

TOWARD A PRACTICAL MODEL OF POSTMODERN PUBLIC RELATIONS

by

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	iii
List of Tables	v
Abstract	vi
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Chapter 2: Method	38
Chapter 3: Results	52
Chapter 4: Discussion	94
References	137
Appendix A: Steps for the Practical Application of Postmodern Public Relations ...	153

List of Tables

Table 2A: Framework for Rhetorical Critical Case Analysis	41
Table 3A: Artifacts for the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD) Case Analysis	63
Table 3B: Examples of AAIDD's Discourse	66
Table 3C: Artifacts for British Petroleum (BP) Case Analysis	89
Table 3D: Examples of BP's Discourse	90

Abstract of Thesis

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Toward a Practical Model of Postmodern Public Relations

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Toward a Practical Model of Postmodern Public Relations

Although there has emerged in the past 10 to 15 years a significant body of scholarly literature on the application of postmodern perspectives to the field of public relations, very little has been offered in the way of a roadmap to a practical, everyday application of postmodernism to public relations. Toward that end, this thesis research project offers a practical model for the application of postmodern ideas to the practice of public relations.

To understand how postmodernism is emerging as a new perspective on the practice of public relations, it is helpful to first consider currently established theories in the field. Toward that end, a literature review is presented first examining Excellence Theory as one current perspective on the field of public relations. Postmodernism is then presented as an alternative view, and a theoretical framework is set forth synthesizing PPR as it is presented in the literature. Rhetorical criticism is then employed to examine the practical usefulness of what has, until now, been only a theoretical model of PPR.

The theoretical framework for PPR is used as a framework to examine two cases of real-world public relations practice: 1) communications surrounding the American Association on Mental Retardation's decision to change its name to the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, and 2) environmental discourse by petroleum giant BP. The result is a useful, useable model for the practice of PPR that derives directly from theory and is directly applicable to industry.

The practical model for PPR bridges theory with practice to provide a roadmap for the effective and ethical practice of public relations. Results of the analysis suggest

that seven of the eight components of the theoretical framework for PPR can be carried out in the practical model. The practical model distills those theoretical components into the four categories: practical relativism, power relations, the dual role of practitioners, and strategy.

The only component of the theoretical framework that was not retained for the practical model of PPR is that of avoiding entering into relationships with stakeholders with planned strategies for success. Just the opposite, this project concludes that strategic planning is, in fact, essential for the practice of PPR. In addition, the practical model for PPR calls on practitioners to use awareness of power relations to direct construction of messages, and to develop understanding of communication contexts in order to engage in discourse that is right and just.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Although Wal-Mart strives to be known as the leader in low prices, the retail giant recently found itself leading in a far less desirable category. The reputation-damaging incident began with the creation of a Web log, or “blog,” purporting to tell the story of a couple inspired by Wal-Mart’s welcoming attitude toward recreational vehicle (RV) drivers who decided to “Wal-Mart Across America.” The online journal described the couple’s road-trip experiences, with Wal-Mart often playing a central role in the depictions of life in small-town America. Later, it became known that the entire cost of the bloggers’ trip was underwritten by funds tracked back to Wal-Mart. In the resulting fake blog, or “flog,” debacle, Wal-Mart earned recognition not as the all-American low-price leader, but as an underhanded corporation attempting to deceive online audiences with surreptitious advertising. Ultimately, the fiasco earned Wal-Mart the No. 8 spot on the *Advertising Age* list of the “Ten Biggest Business Debacles” (*Consumerist’s Ten Biggest Business Debacles*, 2006).

How does a resource-rich corporation like Wal-Mart, one with the economic power to hire the best of public relations firms, make such a misstep? Wal-Mart’s “RV-ing across America” flog demonstrates precisely why Holtzhausen (2002) cautions against the use of technology to create hyper-realities that obscure organizational intentions and conceal power issues. Holtzhausen is one of a small group of public relations scholars taking a new, *postmodern*, theoretical direction in the field.

From this new perspective, the Wal-Mart debacle illustrates how the public relations field has failed to acknowledge the postmodern times in which we communicate

today. Conceivably, a postmodern public relations (PPR) roadmap could have been helpful during Wal-Mart's "RV-ing Across America" effort. Unfortunately, however, no such practical model exists.

Although there has emerged in the past 10 to 15 years a significant body of scholarly literature on the application of postmodern perspectives to the field of public relations, very little has been offered in the way of a roadmap to a practical, everyday application of postmodernism to public relations. Toward that end, this thesis research project seeks to offer a practical model for the application of postmodern ideas to the practice of public relations. The work undertaken in this research project appropriately examines and evaluates the practicality of PPR. First, a comprehensive literature review is presented, providing a theoretical framework for PPR. Then, research questions are identified to examine the practical usefulness of what has, until now, been only a theoretical model of PPR. Finally, rhetorical criticism is employed to apply this theoretical framework to real-world public relations practice.

Results of the analysis suggest that seven of the eight components of the theoretical framework for PPR can be carried out in the practical model. The practical model distills those theoretical components into the four categories: practical relativism, power relations, the dual role of practitioners, and strategy. The only component of the theoretical framework that was not retained for the practical model of PPR is that of avoiding entering into relationships with stakeholders with planned strategies for success. Just the opposite, the finding of this research is that strategic planning is, in fact, essential for the practice of PPR.

The practical model for PPR bridges theory with practice to provide a roadmap for the effective and ethical practice of public relations. The model includes strategic planning as an essential step for the practice of PPR. In addition, the practical model for PPR calls on practitioners to use awareness of power relations to direct construction of messages, and to develop understanding of communication contexts in order to engage in discourse that is right and just.

Literature Review

To understand how postmodernism is emerging as a new perspective on the practice of public relations, it is helpful to first examine currently established theories. Therefore, this literature review chapter will examine current prevailing theories and perspectives in the field of public relations. Then, postmodernism will be presented as an alternative view, and a theoretical framework is set forth synthesizing PPR as it is presented in the literature. In following chapters of this report, a research rationale is presented, and rhetorical analyses of current public relations practice are conducted using the PPR framework. The end result will be a bridging of theory with practice for a pragmatic theory of PPR that public relations practitioners can enact in “real-world” application.

One set of ideas about public relations that has gained much attention in the field in recent decades is Excellence Theory, the result of a multi-year qualitative and quantitative study to define excellence in public relations funded by the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) (Grunig, 1993). From the Excellence perspective, in order to be effective, organizations must balance their own goals with the

expectations of their publics (Grunig, 1997). Grunig and Grunig (2002) state, “Public relations makes its contribution to overall strategic management by diagnosing the environment to make the overall organization aware of stakeholders, publics and issues as they evolve” (p. 312). In order to do so, public relations practitioners should have 17 characteristics of “excellence” as identified by the study (Grunig & Grunig, 2000). The three characteristics of excellence that seem to have evoked the most response from the field are: being involved in strategic management (Grunig, 1993), using two-way symmetrical communication (Grunig, 1993), and being a member of the dominant coalition of management (Grunig and Grunig, 2002).

Holtzhausen (2007) notes the importance of Excellence Theory’s significant contributions to the field of public relations—especially in terms of theoretical development. “In actual fact, before the Excellence Theory there was no theoretical benchmark in the field of public relations against which theory development could take place” (Holtzhausen, 2007, p. 363). Excellence Theory, then, represents a beginning or start toward academic legitimacy for a field which has traditionally borrowed its theories from other disciplines.

Holtzhausen (2007) also credits Excellence Theory with spurring research into activism, revealing opportunities to also take other perspectives on public relations’ response to stakeholder dissensus. “Although the Excellence Theory undoubtedly is slanted toward both for- and nonprofit institutions, one also has to acknowledge that the Excellence Study has always recognized the legitimacy of activist groups” (Holtzhausen, 2007, p. 359). And, take other perspectives we should, at least according to some

scholars. Therefore, while Excellence Theory has propelled the field forward for more than 15 years, it is now appropriate for us to consider new ideas and directions in the field.

“Excellent” Strategy?

While Excellence Theory has garnered much attention and support, the Excellence Study’s symmetrical method also has been the subject of criticism in the field. Among the concerns that have been voiced by public relations scholars are that Excellence Theory is impractical in its idealistic and normative approach, and that public relations’ true main purpose is advocacy rather than two-way symmetrical communication (Holtzhausen, 2007). In addition, while praising the Excellence Study for advancing public relations as a prominent player in strategic organizational management, Ströh (2007) also points out that planning and strategic management are rather vague concepts that can be understood in various ways. As a result, Ströh (2007) asserts that public relations practitioners aren’t always sure what constitutes an appropriate management strategy that will be both accepted by senior management and reflective of public relations’ role in the organization’s overall success. Ströh (2007) also questions whether the strategic planning of corporate communication strategies actually results in effective relationship management. After all, in rapidly changing organizational environments, practitioners who take a linear approach to setting agendas, and creating communication plans are likely to run the risk of losing credibility with stakeholders, “whose activities form part of economic and social systems that are clearly observable as dynamic, fluid and far from equilibrium” (McKie, 2001, p. 90). How then, in this light,

do we understand strategic planning? Must we not ask, “Whose strategy is being planned? Is it the strategy of the board of directors, the chief executive officer, the key stakeholders or the customers?” (McKie, 2001, p. 777).

Powerful Voices

This concern for how the organization’s strategic planning affects its less powerful audiences leads us to questions about Excellence Theory and power relations. Holtzhausen (2007) asserts that although Excellence Theory indirectly addresses power issues between activists and public relations, it does not adequately address the importance of power in the practice of public relations.

Deetz (1998) provides an example of this shortcoming in his description of how corporate dialogue with stakeholders such as employees and customers has increased, but mostly in limited ways that are intended to increase the company’s influence and prevent broadening of value debate or participation in company goal setting and planning. Deetz (1998) writes, “In short, most representation forums are used by management to suppress or diffuse conflict arising from stakeholder groups rather than foster genuine conflict and debate for the sake of company improvement” (p. 158). In actuality, attempts at the appearance of symmetry may serve to mask more manipulative, controlling behaviors (Holtzhausen, 2000).

Even the work of Excellence Theory’s leading proponents reveals such issues. For example, in a case study that used patient focus groups to help mental health service providers understand the stigma of mental illness, Grunig (1992) found the use of focus groups helped service providers to understand and react to such stigma. Grunig (1992)

asserts that, though most public relations practitioners consider the use of focus groups only as a complement to survey-based research, because they provide the added benefit of opportunity for two-way communication, focus groups can be valuable because they provide information that can help form public relations strategies and also evaluate the effectiveness of those strategies. This is an example of a disempowered group being engaged in two-way communication not only to seek feedback on how the organization conducts its business, but also in order to gain a rhetorical advantage.

Asymmetrical Intentions

Excellence Theory can be criticized for privileging the perspective of the organization over that of activists. Such an orientation may well stem from the influence of organizational theorists who view activists as a serious threat to organizations (Holtzhausen, 2007). As Ströh (2007) notes, strategic communication models generated as a result of the Excellence Project are neither totally participative nor symmetrical for the stakeholders at whom communication is directed. Stroh (2007) writes, “There is no implication of participation in the formation of the messages, or much mention of the application of relationship management in order to achieve strategic goals” (p. 209). These practical observations seem to suggest that public relations’ true main purpose is advocacy and not two-way symmetrical communication, implying that Excellence Theory may be both impractical and overly normative (Holtzhausen, 2007).

If, then, we wish to arrive at a more practical and less prescriptive understanding of public relations, we must reconsider the idea of symmetry as it is set forth in Excellence Theory. As we consider how power relations affect organizational

communication with activists and other stakeholders, we must ask ourselves whether “Excellent” communication results not in symmetry, but an engineered form of consent for the benefit of the organization.

Public Relations “Gets No Respect.”

The issue of whether organizational communication can be truly symmetrical may also be related to the belief held by some that, as a field, public relations still does not enjoy the general respect of or trust from academe or the general public (Cheney & Christensen, 2001). A look at the historical origins of rhetoric and persuasion provides insight into the reasons why public relations is sometimes viewed negatively. To address this troublesome issue, L’Etang (2006) turns to persuasion and its historic role in our practice and understanding of public relations. L’Etang (2006) traces rhetoric’s origins back to 386 B.C. and Gorgias, one of Plato’s dialogues, in which Plato paints an unflattering picture of the practice. The Greeks associated rhetoric with logic and persuasive speaking (L’Etang, 2006). In the Classical period, men were encouraged to acquire these skills (L’Etang, 2006). The Sophists were a class of professional persuasive speakers who applied rhetorical skills for financial and social ends (L’Etang, 2006). Plato argued that rhetoric used as the Sophists taught could lead to the perpetuation of injustice in society (L’Etang, 2006). While Plato “sought to identify universal answers to the question ‘How should a man live?’, the Sophists’ position, by contrast, appeared to be a relativist one” (L’Etang, 2006, p. 362).

The social and ethical consequences of communicators’ power to persuade is an issue that is still under discussion by public relations theorists today. According to

L'Etang (2006), the Sophists' rejection of a universal ethical standard is relevant to public relations theory today because it suggests that public relations should be considered in terms of its power to influence knowledge acquisition (L'Etang, 2006). L'Etang (2006) identifies Aristotle's *The Art of Rhetoric* as what might be considered the first attempt to formally define persuasion as a science, focusing more on the approach and analysis of subject rather than philosophical questions of ethics and universal values. Indeed, when it comes to respect for the field, it seems that public relations' connection to the science of persuasion has overshadowed the fields' inherent connection to issues of ethics and values. As Cheney and Christensen (2001), note, "The fact that public relations often is equated with the term *spin*, in both popular and academic writings, is telling" (p. 168).

Indeed, public relations' history is not without blemish. Smudde (2004b) explains the reasons for and persistence of the attitude of public relations as mere "spin." In its infancy, public relations' role was limited to activities of press agency or publicity, but it was "not without a heavy load of semantic baggage" (Smudde, 20004b, p. 422) as it became an institutionalized means for large organizations to meet social, political, and economic challenges in the environment. From these early stages, when Westinghouse and Edison engaged in public discourse regarding the establishment of either alternating or direct current as the electric industry standard, on through to the corporate responses to labor movements in the early 1900s, and up to present-day cases such as the *Exxon Valdez* environmental disaster, Smudde (2004b) asserts that public relations has been seen by government and business as "an essential means to combat hostility and court

public favor, but in the eyes of the public it was seen as a way to manipulate people's thinking about issues" (p. 422). This perceived lack of ethical grounding may be contributing to a lack of respect for the public relations field.

"Excellent" ethics?

Public relations practitioners seem to have come to be perceived as modern-day Sophists in the eyes of many, being "argumentatively *positioned* as lacking a moral compass, being fickle, and as serving only very specific private or institutional interests" (Cheney & Christensen, 2001). But, fortunately, as Smudde (2004b) points out, other examples of public relations practice, such as Tylenol's response to poisonings of its product, demonstrate that an organization's public relations efforts can, in some cases, be practiced ethically and interpreted in a more positive light. Indeed, ethics is central to the practice of public relations, as evidenced by ethical codes of professional associations (*cf.* IABC: Code of Ethics for Professional Communicators, n.d.; Public Relations Society of America Member Code of Ethics, 2000). It is also central to the education of practitioners, as evidenced by a focus on ethics in public relations textbooks (*cf.* Fitzpatrick & Bronstein, 2006; Heath, 2001; Parsons, 2004).

Scholars, too, continue to engage in rigorous and healthy debate about what constitutes the most ethical means for practicing public relations. L'Etang (2006) identifies present-day ethical concerns about the practices of public relations and rhetoric. L'Etang (2006) explains,

"In both public relations and rhetoric, practical emphasis on persuasive technique can distract from the political and philosophical implications of

such a role, such as the importance of social, economic, and political power in influencing the public agenda and dominating the public sphere. The potential of organizational rhetors to dominate discourse is clearly greater than that of most individuals (royalty, celebrities, and leading politicians are potential exceptions), and a society structured around large organizations is likely to give more space for organizational rather than individual discourse” (p. 361).

Thus, scholars today call for new theoretical approaches that will allow public relations to more ethically fulfill its persuasive and rhetorical functions. One such approach advocated by Deetz (1998), Tyler (2005), and Choi (2005) is for organizations to view interaction with publics as discourse. To consider and conduct public relations as a form of discourse requires the practitioner to act ethically, because it requires that others be allowed a voice (Courtright, 2007; Tyler, 2005). As a result, organizations that conduct public relations from a discourse-centered approach will avoid creating a contrived sense of consensus among stakeholders (Day et al., 2001), and they will be required to attend to the impact of their work on others (Griffin, 2003).

These new theoretical approaches have allowed the field new perspectives on ethical issues for public relations. For example, because the discursive view encourages multiple voices, public relations practitioners need not view instances of conflict as unethical (Day et al., 2001; Deetz, 1998; Pieczka, 2006; Surma, 2006). Instead, conflict can be regarded as benefiting both the organization and stakeholders as it requires the organization to keep up with changing stakeholder perceptions (Daugherty, 2001), help

meet human needs (Deetz, 1998; Tyler, 2005), and acknowledge the role of power in public relations (Courtright & Smudde, 2007a).

The practice of public relations as discourse also provides a new means of understanding public relations' power. The practice of public relations as a form of discourse provides both a means for the co-creation of knowledge between organizations and their publics (Smudde, 2007), and offers a means for corporations to avoid domination and exploitation (Surma, 2006; Tyler 2005). For, as Smudde (2007) writes, "The intersection of knowledge and power is based on discourse and found in the ethical relationships between public relations professionals and internal and external stakeholders" (Smudde, 2007, p. 226). The discursive view of public relations, then, provides a much different perspective from that of Excellence Theory. Rather than working to overcome stakeholder objections and conflict, public relations as a form of discourse seeks to acknowledge and engage divergent voices.

To sum up, new perspectives on public relations have sought to reconnect the field to its rhetorical roots in ethics. The concept of rhetoric, according to L'Etang (2006), encompasses "not only analytical elements focused on the structure of language and the practical application of rhetoric in terms of persuasive effects, but also debate regarding its social consequences" (p. 360). L'Etang (2006) argues that a return to viewing public relations as rhetoric will help the field to address ethical issues. As L'Etang (2006) writes, the field of rhetoric "directly confronts questions of dialogue, debate and persuasion within a framework which takes account of ethics and postmodernist thought" (p. 366).

