical structures, with their inflexible rules and procedures, are not suited to the new era in which flexibility and creativity are valued. Many of the attributes necessary to PR professionals are outlined by Chater and Gaster (1995) who state:

We are moving from industrialisation, where the patriarchal model worked brilliantly, to an era where our survival and progress will depend on not our ability to set rules, control production lines, establish bureaucracies, assert status and focus on the bottom line, but on our ability to communicate, negotiate, work with emotions, create solutions to ever-changing problems and opportunities, respond to change, think globally and strategically and work with and value people . . . The playing field is moving in the direction of feminine values, so what the 'game' now needs are the skills that women can bring to it. (p. 10)

Other scholars also agree with this ‘worldview’. In her book, *Gender Games* (1998), Australian PR practitioner Candy Tymson took a broader look at gender differences in management. However, as a PR practitioner, her views are interesting as they could be seen to have a PR “bias”. Basically, she says there are two styles of management:

1. Information (or status) management, which is male-centric and focuses on goals, and
2. Relationship management, which is female-centric and focuses on the process.

On reading the summary of Tymson’s outlook (below) one can not feel (on the surface) that the increase in the number of women entering PR is a result of “natural” forces, with the characteristics of females more suited to the way in which modern PR is practised.

GENDER DIFFERENCES	
MALE	FEMALE
Information-focused	Relationship-focused
Report-speaking	Rapport-speaking
Goal-driven	Process-orientated
Single-task	Multi-task
Succinct language	Storytelling approach
Works towards a destination	On a journey
Needs answers	Asks the right questions
Talks about things in workplace (politics, sport, etc)	Talks about how they feel about things
Seizes opportunity to do business in social setting	Reluctant to raise business socially
Focus on latest development	Focus on “how you are going”
Large groups	Small groups

Table 2: Summary of Tymson’s views on male/female gender differences.

With regard to language, Tymson has drawn on the work of Deborah Tannen, author of 15 books, including the 1990 best-seller, *You Just Don’t Understand*. Tannen, a professor of linguistics, maintains the two sexes do not understand each other because they have distinctly different conversational styles, brought about by the way they grow up. According to Tannen, girls’ groups are structured around pairs of friends who share secrets, grow up to become women, strive to make connections in their conversations, to be supportive and focus on details. The way boys play produces men who develop a competitive, confrontational style, are reluctant

to talk about their problems and prefer abstractions. The result is that women talk in the above-mentioned “rapport-speaking” style, whereas men are more comfortable speaking in public (“report-speaking”). However, these traits have been shown to disappear in a short space of time. Wheeland and Verdi (1992), as cited in Aires (1997) showed that during a four-day group communication exercise that men were initially more task-orientated, while women focused on being friendly and offering support. “This gender difference disappeared in the later sessions ... over time in groups, men and women engaged equally in both forms of talk” (Aires, p. 95).

While women would certainly seem to be more “naturally” more suitable to PR roles than men, that should not discount males from the practice altogether. “We have argued for the hiring and promotion of both women and men in our field, because we understand that few if any of today's organizational environments are composed solely of men” (Grunig, L, 2001).

The changing nature of how we accept women in the (PR) workforce, in part, is perhaps recognition of our society's changing values. Women are seen to be equal to men in occupations which require little physical effort. It shows how we should highly value the entire range of communication skills, both personal and technical.

Noble (2005) was probably the first in the US to look at “why public relations students select the major”. Also stymied by lack of research, Noble conducted research at her university and gleaned some important information from the literature on gender differences and how they influence selection of (university) courses. The findings from Noble's study that are relevant to my Study, and are compared in Chapter 5, include:

- Women (73.8 per cent) were more likely to agree they selected public relations as a major because of the creative aspects than did men.

- Slightly more women (55.6 per cent) than men (51.5 per cent) agreed they chose public relations because of the business aspects.
- Women (71 per cent) were more likely to disagree that public relations courses are easier than the average college course than men (53 per cent), while more men thought public relations is an easy major (31.4 per cent) compared to women (18 per cent).
- More than 60 per cent of public relations majors (64 per cent) said English was their favourite or second favourite subject in high school.
- The news media's mention of public relations and influence from friends were both more prominent than college advisers in students' decision to study PR.
- Sports public relations (29.4 per cent) and entertainment public relations (23.8 per cent) were the most popular choices for public relations careers.

While they may appear unrelated to the study, the final two points (above) are relevant because (1) the news media, as I will outline further on, heavily shapes our perception of PR, and (2) the type of PR students want to practice is also explored in more detail. It is also shown how their perception changes once they start practising.

Citing studies by Niles 1997, Walsh and Srsic 1995, Jepsen 1992, Blakemore 1984, Noble said: "These studies suggest women choose majors consistent with traditional roles, such as teaching, rather than technology-related careers, such as computer programming and engineering" (p. 6). This view correlates to that held by Moir and Jessel (1996) who contend that "we should not be surprised that men and women gravitate to sex-specific jobs. We always have, as a species, divided labour" (p. 158).

Dawson-Threat and Huba, 1996, as cited in Noble, 2005, reported that while less than half of all students in a survey identified themselves with traditional

sex roles, more than half of these students selected a major considered traditional for their gender. Eide, 1994, as cited in Noble, 2005, refuted these studies, reporting that in the 1980s, women were migrating toward high-skills majors, which led to higher paying jobs. A later study disagreed with Eide's findings, suggesting that during the 1990s into the 2000s, women were not shifting to higher paying career fields and majors at the same pace they were in the 1980s, and were still selecting more traditional career fields (Turner, 1999, as cited in Noble, 2005). These studies demonstrate conflicting evidence regarding gender career selection based on traditional gender roles, and demonstrate the continuing evolution of gender career choice.

Femininity and masculinity (male/female values/traits)

While the changing nature of society would go a small part of the way to explaining women's rise to prominence in public relations, in order to further understand why there is a gender imbalance in PR, a study of the way males and females approach work (and life) would seem necessary.

MALE AND FEMALE VALUES	
MALE	FEMALE
Power	Harmony
Money	Service
Freedom	Loyalty
Status	Enjoyment
Profit	Friendship
Control	Commitment
Success	Family
Wealth	Love
Security	Receptivity
Achievement	Responsibility
Task focus	Caring and nurturing
Independence	Relationships

Table 3: Comparison of male and female values (Chater and Gaster, 1995)

The tables, above and below, of our traditional views, offer guidelines on why men still hold senior positions in management, in a culture that values competition, success and linear thinking. It is interesting here to compare what has happened in the industry, with what was predicted. *Business Week*

in 1978 reported that PR was a quasi-management function in which women could be catapulted, but that it was “a fast track to a short career” (Donato 1990). Of course, the reality has proved somewhat different. Traits described as common in 1995 (Table 4) are similar to those described recently.

COMMONLY-PERCEIVED TRAITS OF MEN AND WOMEN	
Men	Women
Logical	Intuitive
Strong	Weak, timid
Unemotional	Emotional
Aggressive	Gentle, caring
Assertive	Submissive
Decisive	Indecisive
Leaders	Followers
Independent	Dependent
Scientific	Humanistic
Rational	Irrational
Competitive	Cooperative
Objective	Sensitive

Table 4: The way we perceive the most common traits of men and women (Chater and Gaster. 1995).

In a web article for the Maynard Institute of Journalism, Farmer (2003) highlighted an interview with MNET television’s manager of human resources, Mark Morales, who pointed to some of the feminine traits of women, who have transformed the culture at Channel 13. According to Morales:

If you look at management in America, it’s always fraught with macho overtones. But I think women have a higher level of emotional intelligence. They look at resources, they use people’s strengths, and involve people in problem solving. I don’t see these women so much making decisions as gathering information and making choices based on their explorations.

MNET’s station manager Paula Kerger agreed that women often make *better listeners*. “Women tend to try to *broker compromise*,” she says. “Sometimes men are just in it to win” (Farmer, 2003).

These narratives tally with commonly-held beliefs about women in general, which are borne out further on in this study in surveys, focus groups and interviews. Other traits that women possess include being able to “make greater eye contact” (Exline, as cited in Deaux, 1976, p. 61). Other beliefs could be that women respond more positively to being touched, or that when in groups, women do not all try to win, but try to achieve the best outcome for all. This was a theme that was touched on in the professional focus group.

Alvesson and Billing (2002) suggest a possible path in gender research involves exploring cultural forms of masculinity and femininity. A central task is to study the way behaviour, work area, feelings, attitudes, priorities and so on, in a particular culture, society, class, organisation or profession, etc., are regarded as masculine or feminine. For me this prompts the questions: is PR masculine or feminine in the context of our society? The answers, as provided by this study’s subjects indicate it is feminine. This ties in with Alvesson and Billing (2002), who point to the rise in the number of ‘soft’ industries (ecology and psychotherapy), saying: “In certain respects the transformation of industry can be described in terms of de-masculinisation.” Further in my study, one of WA’s most prominent PR practitioners and academics also points to the type of “soft, lifestyle PR” increasingly being practised. Today we use buzzwords such as ‘corporate culture’ and ‘networking’, which send signals about the importance of feelings, community, and social relations (all integral and associated with PR). These are attributes, according to Blomqvist, as cited in Alvesson (2002), which are more in accord with femininity.

Taking this a step further to indicate how our culture in turn shapes the notion of feminine or masculine, and in turn shape the way industries (in this case, PR) are perceived, Alvesson and Billing (2002), cite studies by Hines (1992) which suggest that femininity and masculinity refer to four distinct elements in gender construction. Two of these are relevant to PR:

- The gender aura or image of the activity (that is, the ideas that people in the surroundings of the activity have about the work).
- The values and ideas that dominate the activity (p. 13).

If that is the case, it can be said that (a) the gender aura/image of PR is inherently feminine, as evidenced by surveys and comments in this study, and (b) that the dominant values and ideas in PR involve those feminine traits and values highlighted in tables three and four. According to Hines (1992), “the construction of women becomes stronger and more clear cut ... in a particular women-dominated activity [that is, PR]. For example . . . if the activity is regarded as feminine.”

Alvesson and Billing (2002) studied the Swedish public service and found, as I will show in Australian (and also US and UK) PR, that “there seems to be an idea it is natural for women to work in the public sector”. This finding is not unlike the general consensus of this Study’s respondents, that PR is “naturally” women’s work. Soderston (1996, as cited in Alvesson) said that because the Swedish public service had grown this way, many people conclude that women can only be employed there. Could this be the case in Australian PR: where PR has evolved (for whatever reasons) into a feminine industry and men simply do not see the doors open? This view is backed by comments in this study’s surveys and interviews such as:

- Gender does influence entry into PR because males think PR is women’s work. (F student)
- Yes, gender does influence [entry into PR], because it is now pretty well established as a female-dominated profession. (F professional)
- As the numbers of females grow in the industry they tend to influence others to pursue the profession. (M professional)

Stereotyping

Think of the occupation of accountancy. What image comes to mind? Most probably you formed an image of a person, perhaps a prototypical accountant or someone you know who holds the job. (Glick, Wilk and Perreault 1995, p.570)

Whether or not the above findings have anything to do with how men and women's workplace roles have developed, males and females are still stereotyped. This takes place at an early age. Kimmell (2004) cites the examples of sex segregation occurring in the workplace at a young age, with girls working as babysitters and boys earning pocket money mowing lawns.

Sex segregation is a term coined by sociologist Barbara Reskin (as cited in Kimmel, 2004) which refers to "men's and women's concentration in different occupations, industries, jobs and levels in workplace hierarchies" (p. 188). A year 2000 report by the Singapore Government similarly noted: "the tendency for men and women to be in different occupations" (*Occupation segregation: a gender perspective*, 2000). Different occupations are seen as more appropriate for one gender or the other. "Sex segregation in the workplace is so pervasive that it appears to be the natural order of things – the simple expression of women's and men's natural predispositions" (Reskin, as cited in Kimmel, 2004). You would be forgiven for thinking that if that is the case, people in western societies would be working in different occupations with an equal mix of male and female in each occupation. But that is not the case. There are wild fluctuations, even between cities in the same country. Kimmel (2004) says: "In New York there are only 25 women fire-fighters (.03%) out of 11,500. But in Minneapolis, 17 per cent are women. In the US, dentistry is a male-dominated profession, but in Europe most dentists are female."

According to a report commissioned by the UK Equal Opportunities Commission: "Individuals typically prefer those occupations in which they see their own gender represented" (Miller et al., 2003). In our society, men traditionally have entered the sciences, engineering, accountancy and suchlike. Women have traditionally taken up careers in sales, clerical, nursing, and public relations (Chater and Gaster, 1995). This is backed by Brown (1998) who said: "Communications, marketing and PR are still stereotyped as "female," and therefore less important, tasks." Chater and Gaster (1995) observe that "we may never reach an equal distribution of

women and men throughout all occupations, simply because of the genetic imbalance that dictates males and females have different brain patterns”. They used the term “genderlects” to show different behavioural patterns between the sexes. Genderlects could best be described as systems of traditional and widely-accepted values influencing the different ways males and females act, or that masculine and feminine styles of communication are best viewed as two distinct cultural dialects and not inferior or superior ways of speaking.

The key differences are outlined in table 5.

Male genderlect patterns	Female genderlect patterns
Status	Intimacy
Independence	Connection
Hierarchy	Minimising differences
Giving instructions and orders	Consensus; giving suggestions
Arguing and interrupting	Harmony; negotiating conflicts
Elaborate systems of rules	Encouraging participation
Winners and losers	Cooperation
Protection	Helping
Silence	A talking/listening process
Responds to problems with solutions and advice	Responds with empathy and understanding

Table 5: The key differences between male and female communication patterns.

Because we recognise a man or a woman, we also form initial opinions about how he or she will act and/or talk. These are stereotypical beliefs we hold, based on the way we have been “socialised”. We’ve come so far, yet have we in the way we pigeon-hole people? My views are backed by several studies. “Gender stereotypes have changed little in the past 20 years” (Aires, 1997, p.92). “People organize their images of occupations in a highly stereotyped, socially-learned manner” (Glick, Wilk and Perreault, 1995, p. 565).

Table 5 (above) displays the commonly-held perceptions we hold about the sexes. But these are simply preconceptions, based on our social conditioning. Aires cites experiments by Wood and Karten (1986); Pugh and Wahrman (1983 and 1995) and Wagner and Ford (1986) which indicated that women can exhibit male genderlect behaviour when preconceived norms are altered.

As Aires summarises: “It is time to rethink our understanding of gender to move away from the notion that men and women have two contrasting styles of interaction that are acquired during socialisation – a notion that is promoted by Tannen and in the popular press” (p. 97).

Kimmel (2004) believes that individuals become “gendered” during the course of their lives. “We learn the ‘appropriate’ behaviours and traits that are associated with hegemonic masculinity and femininity, and then we each, individually, negotiate our own path in a way that feels right to us. In a sense we each ‘cut our own deal’ with the dominant definitions of masculinity and femininity” (p. 16). This *genderisation* is a result of the mores and/or rules imposed by whatever society a person develop in. Kimmel (2004) believes this, and points to studies by legendary anthropologist Margaret Mead, who was clear that sex differences were ‘not something deeply biological’, but rather were learned. Mead studied three different cultures in New Guinea: the Arapesh, the Mundagmor and the Tchambuli.

- Tribe 1: All members of the Arapesh appeared gentle, passive and emotionally warm. Males and females were equally happy, trustful and confident. Individualism was relatively absent. Men and women shared child-rearing; both were maternal, and both discouraged aggressiveness among boys and girls.
- Tribe 2: The Mundagmor, a tribe of head-hunters and cannibals, viewed women and men as similar, but expected both sexes to be equally aggressive and violent. The women hated to be child-rearers.
- Tribe 3: The Tchambuli women and men were extremely different. One sex was primarily nurturers and gossip consumers who dressed up and went shopping. They wore lots of jewellery and were described as ‘charming and graceful’. **They were the men.** The women were dominant, energetic, economic providers. They fished, held positions of power, controlled commerce and culture and initiated sexual relations.