Wanted: New Perspectives

Although “Excellence” has been recognized, portrayed, and taught as a progressive ideal in the field of public relations, McKie (2001) describes how such rational metanarratives serve to constrict critical thinking in public relations: “How, after all, can anyone rationally oppose being excellent?” (p. 76). Indeed, Berger (2007) concludes that, although Excellence Theory has propelled the field forward in important ways, there exist new opportunities for power research from other perspectives.

It is important that practitioners not get caught up in a revisionist view of Excellence Theory as the only means for effective public relations practice, and an inevitable part of the field’s future success. Indeed, our academic history is a revisionist one, where the reconstruction of previous paradigms and theories in textbooks suggest a linearity and cumulative tendency that affects scientists even as they reflect upon their own research (Kuhn, 1996). Such textbooks can perpetuate the inaccurate perception that our understanding of the world has reached its present state through a series of individual discoveries that, when taken as a whole, make up the modern body of technical knowledge in a relationship akin to the addition of bricks to a building (Kuhn, 1996). This piecemeal-discovered facts approach illustrates a pattern of misrepresentation about the nature of discovery and learning (Kuhn, 1996). Therefore, Excellence Theory can easily be mistaken for an essential and inextricable part of the field’s past, present and future.

There are, in fact, other perspectives on the field. Pieczka (2006) asserts that although Excellence Theory should be considered as just one particular perspective, and perhaps not always the best one. McKie (2001) explains how the Excellence Theory's relatively linear and unchanging perspective may not be ideal for helping practitioners gain credibility in present-day societal conditions. McKie (2001) asserts, in rapidly changing organizational environments, "public relations objective setting and communication plans based on linear approaches to knowledge are increasingly likely to lack credibility with stakeholders whose activities form part of economic and social systems that are clearly observable as dynamic, fluid and far from equilibrium" (p. 90).

As Gower (2006) notes, acknowledging our past helps put our present into context. For public relations, that present is increasingly coming to include postmodernist perspectives. Although Excellence Theory has done much to advance the field, as Gower (2006) writes,

"Today's public relations practice is fluid and complex. Thus, we need to bring into our literature new theories from other disciplines to enhance our conceptual understanding of the field and explore more fully the implications of postmodern theories for the practice of public relations... If we are to be a management function, we need to bring that literature into ours and update what we do and how we do it" (Gower, 2006, p. 185).

Postmodernism offers one means for the field to accomplish this goal.

About Postmodernism

While postmodernism has been recognized as having the potential to enhance and update the field of public relations, it also has been recognized that postmodernism is a difficult concept to introduce. The postmodern perspective is eclectic, de-centralized and difficult to describe with precision. Stewart (1991) acknowledges that the postmodern is hard to define exactly because it is a phenomenon of interest in many fields, ranging from architecture to painting, philosophy and literature. There is no one central definition of what constitutes postmodern perspectives, because, as Holtzhausen (2002) writes, “postmodernism represents a broad theoretical approach” (p. 253). It is possible, however, to paint a picture of the postmodern using broad historical and theoretical brushstrokes.

Rooted in modernism.

Postmodernism finds its roots in the period known as modernism. Modernism represents the period between the present day and the beginning of the Enlightenment, having strongly taken root during the Industrial Revolution (Venkatesh, 1999). Modernization changed every facet of life for humans throughout the world (Venkatesh, 1999). Modernity as an era is known for its great developments in science and technology, Western colonization of much of the rest of the world, the crumbling of monarchies, and the flourishing of liberal democracy, nation-states, and corporate institutions (Venkatesh, 1999).

Postmodernity can be considered a new period in history, one that has abandoned dualistic understandings of fact and value. Stewart (1991) describes the postmodern as

having emerged from the questioning of modern perspectives linked with the Enlightenment, such as Kant and Descartes' insistence that issues of "fact" must necessarily be separate from issues of "value." Postmodernism does not view modernism as the only principle for understanding social order; instead, it attempts to restore aestheticism and subjective experience as legitimate sources of human knowledge (Venkatesh, 1999).

Postmodernism offers a new perspective on what constitutes truth and justice. As Duffy (2000) writes, "Postmodern theorists dispute modernism's privileging of functionalism, stability, and objectivity and point out the exploitative, destabilizing and perspectival aspects of organizations and society" (p. 295). Postmodernism places emphasis on culture, history, class, society, and gender as frames of reference for reality, and it understands that there is no single truth because people with different backgrounds have different realities (Holtzhausen, 2000). Postmodernists question as misleading and flawed modernism's dualisms "between subject and object, theory and practice, art and science, art and reality, literature and criticism, form and content, and will and reason" (Stewart, 1991, p. 355). Furthermore, postmodernists don't share the Enlightenment's wariness of rhetoric; instead, they acknowledge and appreciate rhetoric's link to philosophy (Stewart, 1991).

Modernism is not rejected by the postmodern, however. In fact, as Thomas (1997) writes, for postmodernists, modernism is "precisely the thing" (p. 70). Postmodernism and modernism supplement one another, Thomas (1997) asserts, and it is now "equally impossible to read the text of modernity in the absence of postmodernity" (p. 8). Ströh

(2007), too, acknowledges postmodernism's inextricable connection to modernism "in that postmodernism is the modern in an embryonic state" (p. 205). Venkatesh (1999) also describes postmodernity in relation to modernity, writing, "[W]hereas postmodernity describes the social and economic developments that came after modernity, it also represents the developments that have grown out of modernity" (Venkatesh, 1999, p. 153).

That is not to say that postmodernists are not critical of modernist perspectives. Postmodernism is not in opposition to modernism, but it does reject modernism as the dominant, central discourse (Holtzhausen, 2000). Holtzhausen (2000) explains, "[W]here modernism maintains that it has found the real truth, the postmodern holds that this truth is merely the viewpoint of some dominant groups in society and should not be privileged over another viewpoint" (p. 96). Thus, while postmodernists value modernism as one of many viewpoints, postmodernists are also critical of modernism's hegemony.

What made our society modern, and what makes it postmodern now?

Postmodernism can be attributed to changes in the global economy, media, and ideas about ethics and values. Venkatesh (1999) explains, "The economic modernization of the world has been advancing like a giant machine denying cultural differences and securing the goals of rationalization, standardization and control" (p. 167). Scholars also point to changes in the media as contributing to postmodern conditions. Griffin (2003) writes of the role media play in enforcing cultural myths that maintain the place of those who dominate commerce and power in our society, "This is America, after all, so think big, aim high, and don't be satisfied with anything but the top. Do what it takes—and

purchase what is required—to be the very best. Ideologically speaking, it is this kind of naturalized longing that enslaves the average citizen and fuels the capitalist system” (p.363). As a culture of consumers, we are encouraged to value dominance and power as a means to affluence and purchasing power. Conversely, from a postmodern perspective, we can see that because our world is based on symbols and signs, culture does matter; cultural differences are global and none is superior to the other; and, because economics is part of culture, culture must take precedence over economics and not the other way around (Venkatesh, 1999).

Although postmodernism may seem to echo Marxism’s anti-capitalism, it is distinct and different from Marxism (Holtzhausen, 2000). In fact, because postmodernism rejects the imposition of any one ideology over all others, it instead acknowledges capitalism an ideology that is dominant in the West today while also criticizing capitalism’s inbuilt contradictions and treating it as a metanarrative requiring resistance (Holtzhausen, 2000). In short, postmodernism does not seek to defeat capitalism because, as Holtzhausen (2000) writes, “it is wary of itself becoming a metanarrative” (p. 97).

Language is knowledge; knowledge is power.

Power is a central concept of interest for postmodernist communication scholars. The postmodern critic is interested in power relations in society, and postmodern critics strive to help give voice to those whose voices are shut out (Smudde, 2007b). A common thread among postmodern questions about power is language’s role in how power relations are maintained and shaped (Holtzhausen, 2002). Postmodernists consider language and symbols as cultural artifacts that, for individuals within a culture, have

political or economic reality (Mickey, 1997). Similarly, they disregard previously held distinctions between language and communication, believing that use of language is situated in dialogue (Stewart, 1991). In postmodern discourse, systems are self-referential; as a result, any analysis of their meaning or purpose can only be interpretive in nature (Pieczka, 2006).

We're all right/no one is right.

Postmodernism is also apostivistic. Postmodernism does not presume that philosophies will be applicable in every situation and under every circumstance (Holtzhausen & Voto, 2002). Indeed, as Holtzhausen (2002) describes, "In response to the modernist emphasis on single, dominant theoretical perspectives and philosophies, referred to as metanarratives, postmodernists revel in multiplicity and diversity, and in even questioning their own theoretical perspectives" (p. 253). This rejection of metanarratives also brings into focus the questions of ethics, and the potentially oppressive power of dominant ethical perspectives. For example, Holtzhausen and Voto (2002) describe how the postmodern perspective informs our understanding of organizational communication: "The postmodern stance to ethics and moral decision making holds that a single dominant ethical philosophy will submit employees to a repressive metanarrative" (Holtzhausen & Voto, 2002, p. 66).

That is not to say, however, that postmodernism rejects traditional ethical philosophies. Pearce (1998) asserts that, while the Enlightenment distinguished between ethics, aesthetics, and reason, resulting in a tendency for theorists to see a dichotomy between the description of facts as 'reality' and aesthetics and reason as outmoded, there

does exist “an important difference between making a distinction and treating things as dichotomies” (Pearce, 1998, p. 327). Instead, postmodernists revel in multiplicity and diversity, and even in questioning their own theoretical perspectives (Holtzhausen & Voto, 2002). Indeed, postmodernist perspectives are diverse and sometimes incongruent (Venkatesh, 1999). They emerged independently in different fields such as architecture, literature, politics, social theory, and philosophy (Venkatesh, 1999). Gradually, “these disparate postmodernist tendencies appear to have converged with an interdisciplinary fusion of knowledge. Once these tendencies united to form a loose collective, postmodernism began to assume the character of a major movement” (Venkatesh, 1999, p. 154).

No, we can't “all just get along.”

Finally, postmodernism recognizes that dissensus is inevitable. According to Putnam (1998), the postmodern is “characterized by rapid changes and fragmentation,” (p. 149). As a result, we see postmodern society as fragmented, too (Holtzhausen, 2000). Much like the discursive view of communication, the postmodern perspective provides public relations practitioners with a refreshing new understanding of conflict. Rather than representing opposition that must necessarily be overcome with persuasion, dissensus can instead be seen as an inevitable result of fragmentation. Thus, attending to dissensus can help practitioners to better understand changing societal conditions.

The Beginnings of Postmodernism

Michel Foucault, Jean-François Lyotard, Jean Baudrillard, and Jacques Derrida are some of the writers often credited with establishing the postmodernist perspective

(Holtzhausen, 2002; Mickey, 1997). Foucault focuses on the significant relationships between power and communication and argues that the framework through which people interpret communication is determined by the dominant discourse (Griffin, 2003). “What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn’t only weigh on us a force that says no, but it transverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse,” wrote Foucault (1972, p. 119).

Jean-François Lyotard’s (1988) most significant contribution to postmodernism may well be his concept of the “grand narrative,” an “epistemological stance that is suspicious of any truth claim” such as that of “Marxism, Freudian psychology, and Christianity” (Griffin, 2003, p. A-8). As Holtzhausen (2000) cites, Lyotard makes “the point that consensus aims to co-opt and maintain the status quo” (p. 106). Furthermore, consensus is inevitably unjust because no resolution can satisfy both parties (Holtzhausen, 2000).

Venkatesh (1999) presents five conditions of postmodernism from Baudrillard, including;

1. “The sign system” (p. 154), which describes humans as constantly communicating, using signs and symbols that provide us with shared meanings;
2. “Hyperreality” (p. 155), which describes human reality as constructed and simulated through the use of symbols and signs, so much so that we take the signs and symbols themselves as reality;

3. “Particularism” (p. 155), which states that, because our social and culturally constructed realities are not universally experienced by others in different times and different places, we behave in ways particular to our own space and time ;
4. “Fragmentation” (p. 155), which, describes individuals as fragmented, “continuously emergent, reformed, and redirected through relationships” (p. 155); and
5. “The *symbolic* nature of consumption processes” (p. 156), which describes how media and cultural groups provide customers with symbols that create meaning, and those meanings direct consumers through consumption processes. As meanings change, so do consumption patterns.

Finally, Jacques Derrida (1978) gave to postmodernism the concept of deconstruction as a means for examining the ideas proposed by a text and the ways in which knowledge is constructed. Deconstruction helps postmodern thinkers to examine the ways in which knowledge and truth are socially constructed and maintained. Deconstruction is the dominant postmodern critical approach to analyzing texts (Smudde, 2007b).

Applications of Postmodern Perspectives

From management to marketing to public relations, the flexible nature of postmodern ideas allows for their broad application across many disciplines and fields. From a management perspective, postmodernism has shifted the management paradigm

from being mechanistic to more organic worldview, where organizations are seen as organisms subject to natural laws of evolution, process, and transformation (Ströh, 2007). This flexibility allows for new understandings of and appreciation for relationships such as production and consumption. Venkatesh (1999) presents a postmodern framework for today's global economy and socio-cultural order. Venkatesh (1999) sees in postmodern macromarketing that production and consumption are "two sides of the same coin. That is, no production can take place without corresponding consumption, and similarly, no consumption can take place unless things are produced" (Venkatesh, 1999 p. 167).

Parallels can be drawn between Venkatesh's (1999) postmodern framework for macromarketing and public relations if we consider corporate messages as something that is produced and consumed as well. While our new interconnectedness does still favor the more powerful when it comes to both economies and discourse, the postmodern perspective places value on both the producer and the consumer. This simple parallel demonstrates the ease with which postmodern perspectives can be applied to the practice of public relations. In fact, public relations theory seems to be one of the few disciplines to not have been widely subjected to postmodern scrutiny (Holtzhausen, 2000). But, a small but growing number of public relations scholars have begun exploring such applications.

Postmodern Public Relations (PPR)

There is wide-ranging potential for the application of postmodernism to public relations. Cheney and Christensen (2001) "see public relations as a contested disciplinary and interdisciplinary terrain" (p. 167), where theoretical development "certainly has been

following developments in the profession as well as broader social-political trends that surround them” (p. 167). Some current public relations areas in which scholars have begun to apply postmodern trends include: improving organizations’ engagement with their environments (Courtright, 2007; Holtzhausen, 2007; Holtzhausen & Voto, 2002); ethical communication management (Stewart, 1991; Ströh, 2007); issues of power and public relations management (O’Connor, 2007; Smudde, 2007); and corporate social capital (Ihlen, 2007).

Public relations and activism.

Because of its unique perspective on dissensus, postmodernism provides a new look at how public relations should approach activists who demonstrate opposition to an organization’s objectives. In a postmodern critique of the Church of Scientology’s response to its activist critics, Courtright (2007) investigates the potential power gained by activists communicating online and how organizations can legitimize activists or constrain their power. Courtright (2007) employs Certeau’s notion of organizational space to illustrate how the Internet becomes a potential battlefield, where activists may use an organization’s own words to co-opt the organization’s symbolic space and express their criticism of the organization.

In another look at activism, Holtzhausen and Voto (2002) studied 16 public relations practitioners’ discourse, finding a disconnect between practitioners’ postmodern desires to help effect change in society and the modernist expectations of organizations. These authors write about the nature of public relations practitioners’ work as contributing to an activist-focused perspective for practitioners: “Practitioners as

boundary spanners will inevitably be more in touch with the societal and cultural environment of organizations and will therefore be more susceptible to these changes than most others” (Holtzhausen & Voto, 2002, p. 77). Thus, public relations practitioners, because of the nature of their work, may be well positioned to make use of postmodernism in public relations.

Power and public relations management.

Holtzhausen (2000) looks to Foucault’s idea of resistance from within to answer the question of how practitioners can change power relationships. Postmodernism also provides other scholars with a basis from which to understand power and discourse. Smudde (2007) argues that, because public relations is discursive in nature, it defines the knowledge that shapes corporate destiny. Smudde (2007) proposes a Foucauldian approach to analyzing the relationships between knowledge and power among organizations and their publics, evaluating public relations’ effectiveness, and planning public relations strategy. Smudde (2007) asserts that Foucault’s archaeology, genealogy, and ethics can be used for proactive public relations planning, allowing the bridging of theory with practice. Smudde (2007) predicts that such an approach also would help practitioners plan their work with an eye toward their discursive actions, the organization’s power-knowledge relationships, and ethical concerns.

O’Connor (2007) uses the ideas of Pierre Bourdieu and issues management concepts to examine a Philip Morris public image campaign. O’Connor (2007) describes how Philip Morris used values advocacy messages focused on the company’s social, charitable, and economic contributions in order to deflect attention from the corporation’s

core business of tobacco and its harmful effects. O'Connor (2007) asserts that such values advocacy communications efforts have the potential to manipulate audience thinking in a way that is favorable toward the corporation. As a result, the corporation gains social advantage and control (O'Connor, 2007). O'Connor (2007) concludes that the power of public image campaigns lies in the corporation's ability to direct the public's attention to its corporate social responsibility and away from other, negative images of ways in which the corporation harms its audiences.

Holtzhausen (2002) also asserts that modernist organizations use public relations practitioners to legitimate organizational managers' knowledge, which they present as objective. Holtzhausen (2002) explains, "In this role, public relations practitioners are nothing but the stooges of powerful corporate managers who use public relations' agency to create forms of discipline and normalization criteria" (p. 257). Holtzhausen (2000) recommends that public relations scholars and practitioners should instead embrace postmodern analysis in the spirit of "one of the best Western academic traditions to explore, debate, and test new perspectives" (p. 95). In effect, PPR could be described as, instead of trying to "get a seat at the table," ensuring that table is open to all who are affected by the organization.

In another postmodern look at public relations and power, Ihlen (2005) expands Bordieu's concept of social capital by applying it to organizations. Ihlen (2005) describes social capital as having two components: the size of an individual's network, and the volume of the capital that the other parts of the network have, and to which the individual gains access (p. 494). According to Ihlen (2005), individuals accrue social capital by

providing gifts, care, and other social commodities to the members of the group. Social capital acts as a “credit” of sorts that the individual may call upon to obtain services and goods (Ihlen, 2005). In public relations, Ihlen (2005) asserts, social capital presents a perspective for studying power relations in activities like alliance building, lobbying, and media relations.