“The point is that each culture believed they were that way because of their biological sex, which determined their personality. Mead showed how we can be moulded by our society. Unfortunately, she did not explain why women or men turn out to be different or the same” (Kimmel, 2004, p. 54).

There is a perception that women are nurturers. “When women say: ‘I like people,’ they are really saying that they are natural nurturers and like to encourage people. There seems to be a widespread belief that women work well with clients” (Cline, 1999, p. 266). This is supported by Kolb (1997) who states: “Women view things in terms of relationships, and this fact affects significant aspects of their social lives. They are oriented towards nurturance and affiliation, and make meaning through interconnection” (p. 139). Similarly, Gidon Freeman, editor of Britain’s *PR Week* believes: “PR is all about developing relationships and bringing influence to bear, which historically women have always mastered better than men.” (The gender readership split of *PR Week* in 2004 was 65:35 in favour of women).

Those views would be disputed, however, by a female practitioner who took part in a focus group, who said (somewhat tongue-in-cheek): “I don’t think (at work) I’ve ever nurtured anyone.” However, this notion of women being nurturers is outdated, and has its roots in the way Western society has been structured (men at work, women at home), and the fact that mothers, rather than fathers, nurture their children. This, however, is changing, and there is evidence to show that (given the opportunity) men can be as nurturing as women. (Barnett 2004, p.7) certainly believes this, stating:

There is no evidence of an innate ‘maternal instinct’ that leads all women to be good nurturers. Fathers who are primary caretakers are just as nurturant [sic] toward their children. When confronted with the need to care for their children, men exhibit the same capacity as women, and indeed are indistinguishable in their care-taking from mothers. Fathers appear to have the capacity to nurture, although in many situations it is not evident because it is not called upon.

There have been several studies that seek to explain gender stereotyping in certain occupations. Rozier et al. (2001) looked at the specific factors influencing career decisions of male students to choose the female-dominant profession of physical therapy, finding that “occupations may be segregated by gender if the particular attributes of the job are viewed as masculine or feminine and if the majority of workers are male or female. Men may be discouraged from selecting a female-dominant profession because of perceptions that the attributes of the job are feminine.” As shown later, from this study’s interviews and surveys, the perception of the PR industry (and, in the case of students) is that the attributes need to perform PR are seen as being feminine. Rozier et al. (2001) also found that factors such as the belief that female-dominant careers have less social desirability and prestige than male careers also discourage men from pursuing gender-atypical careers.

Brain function

I've been torn for years between my politics and what science is telling us. I believe that women actually perceive the world differently from men. – US neuro-psychiatrist Louann Brizendine, as cited in Midgley, (2006).

The subject of brain function is also a relevant topic in discussing male and female differences. It is linked to socialisation, in that are males and females different because of their brains (nature) or of the way their brains are conditioned (nurture)? Brain function is a controversial area, and certainly one that I am not professionally equipped to deal with, other than to weigh current trends. The sheer weight of research on brain function and its relationship to gender is enough to warrant a look at its role (if any) in determining why more women than men enter PR.

In a highly-relevant book on communication, Wahlstrom (1990) is clear in her reasons for including it in an analysis of the topic: “Any examination of women and communication can not proceed without considering the human communicator at the most basic level.” Janet Emig (1980, as cited in Wahlstrom, 1990) suggests that “to understand communication processes at

all we must know their neuro-psychological underpinnings.” According to Moir and Jessel (1996) “the nature and cause of brain differences are now known beyond speculation, beyond prejudice and beyond reasonable doubt” (p. 11).

While brain research data is abundant, it often results in emotional debate, which “reflects the emotional values that come to the fore so readily when issues of nature versus nurture emerge, as they do in analysing intellectual capability” (Wahlstrom, 1990, p.23).

Early research showed there are differences in men’s and women’s thought processes, characterised by differences in the way the brain operates. Much research has been undertaken highlighting the differences in construction between the male and female brains and how they operate. Psychologist Herbert Landsell (as cited in Chater and Gaster, 1995) found male brains have specific locations for language and spatial skills, while women have the mechanisms for these skills in both hemispheres of the brain. In simple terms, they said: “a typical male brain is more specialised, and a typical female brain is more diffuse”. Generally, in creative terms, it means men and women do things and think about things differently.

WOMEN	MEN
Develop language skills earlier. Communicate more fluently.	Process visual and spatial information better
Express and release emotion more easily than men	Greater capacity for mathematical reasoning
Can focus on multiple tasks	Focus more easily on single task

Table 6: Summary of the different thought patterns in men and women (Chater et al., 1995).

The key characteristics of left and right hemispheres are summarised in table 7. From it, the general pattern shows the creative skills, so often presumed to be apparent in women, and traditionally associated with public relations, belong in the right hemisphere, which is where most women’s thought processes take place. This, of course, is a generalisation, as some other process necessary in PR (notably, tact, analysis, language and verbal) are located in the left hemisphere. And if women are predominantly “right-

brained”, how is they are using the brain’s left-hand verbal and language functions to do so well in PR?

LEFT	RIGHT
Sequencing	Random
Logic	Intuition
Tact	Creativity, imagination
Words, numbers	Rhythm, music
Black and white	Colour
Small picture	Big picture
Detail, parts	Whole
Reality-based	Fantasy-oriented
Time	Space
Analysis	Synthesis
Thinking	Feelings, emotions
Language, reading	Shapes, patterns
Verbal	Non-verbal
Symbols	Concrete
Listening	Visualisation

Table 7: Key characteristics of the brain’s left and right hemispheres.

Unfortunately, for Chater and Tymson, and Moir and Jessel, the method of splitting up the brain’s tasks into left and right may be somewhat simplistic. Take the notion of creativity – commonly regarded as a prerequisite for success in PR. *Science Daily*, in reporting on schizophrenia, quotes Vanderbilt University psychologist and researcher Brad Folley, who says: “In the scientific community, the popular idea that creativity exists in the right side of the brain is thought to be ridiculous, because you need both hemispheres of your brain to make novel associations and to perform other creative tasks” (Moran, 2005). Research in the past 20 years has established the fact that areas of the two cerebral hemispheres in humans are specialised for different functions. Wahlstrom 1990, p. 22) cites 11 studies that reach this conclusion. From a series of 13 studies, these are summarised (and simplified), according to Witelson, as cited in Wahlstrom (p. 23) in figure 8 (below).

Left hemisphere	Right hemisphere
Linear Analytic Linguistic 	Holistic Emotional Spatial
Language and writing	Processes picture, patterns and music

Figure 8: Brain functions.

The major problem with studying brain function as it relates to gender is that traditional ways of viewing what is female and what is male have literally been reversed. In the 70 and 80s we were told the right hemisphere was female, and the left male. According to research in the late 80s and 90s, those positions are reversed. “After centuries of being accused of being devious, intuitive, roundabout and anything but linear in their thought processes, women are suddenly being told that is it, in fact, men who are capable of ‘simultaneous integration’ and that women are sequential reasoners” (Wahlstrom, 1990, p. 28). Kimmel (2004) also follows this train of thought: “Scientists can’t seem to agree on which side of the brain dominates for which sex. They keep changing their minds about which hemisphere is superior, and then, of course, assigning that superior one to men” (p. 33).

Recent research by American neuro-psychiatrist Louann Brizendine, outlined in a review (Midgley, 2006) of her book, *The Female Brain*, points to the fact that men and women simply perceive the world differently because of brain differences. Women, she says, have 11 per cent more neurons in the area of the brain devoted to emotion and memory. “Women tend to use both hemispheres for language tasks, which may be why girls learn to talk earlier than boys” (Midgley 2006) – once again another skill crucial to practicing PR successfully. “Steve Jones, a geneticist and author of *Y: The Descent of Men*, has said that there is absolutely no consensus about this science” (Midgley, 2006).

Despite the shortcoming of this type of science, most researchers agree that women:

- Have “superior linguistic performance related to verbal fluency” (Witelson, 1976, as cited in Wahlstrom, 1990; Moir and Jessel, 1996).
- Have earlier maturation of speech organs (Darley and Witz, as cited in Wahlstrom, p. 29; Moir and Jessel, 1996)
- Are more verbally fluent than males (Gari and Scheinfeld, 1968, as cited in Wahlstrom, 1990; Moir and Jessel, 1996)
- Make fewer grammatical mistakes (Schucard, et al., 1981, as cited in Wahlstrom; Moir and Jessel, 1996)
- Produce more complex and longer sentences (Bennett, Seashore and Wesman, 1959, as cited in Wahlstrom, 1990; Moir and Jessel, 1996).

Wahlstrom (1990) says there are too many hypotheses with differing methodologies, leading to a myriad of results, and also doubts what influence the research would have, but for different reasons. She suggests:

With such a growing store of frequently inconclusive or contradictory data available it is hard to decide what specific conclusions we can draw regarding gender, brain function and communication. Yet we must consider the issue. We need to encourage more research in order to determine, first, if differences in cognitive functioning exist and, if so, whether or not they are sex differences or differences that are caused by cultural forces. If no sex differences exist in the cognitive ‘functionings’ of males and females, then in some ways we can carry on pretty much as we have, except that we will have to engage in publicising data that indicate no difference.

Kimmel (2004) highlighted what is probably the most comprehensive study on the subject ever undertaken. Janet Hyde, a psychologist at the University of Wisconsin, reviewed 165 studies of verbal ability that included information about more than 1.4 million people and included writing,

vocabulary and reading comprehension. She found no gender differences in verbal ability. She found there is a far greater range of differences among males and among females than there is between males and females. “Many investigators seem determined to discover that men and women ‘really’ are different. It seems that if sex differences do not exist, then they have to be invented” (Kimmel, 2004).

Gender differences

Grunig, Toth and Hon (2001) imply that there are feminine attributes that make women particularly suited to carry out public relations work. These are listed as “co-operation, respect, caring, nurturance, interconnection, justice, equity, honesty, sensitivity, perceptiveness, intuition, altruism, fairness, morality and commitment”. However, they do not delve into the reasons why, but rather concentrate (as most scholars have done) on the discrimination against the appointment of women to senior levels and opposition to the promotion of feminine values when public relations strategy is decided.

Kimmell (2004, p. 15) supports this in a wider context. “In the past 30 years, feminist scholars properly focused most of their attention on women – on what Catherine Stimpson has called the ‘omissions, distortions and trivialisations’ of women’s experiences.”

The behavioural sciences provide more insight into the attributes that may point towards women being better at PR than men. Reciniello (1999) refers to “the school of object relations (Fairbairn, 1952; Winnicott, 1965; Klein de Riviere, 1964) [which] also contributed to the psychoanalytic theory of women by enlarging traditional drive theory to encompass a primary drive to create relationships.”

In an unpublished thesis, Rea (2002) came closer than Grunig et al. (2000) in trying to analyse the link between gender types and an ability to perform PR. However, it was a fleeting insight into the issue.

When we think about women, are we really thinking about gender, which we consider biological, or a constellation of socially-determined sex roles, which encompass stereotypical qualities associated with either femininity or masculinity? We all know that not all people biologically classified as “women” act alike. People of either gender may have feminine characteristics. We value the qualities associated with femininity, but of course not all women exhibit female characteristics or are feminine. Not all men act ‘masculine’. Men who remain antagonistic to women and to women getting ahead will find themselves increasingly marginalised over time. The modern public relations industry will reflect the enormous changes in gender relations and roles sweeping through society. Therefore, the industry will be best placed to understand and represent the interests of clients and of society.

What is apparent, though, is that in trying to analyse why there are more females than males in PR, one can not ignore sexuality as an issue. There are several theories which provide clues as to why women find PR a 'niche' field.

Noted American PR scholar James Grunig (1992) suggests women are more effective in PR because theirs is a worldview – one that suits the engagement of all publics and leads to balanced, two-way communication. This is backed by research by Smith, as cited in L. Grunig (2001) who found:

Public relations is a highly intuitive business. The ability to recognise what sort of behaviour brings about what kind of response is a talent inborn in little girls and developed to a higher degree of sensitivity by the time they are through their teens. It's an invaluable asset in public relations. (np)

The common thread that runs through the PR literature is that ‘social’ factors are a prime motivation. Becker et al. (2003) found “some 63 per cent of the [US] female bachelor’s degree recipients said a desire to work with people was a very important reason for their decision to study journalism”. Only 41.9 per cent of men nominated this as a reason. While that is not the only motivation, Becker et al. found it to be highly important. Of the women, 29.2 per cent sought a public relations agency job; of the men, only 20.2 per cent sought such a job.

Chater and Gaster (1995) observe that the way business is done today is markedly different from previous eras. The most notable impact of change is the increased emphasis on ethical practice. This includes attention to the environment and the proper treatment of staff. The emphasis on these values can be seen to be more compatible with the way women work, presenting an ideal opportunity for women to take the lead in these areas.

Most people tend to agree that men and women DO think differently. It is just why they think differently that they can not agree on. Is it biology or culture that determines gender differences? There are two schools of thought: biological determinism and differential socialisation, more commonly known as nature and nurture. Men and women could be different because they are naturally that way (nature), or are they different because they've been taught to be (nurtured).

Kimmel (2004) asks: "is biology destiny; or is it that human beings are more flexible and thus subject to change? The answer is an unequivocal maybe. Or, perhaps more accurately, yes and no. Few people would suggest there are no differences between males and females. There are sex differences (anatomical, hormonal, chemical and physical differences). But there are also shades of maleness and female-ness in those areas" (p. 2)

Clearly, despite the hundreds of studies that have been conducted on the subject, there is still no agreement. In fact, many studies on gender differences may not have even been studies, but merely ideas and hypotheses that have taken on lives of their own. However, there is strong belief among students and professionals that gender differences do exist. Whether these are simply a result of conditioning, it is hard to know; particularly considering the wildly differing academic viewpoints that exist. There are those who say gender differences are a result of our cultures, and those who say (as recently as 2005) that the difference is due to biological reasons (Shute, 2005).

According to Alvesson and Billing (2002) “biological differences are not regarded by many as the ultimate determination of the way men and women act”. Some feminists believe we should neither exaggerate nor deny the importance of biological differences (Cockburn, 1991). Bearing and nursing children, according to some researchers, does give a women a certain orientation that is quite distinct from men’s (Choworow 1978, Hartsock 1987, as cited in Alvesson and Billing, 2002). Others claim that gender can be explained almost exclusively by reference to social processes, irrespective of biological or gender differences. What may look like gender-specific inclinations (that is, in PR) can be better explained in terms of the positions of external social conditions in which men and women find themselves (that is, the rapid increase of women into the workforce, and the appearance of tertiary courses for PR). However, this is a forum to display current thinking among today’s professionals and students.

The views expressed by high-profile practitioners are important, as ultimately they do have a considerable influence on the composition of the profession in terms of who is being hired, the type of PR being practised, etc. First, consider the views of several high-profile US female executives.

Muio (1998, p. 17) quotes Sharon Patrick, the president of Martha Stewart Living, who says the differences are all about men ‘hunting’ and women ‘gathering’:

I believe that ‘gathering’ is at the crux of how women view and use power differently from men . . . Men have tended to demonstrate a ‘go-for-the-kill’ mentality. They try to get as much as possible through pressure, intimidation, and the sheer desire to defeat at any cost whoever is sitting across the table from them. Women have tended to prefer searching for common interests, solving problems, and collaborating to find win-win outcomes.

Patrick’s views were shared in the same article by several other leading female executives. The views give some insight into what leading female executives think about the way power is used differently by male and

females and why there are gender differences, but from a corporate viewpoint.

Janice Gjertsen, of Digital City (New York) said:

Men are oriented toward power, toward making fast decisions in a black-or-white mode. Women are more skilled at relationships. They see shades of gray and explore issues from different angles. It's instinctual. Men come to the negotiating table in full battle armour. What's interesting is that the kinds of companies we admire today are also those that depend increasingly on female attributes. We are in the relationship era: Its all about getting close to customers, striking up joint ventures, partnering with suppliers. Warriors don't make good CEOs in companies based on relationships. The new CEO is a seeder, feeder, and weeder – and those are women's roles.