Postmodernism as a means to ethical practice.

Public relations theorists have also recognized postmodernism’s potential for contributing to ethical practice. Ströh (2007) proposes an approach to corporate communication strategy drawn from the postmodern concepts of chaos and complexity theories, which put emphasis on interaction, relationships, and self-regulation. Ströh (2007) concludes that, while conventional strategic management models are linear, the business environment is too unpredictable for managers to be able to control implementation of their strategic plans. Ströh (2007) points to postmodern approaches as an ethical means of managing communication in a way that ensures all stakeholders are able to truly participate in determining decision-making processes.

The application of postmodern principles to the everyday practice of public relations would not come without significant changes for the field. Stewart (1991) points out the drastic implications of applying postmodern ideas to the need for corporate ethics. Postmodern thinkers see humans as historical, social beings who are not autonomous but instead find their identity in relational, social, historical cultural, and linguistic contexts (Stewart, 1991). Cognition and the use of language are not distinguishable as separate phenomena (Stewart, 1991). For this reason, we are defined by our language as much as

we use it to define our world (Stewart, 1991). Therefore, postmodern investigations of public relations are not simply “esoteric, idiosyncratic, or mystical speculations about arcane philosophical constructs” (Stewart, 1991, p. 372), they are in fact analyzing the definitions, methodological assumptions, and pedagogical beliefs that underlie much of what communication professionals do as scholars and teachers” (Stewart, 1991, p. 372).

Traditional ethics vs. PPR.

Because they represent such a drastic shift, postmodern ethical views may appear, on their surface, to conflict with traditional ethical perspectives on public relations. For example, traditional views of public relations require practitioners to contribute to the profitability of the corporation by helping to ensure public acquiescence for corporate initiatives. For, practitioners are obliged to protect the interests of those who employ them. In light of this obligation, the idea of embracing dissenting voices and valuing conflict may, at first glance, appear to run counter to that profit-driven priority.

But, postmodern public relations can serve to build an ethical bridge between the motivations of organizations’ management and their publics (Daugherty, 2001). While managers may view their first and most important responsibility to be ensuring profitability for the company and its shareholders, as Daugherty (2001) explains, a postmodern approach to ethical behavior “is that which serves both the organization’s and public’s interests” (p. 396). From the postmodern perspective, corporate behavior that ignores or overpowers dissenting voices may ultimately ignite opposition strong enough to derail corporate initiatives. Meanwhile, an ethical approach to public relations can help build a positive corporate image (Day, et al., 2001), creating greater cooperation

from the corporation's publics. Thus, Daugherty (2001) writes, "Ethical behavior contributes to bottom line results" (p. 396).

Another commonly-valued objective for the practice of public relations is the Excellence Theory's goal of building of symmetry between the organization and its stakeholders. Again, in apparent contrast, PPR would embrace conflict and dissent. But, in truth, PPR does not reject symmetry; it simply uses the concept differently (Heath 2001). As Heath (2001) explains, "A rhetorical view presumes that, in terms of their right to speak, all parties are symmetrical" (p. 35).

In the postmodern view, the concept of symmetry is perceived quite differently. Holtzhausen (2000) explains, "Seeking consensus implies seeking an unjust settlement in which the most powerful, usually organizations, get their way," (p. 106), and "consensus actually represents an unequal relationship between activists and corporations" (p. 106). Due, in part to this concern, Holtzhausen (2000) offers postmodernism as a more appropriate and ethical approach to public relations than the practices of seeking to build consensus and achieve symmetry. Rather than symmetry, postmodern public relations theorists assert, public relations should value dissensus and conflict.

Because it offers such a different ethical approach, postmodern public relations has the potential to help remove the suspicion of organizational propaganda. Weaver et al (2006) assert, when public relations takes a postmodern view of reality as constructed, "it becomes very difficult, if not impossible, to argue that propaganda is necessarily a form of lying—or the promotion of 'untruths'" (p. 8). Because postmodernism views truth as constructed, for the postmodern public relations practitioner, engaging in the use of

propaganda to influence discourse is not inherently unethical. The issue instead becomes a question of what society accepts as truth (Weaver et al, 2006).

Weaver et al (2006) argue that the tactic of propaganda or persuasion is not in and of itself unethical, but whether or not it is ethical must be considered in light of the social context in which it is practiced and the purpose for which it is used. As Weaver et al (2006) explain, “[T]he determination of what constitutes ‘the public interest’ is contestable and context dependent, linked to the social norms of a given time and place” (Weaver et al, 2006, p.8). This context-focused perspective offers a redemptive look at public relations and a reconsidering of practitioners as mere “spin-meisters” (Weaver et al., 2006).

Weaver et al. (2006) reject both the notion that propaganda inevitably operates against the public interest and the idea that symmetrical public relations automatically does serve public interest. Instead, these authors write, “Multiple discourses circulate and compete with each other for hegemonic power and therefore there is a choice of meanings, identities and realities available to audiences, not one all-powerful construction of reality” (Weaver et al., 2006, p. 21). Thus, when understood in terms of political power, the creation of meaning, truth and public interest, public relations becomes “a tool of social power and change for utilisation [sic] by not only those who hold hegemonic power, but also those who seek to challenge and transform that power and reconfigure dominant perceptions of the public interest” (Weaver et al, 2006, p. 21). Thus, PPR in fact fulfils traditional ethical public relations standards in nontraditional ways.

Benefits of PPR.

The aforementioned postmodern examinations of public relations practice reveal a number of benefits of PPR. PPR can help the field stay relevant, vital, and dynamic; PPR can help organizations better align themselves with the values of the cultures in which they exist; and PPR practitioners can help enact social change. Holtzhausen (2002) advocates strengthening the emphasis on the postmodern in public relations as a way to keep up with new theories and ideas in other fields and to understand how they apply to our own. In describing why practitioners would pursue activism, Holtzhausen (2007) writes,

“The answer likely lies in both the economic and social contexts of public relations. First, activist public relations practitioners will actively advocate on behalf of the less powerful and will fearlessly stand up to unfair power. In that way, they will help their organizations align with the value systems of their environments, which will ensure their economic survival... Second, activist public relations practitioners can also be powerful role players in bringing about social change. In a time in which social change is increasingly brought about through activism, public relations practitioners have all the necessary attributes and skills to lead social change movements” (p. 375).

Furthermore, as organizational environments become increasingly dynamic, activist practitioners can help organizations stay aware of and adjust to those changes (Holtzhausen, 2007). In addition, PPR can help organizations stand up to dominant power

(Holtzhausen & Voto, 2002), which may be a common need of nonprofit and charity organizations.

Ströh (2007) asserts that public relations would benefit from shifting its focus away from measuring outputs to the process of relating, “that is, of engagement and enrichment through constant dialogue, debate, and discourse. This is the making of true values, not only for the organization, but also its environment and, ultimately, society as a whole” (p. 213). By listening to diverse and dissenting voices, the organization may become more self-aware and therefore better able to diffuse crises before they grow (Tyler, 2005). Such a postmodern approach is admittedly idealistic, but equally so is the modernist approach of attempting to gain control where it is clearly lost (Tyler, 2005).

Theoretical Framework for PPR

Taken as a combined whole, the existing literature can be synthesized into a comprehensive theoretical framework for PPR:

1. A PPR approach “will be to address symmetry not at the macrolevel but to address it in particular situations by focusing on what is right and just in those situations” (Holtzhausen, 2000, p. 97).
2. PPR practitioners will, rather than measuring excellence against universal models, gauge public relations’ ability to “deal with a particular event, in a particular place, within a just and moral framework” (Holtzhausen, 2000, p. 109).
3. PPR practitioners and scholars will “create a postmodern condition by being critical and by exposing the irony and contradictions of public relations practice” (Holtzhausen, 2000, p. 111).

4. PPR will acknowledge that conflict and dissensus exists and, rather than claiming objectivity, be aware of the role their power relations play in their work (Holtzhausen, 2000).
5. PPR practitioners will act as activists, forming alliances with marginalized people or functions, but they also will form alliances with those who can help them gain power and influence in the organization (Holtzhausen & Voto, 2002).
6. PPR practitioners will make transparency rather than power their priority in dialogue with publics (Courtright, 2007 p. 157)
7. PPR practitioners will “map power-knowledge relationships so that any discursive action can be properly and effectively focused” (Smudde, 2007, p. 229).
8. PPR practitioners will enter into relationships without planned strategies of how they are going to achieve success in those relationships. (Ströh, 2007).

The application of the above the theoretical framework for PPR could offer a refreshing new approach for public relations practitioners, but its challenges and shortcomings must be addressed. This framework offers much in the way of ideas, but little in the way of practical direction for the enactment of PPR. Indeed, much is left to answer about whether, and how, PPR could be carried out in real-world application.

Thus, the following discussion examines potential challenges for the enactment of PPR, yielding questions about public relations practitioners as activists, the ethics of PPR, and PPR’s practicality. The research questions that follow will provide a basis for analysis of the theoretical framework for PPR toward the development of a practical PPR model.

Research Questions

RQ1: Can professionals effectively practice PPR while also serving as an activist for disempowered stakeholders?

First, along with postmodernism's questions about symmetry and power come questions about the practitioner's role in activism. One might ask if, from a postmodern perspective, it is problematic for the practitioner to attempt to act as an activist for disempowered stakeholders while also receiving a paycheck from the organization. Wouldn't it appear that postmodernism, with its irony and distrust of corporations, and public relations would make rather strange bedfellows? If rhetorical criticism aims to help the disempowered, are the likes of Martha Stewart (see Jerome, Moffitt & Knudson, 2007) and her corporation truly the intended beneficiaries? It is natural to wonder whether the practice of PPR on behalf of organizations might actually serve to further disempower audiences. For, according to Holtzhausen (2007), the Foucauldian view of power and resistance results in a view of public relations that is, at times, confrontational and beset by conflict. As Holtzhausen (2007) acknowledges, "Admittedly, in this approach, the opportunities for collaboration might be considerably less" (Holtzhausen, 2007, p. 367). Nevertheless, public relations practitioners who get people to the table by acting as activists may achieve dialogue that otherwise wouldn't have occurred between corporations and their publics. For, as Holtzhausen and Voto (2002) point out, it may only be through our old, modernist perspective that "the idea of organizational activism seems confrontational and perhaps even impossible" (p. 77). The question seems an

important one, however, and one that will require resolution in order for the practical implementation of PPR.

RQ2: Can PPR be practiced ethically without imposing new grand narratives?

Secondly, in seeking to improve our field through the application of PPR values, mustn't we establish ourselves as experts and leaders, just as Excellence Theory prescribes? If we do, aren't we seeking to privilege ourselves? As practitioners, how can we ethically acknowledge our own motives?

Courtright (2007) discusses how corporations can make strategic decisions based on postmodern concepts of power that will ultimately protect the organization's power. How, then, do we reconcile the circular problem of the need for practitioners and organizations to have power in order to conduct PPR? Are these aims to gain power, both by the postmodern corporation and by the PPR practitioner, problematic in light of postmodernism's own rejection of grand narratives? Postmodernists believe that values aren't one-size fits all, and that this conviction makes it unethical for corporations to force modernist values on audiences in postmodern times. But, if PPR calls for participative communication strategies because that's the "right" thing to do, then aren't proponents of PPR still claiming a moral and ethical perspective? And, if so, aren't they also bound to empower some and disadvantage others? In short, we must ask whether enacting PPR would simply create new sort of grand narrative. Yet, without ethical motivation, why would organizations choose to share power with stakeholders?

RQ3: Can PPR theory be bridged with public relations practice to reveal the pragmatic side of postmodernism?

Finally, another challenge associated with postmodern and critical/cultural theory is that, to date, it does not provide much in the way of instruction for actual practice (Curtin & Gaither, 2005). Although there has emerged in the past 10 to 15 years a significant body of scholarly literature on the application of postmodern perspectives to the field of public relations, with a few rare exceptions (*cf.* Smudde, 2007a) very little has been offered in the way of a roadmap to a practical, everyday application of postmodernism to public relations. If PPR is to become a useful and usable perspective for the practice of public relations, then, it will be necessary to analyze the theoretical framework in light of real-world practice.

Research Rationale

The need for a practical model for the enactment of PPR becomes evident when one considers present-day characteristics of the society in which we currently theorize about and practice public relations. As the literature review for this project reveals, our society has become postmodern, and we cannot go back. Thus, if we see old ways of doing public relations as potentially unethical and outmoded, we are obligated to move forward in adapting our field to the postmodern present. Otherwise, should practitioners go on practicing and theorists go on theorizing, so that “ne’er the twain shall meet?” For the future of the field, then, and for the benefit of scholars and practitioners, we must develop a useful, usable model for PPR that derives directly from theory and is directly applicable to industry. In doing so, we will bring relevance to the academy and improve outcomes for organizations, enabling both to better prepare for challenges ahead. Toward that end, this chapter has presented a theoretical framework for PPR, a rationale for

research into the practicality of PPR, and three specific questions for the present research project. The following chapters outline and carry out an analytical approach to this evaluation, bridging the theoretical foundation with practice. The result will be a useful, useable model for PPR that is grounded in theory and can be enacted in “real-world” public relations practice.

Chapter 2: Method

The previous chapter summarized theoretical ideas about PPR in the existing literature and presented research questions about the practical application of postmodern perspectives for public relations practitioners. The present chapter outlines an analytical approach to answering those research questions through the use of rhetorical criticism. The purpose of carrying out such an analysis is to arrive at a practical model of PPR that will be useful and usable to public relations practitioners. Rather than engaging in criticism of PPR theory in order to simply point out the flaws or shortcomings of current ideas about PPR, the goal of the present research is to create a bridge between theory and practice, advancing the public relations field on both fronts. As Smudde (2007) contends, “Criticism, then, becomes something more potent—a tool for more effective discourse rather than an exercise in attaining 20/20 hindsight,” (p. 215).

That is not to say that such an endeavor will be easy to carry out or yield perfect results. Although the proposed research questions may prove to be difficult ones, they must be addressed if public relations is to be a relevant part of this postmodern society. And, the field will become stronger as a result. For, as we seek to apply new forms of critical theory, “not everything will work. Not everything will be worth adopting or saving” (Gower, 2006, p. 186). But, “[t]he process of self-reflection itself will be worth the effort” (Gower, 2006, p. 186).

The goal of the present research is to apply the PPR framework to evaluate current cases of public relations practice, yielding a practical model for the field. Such an in-depth, systematic exploration will help reveal “the day-to-day ‘stuff’ of public

relations' value to individuals, organizations, communities, society, the field itself, and other relevant fields of study" (Smudde & Courtright, 2007, p. 271). Indeed, the ontological nature of this research into a practical model for PPR will serve to reinforce public relations' relevance to society as a whole.

Approach to Analysis

Rhetorical criticism can be defined as "a process of thinking about symbols, discovering how they work, why they affect us, and choosing to communicate in particular ways as a result of the options they present" (Foss, 1996, p. 3). This method is a widely accepted qualitative approach for inquiry into the practice of public relations. Rhetorical criticism has been used in a number of book-length works (i.e. Coombs & Holladay, 2007; Courtright & Smudde, 2007) and individual scholarly works (i.e. Livesey, 2002) on public relations. Rhetorical criticism offers an especially fitting means for investigating postmodernism and public relations. PPR theory concerns itself with issues like the effects of organizations' symbolic actions on disempowered organizational stakeholders. Similarly, rhetorical criticism aims to evaluate the ways in which communication is used to persuade audiences and, in doing so, gain power for rhetors.

Communication by organizations in the form of public relations is appropriate content for rhetorical criticism. As Coombs and Holladay (2007) assert, "Influence is a matter of power or the ability to get an actor to do something it might not otherwise do. While each side can influence the relationship and also resist the influence, they do not, typically, do so to an equal extent" (p. 25). Organizations typically have more power to

influence than do other stakeholders, as Coombs and Holladay (2007) explain, “because of their ability to gain access to the arenas of public discourse (p. 23).”

Further strengthening the case for using rhetorical criticism is the existence of postmodernism as a particular type of rhetorical criticism. The postmodern perspective on rhetorical criticism can be distinguished from others in that it “seeks to determine the ways in which paradoxical power struggles can exist” (Brock, Scott & Chesebro, 1990, p. 436). The fit of this perspective for investigating the practicality of PPR is clear: postmodern rhetorical criticism can help us understand how practitioners, as boundary-spanners between the organization and its stakeholders, might effectively serve the interests of both. Thus, postmodern rhetorical criticism, with its attention to power and symbolic action, is an appropriate tool for developing an informed understanding of the application of PPR.

The approach for the use of postmodern rhetorical criticism in this project is outlined in Table 2A. It involves using the PPR framework to describe, interpret, and evaluate current examples of public relations practice.

Description

Description represents the first step for rhetorical criticism. “In part, the function of the rhetorical critic is to indicate, to point out, to draw the attention of others to, a particular case or type of symbolic inducement” (Brock, Scott & Chesebro, 1990, p. 16). Thus, this investigation will begin each case analysis by describing the organization; the issue being communicated about; the artifacts, or communication texts, being used to investigate the case; and the context in which the case takes place.

Table 2A: Framework for Rhetorical Critical Case Analysis

<p>I. Description</p> <p>a) Organization:</p> <p>b) Artifacts to be used:</p> <p>c) Demonstrate the relevance and appropriateness of the case by responding to each bulleted item below.</p> <p>⇒ How does the rhetor and artifact fit into the historical context in which it occurred? What was the artifact? When, why, and to who was it delivered? What was the social and political and economic environment?</p> <p>⇒ Are there any specific characteristics of or patterns in the artifact that stand out (the organization, use of language, types of appeals used, symbols, etc.)?</p> <p>⇒ Every artifact is given for a purpose. To what extent was this purpose fulfilled? Has the artifact had any impact on history? Has the artifact had any impact on the speaker/author/rhetor?</p> <p>⇒ What have other scholars said about the artifact or artifacts like it?</p>
<p>II. Interpretation</p> <p>What can be discovered about the case by applying by responding to each bulleted question below? (Questions correspond to the PPR framework as outlined in the literature review.)</p> <p>⇒ What were the messages communicated in this case?</p> <p>⇒ Based on those messages, what strategies did the organizations use? Who would these messages and strategies empower, and who would they disempower?</p> <p>⇒ Were the strategies and messages developed with concern for what was right and just in this particular situation? If not, how could they have been?</p> <p>⇒ How did the rhetors in this case handle conflict and dissensus? Did their messages demonstrate awareness of the role played by power relations? If not, how could they have done so?</p> <p>⇒ Did the public relations practitioners in this case acknowledge/expose ironies/contradictions of their public relations practice? If not, how could they have done so?</p> <p>⇒ Did the organization gauge the effectiveness of its messages based on what is just and moral for the particular event and place? If not, how could they have done so?</p> <p>⇒ Did the public relations practitioners act as activists, forming alliances with disempowered people to help them gain power and influence? If not, how could they have done so?</p> <p>⇒ Did the public practitioners demonstrate a commitment to transparency over the gaining of power as a priority in dialogue with publics? If not, how could they have done so?</p> <p>⇒ Did the public relations practitioners enter into relationships without planned strategies for achieving success in those relationships? If not, how could they</p>

<p>have done so?</p> <p>⇒ Did the public relations practitioners demonstrate awareness of power-knowledge relationships and use that awareness to properly and effectively focus the organization's messages? If not, how could they have done so?</p> <p>⇒ How does the practice of public relations in this case compare to the PPR framework?</p>
<p>III. Evaluation</p> <p>Answer the research questions based on interpretation of the case using the PPR criteria described in Section II above.</p> <p>⇒ <i>RQ1</i>: Based upon this case, can professionals effectively practice PPR while also serving as an activist for disempowered stakeholders?</p> <p>⇒ <i>RQ2</i>: Based upon this case, can PPR be practiced ethically without imposing new metanarratives?</p> <p>⇒ <i>RQ3</i>: Based upon this case, how can PPR theory be bridged with public relations practice to reveal the pragmatic side of postmodernism?</p>

Interpretation

Secondly, the rhetorical critic must interpret the meanings of the case artifacts. In this stage, the public relations messages are teased out from the artifact. Thus, the critic sets forth specific aspects of the artifact as “constituting a symbolic inducement” (Brock, Scott & Chesebro, 1990, p. 16) or an attempt to persuade.

Evaluation

In the third step, the critic evaluates the symbolic inducement on some basis or another (Brock, Scott & Chesebro, 1990). For this project, the PPR framework provides the basis for evaluation. The evaluative nature of rhetorical criticism is key to developing a practical model for PPR. Indeed, criticism is “a part of learning how to act toward something or someone” (Brock, Scott & Chesebro, 1990, p. 14). Because rhetorical criticism necessarily evaluates, or passes judgment (Brock, Scott & Chesebro, 1990), it

brings real-world relevance to theoretical ideas by applying them to the question of ‘what should be done.’

Cases for Analysis

Toward the goal of providing a practical model of PPR, two public relations cases are evaluated in this thesis research project; one from the nonprofit/non-governmental organization and the second from the corporate sector. As Dabbs (1991) points out, due to its unique nature, the communication of nonprofits has the potential to inform and expand existing communication theory in ways that for-profit business have not. Nonprofit public relations has several characteristics that makes it unique from that of corporations: limited funding and personnel resources; the presence of donors, volunteers and members as key stakeholders; and the challenges of providing measurable support for organizational missions that are often much more abstract than the typical, bottom-line-focused missions of for-profit. Because of the unique nature of communication for nonprofit organizations, the inclusion of a nonprofit case in this research project has the potential to inform and expand existing PPR theory in ways that an analysis of for-profit communication alone might not.

Although not all nonprofit organizations are small and under-funded, much of the literature on nonprofit communications paints a picture of most of these organizations as operating with few or no personnel devoted only to public relations practice (Boyer, 1997; Dyer, Buell, Harrison, & Weber, 2002; McPherson, 1993), and as having very limited funding (Boyer, 1997; McPherson, 1993). As a result, public relations practitioner’s job may in some ways be much harder in a nonprofit. As Boyer (1997)

asserts, because funding and spending are such important issues, public relations must be seen as contributing to the organization's overall mission in order to not be seen as an unnecessary frill. But, public relations can also be especially helpful to organizations under the pressure of limited funds and staffing. Boyer (1997) writes, "a great deal has been written about how successful business organizations in the new century will be able to adapt quickly to changing competitive environments. By the same token, nonprofit organizations must adapt to changing economic and social environments. Effective communications and public relations strategies will be central to their success" (p. 497). Indeed, one positive aspect of the constant pressure for nonprofit public relations departments to do more with less may be that nonprofit public relations is more highly valued in these settings because it is a cost-effective—and sometimes, even free—means of furthering the organizations' mission (Jaye, 1996).

Another unique aspect of nonprofit public relations is the different key audiences for nonprofits. While for-profit corporations must focus on customers and shareholders to ensure their ability to carry out bottom line-driven goals, key stakeholders for the achievement of nonprofit missions often include members, volunteers and donors. The added responsibility for directly generating income for organizations through fund-raising may be one of the most significant differences between nonprofit and for-profit communication (Dyer et al., 2002). Kelly (1994) surveyed 175 public relations managers, finding a small but significant correlation between encroachment of fund-raising on public relations and diminished knowledge and expertise in practicing two-way models of communication. As Kelly (1994) explains, this focus on donors can be problematic

because the effectiveness of organizations depends on managing the organizations' relationships with multiple publics, not just donors. Boyer (1997) asserts that nonprofits have two key audiences: the individuals whom it supports, and those whose support the organization needs in order to be able to do its work. This second group is likely to include not only donors, but also staff, board members, people served, people whose attitudes the organization wants to influence, other similar organizations, politicians, the general public and media. Kelly (1994) describes the potential dangers of such a donor-focused approach to public relations: "Subordination of the public relations function through fund-raising encroachment focuses undue attention on donors at the expense of other strategically important publics, leaving the organization vulnerable to loss of support and even attack by those who have been ignored (e.g., legislators, employees, or clients)" (p. 3). In short, the unique make-up of nonprofit organizations' key stakeholder groups provides unique challenges for organizations of this type.

A third unique characteristic of nonprofit organizations lies in the nature of nonprofit organizations' missions. While for-profit organizations have as their mission the procurement of money, most nonprofits seek to procure money in order to be able to accomplish their missions (Dabbs, 1991). In other words, business matters are more often the means to the ends for nonprofit managers rather than the ends, themselves. Salamon (1994) sees a mission orientation as the fundamental distinguishing characteristic of nonprofit organizations: "Where for-profit organizations acquire their organizational *raison d'être* fundamentally from the pursuit of profit, nonprofit organizations get theirs from the pursuit of a mission" (p. 95).

As a result of the difference between for-profit and nonprofit missions, the staff working in a nonprofit organization may be fundamentally different in their implementation and evaluation of public relations. In nonprofit organizations, an employee's contribution or dedication to the organization's mission—rather than business training—often determines management qualifications (Dabbs, 1991). This lesser emphasis on business and greater emphasis on mission is further complicated by the fact that, much like the benefit of public relations is hard to measure (Unterman & Davis, 1984), the missions of nonprofit organizations also are almost always abstract and hard to measure. Sawhill and Williamson (2001) write, "Most nonprofit groups track their performance by metrics such as dollars raised, membership growth, number of visitors, people served, and overhead costs. These metrics are important, but they don't measure the real success of an organization in achieving its mission. Of course, nonprofit missions are notoriously lofty and vague" (p. 96). Based on these differences, public relations work in nonprofit organizations may differ from that of for-profits in subtle but important ways.

That is not to say that bottom-line considerations are not also important for nonprofits. As Gibelman (2000) asserts, a nonprofit board or CEO lacking business savvy can easily see its entire organization go under. Therefore, nonprofits should not be viewed as having inherent, dualistic differences from for-profit organizations, argues Gibelman (2000). Instead, nonprofits should be seen as businesses of a different kind. And, nonprofit public relations can also be seen as having the same bottom-line orientation. In a world of limited resources and fierce competition for donor funding,

today's nonprofits are no less aware of the bottom line than are for-profit organizations. In fact, as Graham (1997) points out, such pressures have intensified the importance of the communication professional's area of responsibility, the organization's image, as a "bottom-line asset" (p. 274).

Clearly, nonprofit and for-profit public relations share important similarities and differences that can help inform this investigation of PPR's practicality. While both types of organizations require public relations practitioners to provide bottom line-focused support organizations' business objectives, nonprofits are unique in that they often operate with resources that are more constrained, they must attend to different types of key stakeholders, and their missions tend to be more lofty and difficult to measure. Based on these differences, a study of both for-profit and nonprofit communications can provide added depth to the examination of the real-world practicality of PPR.

The Organizations

In order to evaluate PPR's practicality for use by different organizations with varying financial and human resources, diverse audiences, and contrasting organizational objectives, this research project will examine two cases of public relations practice. The first case is that of the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, from the nonprofit sector. Among the researchers and professionals who make up the membership of the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities' (AAIDD), formerly known as the American Association on Mental Retardation (AAMR), a debate more than eight years long ensued about whether to drop the stigmatized "MR" term from its name. The AAIDD name change debate focused on

the importance of communication with and about people with intellectual disabilities—a group of people who have been largely been powerless and voiceless throughout much of history while others engaged in discourse that shaped their life circumstances. Because PPR is largely concerned with how public relations can help empower such disenfranchised stakeholders, AAIDD’s communications surrounding its name change represent an ideal case for analysis.

The second case, from the for-profit sector, is that of the multinational oil company, British Petroleum (BP). In recent years, BP has recorded annual profits in the tens of billions of dollars. But, in light of current concerns about global climate change, discourse about climate change is becoming increasingly important to BP’s bottom line. PPR is interested in how public relations professionals can ethically communicate on behalf of organizations that are more powerful than other stakeholders, and BP is literally, figuratively and financially one of the world’s most powerful corporations. Thus, the case of BP’s environmental discourse is appropriate subject for this project’s investigation of how PPR can be employed to help organizations accomplish their business objectives while also taking into consideration their power relations with less powerful stakeholders.

The two cases presented for analysis vary in significant ways. AAIDD is a relatively small, nonprofit organization dedicated to furthering the rights of a relatively disempowered stakeholder group. In contrast, BP represents one of the world’s most powerful and resource-rich corporations, and it the company exists primarily for the purpose of bringing profits to it shareholders. Because these two cases illustrate the

differences between nonprofit and for-profit organizations as outlined in Chapter One, the cases of AAIDD and BP are both significant and appropriate for the study of PPR. An examination of these two cases will provide insight into the PPR's practicality across a variety of organizational circumstances.

The Artifacts

The case analyses for this project are based upon three text artifacts from AAIDD and three from BP. Textual examples for analysis of AAIDD's handling of the language and terminology issue include two letters and one address to members from recent presidents of the organization. Textual examples for analysis of BP's climate change discourse include CEO letters of introduction to three reports: a sustainability report, an annual review, and a report on BP's annual statistical review of world energy. When evaluated against the PPR framework, these artifacts will help illuminate how PPR can be put into practical application.

The letters and address from AAIDD and BP do not make up the whole of these organization's communications, but they do appropriately represent discourse by the organizations and provide rich material for analysis¹. Letters from organizational presidents and CEOs introducing corporate reports are well recognized as valuable sources for insights into the organizations' rhetorical actions (Hyland, 1999; White & Hanson, 2000). Such artifacts can reveal organizations' responsiveness to audiences' societal expectations (White & Hanson, 2000), and their rhetorical approaches to shaping

¹ The six selected artifacts are not given as appendices to this report because reproduction permission could not be obtained in a timely manner.

public discourse (Hyland, 1999).

As described elsewhere in this report, nonprofit and for-profit communications do differ in subtle but important ways. It should come as no surprise, then, that the two sets of artifacts for this analysis are not exactly similar. The BP artifacts consist of CEO letters of introduction to corporate reports. AAIDD, however, does not publish an annual report or other items exactly paralleling those of BP. However, the two AAIDD presidents' letters selected for this analysis can be seen as serving similar organizational functions, as they introduce and interpret recent significant organizational happenings. The AAIDD "President's Address" is also substantially similar in purpose to a traditional CEO letter of introduction for a report. According to David Coulter, AAIDD's president for 2005-2006, "The address given by each president... is an opportunity to summarize the most important things one has learned in a career that culminated in the presidency" (Coulter, 2006, p. 64). Thus, the six artifacts selected for analysis in this project were chosen because they appropriately represent rhetorical action by the two organizations. An examination of the messages in each artifact, as interpreted through the PPR framework, will reveal practical implications for PPR.

Toward the goal of creating a model for the practice of PPR, the previous chapter of this report presented a review of the current literature and identified research questions about the practical application of PPR. The present chapter outlined an analytical method for the examination of two real-world public relations cases using the theoretical framework for PPR. In the chapter that follows, the cases are described and interpreted.

Finally, the closing chapter will offer evaluation of the cases and present conclusions bridging theory with practice for the development of a practical model for PRR.

Chapter 3: Results

The goal of this thesis project is to take the initial steps necessary toward the development of a practical model for the application of postmodern ideas to the practice of public relations. The literature review examined current prevailing theories and perspectives in the field. Postmodernism was presented as an alternative view, and a framework was proposed for the practice of PPR. Research questions were identified in order to examine the framework's practical usefulness for practitioners. Next, a rationale for research was presented describing how rhetorical criticism offers an effective and appropriate method for answering these questions. The analytical method proposed included the examination of two real-world public relations cases using the theoretical PPR framework set forth in the literature review.

What follows in this chapter is the description and interpretation of the two cases for this project. Toward the goal of providing a practical model of PPR, two public relations cases are evaluated; one from the nonprofit/non-governmental organization and the second from the corporate sector. The first case, from the nonprofit sector, examines discourse on disability by the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities. The second case comes from the corporate sector, examining British Petroleum's environmental discourse. The present chapter presents a description and interpretation of each case. The next and final chapter of this report will offer evaluation of the cases and a conclusion bridging theory with practice for the development of a practical model for PPR.

Case 1: American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

“Backward”... “Feeble-minded” ... “Idiotic.” Today, these would be highly offensive things to say about a person. But, just a few decades ago, these words were part of the commonly-accepted terminology for referring to people with intellectual disabilities (e.g., Heber, 1959). More recently, the term mental retardation (MR) has also been rejected as one that is stigmatized and hurtful.

Among the researchers and professionals who make up the membership of the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities’ (AAIDD), formerly known as the American Association on Mental Retardation (AAMR), a debate more than eight years long ensued about whether to drop the stigmatized “MR” term from its name ¹. Three groups of stakeholders were in this situation: (1) “self-advocates” with intellectual disabilities, who went so far as to picket and hand out flyers at the organization’s conventions, demanding that the term be changed; (2) doctors and other professionals, a group that debated amongst itself whether the term was needed for accurate diagnoses, funding and the provision of support services; and (3) theorists who considered approaches such as symbolic interactionism for answering this question. The case of AAMR’s eventual name change provides insights into how an organization might

¹ From 2000 until 2006, this researcher worked as a public relations practitioner for a nonprofit organization serving people with intellectual disabilities. The organization took no official position on the AAMR name change during this period, but it did advocate for discontinuing use of the MR term in general. This researcher was actively involved in that advocacy and was also a member of AAMR for some of these years.

use the theoretical principles of PPR as it engages with stakeholder activists to shape its public communication.

The field of intellectual disability, with its issues of competing stakeholder voices and basic human rights, presents rich ground for the development and application of a practical model for PPR. Established in 1876, AAIDD's membership consists largely of professionals and academics in the field of intellectual disability (AAIDD, November 2, 2006). The organization's mission is to promote "progressive policies, sound research, effective practices, and universal human rights for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities" (AAIDD, September 4, 2007). AAIDD's response to self-advocates' demands for an organizational name change represents an opportunity to explore the very type of organizational power relations with which PPR is concerned.

Historical Context

Description represents the first step for rhetorical criticism. Describing an organization and its history provides a basis for understanding the organization's objectives, the issues it communicates about, and the context in which the case takes place. The historical context for AAIDD's case provides richer insights to power relations that are inherent in the organization's public communications.

People with intellectual disabilities have not always been welcome to live among everyone in the rest of the world, having been relegated to live in institutions or kept at home without participating in community life, for example. But times have changed. Larson, Lakin, Anderson, Nohoon, Lee, and Anderson (2001) estimate that current prevalence of mental retardation and/or intellectual disability is 1.49% of the U.S.

population. Most members of this population live not in institutions of decades and centuries past, but they live and may be active in our neighborhoods and communities. Since 1967, people with intellectual disabilities have continued to move out of institutions and into community settings (Braddock, Hemp, Rizzolo, Parish, & Pomeranz, 2002). From 1990 to 2000 alone, the number of residents of institution-sized settings (16 or more beds) declined 34% (Braddock et al., 2002). As more people with intellectual disabilities join our communities, the circumstances of their lives have become increasingly recognized as an important contribution to and issue for our society and the organizations serving this population.

The current field of intellectual disability traces its heritage back to the 1840s, which was a time when educational and training institutions were being developed to serve this population in Europe. Learning institutions were established by educators who believed and demonstrated that, with training and education, people with limited cognitive abilities could return to their communities and take productive roles in society (Trent, 1995). During this period, cultural attitudes toward intellectual disability were generally inclusive, and people with intellectual disabilities received the education and support necessary for their successful participation in community life.

Disability in the modern era.

Unfortunately, this early era of inclusion and education for people with intellectual disabilities was short-lived. In the next decades, a period of economic hardship and unemployment led to a loss of focus on preparation for community life.

Instead, there arose a system of life-long, custodial protection from the ills of a society in decline (Trent, 1995).

Early in the 20th Century, many people with intellectual disabilities suffered what are now considered abuses and violations of their human rights. Indeed, the very professionals and academics who sought to serve individuals with intellectual disabilities endorsed such abuse in the form of sterilization and imprisonment. As Coulter (2004) explains, “[AAIDD] leaders were concerned about the relationship between mental retardation and crime and wrote extensively about the problem of the ‘defective delinquent.’ For these reasons, [AAIDD] actively promoted the practice of sterilization of individuals with mental retardation. This explicit support for sterilization persisted until the early 1940’s [sic] when the Nazi program became well-known” (Coulter, 2004, p. 46). It was during this time that institutions flourished. From 1925 to 1950, every state in the Union had at least one government-run institution, doubling the number of institutionalized people from 25,000 to 50,000 (Minn. Governor’s Council on Developmental Disabilities [MGCDD], 1998).

Deinstitutionalization.