Harriet Rubin, Founder and Editor at Large Doubleday/Currency, said:

Women need to become more like men than men are. We need to become hyperaggressive and hyperdetermined - because business is about intense daring and a reckless abandon to succeed. Of course, men have those qualities. It has to do with their once being boys. While girls learn to be good, boys play at being great. And men build their companies the way they used to build their forts - as clubs of exclusion.

Kathryn Gould, General Partner, Foundation Capital:

Let's be honest: The culture of any management team, even if there are women on it, is still a male culture. It all comes down to football. Most women haven't played team sports. They don't understand how men feel when they're part of a team – the sense of camaraderie, the joy of victory. I haven't met many women who are conditioned to touch people's hearts as leaders – which is quite different from touching their hearts as nurturers.

Sara Levinson, President, NFL Properties Inc:

My emphasis on group communication, on soliciting their ideas and opinions, is a major characteristic of my management style. They also say it's why they think I'm a good leader. Is this a distinctly 'female' trait? The members of my team - all of them male - seem to think so.

[Barry] Leggeter (2005) highlighted the gender imbalance issues facing the industry, though did not pursue it far. Responding to articles in *PR Week* on 2 and 12 September 2005, Leggeter, the principal of Bite PR (UK, US and Sweden) expressed concern at the phenomenon.

It's the way that our business sells public relations at the college/university level that I think needs our attention. Why is it that PR, apparently, appeals to less male undergraduates than female? I'm not trying to reverse anything. I'm simply concerned with dominance. What I am questioning is do we have the right balance in our business? I believe this is an issue we should look at thoughtfully and thoroughly. Let's simply find out what is happening here – whether it is a recruitment issue or a reality that the balance of our account teams has apparently irreversibly changed.

In the company's blog site, Leggeter gave the issue further 'airing' and the issue was taken up by several writers, who agreed with his views. The following response of one particular female student summed up the feeling of many in my study.

I was actually curious about the gender in the PR department earlier this semester because there is only one to three males at most in my PR classes. I think Public Relations is just not that appealing to males as it is to females. I also think there maybe a lack of knowledge of exactly what you can do with a major in Public Relations. I know a few guys that want jobs in areas that a communication or public relations major would be ideal. But instead they choose marketing because they think PR is more for females. It is natural for women to be better at PR-type task, and women are also better at understanding the public than males. Multi-tasking and being sensitive to people's needs might not sound that enjoyable to [men].

Are these views, which are supported by many of the comments found in both my professional and student surveys, valid? Or have we all simply been duped by faulty research? Barnett and Rivers (2004) cite a study conducted in that year by researchers at Purdue University, which could not find support for the idea that women and men have different 'communication cultures'. The results were based on three studies that used questionnaires and interviews with 738 people – 417 women and 321 men. "Both men and

women view the provision of support as a central element of close personal relationships; both value the supportive communication skills of their friends, lovers, and family members; both make similar judgments about what counts as sensitive, helpful support; and both respond quite similarly to various support efforts.” Barnett and Rivers describe a range of what they call ‘bandwagon concepts’, as dangerous. Among these are:

- Women are inherently more caring and more ‘relational’ than men.
- For girls, self-esteem plummets in early adolescence.
- Boys have a mathematics gene, or at least a biological tendency to excel in maths, that girls do not possess.

“While the industrial society was created by men for men, the information society needs people, both male and female, who are well educated and technically trained. This has created a unique opportunity for women, as all levels of business are now potentially open to us.” (p. 8)

It is also widely recognised that women are better at relationship-building. After all, public relations is about the relationship between an organisation and its publics. Grunig (2001) cites studies by Reif, Newstrom and Monzka (1978) and Knowles and Moore (1970) that demonstrate women have a greater concern for relationships. “The two-way symmetrical model of public relations requires resolving conflict and building relationships, which are intrinsically feminist values” (Grunig, Toth and Hon, 2000). Many of the attributes necessary for PR professionals are outlined by Chater and Gaster (1995), who state:

We are moving from industrialisation, where the patriarchal model worked brilliantly, to an era where our survival and progress will not depend on not our ability to set rules, control production lines, establish bureaucracies, assert status and focus on the bottom line, but rather on our ability to communicate, negotiate, work with emotions, create solutions to ever-changing problems and opportunities, respond to change, think globally and strategically and work with and value people . . . The playing field is moving in the direction of feminine values, so what the 'game' now needs are the skills that women can bring to it. (p. 10)

Cline, as cited in Newsom, et al. (2000), alludes to the problem being not only just the large numbers of women entering the profession, but to the innate skills females bring to PR being responsible for the industry's low standing.

The major problem facing public relations' move into top management today may be not only the large percentage of women in the field, but the dominance of the profession by the intuitive. An intuitive worker seeks the furthest reaches of the possible and the imaginative, and is comparatively uninterested in the sensory reports of things as they are. This conflicts with the methodology of a sensate worker, who prefers an established way of doing things, relying upon skills already learned, working steadily, and focusing on now. The sensate type of worker accounts for 70 to 75 per cent of the American population.

Gender issues, however, are a complex matter. Not all women (or men) act alike. People of either gender may have feminine characteristics, and vice-versa. While most females have certain feminine characteristics, not all women are feminine. Similarly, not all men act masculine.

The literature also provides some statistical clues, fragmented as they are, regarding the rise in the number of women within PR.

US Department of Labor statistics for public relations in 1960 showed 25 per cent of the PR workforce were women. This increased to 51 per cent in 1983, 65.7 per cent in 2000. At the same time, membership of the PRSA went from 10 per cent women members in 1968 to 15 per cent (1975), 54 per cent in 1990 and 60 per cent in 2000 (Figure 3). By early 2002, 69 per cent

of the practitioners surveyed were female (Andsager and Hust, 2004). Female participation in America's other peak communications body, the IABC, is 76 per cent (Willams, 2002).

The Occupational Employment Statistics Survey (US Department of Labor 2004) reports "employment of public relations specialists ... is expected to grow faster than the average for all occupations through 2012" (OES Survey, May 2004). Similarly, the United States Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics' *Career Guide to Industries* reports that "public relations jobs are projected to increase by at least 19 per cent through 2012, compared to a 16 per cent growth rate average in all other industries".

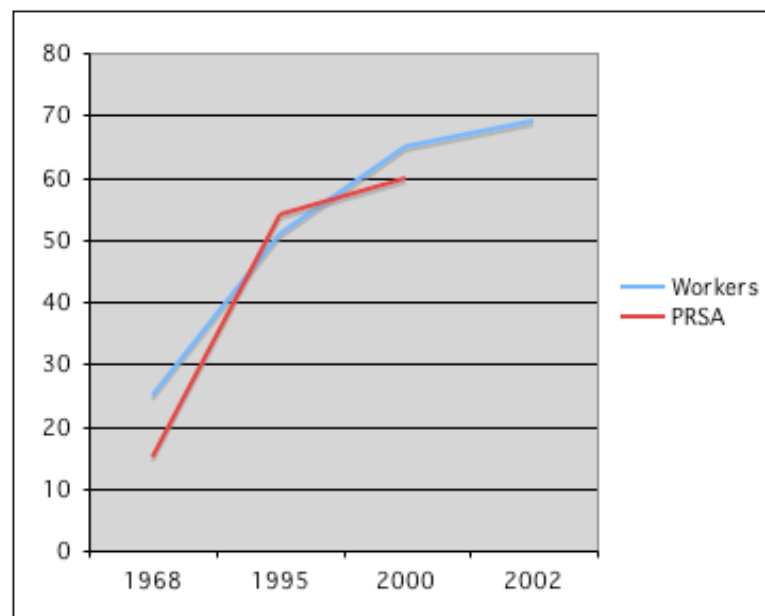


Figure 9: Rise of American women in PR from 1960–2000.
Sources: US Dept. of Labor and PRSA. Gap in years due to lack of statistics.