A major shift occurred in the late 1950s, when professionals in the field came to believe that behavior training could help alleviate impairment associated with intellectual disabilities. It was the AAIDD’s 1958 redefinition of the condition that led to an eventual shift away from a biomedical understanding of intellectual disability. The organization, then-known as the American Association on Mental Deficiency (AAMD), added the impairment of adaptive behavior to the existing diagnostic criterion of “sub-average

intellectual functioning,” (Parmenter, 2001, p. 185). The redefinition created a new understanding that the effects of intellectual disability could be mitigated with training (Parmenter, 2001). The 1958 redefinition represented a turning point from the physician’s view of intellectual disability as a strictly medical diagnosis. In this new understanding, impairment of a certain behavior meant that behavior training could alleviate the impairment (Simpson, 1998).

The following year, AAMD published *A Manual on the Classification and Definition of Mental Retardation* (Heber, 1959) including a new, three-tiered schematic of mental retardation. The first tier, including those with the lowest IQ scores, was labeled “custodial mentally retarded” (Heber, 1959, p. 98), and was largely viewed and treated traditionally. But, those in the second tier, with mid-range IQ scores, were now defined as “trainably mentally retarded” because, though they weren’t likely to make meaningful progress in academic subjects, they were regarded as able to profit “from programs of training in self-care, social, and simple job or vocational skills (Heber, 1959, p. 98). Finally, in the third tier of diagnosis were the “educable mentally retarded,” defined as individuals “capable of some degree of achievement in traditional academic subjects such as reading and arithmetic,” and also as individuals “who may be expected to maintain themselves independently in the community as adults” (Heber, 1959, p. 98). In light of this new definition and diagnostic schematic, service providers took the view that, if people with intellectual disabilities were to overcome their impairments in development, treatment outside of institutions was essential (Simpson, 1998). The result

would be a dramatic change in the delivery of treatment services for people with intellectual disabilities (Parmenter, 2001).

To provide opportunities for training, Wolfensberger (1983) argued for smaller, community-based settings where people with disabilities would improve their adaptive behaviors and become socially integrated with society. Wolfensberger (1983) revolutionized the field of intellectual disabilities by ending the widespread acceptance of isolation and segregation of people with intellectual disabilities. Over the next decade, this shift would grow into deinstitutionalization, an entirely new movement in intellectual disability services. “The normalization principle was a major catalyst for the deinstitutionalization movement that saw thousands of people in a number of western countries move into community living and working programmes,” writes Parmenter (2001, p. 191).

From inclusion to activism.

Despite the shift in location and design of treatment programs, deinstitutionalization would not bring about complete freedom or equality for people with intellectual disabilities. As Parmenter (2001) observed, “it is important to recognize the force of the word ‘programme,’ for in many cases professionals still exert control over the lives of these people” (p. 191). Although individuals with intellectual disabilities moved into group homes, supported-living apartments, sheltered workshops and other community-based program settings, they did not necessarily have the rights to exert any real degree of control over their own circumstances. Nor were they necessarily integrated into or accepted in their communities.

It was the convergence of deinstitutionalization with the greater societal shifts of the Civil Rights movement that eventually provided momentum for the disability community to begin advocating for increased individual rights. The first civil rights law for people with disabilities came with the enactment of the 1973 Rehabilitation Act. Section 504 of this act made it illegal for federally funded programs to discriminate based on disability (Potok, 2002).

As the overall disability rights movement grew, people with intellectual disabilities also began to organize. Founding the self-advocacy group “People First” in 1973, people with intellectual disabilities demanded the right for people to live in the community rather than in institutions (Driedger, 1989). Members also called for a redefinition of the term “handicap” as a barrier constructed by society rather than a shortcoming of the individual (Driedger, 1989).

Growing advocacy by the stakeholder group of individuals with intellectual disabilities gained an even stronger foothold with the passing of additional legislation in 1975. The Developmentally Disabled Assistance and Bill of Rights Act established the basis for a “bill of rights” for people with intellectual disabilities, as well as mandatory deinstitutionalization (Driedger, 1989). Soon after came the disability advocacy movement’s most significant legislative victory: passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The ADA, which made acts of discrimination based on disability illegal, represented the first comprehensive U.S. federal legislation to address discrimination against people with disabilities in the areas of employment, public services, public accommodations, and telecommunications.

The AAMR played an active role in this period of civil rights advocacy as the professionals and researchers who made up AAMR's membership continued to weigh in on public discourse about disability. Ongoing efforts by the AAMR, in 1973, 1992, and 2002 continued to broaden its definitions to include questions of individuals' adaptability to their environments and communities' roles in making those environments accessible (Trent, 1995). The 1992 definition presented intellectual disability not in terms of an individual's shortcomings but in terms of the interaction between the individual's intellectual and adaptive limitations and the barriers that existed for the individual in society (Smith, 2003). Most recently, the definition of intellectual disability has continued to change, with yet another version in 2002. Still in use today, the AAMR's (now known as AAIDD) current definition focuses even less on individual's limitations and instead presents the disability in terms of the intensity of supports that people need (Wehmeyer, 2003).

Self-advocates speak.

Along with the increased emphasis on supported community living came growth in the self-advocacy movement. One major issue for the movement has been that of language and terminology. According to self-advocates, although teachers, parents, social workers, and psychologists may mean well, they should not be allowed to define the lives and circumstances of people with intellectual disabilities.

The right to define oneself has clearly been claimed by one group, Self Advocates Becoming Empowered (SABE). People involved in the self-advocacy movement "are very clear about not wanting to be called retarded, handicapped or disabled or to be

treated like children. They are clear that self-advocacy represents ‘rights,’ not ‘dependence’—the right to speak out, the right to be a person with dignity, the right to make decisions for themselves and others” (AAIDD, March 23, 2005). At a 2005 conference hosted by the organization known at the time as AAMR, members of SABE distributed flyers asserting their right to demand removal of the stigmatized term, *mental retardation*, from the terminology of the field:

Just do it!!!! Many have listened, some have taken action and we thank you. But we have talked enough and waited too long!!! We have told you what is important to us. Get rid of the infamous and hurtful “r” word[;] do not label us. We will not put up with the “r” word continuing as part of an organization’s name, even as initials[.] If you are working with me and for me then do not disrespect me[.] We have been prepared enough, ASK the people who are living in institutions[.] Would you trade places? Close institutions. Get us real jobs. Close sheltered workshops. Give US the money to live OUR lives. Money follows the person means it is OURS not programs[’]. We have the right to make our own decisions with or without the support from others. WE CAN RUN OUR LIVES[.] Support our movement, IT IS OURS. You receive millions of dollars in our name. We want to control this money. We are the EXPERTS. You must change, we have change[d,] we are taking the power. Walk the Walk[.] Respect US or We will go on without you!” (SABE, 2005, p.1; some punctuation added).

The outcry by self-advocates for change has not gone unheard; in fact, intellectual disability scholars have proposed approaches for encouraging self-advocacy such as: encouraging first-person retelling of stories (MacDonald & MacIntyre, 1999); the use of facilitated communication to mediate rhetoricity for those who are nonverbal (Lewiecki-Wilson, 2003); and making the implicit assumption, “That every person with an intellectual disability has the capacity to speak for himself or herself. Only by nurturing this capacity, however limited in scope it may be, can the true potential of an individual human being be realized” (Braddock, 1996, p. ix).

Self-advocates have also weighed in on how their movement should be supported, calling for professionals to use language and communication styles that will make discussions about intellectual disability more accessible (Schaaf, 1996), and suggesting that agencies help self-advocacy organizations with practical concerns such as transportation, money, and communication issues such as reading, writing, and access to telephones (Schaaf, 1996). Self-advocates have further asserted that advisors should help people with intellectual disabilities to tell their stories in ways that make sense without altering the self-advocates’ intent (Goode, 1996), people-first language should be used to talk about people with intellectual disabilities (Guth & Murphy, 1998), and facilitated communication should be used to help people with intellectual disabilities to speak for themselves (Martin, 1996).

Interpretation

When evaluated against the PPR framework, AAIDD’s communication surrounding its name change will help illuminate how PPR can be put into practical

application. The following analysis is focused on three text artifacts taken from the AAIDD case. First, the organization, the name change issue and the artifacts being analyzed are described in terms of their historical context. Next, the messages in the case artifacts are identified and interpreted. Later, in the “Evaluations and Conclusions” chapter of this report, AAIDD’s discourse on the issue is evaluated using the PPR framework. This procedure will help provide a practical foundation for the theoretical idea of PPR by applying it to a specific organization’s public relations need.

Textual examples for analysis of AAIDD’s handling of the language and terminology issue include two letters and one address to members from recent presidents of the organization. Table 3A describes each of these artifacts and provides them with an identifying label (i.e., A-1, A-2, etc.)

Table 3A: Artifacts for AAIDD Case Analysis

<i>Identifier</i>	<i>Artifact</i>	<i>Content</i>
A-1	October 2005 Letter from AAIDD President Valerie Bradley (Bradley, 2005)	Recaps 2005 disability summit and annual meeting, proposes next steps for selection of a name
A-2	August 2006 Letter from AAIDD President Hank Bersani (Bersani, 2006)	Reports results of 2006 name change vote, reiterates member consensus, reconfirms that AAIDD’s mission has not changed
A-3	2007 President’s Address (Bersani, 2007)	Advocates building upon recent name change to bring about real changes in the life circumstances of people with intellectual disabilities

As described elsewhere in this report, for communication scholars, annual reports and their introductory letters from organizational presidents and CEOs are recognized as

valuable sources for insights into the organizations' rhetorical actions (Hyland, 1999; White & Hanson, 2000). While AAIDD does not, in fact, publish an annual report, the presidents' communications selected for this analysis can be seen as serving similar organizational functions.

The AAIDD "President's Address" is published annually in the October issue of *Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*, one of two journals published by the organization. Of these annual addresses, one is focused on issues of disability language and terminology. This address is one of the artifacts selected for analysis.

In addition, AAIDD publishes and sends to members occasional "Letters from the President," two of which are also included in this analysis. AAIDD Letters from the President are created on an as-needed basis. They are published on the organization's Web site. They also may be mailed or emailed to members along with annual voting ballots or in order to make announcements or respond to current developments in the field. Only those Letters from the President addressing issues of disability language and terminology have been included in this analysis.

The letters and addresses from AAIDD's presidents do not make up the full body of the organization's communications on this topic; indeed, one of the organization's niches is the publishing of various journals, professional manuals, and guidebooks on the field of intellectual disability. In addition, AAIDD provides a Web site replete with various fact sheets and other resources. The organization also publishes a weekly e-mail newsletter for communicating with members. Each of these vehicles has been used by the organization to address language and terminology issues. (A comprehensive listing of the

AAIDD's discourse used in this project is given in Table 3B.) Although the three artifacts selected for analysis in this project represent only a small portion of AAIDD's discourse, these artifacts were selected because they appropriately represent rhetorical action on the part of AAIDD's leadership in response to both cultural changes and stakeholder dissensus about the language and terminology to be used by the organization.

Bradley sets a strategy for the organization to move forward toward the goal of changing its name over the course of the year to come. She outlines a process by which member suggestions will be collected and reviewed by the organization's board and management staff: a list of names, with pros and cons for each, will be presented for a vote by the membership.

In Letter A-1, Bradley makes a direct appeal to members' sense of what is just and right. In doing so, she invokes the organization's mission, which includes the promotion of basic human rights for individuals with disabilities. She also speaks of empowerment, writing of the recent summit attendees' affirmation of the commitment "to include people with disabilities wherever decisions are being made about their destinies" (A-1) and "to eliminate the term mental retardation in favor of a less hurtful term" (A-1). The purpose of Letter A-1 was successfully carried out at the October 2006 AAIDD Annual Meeting, when the organization's membership voted to change its name to the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD, November 2, 2006).

Table 3B: Examples of AAIDD's Discourse

<i>Artifact</i>	<i>Reference details</i>	<i>Relevance</i>
2003 name change vote results	American Association on Mental Retardation (February, 2003). More on the AAMR election results—name change and new leadership. In <i>AAMR F.Y.I.</i> , 3(2). Retrieved January 29, 2008 from the World Wide Web: http://www.aaid.org/FYI/fyi_vol_3_no_2.shtml	Summarizes results of 2003 vote not to change name
2005 letter from the President	American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (January, 2005). Letter from the President. Retrieved January 29, 2008 from the World Wide Web: http://www.aamr.org/pdf/ltrodec05.pdf	Urges members to take steps toward adopting a new name
2006 name change vote results	American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (June 4, 2007). Results of the Vote on the Name Change. Retrieved January 29, 2008 from the World Wide Web: http://www.aamr.org/About_AAMR/name.shtml	Describes options considered and 2006 vote to change name.
2007 letter from the President	American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (January, 2007). Letter from the President. Retrieved January 29, 2008 from the World Wide Web: http://www.aamr.org/About_AAMR/letters/Bersaniltr2.pdf	Reiterates member consensus on new name
Code of Conduct	American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (July 5, 2007). Guidelines to Professional Conduct. Retrieved January 29, 2008 from the World Wide Web: http://www.aaid.org/Policies/guidelines.shtml	Calls on members to support self-advocacy
FAQ about MR	American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (July 5, 2007). Frequently Asked Questions about Mental Retardation. Retrieved January 29, 2008 from the World Wide Web: http://www.aaid.org/Policies/faq_mental_retardation.shtml	Defines criteria and meaning for MR diagnosis
History of AAIDD	American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (June 28, 2007). History of AAIDD. Retrieved January 29, 2008 from the World Wide Web: http://www.aamr.org/About_AAMR/history.shtml	Establishes the organization's power and position
Mission, Principles and Goals	American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (September 4, 2007). Mission. Retrieved January 29, 2008 from the World Wide Web: http://www.aamr.org/About_AAIDD/mission_statement.shtml	Describes mission and approach to promoting "universal human rights" for people with disabilities
News release	American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (November 2, 2006). World's Oldest Organization on Intellectual Disability Has a Progressive New Name. <i>American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Press Release</i> . Retrieved January 29, 2008 from the World Wide Web: http://www.aaid.org/About_AAIDD/name_change_PRRdeen.htm	Announces the organization's name change

<i>Artifact</i>	<i>Reference details</i>	<i>Relevance</i>
News release	American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (February 20, 2007). Mental Retardation Is No More—New Name is <i>Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities</i> . <i>American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Press Release</i> . Retrieved January 29, 2008 from the World Wide Web: http://www.aamr.org/About_AAIDD/MR_name_change.htm	Announces name change for the organization's scholarly journal
President's Address 2007	Bersani, H. (2007). President's address 2007: The past is prologue: "MR," go gentle into that good night. <i>Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities</i> , 45(6), 399-404.	Now that organizational name change is settled, Bersani advocates change in diagnostic terminology
Self-Advocacy Definition Fact Sheet	American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (March 23, 2005). What is Self-Advocacy? Retrieved January 27, 2008 from the World Wide Web: http://www.aaid.org/Policies/faq_advocacy.shtml	Defines self-advocacy
Self-Advocacy Movement Fact Sheet	American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (July 5, 2007). The Self-Advocacy Movement. Retrieved February 3, 2008 from the World Wide Web: http://www.aaid.org/Policies/faq_movement.shtml	History and issues for self-advocacy movement
September 2005 letter from the president	American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (January, 2005). Letter from the President. Retrieved January 29, 2008 from the World Wide Web: http://www.aamr.org/pdf/ltrodec05.pdf	Describes situation for people with intellectual disabilities in Hurricane Katrina
Intro to 2003 symposium on "What's in a name?"	Taylor, S. J. (2002). Symposium on "what's in a name?": Editor's introduction. <i>Mental Retardation</i> , 40(1), p. 51.	Sets context for series of articles debating merits of name change
The renaming of <i>Mental Retardation</i>	Schalock, R. L., Luckasson, R. A., Shogren, K. A., Borthwick-Duffy, S., Bradley, V., Buntinx, W. H. E., et al. (2007). The renaming of <i>Mental Retardation</i> : Understanding the change to the term <i>Intellectual Disability</i> . <i>Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities</i> , 45(2), 116-124.	Article by journal editors clarifies shift in field to the term intellectual disability
Editor's note	Taylor, S. J. (2007). Editor's note. <i>Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities</i> , 45(1), p. ii.	Announces publication name change, provides historical context
1959 diagnostic manual	Heber, R. (1959). A manual on terminology and classification of mental retardation [Monograph]. <i>American Journal of Mental Deficiency</i> , 64(2).	Historic look at terminology
Definition of MR	Luckasson, R., Borthwick-Duffy, S., Butnix, W. H. E., Coulter, D. L., Craig, E. M., et al. (2002). <i>Mental Retardation: Definition, classification and systems of supports</i> (9 th Edition). Washington, DC: American Association on Mental Retardation.	Presents MR as a diagnosis focusing on supports needed for people to participate in community life

Letter from the president, August 2006.

Artifact A-2 is an August 2006 letter to members from AAIDD President Hank Bersani (Bersani, 2006). Letter A-2 was written to report the results of the organization's recent name change vote, reiterate member consensus, and reconfirm AAIDD's ongoing commitment to its mission. Letter A-2 communicates two central messages: first, member consensus for the name change is overwhelming; secondly, the organization will move forward and continue fulfilling its mission.

By claiming strong consensus, reporting details on the voting process and statistical procedure to determine the exact final votes, Letter A-2 empowers the organization's leadership by placing its handling of the vote beyond question. Although this communication does embody the PPR principle of transparency, it also does little to acknowledge disempowered minorities.

In this situation, the minority voices include the approximately 17% of members who voted against the name change, and the approximately 1.5% whose votes on whether to change the name were not marked clearly enough to read (AAIDD, June 4, 2007). Furthermore, although the name AAIDD was chosen by a majority vote of 49%, 37% voted to name the organization American Association on Developmental Disabilities, and 14% voted for 'American Association on Intellectual Disability (AAIDD, June 4, 2007). Thus, just more than half of the organization's members voted for a name other than AAIDD. In addition, Letter A-2 mentions nothing of other stakeholders not represented by the vote, namely, the self-advocates who helped lead the charge for change but do not hold official member status. Although Bersani invites contact from those with questions

or concerns, such a gesture does not appear to go quite far enough to meet the PPR principle of developing alliances with the disempowered in order that they might have a voice.

Bersani's Letter A-2 does not directly acknowledge potential conflict and dissensus on the vote or any resulting ironies or contradictions. It seems possible that, as Bradley did in Letter A-1, Bersani could have at least acknowledged various stakeholder concerns and described the organization's efforts to continue to include those stakeholders. Instead, Bersani's repeated claim of consensus and his reference to members' common mission in Letter A-2 seem to suggest a strategy aimed at overcoming opposing arguments.

Bersani's Letter A-2 appears to do little to embrace disempowered minorities, but like Bradley, the content of Bersani's messages in letter A-2 do suggest an awareness of power-knowledge relationships. For, without consensus and forward momentum to preserve the organization's powerful role as the leader in the field, its ability to carry out its mission would be endangered.

Finally, although the messages in Bersani's Letter A-2 seem to suggest the presence of a strategy, the lack of acknowledgement of disempowered audiences in Letter A-2 suggests that the strategy was not well-planned in terms of attention to those disempowered audiences.

Despite what may be its shortcomings, Bersani's Letter A-2 appears to have been successful in its aim to carry out the name change without dissent or conflict from within

the membership. The organization successfully implemented its name change, making it effective as of January 1, 2007 (AAIDD, November 2, 2006).

2007 president's address.

The last AAIDD artifact for this case analysis is the 2007 President's Address (Address A-3), written and delivered by Bersani (2007). Bersani's Address A-3 advocates building upon the recent name change to bring about real changes in the life circumstances of people with intellectual disabilities. Bersani's message in Address A-3 is that changing the name of the association was necessary but is not sufficient to bring about changes in the quality of life for people with intellectual disabilities.

Bersani's Address A-3 uses a number of strategies to persuade readers to do all they can to provide opportunities for "the kind of high quality lives to which we all aspire" (p. 404). Bersani points to the organization's successes, especially for professionals who gained a field of study and the accompanying prestige from the existence of the disability formerly called mental retardation. But, he also points out the field's devastating shortcomings for the people the association professes to serve, writing, "At the same time, MR has drawn narrow lives for people defined by it—lives devoid of any of the facets that we find lend our lives dignity, afford us respect, and make our lives comfortable. People with MR continue to live well below the poverty line, receive second-rate medical services, live in inferior housing, have one of the highest unemployment rates in the country, and have far too little to say in the matters that affect the quality of their lives" (A-3, p. 400).

The strategy of Bersani's Address A-3 appears to be not the acquisition or maintenance of power for the organization, but creating awareness about what is right and just in the current situation. In Address A-3, more so than in the previous artifacts, Bersani appears to take the role of activist in order to help people with intellectual disabilities to gain power and influence.

By acknowledging the importance of the association's name change, Address A-3 does demonstrate awareness of power-knowledge relationships. Bersani describes the MR term as not just a label, but as "a social condition marked by substantially subaverage quality of life that is associated with high levels of marginalization from society" (A-3, p. 404). In proclaiming the "death" of MR, Bersani's A-3 Address effectively focuses the message to his audience, the practitioners with the position, power, and opportunity to help bring about significant improvements in quality of life for people with intellectual disabilities.

The success of Bersani's A-3 Address remains to be seen. Success will come, asserts Bersani, when we no longer "medicate, punish, and mutilate individuals with ID 'for their own good'" (A-3, p. 404), and when we no longer "assume we can describe a person by knowing their IQ, adaptive behavior, and age of onset of their disability" (A-3, p. 404).

Thus far, the present chapter has presented a description of AAIDD in its historical context and used the theoretical framework for PPR to interpret the messages included in three examples of AAIDD's discourse. As was discussed elsewhere in this report, nonprofit public relations has several characteristics that makes it unique from that

of corporations, including the presence of donors, volunteers and members as key stakeholders, as well as the organization's abstract mission. The AAIDD artifacts have demonstrated these characteristics. First, in AAIDD's case, the key audiences for the presidents' communications were not the individuals with intellectual disabilities who are meant to be the ultimate beneficiaries of the organization's work, but instead, the dues-paying members whose financial support enables the organization to carry out its mission. Secondly, the abstract nature of the organization's mission, to ensure the rights of people with intellectual disabilities, provided an opportunity for discourse that is perhaps more focused on what is just and right than the discourse of a typical for-profit corporation. Thus, the interpretation of the AAIDD case examples revealed some of these unique characteristics of nonprofit communication, helping to inform and expand communication theory in ways that an analysis of for-profit communication alone might not (Dabbs, 1991).

Case 2: British Petroleum (BP)

The second public relations case takes the focus of this research from the communication of nonprofits to that of corporate, for-profit organizations. The second case also shifts in focus from issues of disability to those of sustainability. Examining cases from the two contrasting sectors will provide insight on PPR's potential usefulness to satisfy a variety of practical public relations needs. While AAIDD attempts to advocate on behalf of one of the more powerless groups in society, the subject matter for the second case in this project consists of attempts by an organization to advocate for itself and its shareholders.

With annual profits exceeding \$22 billion (BP, 2007a), petroleum giant British Petroleum (BP) is literally and figuratively one of the most powerful corporations in the world today. As environmental concerns have become increasingly important for consumers who use BP's products, it has become increasingly likely that regulatory changes will be enacted that will affect the company's bottom line. Thus, BP's environmental discourse represents an opportunity to explore how PPR can be applied to inform public relations practice that attends to a corporation's business objectives while also taking into consideration its power relations with less powerful stakeholders.

Historical Context

As has been described in detail elsewhere in this report, description represents the first step for rhetorical criticism, providing a basis for understanding the organization's objectives, the issues it communicates about, and the context in which the case takes place. The historical context for BP's case provides insights into the powerful role the energy company plays in society and the ways in which those power relations are carried out through its public communications.

From the prehistoric to the present, energy issues have always played a role in shaping human society. Simmons (2001) asserts that the past 10,000 years of history can be marked off in periods according to the energy sources, and hence, the economies of society. Simmons' (2001) energy-based understanding of history begins with the hunting, gathering, and fishing period before 3500 BCE, when solar energy in the form of plants and animals, as well as controlled fire, drove an economic system based largely on food

collection. Between 3500 and 1800 BCE, the development of agriculture also depended on solar, but also included uses of wind, water, and tidal power (Simmons, 2001).

During the age of industrialism, from 1800 to 1950, these energy sources were supplemented greatly by the use of coal, oil, and natural gas for the production of goods, food, and services in cities (Simmons, 2001). It is during this period that BP got its start. In 1909, BP was created as the Anglo-Persian Oil Company Limited, with the British government as majority owner (BP, 2007a). The company was focused on Masjid-i-Suleiman in Iran, the first commercial oil resource discovered in the Middle East (BP, 2007a).

Post-industrialism and environmentalism.

Humans' relationship with energy changed following the Industrial Age. Simmons (2001) describes the period of post-industrialism, from 1950 to present, as having depended mainly on oil and natural gas to power economic activities that still include the production of goods, but with services playing a more important role (Simmons, 2001). Additional economic activities in the post-industrialism period include consumerism and increased outdoor recreation (Simmons, 2001).

It is in this context of an oil-dependent economy that BP emerged as an international oil company. By 1954, the organization had become The British Petroleum Company and was concerned with extracting oil in the Middle East and marketing it in Great Britain, New Zealand, parts of Africa, and parts of Europe (BP, 2007a).

Although the post-industrialism period continues into the present, BP and the society in which it operates have continued to change. In the past 50 years, and

increasingly so since 1970, global warming and sustainability issues have become more common topics of discussion and concern (Simmons, 2001). This concern coincides with a societal shift from coal to oil as the major energy source (Simmons, 2001). Along with the use of oil came private cars for travel and the associated environmental effects as people drove cars into the country for leisure and suburban living (Simmons, 2001).

Beginning in the 1960s, environmental criticisms began to challenge the dominant discourse of science and technology (Livesey, 2001). As oil tanker spills and other economic disasters contributed to public mistrust of oil companies, environmental laws began to restrict corporation's efforts and hold them accountable for the social and economic results of their actions (Livesey, 2001). During this period, participation in environmental groups grew quickly; for example, membership in the National Trust rose from 278,000 members to more than two million between 1971 and 1990 (Simmons, 2001).

Global warming.

As the impacts of energy use became more apparent, society began to focus more on environmental issues. In 1979, on the heels of the Arab oil embargo earlier in the decade and amid growing concerns that human activity and the resulting carbon dioxide emissions could be dangerously and irreversibly altering the earth's climate, the United Nations (UN) World Climate Conference established the World Climate Change Program (Livesey, 2002). This UN program was eventually institutionalized through the establishment of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in 1988 (Livesey, 2002). The stated purpose of the IPCC is to provide guidance for the world's

governments by providing “a clear, balanced view of the present state of understanding of climate change” (IPCC, n.d.).

By 1992, at the Earth Summit in Rio De Janeiro, consensus had been reached among most scientists and politicians on the existence of climate change and the human contribution to it (Livesey, 2002). At the Summit, governmental leaders from most nations around the world agreed upon the creation of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (FCCC), which provided a basis for continuing global efforts to address climate change (Livesey, 2002).

The Kyoto Protocol was established at the third meeting of the FCCC Conference of Parties in Kyoto, Japan in 1997 (Livesey, 2002). The Kyoto Protocol called for emissions to be reduced in industrialized nations to 5% less than 1990 levels between 2008 and 2012 (Livesey, 2002). Although strong consensus on the Protocol existed among most nations, the U.S.—which is by far the biggest polluter—refused to ratify the agreement based on concerns about its economic impacts, effectively preventing the Protocol from being fully enacted (Livesey, 2002).

Since 1990, the IPCC has provided regular Assessment Reports. The fourth report was published in 2007 (IPCC, n.d.). The IPCC’s Fourth Assessment Report concludes that evidence of global warming is unequivocal and that human activities have resulted in warming (IPCC, November, 2007). The report also concludes that, while no single strategy will mitigate global warming on its own, global action can and should be taken in a number of sectors, including energy and transportation (IPCC, 2007). According to the report, regional impacts of global warming in North America will include

exacerbation of current water shortages in the west, major challenges related to the variability of agricultural yields, increasingly frequent and intense heat waves in urban areas, and increasing stresses on coastal communities (IPCC, 2007). The IPCC recommendations are not presented without attention to business and economics; indeed, the report concludes, “Choices about the scale and timing of [greenhouse gas] mitigation involve balancing the economic costs of more rapid emission reductions now against corresponding medium-term and long-term climate risks of delay” (IPCC, 2007, p. 23).

Corporate environmentalism.

The growing urgency of climate change concerns and growing consensus for intergovernmental regulation have significant implications for companies such as BP. Climate change presents potentially critical challenges to the petroleum industry’s core businesses as restrictions of carbon dioxide emissions become more likely (Livesey, 2002).

While some environmental groups have emerged as a strong, anti-corporate voice, the concept of sustainable development resulted as a balance between the two opposing positions (Livesey, 2001). In fact, some corporations are moving more quickly than governments. For example, although any U.S. president’s administration has yet to agree to the Kyoto Protocol for mitigating global warming, many multinational corporations operating in the U.S. have chosen to comply with the Kyoto Protocol (Eizenstat & Kraiem, 2006).

As public concern about the environment makes eventual regulation more and more likely, organizations may gain a strategic advantage from early action. Corporate

efforts to protect the environment are driven by a number of motivations. Banerjee, Iyer, and Kashyap (2003) define corporate environmentalism as incorporating both awareness and a strategic element: “Thus, we define corporate environmentalism as the recognition of the importance of environmental issues facing the firm and the integration of those issues into the firm’s strategic plan” (p. 106).

Stakeholders in the corporate environmentalism model include customers, employees, shareholders, nongovernmental organizations, and others with an interest in the environment (Banerjee, Iyer, Kashyap, 2003). The antecedents to corporate environmentalism include public concern, regulatory forces, competitive advantage, and top management commitment (Banerjee, Iyer & Kashyap, 2003).

Energy issues are more important to some industries than to others. Banerjee, Iyer, and Kashyap (2003) found that public concern for the environment influenced companies’ marketing strategies and affected top management priorities, especially in industries with a high environmental impact (HEI). For companies with HEI, factors affecting corporate environmental orientation were, in order of importance: top management commitment, public concern, regulatory forces, and competitive advantage (Banerjee, Iyer & Kashyap, 2003).

Furthermore, corporations of any sort will be more motivated to proactively address environmental issues when the success of their business is at stake. Banerjee, Iyer, and Kashyap (2003) note that more effective than emotional or moral appeals, top management will be moved toward corporate environmental orientation when they perceive the potential for economic and competitive advantages. Eizenstat and Kraiem

(2006) assert that “Global business leaders are not waiting for environmental mandates to be handed down from Washington” (p. 93). Instead, they’re enacting their own programs to reduce emissions—for example, BP initiated the idea of an internal cap-and-trade program for emissions among internal managers (Eizenstat & Kraiem, 2006).

For businesses whose long-term viability is at stake, climate change is more than a problem of public perception. Climate change concerns can affect a corporation’s access to capital, and therefore, its very ability to carry out its core business functions. Other industries taking note of climate change include financial services, institutional investors, and reinsurers (Eizenstat & Kraiem, 2006). Eizenstat and Kraiem (2006) assert, “Eventually, Wall Street will factor the costs of complying with emissions targets into the price of corporate debt and equities. American businesses that refuse to accept that we live in a carbon-constrained world are living on borrowed time. Soon it will no longer be economical for the holdouts to view the United States as a regulatory safe haven” (p. 93).

From “big polluter” to “beyond petroleum?”

Energy corporations have been slow but responsive in accommodating selected aspects of global warming and energy production. The growth of BP into a global company has coincided with the emergence of corporate environmentalism. By 1969, BP’s reach had extended to North America when it discovered the Prudhoe Bay oil field in Alaska (BP, 2007a). Within less than a decade, it had gained a majority interest in Ohio-based Standard Oil (BP, 2007a). Standard Oil became BP’s wholly owned subsidiary in 1987 (BP, 2007a). Shortly thereafter, BP shifted its focus to exploring new frontier oil sources as an important opportunity for future investment (BP, 2007a).

In 1995, Lord John Browne became chief executive of BP, leading the company through a takeover of a number of oil firms (Healy & Griffin, 2004). In addition to acquiring Standard Oil, BP merged with US-based Amoco, making it one of the world's top three oil and gas companies (BP, 2007a). Over the next five years, additional acquisitions included US-based ARCO, Burmah Castrol, and Veba's retail and refinery facilities in Germany and Austria (BP, 2007a). In 2003, BP embarked on TNK-BP, a joint venture in Russia with the Alfa Group and Access-Renova (BP, 2007a).

Interestingly, at the same time BP was emerging as a multinational petroleum giant, Browne was also speaking out on issues of corporate social responsibility including global climate change (Healy & Griffin, 2004). Prior to 1996, BP had participated in the Global Climate Change Coalition (GCCC), a joint publicity effort by the world's oil companies downplaying the seriousness of global warming (Livesey, 2002). The GCCC argued against emissions regulation based on the premise that petroleum represented the only economical means to meet society's energy demands and downplaying the global warming threat (Livesey, 2002).

In 1997, however, BP broke ranks with the GCCC and became the first major oil company to acknowledge global warming concerns and the need for precautionary action (BP, 2005; Back to Petroleum, 2007). The company committed to investing in renewable energy and to voluntarily reducing its own carbon emissions (BP, 2005). BP invested significant funds and efforts in the development of renewable energy businesses and created public relations campaigns to promote the company's corporate social responsibility (Livesey, 2002). Shell (Livesey, 2002) and others would later follow suit.

The campaign.

BP's public communications had a number of obstacles to address during this period. At the time of the Amoco merger, according to BP's U.S. director of brand communications, Kathy Leach, the company believed that most Americans had little opinion about BP, good or bad (Solman, 2008). Thus, as BP sought to establish itself in the U.S. market, where it was relatively unknown before the BP Amoco brand was introduced, its goal was to retain the Amoco market share while also building customer recognition of BP (Healy & Griffin, 2004). Themed "Beyond Petroleum," the campaign also faced other challenges including a likelihood that the theme would resonate better with environmentalists than investors, and the need to evoke a more specific and defined public perception of what, exactly, was meant by "Beyond" (Healy & Griffin, 2004).

As BP embarked on its reputation-building campaign, the company also had a number of strengths on which to call: its reputation as an innovator in the areas of technology, environment, and marketing; leadership commitment; recently having become BP, a new company with a new name, following the acquisitions of Amoco and others; and its size as a global corporation with significant resources and reach (Healy & Griffin, 2004).

As part of "Beyond Petroleum," BP ran television spots featuring everyday people making candid remarks about their energy and environmental concerns, followed by short, factual statements about BP's efforts in these areas. The campaign represented an intentional effort by BP to demonstrate that the company was committed to engaging with stakeholders and taking their concerns seriously.

According to John Siefert, chairman of the PR firm selected by BP, the intention was to create “a very transparent campaign where consumers said some very harsh things” and BP responded to those concerns (Solman, 2008, p. 2). Other “Beyond Petroleum” tactics included changing the corporation’s name to BP; the introduction of the “helios,” a new stylized logo meant to evoke a connection with sun and nature; rebranding all BP Amoco stations with the BP name, helios logo and colors, and print pieces promoting BP as a leader in alternative energy investments (Solman, 2008). Additional print pieces directed consumers to the company’s online carbon calculator, inviting them to measure their own “carbon footprint” (Solman, 2008).

Through the “Beyond Petroleum” campaign, BP positioned itself as more honest with customers and aware of the need to balance customer demand for energy with their fear of pollution (Solman, 2008). The Beyond Petroleum campaign achieved favorable measured results in terms of public perceptions during its first year, 2001 (Healy & Griffin, 2004). The following year, other factors including economic pressures and internal politics led to the scaling back of the campaign, but it was reemphasized in the following years (Healy & Griffin, 2004), and the “Beyond Petroleum” television spots continue to run in the U.S. to this day.

BP invested significant funds in the campaign. The company also reaped significant profits during this period. BP spent \$145 million on the campaign in 2005, \$100 million in 2006, and more than \$125 million in 2007 (Solman, 2008). Sales during this period rose from \$192 billion in 2004 to \$266 billion in 2006 (Solman, 2008). After “Beyond Petroleum” was rolled out, the business and marketing sectors hailed the

campaign as an important innovation for achieving corporate business objectives (Solman, 2008). Overall, the campaign has been evaluated as a successful one.