Year	Total	Male	Female	% Female
1950	18,565	16,607	1958	10.5
1960	30,363	23,358	7005	23.1
1970	80,302	58,906	21,396	26.6
1980	120,037	61,442	58,595	48.8
2000	129,000	49,000	80,000	62
2002	136,000	38,000	65,000	63.1
2003	129,000	43,000	85,000	63.4
2004	133,000	52,000	81,000	66.4

Table 8: There has been a steady increase in number of women entering PR from 1950–2004 (Source: US Dept of Labor).

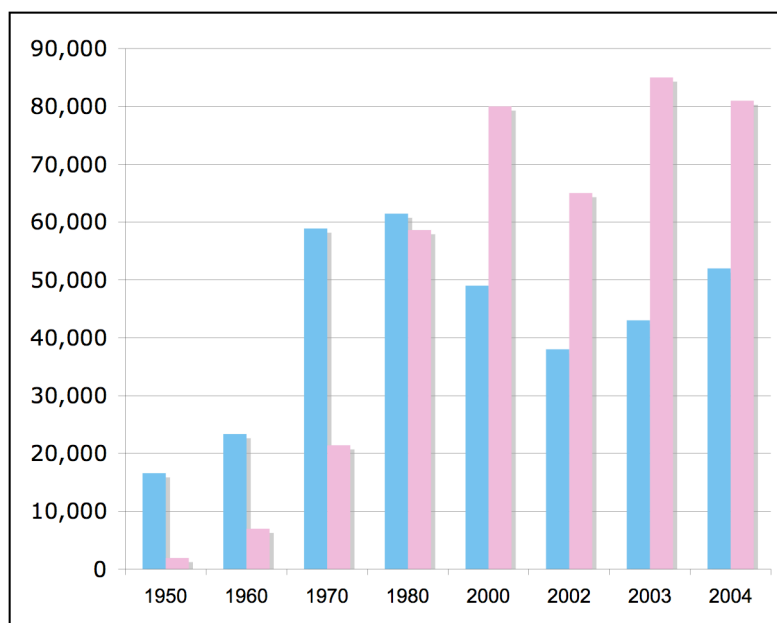


Figure 10: In the US, there has been a steady increase in women entering PR, and a leveling of male entry. Source: US Dept of Labor.

The increasing number of women in PR [in the US], is demonstrated in Table 8 and Figure 10 (above) from the Department of Labor (Martin, 1993; US Dept. of Labor, 2005) showing women's representation increasing markedly, from 10.5 per cent in 1950 to 66.44 per cent in 2004.

The trend is mirrored at US universities.

"Since 1977 the majority of students enrolled in (US) journalism and mass communication programs have been female. In the early 1980s, national enrolment patterns stabilised at about 60 per cent female to 40 per cent male, and a similar ratio has also become the norm for graduates of mass communication programs" (Peterson, as cited in Creedon, 1989, p. 14).

In a follow-up report on the *Velvet Ghetto*, Cline (1986) reported that "female (US) communications students outnumbered men by more than 8 to 1 [and that] communication may soon be 80 per cent female". The prophecy may be proved correct, as Cline (1999) reported that at the University of Texas in 1985 the figure was close to 90 per cent female.

Fact. For more than a decade, women have made up the majority of students enrolled in American schools of journalism and mass communication. Fact: these female graduates are finding employment and due to this influx of women, mass communication is becoming a female-intensive occupational category” (Creedon 1989, p. 16).

Beasley (1999) also considers the impact of journalism within communications. In 1985 the University of Maryland College of Journalism released preliminary findings of a study that called attention to the ‘new majority’ in schools of journalism and mass communication. This referred to the growing influx of young women, who had changed the balance of journalism school enrolment from predominantly male to predominantly female in less than a decade. At that time journalism enrolment was about 60 per cent female.

“In 1977, when [US] journalism enrolment nationally reached a record 64,000, the proportion of women students reached more than 50 per cent, but little notice was taken. Today, two-thirds of all graduates (64.1 per cent) are women” (Beasley, 1999). Journalism enrolments at Perth universities also show more females than males study the subject. At Curtin University, the institution with the largest number of students in Mass Communication, the breakdown for journalism from 2001–05 shows a constant predominance of women. Statistics for 2005 fell for both male and female, but this can be explained by a general national downturn in applications for university places across all subjects.

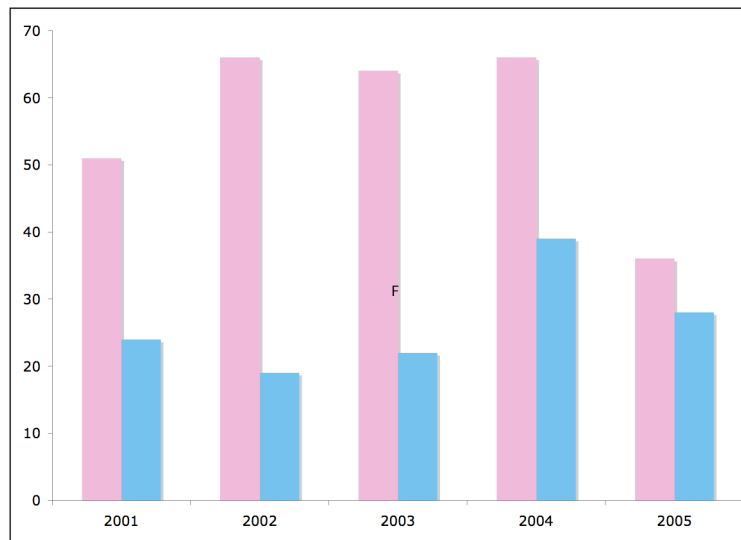


Figure 11: Journalism enrolments at Curtin University. Source: Curtin University.

Interestingly, this has not manifested itself within the Perth media industry, where the ratio is 57 per cent male (256) to 43 per cent female (195). Ten news organisations were surveyed in April 2006. Some within the industry expressed surprise at the figure. However, that is probably because we tend to be influenced by what we see, and to a lesser extent, hear. Most newsreaders and weather presenters tend to be female; particularly in Perth radio.

	Female	Male
Channel 9	12	4
Channel 10	12	9
Community Newspapers	29	24
Radio 6PR	3	4
Channel 7	8	12
ABC Radio and TV	20	18
Nova FM	3	0
92.9/94.5 FM	1	0
Sunday Times	22	37
West Australian	85	148
TOTAL	195	256

Table 9: Perth news media employment (journalists only).
These include chiefs of staff and news editors. Source: direct from each organisation.

“[In Europe] the share of women [journalists] has stagnated at around one third, [while] the growing field of public relations continues to attract

increasing numbers of women” (Dorer, 2005, p. 185). In Australia, the situation is little different. There is certainly no dominance of either gender within the major media outlets in Perth. In a census (6 April 2006) of all but one Perth news organisations (Community Newspaper Group, ABC radio and TV, three commercial TV channels and four radio newsrooms) there were 72 males and 73 female journalists. However, the balance is slightly tipped by the large number of males employed at *The West Australian*. The drift of women from journalism into PR may be because that women in journalism simply find entrenched male attitudes and behaviour (that is, chauvinistic, hard-drinking, prying, etc.) still too prevalent and ‘overbearing’, so they choose a more values-orientated and ‘family-friendly’ industry such as PR. The notion of the family-friendliness of PR has been raised in several interviews conducted, and noted in surveys, during this study. As mentioned elsewhere, female practitioners regard PR as a flexible occupation in which the hours and location, to a large degree, can be moulded to suit the demands of working mothers. For [most] males, this would probably not be a consideration. On the other hand, the entry of women into communications courses may simply be a result of more women studying. That’s certainly the view of Sydney academic Matthew Byrne, of the University of Technology, who said in a phone interview with me:

In New South Wales we have an extremely high UAI (Universities Admissions Index) score to enter communications courses – PR and journalism. It’s 96 per cent, and we attract the top four per cent of the State’s students, who happen to be women. So you look at the HSC (Higher School certificate) and there is a female dominance at the top.

This move of women into PR may be explained by several other factors affecting the general workforce, as outlined by Wootten (1997), including “the advances of the women’s movement, the enactment of laws prohibiting sex discrimination, increases in female enrolment in higher education and professional schools, the steady increase in women’s labor force participation, and reductions in gender stereotyping in both education and

employment”. One of the biggest factors in the sudden rise of women into the (US) PR workforce was the advent of affirmative action in the 1970s. Legislation forced companies to hire a certain percentage of women. “Employers may have found it useful to place women in visible positions” (Donato, 1990, p. 135).