“Regardless of whether industry observers believe BP is truly ‘green,’ the company and its rebranding campaign have managed to convince the public that it is more eco-friendly than its competitors” (Solman, 2008, p. 2).

Nevertheless, “Beyond Petroleum” was not beyond criticism from employees and environmental groups. For example while BP was lobbying to drill in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, a number of employees set up a website describing their perceived failings of BP in the areas of the environment and worker safety (Alaskan Oil Warnings, 2001). The workers suggested that BP’s irresponsibility could cause a major oil spill, damaging the industry overall, and leaving employees out of work (Alaskan Oil Warnings, 2001). And, although business has praised BP’s corporate social responsibility model, BP has also been criticized by others for “greenwashing” its image in attempt to make more palatable its core business of oil production and refining (Solman, 2008).

Other important stakeholders including environmental and anti-business groups also recognized BP’s success, but not without serious criticism: “Environmental and anti-corporate groups such as CorpWatch, for example, grudgingly admitted that BP had indeed become the world leader in solar energy production, but complained that it had only achieved that feat through the acquisition of Solarex and had spent significantly more on stereotypically rapacious oil company ventures” (Solman, 2008, p. 1). The corporation was named by *Multinational Monitor* as one of the year’s 10 worst corporations for its efforts to promote itself as an alternative energy leader despite

concerns about many of its environmental actions and perceived other social responsibility shortcomings (Mokhiber & Weissman, 2005).

Beyond the campaign.

In addition to its efforts to promote itself as an environmental leader, BP has continued to make strides in its green business efforts. In 2005, BP pointed to growing energy demand and the risk that continued use of its fossil fuel products comes with the risk of environmental impacts caused by carbon emissions (BP, 2006a). Noting that power generation is the largest source of fossil fuel emissions, the company established BP Alternative Energy to develop renewable energy sources such as solar, wind, gas, and hydrogen (BP, 2006a). Thus, the company positioned itself to meet emerging demands in the new energy market while also touting its commitment to social responsibility: “We believe we can help meet the energy needs of a growing world while minimizing the impact on our common environment” (BP, 2006a, p. 5).

In 2006, BP partnered with DuPont for the creation and marketing of new biofuel sources (BP, 2007a). BP’s renewable power generation capacity grew from 80 megawatts (MW) of solar energy in 2002 to 201 MW in 2006 (BP, 2007a). BP’s wind power portfolio started with 23 MW in 2003 and reached 43 MW in 2006.

The company also flourished in terms of its profits. BP’s profits grew from \$6.8 billion in 2002 to approximately \$22 billion in 2006 (BP, 2007a). BP has doubled or tripled in size since 1995 and now produces more than 100,000 barrels of oil equivalent each day (BP, 2007b).

Despite the relative success of its campaign and its very attractive balance sheets, BP has not been without significant challenges in recent years. An industrial accident at BP's Texas City refinery in March 2005 caused 15 deaths and many injuries (BP, 2006a). Although BP earned a record \$22.3 billion in profits during 2006 (BP, 2007b), 2006 also brought two oil spills in Alaska's Prudhoe Bay occurred as a result of pipeline corrosion (BP, 2007b). Events such as the oil spills and the 2005 Texas City refinery accident brought increased public scrutiny and negative impacts on BP's reputation as a socially responsible corporation (BP, 2007b).

Amidst BP's operations problems in recent years, public concern about our world's energy future has not lessened. In fact, the climate change discussion intensified in 2006, with legislative activity in Europe and the U.S. to significantly reduce carbon dioxide emissions (BP, 2006b). Combined with unease about the geographic concentration of energy resources, concerns about how long the world's existing fossil fuel energy resources might last has helped to drive BP's efforts in the areas of exploration, production, and diversified energy sources (BP, 2006b).

Vivienne Cox, head of BP Alternative Energy, describes the challenges driving the company, "The fundamental challenge for the future of our industry is that people are not only demanding more energy—because economies and populations are growing; they're also demanding energy that's reliable, affordable and clean: energy we can depend on and energy that is sustainable for future generations" (Cox, 2008). Cox (2008) asserts that BP has an important role to play in helping governments create such mechanisms. BP advocates for a system of carbon limits and trading as a means to

address climate concerns (Cox, 2008). Under “cap and trade” schemes, carbon emitters would be allowed to emit a certain maximum of carbon dioxide. Surplus allowances could then be bought and sold on a market system. It is believed that putting a price on carbon emissions will drive the development of cleaner technology. In the U.S., a number of states and regional governor’s alliances have initiated plans to enact such a market.

BP has taken an active role in attempting to shape discourse regarding future energy policy. Cox (2008) describes BP’s claim to this role: “Our job as a business is a practical one—to provide solutions that work. But we also have view on what will best incentivise us. And we strongly believe the market is the best means for driving and rewarding innovation. That is why we support establishing a price for carbon to drive innovation and emission reductions across the economy, and specifically market mechanisms such as emissions trading systems” asserted Cox (2008, p. 4). Cox (2008) also asserts that, initially, additional incentives will be needed in order to stimulate large scale deployment of clean energy technology.

Postmodern petroleum?

Interestingly, despite this increased attention to environmental matters, business is booming for companies like BP. Society’s ecological impact and its demand for energy continue to grow (Simmons, 2001). Accompanying this demand is a modernist view of technology as ultimate solution coupled with a postmodern distrust of big oil. Simmons (2001) sums up the situation: “Some kind of collective schizophrenia is clearly at work, though its contradictions are probably not recongnised [sic] by most people. If they are, then they are shelved in the face of the efforts of everyday living. At the heart, perhaps, is

the binary division between humanity and nature which seem to be deeply embedded in the western world view” (p. 324).

Meanwhile, contrasted with this fragmented social nature is the coalescence of transnational companies such as BP (Simmons, 2001). While society as a whole seems mired in competing concerns of a growing demand for energy, concern for the environment, and distrust of corporations, companies like BP are pushing environmental change—giving greater voice to the voiceless environment. Simmons (2001) asserts that this contrast results from the coalescent nature of transnational companies, which are constructed to focus on creating profit and must therefore adopt new strategies to gain new advantages.

Interpretation

From the initial UN negotiations that created the IPCC to BP’s recent advocacy on carbon cap-and-trade mechanisms, discourse has always played a critical role in the global response to climate change. Long-known as a leader in corporate environmentalism, BP’s discursive texts offer rich source material for a postmodern rhetorical analysis. An interpretation of BP’s approach to climate change based on its discourse will reveal important implications for the practice of postmodern public relations.

As discussed previously in this report, annual reports, other corporate reports, and their introductory letters from organizational presidents and CEOs are recognized as a valuable source for insights into the organizations’ rhetorical actions (Hyland, 1999; White & Hanson, 2000). Furthermore, Banerjee, Iyer, and Kashyap (2003) have

demonstrated that top management commitment is the most important antecedent for corporate environmentalism in companies such as BP. Thus, three letters from the BP CEO will provide the text for this analysis. An examination of the messages in each letter, interpreted through the PPR framework, will reveal practical implications for PPR.

Textual examples for analysis of BP's climate change discourse include CEO letters of introduction to three reports: BP's 2006 sustainability report (cataloged and described in Appendix C as artifact C-1), BP's Annual Review 2006 (C-2), and the BP Statistical Review of World Energy June 2007 (C-3). A detailed list of the communication artifacts used for this case analysis is given in Table 3C.

Table 3C: Artifacts for BP Case Analysis

<i>Identifier</i>	<i>Artifact</i>	<i>Content</i>
C-1	Introduction to 2006 Sustainability Report (BP, 2006b)	Communicates about BP's long-term success and broadly defined commitments sustainability
C-2	Introduction to Annual Review 2006 (BP, 2007c)	Communicates about BP's long-term success and broadly defined commitments sustainability
C-3	Introduction to BP Statistical Review of World Energy June 2007 (BP, 2007, June)	Calls for a carbon cap-and-trade program to reduce greenhouse gas emissions

While these artifacts are just a few of perhaps hundreds of possible examples, they were selected because they appropriately represent BP's rhetorical action in response to environmental issues faced by the company and society. A comprehensive list of all BP artifacts reviewed for this project is provided in Table 3D.

Table 3D: Examples of BP's Discourse

<i>Artifact</i>	<i>Reference details</i>	<i>Relevance</i>
BP Sustainability Report 2006	BP. (2006). BP Sustainability Report 2006. Retrieved February 10, 2008 from the World Wide Web: http://www.bp.com/sectiongenericarticle.do?categoryId=9015498&contentId=7028087	Reporting on BP's non-financial performance in 2006
BP Annual Report & Accounts 2006	BP. (2006). BP Annual Report & Accounts 2006. Retrieved February 10, 2008 from the World Wide Web: http://www.bp.com/sectiongenericarticle.do?categoryId=9015498&contentId=7028087	A performance review of each BP business segment with detailed disclosure of financial performance
BP Annual Review 2006	BP. (2006). BP Annual Review 2006. Retrieved February 10, 2008 from the World Wide Web: http://www.bp.com/sectiongenericarticle.do?categoryId=9015498&contentId=7028087	Annual summary of the BP group's strategy and performance
2007 Statistical Review Presentation	Rühl, C. (2007, June 12). [address] BP Statistical Review of World Energy 2007. Press conference, London, UK. [Transcript and slides]. Retrieved February 10, 2008 from the World Wide Web: http://www.bp.com/subsection.do?categoryId=9017893&contentId=7033412	Slides and speech from 2007 sustainability presentation by Christof Rühl, BP Deputy Chief Economist
2007 Statistical Review of World Energy	BP. (2007, June). BP Statistical Review of World Energy 2007. Retrieved February 10, 2008 from the World Wide Web: http://www.bp.com/sectiongenericarticle.do?categoryId=9015498&contentId=7028087	BP presents a statistical review of the current and historical world energy trends
World Future Energy Summit, Abu Dhab, 2008	Cox, V. (21 January 2008). [address] New Partnerships, New Possibilities. Presented at the World Future Energy Summit, Abu Dhab. [Transcript]. Retrieved February 10, 2008 from the World Wide Web: http://www.bp.com/genericarticle.do?categoryId=98&contentId=7040762	Speech by Vivienne Cox, Chief Executive of BP Alternative Energy
BP Governance and Board Performance report 2006	BP. (2006). BP Governance and Board Performance report. Retrieved February 10, 2008 from the World Wide Web: http://www.bp.com/subsection.do?categoryId=9017893&contentId=7033412	Explains BP's system of governance and representation of shareholders' interest

2006 sustainability report.

In Letter C-1, BP CEO Browne writes to introduce the most recent edition of BP's annual sustainability report, which covers the issues BP has identified as most important to its audiences. The intended audiences appear quite diverse. A reader survey tucked into the back of the envelope provides some insight into the intended audiences for the report, asking readers to identify themselves from a list of categories including BP employee/contractor, institutional/private investor, socially responsible investor, government member, NGO representative, CSR professional, media, academia (student/educator) or other. The report includes chapters on BP's safety, environment and ethics efforts; BP's commitments to help address climate change; and BP's role in economic development.

While Browne's climate-change related messages in Letter C-1 acknowledged the company's recent failings, the key message was one of long-term commitment and continued success. Browne refers to BP as a company that has "sustained itself for almost 100 years," describing the company as having worked to transition the world to a "lower-carbon" economy" for "more than 10 years," and speaking of relationships that are "built to last."

Secondly, Browne's Letter C-1 seeks to present the corporation's plans for success in a number of different and sometimes conflicting areas of interest, all under the general heading of sustainability. These areas included profitability, economic development, new technology, employee safety, corporate environmentalism, energy security, and business ethics. BP's success in these areas benefit everyone, the argument

goes, not just the company and its shareholders. Brown writes, “In all these ways, we aim to achieve the sustainability of the group, and even more important, the sustainability of the societies in which we operate.” Thus, climate change is presented as only one of many important factors in the company’s ongoing commitment to sustainability.

2006 annual review.

The second artifact for review in this case is CEO Browne’s letter of introduction to BP’s annual “Corporate Review” report (C-2). The corporate review is made up of summaries of the directors’ reports and financial summaries for 2006. Based upon Browne’s greeting, “Dear Shareholder,” it can be assumed that shareholders are the primary intended audience for Letter C-2.

The environmental messages communicated in Letter C-2 are slightly different from those in Letter C-1, but still focus on the company’s long-term successes. While C-1 sought to inform a wide variety of stakeholders on how nearly all of BP’s activities contribute to its long-term sustainability, the message of C-2 is much more tightly focused. In short, Letter C-2’s message is that BP is on the right track and should not be derailed by temporary setbacks. To prove this point, C-2 cites BP’s record 15% increase in replacement cost profits for the year, and its 22% increase in earnings per share. The strategy behind this message appears to be reassuring shareholders in order to protect the company’s stock price.

2007 statistical review of world energy.

New CEO Tony Hayward provided the introductory letter (C-3) to the 56th edition of BP’s annual Statistical Review of World Energy. Among transnational oil companies,

this report and its history are unique to BP. Claiming to provide “high-quality, objective, and globally consistent data on world energy markets,” BP calls the report, “One of the most widely respected and authoritative publications in the field of energy economics.” According to BP, the audience for the report includes the media, academia, world governments, and energy companies. Perhaps in keeping with the “objective” nature of the report, Letter C-3 is much shorter and less rhetorical than the other artifacts used for this analysis. That is not to say the letter lacks clear messages, however.

The key message in Letter C-3 is that a carbon cap-and-trade program is needed in order to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The strategy used by the organization is to present clear, objective evidence that, despite strong societal concerns about climate change and high energy prices, demand for energy is continuing to grow. And, compared to more expensive “green” technologies, fossil fuels still represent the most economic means for meeting that growing demand. Thus, BP’s argument goes, a market mechanism is needed to incentivise companies such as BP to continue their renewable energy efforts.

In 2007, BP’s streak of financial success seemed to have finally come to an end. The resulting management response suggests a possible shift in corporate strategy away from a focus on renewable energy and other climate change solutions. In comments at an employee gathering where dismal third quarter results were reported for 2007, new BP chief executive Tony Hayward said the company would weather recent operational and economic failures resulting from the refinery fire and oil spills by refocusing on its core business of petroleum (Back to Petroleum, 2007). Hayward has outlined an approach that

will shift BP's attention to the safe, efficient production of oil and gas (Back to Petroleum, 2007). BP will focus less on gas, power, and renewables (Back to Petroleum, 2007). Its alternative-energy division will not be altogether abandoned but will be incorporated into the two traditional, core segments of the company: exploration and production, and refining and marketing (Back to Petroleum, 2007). And, although BP continues to invest in alternative energy—it has set aside \$8 billion for this purpose over the next decade—“It remains to be seen whether chief executive Tony Hayward's back-to-petroleum focus will result in those plans being scaled back” (Back to Petroleum, 2007, p. 7). At the time of this analysis, BP's 2007 Annual Review and accompanying letter of introduction from Hayward has not yet been published. When published, this text is likely to provide useful material for extension of the present analysis.

The cases presented in this chapter illustrate how the theoretical framework for PPR as presented in the literature review can be used to analyze current examples of public relations practice. The method for case analysis outlined in Chapter 3 of this report calls for an application of the PPR framework using rhetorical analysis. The present chapter carried out the first two general steps for rhetorical analysis: to describe and interpret. The next and final chapter of this report carries out the third step, which is evaluation. Following the case evaluation, holistic conclusions about PPR are offered, and a new, practical model for PPR is set forth.

Chapter 4: Discussion

This thesis research project seeks to move the field of public relations toward a practical model of PPR. In the literature review, current prevailing theories and perspectives were examined, postmodernism was presented as an alternative, and a framework was set forth summarizing current theory on PPR. Next, research questions were posed about the framework's practical usefulness for practitioners, and rhetorical criticism was presented as an appropriate analytical approach to answering those questions. In Chapter 3, rhetorical criticism was employed to describe and interpret two real-world public relations cases using the theoretical PPR framework set forth in the literature review.

Evaluation

The final step in rhetorical criticism is to evaluate, or pass judgment upon, the case against the previously established theoretical framework. In doing so, the rhetorical critic arrives at holistic conclusions about the project, providing answers about the research questions asked and recommendations for future action. Toward that end, this chapter applies the theoretical PPR framework in order to evaluate the AAIDD and BP cases, answering questions about the practical application of PPR, and presenting recommendations toward a practical model for PPR.

The literature review for this research presented eight components of a theoretical framework as they appear in the current literature on PPR. In this section, PPR theory is applied to the cases described in Chapter 3, revealing that PPR can indeed find practical

application in the field. In addition, the evaluation will show that much remains yet to be learned about PPR and these cases.

Both the AAIDD and BP cases provide examples of how organizations can, and in some cases, already do carry out most of the principles set forth in the theoretical framework for PPR presented in the literature review of this report. Furthermore, the evaluation reveals how most components of the theoretical framework can be distilled into four general categories of practical guidelines: practical relativism, power relations, the dual role of practitioners, and strategy. The following section provides an explanation of how those four categories emerged, followed by a set of steps for the practical application of PPR.

Practical Relativism

The cases of both AAIDD and BP provide insight into the practicality of PPR's relativist approach to ethics. In the AAIDD case, the rhetorical issue of intellectual disabilities is one of human rights, rooted in the U.S. American value of fairness, justice, and individual rights. This value clearly pertains to the issues at hand for AAIDD, which include the rights of people to determine the circumstances of their own lives. Adherence to this value requires that people have a role in the decisions that affect them and the language that describes them.

The artifacts examined in the AAIDD case demonstrate a practical application of PPR's relativistic approach while also avoiding the "circular" issue of creating a new grand narrative. This is accomplished through attention to guiding principles set by the organization's business objectives. Bradley's appeal in Letter A-1 to members' sense of

what is just and right is also grounded in the organization's mission: the promotion of basic human rights for individuals with disabilities. This balancing act between what is "right" for the disempowered and what is "right" for the health of the organization demonstrates how PPR can indeed be put into practice. In fact, the practical requirement of carrying out a business goal or mission provides grounding for what might otherwise devolve into the circular issue of creating a new grand narrative.