Certainly PR in Australia, the US and UK has ‘ridden the expansive wave’ of jobs creation, sucking up eager graduates. “The [US] Bureau of Labor Statistics tagged public relations as one of the three fastest-growing industries in the United States (No. 1 is computer and data processing services, and No. 2 is health services)” (Brown, 1998). How could PR not fail to attract women, who benefited not just by an expanding labour force, but by new workforce rules? US Department of Labor statistics show between 1975 and 1995 women’s employment in areas of professional specialty, which PR is part of, grew by 53 per cent (9,800 to 18,100) – the highest growth rate of 12 general employment categories. Generally, it can be said that “in the past 15 years, women entered the workforce in ever-increasing numbers” (Wootton, 1997).

Donato (1990) is another of the few academics to have broached the reason/s for women entering PR, points to several reasons for the rise of women in the profession. These included:

- Some [employers] saw women as a better financial '**bargain**'. Women were (and probably still are) disproportionately represented as technicians, while men were in management positions. Women stayed in those roles longer than men. The wage gap was maintained. "Women earned less, therefore were a better bargain" (np). However, Donato does not explain why this happened. Certainly the fact that women remained in technician roles longer than men may be connected to their careers being interrupted to have families. I found anecdotal evidence of this in surveys and focus groups. Or was/is it simply a case of men seeking to maintain their positions of power?
- Women were recognised as a new and important '**public**'. As far back as the 1940s it was recognised women could help shape opinion. "The expansion of women's consumer roles [buyers] made them advertising [and presumably PR] targets" (np).
- The (presumed) **nature of women** being 'nice' and being suited to 'emotional work'. This type of PR may be prevalent in industries that dump waste, or have unsafe or controversial products. "People [presumably management] believe women have better interpersonal skills" (np). Once again, this is influenced by the way we are 'socialised' and conditioned to accept traditional notions about gender.
- Financially, PR generally offered better **opportunities** than journalism, which had a (US) female population of 60 per cent in the 1980s, and which continues to be a career path for many practitioners. In fact PR offered rewards which were/are "competitive with other accessible occupations, and is better paid than the average female job" (np).

The pay situation is similar in Europe. Dorer (2005) asserts that pay is one factor which attracts more females than males. "PR offered 'varied opportunities', 'attractive pay levels' and 'promotion' – as reasons for

attracting females” (p. 187). However, those factors would be equally as appealing to males and surely would not be valid reasons for the growth of females into PR in Austria and Germany. Certainly, if the pay of PR people was so good in those countries, men would have deserted journalism. One suspects that the pay may not have been as good, as Dorer (2005) believes.

The most comprehensive [US] survey of communications students is the Annual Survey of Journalism and Mass Communication Enrolments, which has operated at the Henry W. Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Georgia since September 1997. While not wishing to draw too much on US research, it is necessary, owing to the lack of material in Australia. The parallels between American practice and ours are strikingly similar; probably because a high percentage of university course content is American.

Becker et al. (2004) summarised the findings of the 2003–04 study, which surveyed 463 journalism and mass communication programs (194,500 students) thus:

- Women were more than twice as likely as men to have majored in public relations.
- Female students were about twice as likely as male students to have had an internship in public relations.
- Female graduates on graduation are more likely to have sought work in public relations.

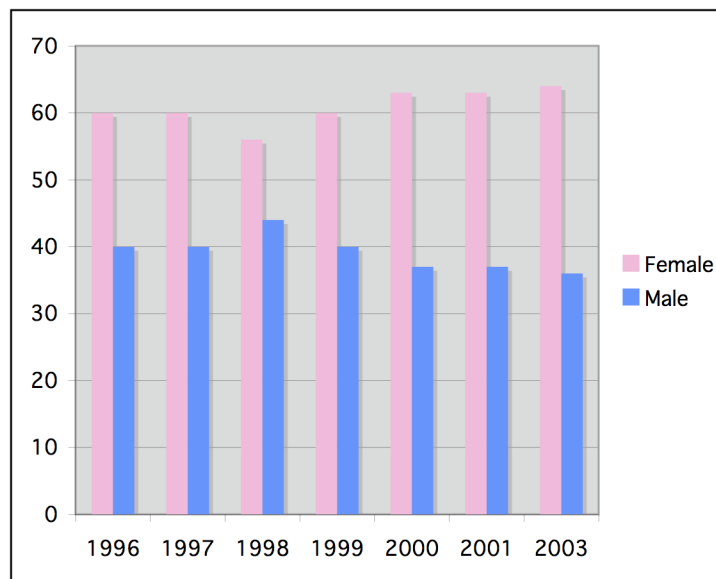


Figure 12: Percentage of women and men enrolled in undergraduate communication courses at all US universities 1996–2003 (Becker, et al.).

While that survey is comprehensive, it is the only survey of PR students. With the industry now being fuelled almost exclusively by students, now is the time to undertake research in that area. As Noble (2004) points out: “A review of literature reveals virtually no research related to the specific reasons why public relations students select the major.”

The US statistics show women clearly outnumber men, with male enrolments slowly declining from 44 per cent since 1998. These statistics cover the entire US, and there are bound to be discrepancies, as is the case at the University of San Jose. In e-mail correspondence of 19 April 2005 between myself and Prof. Dennis Wilcox, head of PR at the University of San Jose, Wilcox said: “In many of our classrooms now, it’s almost like teaching in a women’s college. About 80 per cent of our PR majors are women.”

The statistics are strikingly similar in the UK. Hall (2005) refers to an article on the *Icbirmingham* (2004) website, which states: “According to latest membership figures released by the [now Chartered] Institute of Public Relations, women now outnumber men by 60:40 – a massive swing since 1987, when figures highlighted the opposite at 20:80.”

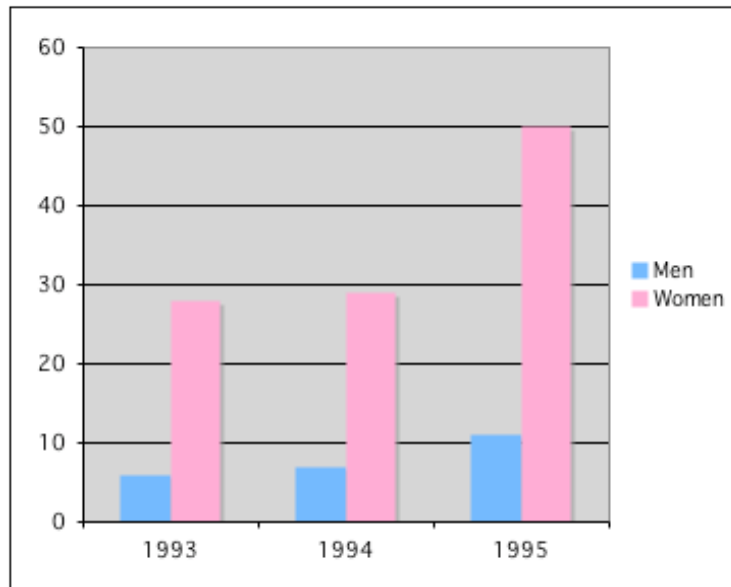


Figure 13: The rise of female enrolments in PR courses at US universities from 1993–95.

In Australia, for example, the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) public relations undergraduate degree course's trend has been similar. In 1993, a total of 28 women and six men graduated. In 1994, 29 women and seven men graduated. In 1995, 50 women and 11 men graduated.

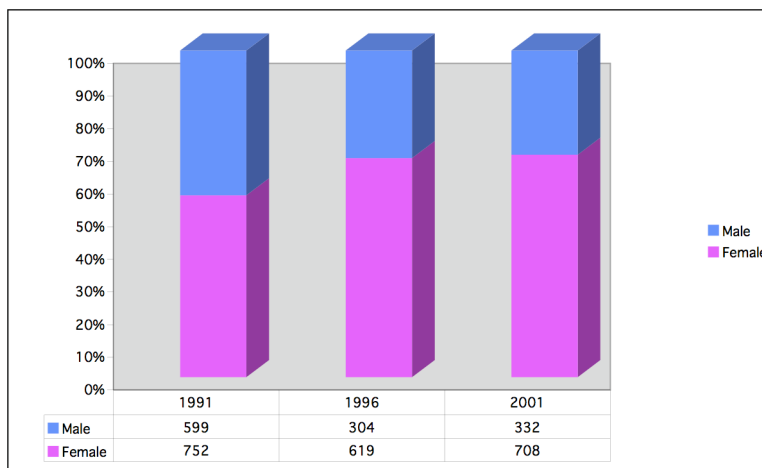


Figure 14: Rapid increase of female graduates at RMIT, 1993–95.

Australian Bureau of Statistics workforce figures taken over three censuses in 1991, 1996 and 2001 for PR in Western Australia show women clearly dominating the field. A breakdown for Perth is not available. However, as there are few PR professionals operating out of the metropolitan area in WA

(due to the few major regional towns), it can safely be stated the figures are an accurate reflection of the numbers employed in the profession in Perth.

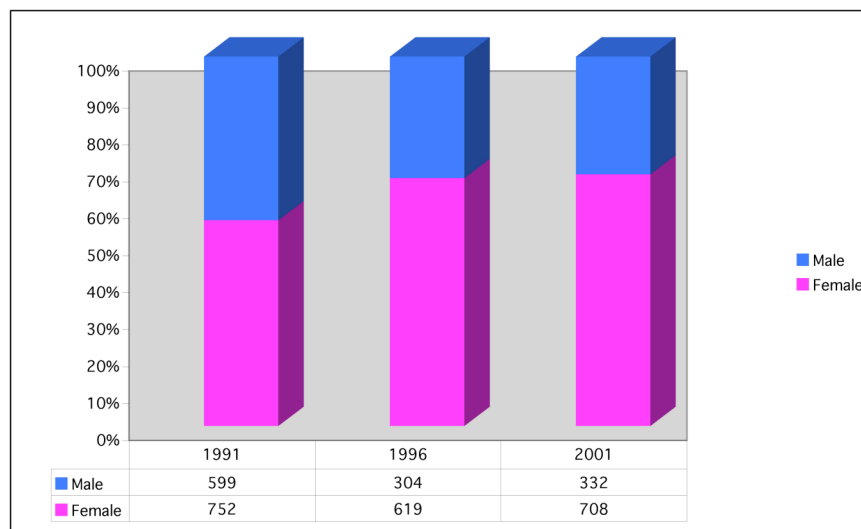


Figure 15: Australian Bureau of Statistics Census figures for public relations practitioners in Western Australia. Source: ABS 2005.

NB: The above graph is perhaps not an ideal representation, as the 1991 Census figures do not accurately reflect the industry participation rates, as PR practitioners were grouped with marketing and advertising.

From the most recent two Censuses (1996 and 2001) the trend in Western Australia (and Australia) shows women as predominant, occupying 68 per cent of the workforce in 1996 and 67 per cent in 2001. Nationally the percentage of women in PR was 60 per cent in 1996, rising to 67 per cent in 2002.

	Female practitioners		Male practitioners	
	WA	Aust.	WA	Aust.
1996	619	7240	304	3613
2001	708	8117	332	3936

Table 10: ABS Census figures for PR Officers (national and WA) 1996 and 2001.

From ABS figures (Table 10 and Figure 15, above) it can be seen that the growth in PR practitioners from 1996 to 2001 has favoured women, both nationally and in WA. In WA (read Perth) the number of women employed in PR increased by 89, while the number of males employed in PR rose by

28. Nationally the trend showed women increasing their majority, with 877 women joining the ranks, compared to 323 men. More current statistics are presented as part of the methodology (Chapter 3).

The ABS figures do not indicate as marked a difference in male and female participation rates in PR as does my 2005 survey, which shows industry participation rates at 74 per cent for women. The main factor for this discrepancy could simply be the continued increase in the number of female graduates. The ABS survey also depends on people's honesty when listing their occupation. PR has traditionally been an occupation in which people say "oh, I'm in PR" (which, for them, could cover many different areas, including hostessing and function management).

More work opportunities for women

The needs of today's information age have created more opportunities for women. Manual work within western society has decreased and been replaced by a knowledge-based economy based on the use of computers and other technology. "Mental tasks have replaced mechanical ones. Work is what goes on inside people's heads at desks, on airplanes, in meetings, at lunch. It is how they communicate with clients, what they write in memos, what they say at meetings" (Naisbitt and Aburdene, as cited in Chater, 1995). This new way of working, particularly when applied to public relations, is ideally suited to women, who not only can exercise their penchant for language, creativity and communication, but also adapt to the new environment simply because they haven't learnt the old work ways (physical labour). Because women can handle multi-tasking better than men, they would also be better suited and attracted to public relations because of the growing demand for practitioners to be multi-skilled (web design, publications, writing, strategic planning).

In a article for *Salon* magazine, (Brown, 1998) had a "stab" at the reasons why women enter PR.

Public relations jobs currently pay significantly more than, say, a newspaper job. Public relations also entices young careerists with its management potential and the opportunity to learn business skills, plus it's a flexible career that can be used as an entryway to any industry, from entertainment to high-tech.

It may be interesting to pause and consider Brown's comments. She compares PR to journalism in terms of pay. However, because the two fields overlap in many of the skills needed (writing, news-gathering, interviewing) and the fact that journalism initially was the main source of PR practitioners (until the advent of university courses) that a comparison between the two might also extend to creativity. This factor was mentioned by several respondents in my surveys and in interviews and is covered in more depth later on. Most participants, however, regarded PR as the more "creative" of the two professions. Hamilton (1999) said: "the general consensus is that journalism killed their (journalists') natural creativity".

With all the advantages they have (on paper at least) it would seem women are ideally placed to break through the 'glass ceiling'. However, that still seems a way off. With communication such a powerful tool, and one that women use better than men, experts are fearful of the future. "These natural advantages have not so far benefited women in the business world" (Chater and Gaster, 1995). Just as Tymson laments the fact that women are not perceived to be serious contenders for the boardroom, Chater and Gaster (1995) also point to our social structures which work against women. "Women, especially in business have been forced to change in the direction of conforming to the male picture of the world." However, this has created opportunities in information-based fields such as PR. The changes brought about by the information age can be seen as favourable to women, as "the needs of the information age are inconsistent with the structures, bureaucracies and rules of the industrial era" (Chater and Gaster, 1995).

Conclusion

Chapter Two was concerned with the research issues, as derived from a comprehensive review of the available literature. The review included research from the immediate (PR) discipline and, because of its subject nature (gender imbalance), extended into the social sciences (gender studies), touching on psychology, brain differences (thought patterns). It also compared PR to other industries with a gender imbalance. There was a detailed presentation of statistics on PR employment from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, which was found to correlate with my own census of the Perth PR population. These figures also closely matched enrolment figures for the four Perth universities – all showing a steady increase in the number of women studying and entering PR.

The literature review showed:

- An overall lack of study into the issue.
- Though some figures date to the 1960s, the issue was “formally” identified in the 1970s, but only came to prominence in the 1980s, but with most studies focusing on salary and management inequalities for women in PR.
- The first UK study into the phenomenon was undertaken in 2005.
- The main cause of the rise of women in PR in Australia is attributed to the introduction of PR degrees in the 1960s.
- In Australia, figures show there was a 50/50 gender split in PR in the 1980s. By 1997 this had risen to 70/30 in favour of females.
- There is an issue of PR becoming typecast as “women’s work” and a second-class” occupation. This has been labelled “recoding”, and it has happened in several industries throughout the past 50 years (IT, clerical and veterinary science). Some academics believe this has already occurred in PR and will lead to a “cheapening” of the profession.
- Socialisation plays an important part in the way we perceive PR.

- Perceptions of occupations play a vital part in whether males or females enter them. PR's problems are that it is perceived as being "girlie, flaky, fuzzy and/or soft".
- Women are better than men at the base skills that are vital in PR (the ability to listen, form lasting relationships, speak and write English).