The BP case also provides insight into how corporate organizations can carry out the PPR ideal of context-based ethical decisions while avoiding the circular problem of relativism. As an investor-owned organization, BP's decisions must be grounded in its ethical obligation to provide the best possible financial results for its shareholders and to engage in discourse that will allow the company to continue to perform well. At the same time, like all public relations professionals working in the United States and Europe, BP's communication professionals are held to codes of ethics calling for transparency and fairness, such as the PRSA (2000) and IABC (n.d.) codes of ethics. BP's discursive actions are further guided by its own code of conduct, which requires integrity of all its employees in areas including health, safety, security and the environment (BP, 2006b). Thus, BP's discourse does not attempt to dishonestly cover up or deny the organization's recent operational difficulties and shortcomings, but it does appear to downplay them in an effort to limit their consequences for shareholders. In this way, the need to do what is right and just in a situation is respected, but the organization's overall objectives inform the ways in which this message is delivered.

Another practical benefit of carrying out PPR's context-based ethical principle can be seen in the AAIDD case. While Bradley's Letter A-1 implores AAIDD members to resolve the organization's naming issue because it is the right thing to do for the people the organization intends to serve, its success also benefits the organization itself by resolving an ongoing conflict. Indeed, without this sense of needing to do the right thing in a particular situation, the polarized audiences might never have been able to make progress, jeopardizing the very existing of the organization. Thus, doing what is "right" also provides means to move the organization forward through what may be a difficult or contentious period.

The real-world cases presented in this report provide strong support for the feasibility of a practical model of PPR. They provide a more nuanced understanding of how, for public relations, doing what is right in a particular situation necessarily requires attention to the ethical codes and organizational goals present in the context of any particular case. In this way, the practitioner honors postmodernism's rejection of metanarratives while also meeting real-world expectations for ethical practice.

Thus, "practical relativism" is the first category of practical guidelines for the application of PPR. As revealed in the cases studied for this report, the PPR practitioner must choose discursive action that is as transparent as possible, based on what is in keeping with organizational objectives and what is right and just in the context of a particular event or situation.

Power Relations

The evaluation of the BP cases revealed how the first two components of the PPR framework could be grouped together under the category of practical relativism. The third and fourth components deal with acknowledgement of contradiction, irony, conflict and dissensus, as well as organizational claims of objectivity. These components fit together under the general category of power relations.

The AAIDD case provides practical insights into the issues of conflict and power that are inherent in communication. Historically, the circumstances of people with intellectual disabilities were shaped by dominant scientific and medical discourses. When, during the period leading up to and including the modern era, the social construction of intellectual disabilities took a turn from “teachable” to vulnerable, the circumstances of people carrying these labels followed suit. Rather than being included as a normal part of the community, people with disabilities were “protected” through imprisonment in institutions.

Another shift in the meaning of intellectual disability came with the advent of the scientific revolution and the concept of eugenics. Based on this new, scientific understanding, institutionalization and segregation became a means not just to protect a vulnerable population from the ills of society, but to protect the rest of society from “contamination” by the “feeble-minded.” Thus, for people with intellectual disabilities, “*they had become the menace to society*” (emphasis added) (Trent, 1995, p. 20).

The rise of the social sciences and psychology in the 20th Century also shaped the meanings, and consequently, the circumstances of intellectual disability. Along with

psychology's development of intelligence testing came scientific, quantifiable means for labeling people as "defective"—a label that, once firmly affixed, remained with an individual for life (Trent, 1995). This contributed to the meaning of intellectual disability as "disease....[because] [m]edical language, as medical practice, is not exempt from expressing social beliefs" (Potok, 2002).

Despite the long and bleak history of disempowerment of people with intellectual disabilities, AAIDD's role in shaping discourse also illustrates the potential for communication to help improve the circumstances of the disempowered. When AAIDD's definition of the disability changed in the late 1950s, the dominant understanding of intellectual disability shifted from one based on chronic or terminal medical impairment, to one that was simply an impairment in adaptive behavior (Simpson, 1998). As a result, the field shifted its focus toward training and brought about the deinstitutionalization of people defined by the term. As Bruininks and Lakin (1985) assert, "What is most important about deinstitutionalization is that it is a descriptive label that has changed society's perception and led society to act in response to the needs of its citizens with disabilities" (p. 231). In short, what may have, in 1959, seemed a subtle change in the definition of a term has today resulted in dynamic changes to the lives of people with intellectual disabilities. Since the era of deinstitutionalization, surveys of various agencies and institutions serving people with intellectual disabilities indicate that decreases in state institution populations have been slow but continual (Prouty, Coucouvanis & Lakin, 2005).

The shift in services has not been without its own social dilemmas. As Bruininks and Lakin (1985) describe, “Semantic confusion has become a hallmark of deinstitutionalization, as new concepts have been sought to explain and deal with arising problems...even the term deinstitutionalization is rarely defined with precision but this does not stop it from being used either as a planning concept or a rallying cry” (p. 28). Nor has the shift in terminology led to a general empowerment of people with intellectual disabilities. Simpson asserts that, although more people with intellectual disabilities have gained a physical place in the community in the 30 years since normalization took hold, it seems that this shift has not discouraged society’s tendency to label, classify, and set apart those who are different (Simpson, 1998).

As the question of labels evolved, so did AAIDD’s attempts to provide answers. And, each step illustrated the power of discourse to shape the lives of people. The 1992 definition suggested that the socially constructed nature of disability could indeed liberate and empower people. Trent (1995) explains, “Communities, by structuring themselves to meet those functional needs, can ‘cure’ mental retardation. A person ceases to be mentally retarded, in other words, the moment people quit defining him [sic] as such” (p. 18). The understanding of disability as a construct of the environment took away the emphasis on deficits as identified by IQ tests (Wehmeyer, 2003).

Despite progress in empowerment of people with intellectual disabilities through discourse, dominant, “rational” discourses continue to stigmatize. Wilson (2003) points to the Human Genome project as one current example. The Human Genome Project has emerged to inform our scientific and metaphorical understanding of the genetics of

disability as “mutants, lesions, errant, disease loci, and susceptibility genes” (Wilson, 2003, p. 198). These metaphors of “bad citizens” in a “social collective” (Wilson, 2003, p. 198) evoke the disturbing history of eugenics, where those with undesirable genetic traits were to be systematically controlled and eliminated. As it was with eugenics, the language of postgenomic science has once again stigmatized the person with a disability as a social deviant.

From the period when people with intellectual disabilities were regarded as inmates to be locked away, to the post-genomic present understanding of disability as an errant gene warranting isolation and containment, the history of disability communication illustrates the critical role that discourse plays in power relations. The third component of the theoretical model for PPR proposes that practitioners can wield this power more justly if they acknowledge the contradictions and ironies inherent in their communication.

Contradiction, irony, conflict, and dissensus.

AAIDD’s long history of discourse about intellectual disability offers a practical example of how an organization can demonstrate awareness of power relations and acknowledge conflict, dissensus, contradictions and irony in its own communications. AAIDD’s case demonstrates that it is possible to make such acknowledgements while still pursuing and achieving organizational objectives. In fact, AAIDD’s case illustrates how acknowledging such conditions can, in fact, help the organization to achieve its objectives.

Bradley’s letter A-1 clearly demonstrates how an organization can acknowledge conflict and dissensus while pressing on toward resolution of a problem. Bradley

acknowledges directly that the organizational strategy she maps out will inevitably meet with conflict and dissensus. For, while self-advocates and others demand that the MR term must go, other stakeholders will have concerns. For academics and researchers, the altering of a well-known name for their field of study represents a potential loss of recognition and prestige. In addition, there is concern that any new term will also become stigmatized with time. Also of concern is the potential for losing ground already won through difficult battles, as policymakers have worked hard to develop statutes that now depend on the MR term. Finally, changing the organization's name before such time as the disability itself receives a new, official diagnostic term presents a risk that organization's decades of work on terminology and classification may be jeopardized.

While acknowledging these contradictions and conflicts, Bradley urges the group toward action by pointing to what is just and right in the situation. Interestingly, however, her plan for resolution by a member vote also perpetuates the disempowerment of people with intellectual disabilities by excluding them from the process of selecting a new name. By and large, AAIDD's members are not people who have intellectual disabilities.

That is not to say that Bradley appears unaware of the power-knowledge relationship between AAIDD and its stakeholders. Indeed, while the organization's name change would empower self-advocates to a certain extent by assenting to their demands, the power of AAIDD itself is also at stake. Bradley's letter is effectively directed and focused by those relationships. For, in addition to doing what is right by self-advocates, the organization also has a powerful role to maintain. "In the end, if we want to continue

to be among the leaders in our field, then we must show self advocates and families that they have been heard,” Letter A-1 asserts, in bolded typeface.

In another approach to acknowledging conflict, Bersani’s Address A-3 seeks to empower people with intellectual disabilities by shedding light on the injustices they have suffered. Indeed, Bersani’s Address A-3 points out more than mere ironies; it describes outright abuses and human rights violations, such as forced institutionalization and sterilization, and demands that the association acknowledge its role in perpetuating them. In doing so, Bersani cedes some of AAIDD’s power as an authority on intellectual disability.

The strategy of Bersani’s Address A-3 appears to be not the acquisition or maintenance of power for the organization, but awareness by members of what is right and just in the current situation. In Address A-3, more so than in the previous artifacts, Bersani appears to take the role of activist in order to help people with intellectual disabilities to gain power and influence. By acknowledging the importance of the association’s name change, Address A-3 does demonstrate awareness of power-knowledge relationships.

BP’s case also highlights the importance of acknowledging irony and contradiction in its own discourse. BP chose not to attempt to fight the growing calls for emissions regulations and accountability for companies such as itself. In doing so, BP would have run the risk of having some of its political power taken away. Instead, BP enacted its own programs to reduce emissions and speed the development of renewable energy technologies. In doing so, BP demonstrated awareness of the continually shifting

nature of political power and acted in ways to maintain its powerful position. By acting on these issues first, BP both gained power for itself and took away some of the power of the environmentalists who would criticize the company. In doing so, BP was able to maintain its power and continue to control discourse about itself.

Based on Letter B-1's attempt to present BP in human terms, as a group of people with individual stories, the letter appears to have been written with an understanding of power-knowledge relationships. By rejecting the typical "factual" approach for corporate reporting and instead legitimizing itself with the stories of "individuals and teams" behind those facts, Browne seeks to redefine the company in more human terms. Letter B-1 speaks of customers having a "personalized" relationship with BP, and invites readers to consider the company through its "individual stories" and the people behind them. In doing so, he takes away some of the "big oil" ammunition available to anti-corporate critics.

One aspect of awareness of power relations in which BP does seem to fall short is the acknowledgement of ironies and contradictions inherent in its communications. Despite the many ironies and contradictions to be unearthed when one of the world's largest fossil fuel producers speaks in all seriousness about concern for the environment, Letter B-1 does not acknowledge or expose these contradictions.

That is not to say that BP could not have practically carried out this aspect of PPR. BP could have done so by describing its failures in more detail and by exposing some of the factors that caused them rather than attempting to neatly wrap up every

aspect and activity of the organization within the “sustainability” message. Surely, some of the things that BP does simply do not fit within the mantra of sustainability.

In Letter B-2, BP seeks to reassure shareholders in order to protect the company’s stock price. Obviously, such a strategy would empower the company by ensuring its continued access to capital. This strategy would disempower environmentalists who would characterize BP’s 2006 oil spills as miserable failures, as well as the employee safety advocates who would likely argue that the loss of 15 lives in Texas City represent more than a mere “recent setback.”

Letter B-2 also seems to do little or nothing to acknowledge this potential source of conflict or dissensus, or the ironies and contradictions that result. Again, this is not to say that BP could not have practically carried out the PPR principle of acknowledging irony and contradictions in this case. This could have been accomplished in letter B-2 with simple statements about the invaluable lives that were lost being more important than the company’s \$22.3 billion in profits for 2006, or on the incalculable environmental toll of the Alaskan oil spills.

Interestingly, BP’s letter B-3 points to coal as the world’s fastest-growing hydrocarbon, which it says will lead to continued increases in carbon emissions. In light of BP’s significant investments in alternative energy technology, the strategy behind this message appears to be aimed at disempowering the energy sector that competes most directly with BP². But, again, BP’s failure to acknowledge irony in its own

²This researcher is employed by an electric utility in a region of the United States that depends on coal-fired generation to meet a significant portion of its energy demand.

communication in this instance does not mean that the company could not have done so. Indeed, if BP had presented its assertions about the superiority of its own technology while also acknowledging its bottom line-driven motivations for doing so, it is likely that those messages would have been perceived as no less effective for their honesty. After all, the idea that an investor-owned organization should seek a competitive advantage comes as no surprise to society. A frank acknowledgement of that motivation and its effect on the organization's discourse, however, might be received by audiences as both surprising and refreshing.

As evidenced by the cases of AAIDD and BP, public relations can indeed make practical use of several PPR guidelines that can all be grouped together under the general heading of "power relations." Public relations practitioners can uphold PPR principles by engaging in discursive action without privileging their own discourse over that of others, and by acknowledging the contradiction and irony inherent in their discursive actions.

Objectivity.

Closely related to the idea of acknowledging conflict and dissensus, the fourth component of the theoretical framework for PPR also requires practitioners to avoid making claims of objectivity which privilege the organization's knowledge and can serve to disempower dissenters and activists. The BP case sheds light on how this component could fit into a practical model for PPR.

In artifact B-3, as it introduces its annual report on energy statistics, BP does not address conflict or dissensus related to its own activities at all. Instead, it simply privileges its scientific data as correct and right. While BP's supporting data is almost

certainly accurate and informative, it also neglects to acknowledge some of the coal industry's positions on the economic and energy security benefits of coal, as well as the also-promising new advances in "clean coal" technology. Neglecting to acknowledge these positions reflects the company's profit-driven, competitive nature and highlights the literal and figurative role of power in shaping current understandings of how climate change should be addressed. Thus, the seemingly objective and factual Letter B-3 does indeed demonstrate awareness of relationships between power and knowledge.

On one hand, the fact that BP provides these comprehensive energy statistics free of charge to anyone who wishes to see them suggests a commitment to transparency and what is "right." As a multinational corporation, BP has the resources and expertise to collect and provide such data to stakeholders who could not likely come across such exhaustive data on their own. But on the other hand, the subtle characterization of the data in BP's favor also suggests a slightly less altruistic motivation. Clearly, BP has a planned motivation for offering this report with Letter B-3 to introduce it. And, while doing so in and of itself may not be disingenuous, presenting Letter B-3 and the accompanying report under the guise of objectivity may not be entirely forthright.

That is not to say that, from a PPR perspective, BP could not or should not continue its long tradition of sharing the results of its energy statistics research with the world. Undoubtedly, these statistics provide valuable information that might not otherwise be available to help inform world discourse about our energy future. However, from a PPR perspective, BP could have presented the supposedly "unbiased" study without editorializing in its introduction. Although BP could appropriately make its

arguments about the coal industry elsewhere, a practical model for PPR would call for refraining from such commentary in Letter B-3.

The Dual Role of Practitioners

The fifth component of the theoretical framework for PPR addresses matter of public relations practitioners' relationship to activists. Proponents of PPR Holtzhausen and Voto (2002) call for practitioners to themselves become activists, forming alliances with marginalized people or functions. The AAIDD artifacts demonstrate that this component of the theoretical framework should indeed be retained as part of the new, practical model for PPR.

AAIDD demonstrates the practical feasibility of this activist approach in its support for the self-advocacy movement. The long history of intellectual disability discourse illustrates a painfully slow process of empowerment for individuals. Gradual shifts in what constitutes knowledge about intellectual disability have lead to deinstitutionalization and the guarantee of certain civil rights for people. Now, as more and more individuals participate in communities and seek to exercise their human rights, people with intellectual disabilities are becoming more visible and more vocal.

SABE's outcry at the 2005 AAIDD annual conference illustrates the current struggle of power and voice for people with intellectual disabilities. Self-advocates claim a moral right to define themselves and determine their own circumstances. In doing so, they reject the continued use of stigmatized terminology and patronizing language. As impassioned and direct as the entreaties of self-advocates may be, however, theirs is still

not the only voice in disability discourse. This historically disempowered group continues in its struggle to be heard.

In AAIDD's case, the rhetorical effectiveness of embracing activists is highlighted by artifacts A-1 and A-3, in particular. Both directly acknowledge self-advocates and their rights. On the other hand, Bersani's Letter A-2 does not directly acknowledge self-advocates and their lack of participation in the AAIDD name change vote. It seems possible that, as Bradley did in Letter A-1, Bersani could have at least acknowledged various stakeholder concerns and described the organization's efforts to continue to include those stakeholders. Instead, Bersani's repeated claim of consensus and his reference to members' common mission in Letter A-2 seem to suggest a strategy aimed at overcoming opposing arguments. That is not to say the overall act of changing the organization's name was carried out with no regard for the self-advocate activists in this case, however. The texts do appear to at least acknowledge the grievances of those disempowered groups, describing AAIDD's efforts to redress the wrongs it committed.

In the case of BP, little can be guessed about the public relations practitioners' orientation toward activists from the artifacts examined. In cases where the company does seem to acknowledge activist concerns, those acknowledgements seem directed more at maintaining organizational power than at ceding it to the disenfranchised.

That is not to say that PPR practitioners cannot or should not engage in such power-focused discourse. The fifth component of the theoretical framework for PPR also calls on practitioners to form alliances with those who can help them gain power and influence in the organization (Holtzhausen & Voto, 2002). Indeed, such power is likely

required for the organization to continue to do its job well. Without power, the organization cannot help itself or those marginalized people or functions it should seek to embrace.

The cases of AAIDD and BP help illuminate aspects of the PPR framework that can be represented under the heading, “the dual role of practitioners.” In this dual role, the PPR practitioner should form alliances, both with those who may be marginalized by the organization and with those who can help empower it. In so doing, practitioners will form alliances with disempowered people, helping the organization act more ethically and communicate more effectively while also lending voice to those who have traditionally been shut out. The AAIDD artifacts demonstrate that this component of the theoretical framework should indeed be retained as part of the new, practical model for PPR.

Strategy

The issue of decisions about whether and how to seek power leads us to our next category for practical PPR, that of strategy. The last three components of the theoretical framework for PPR can be evaluated under this general heading.

In the sixth component of the theoretical framework for PPR, practitioners are called upon to privilege transparency, not the gaining of power, in their public dialogue. At the same time, in the seventh component of the framework, Smudde (2007) acknowledges both the need for strategy and the role of power-knowledge relationships for successful strategic planning. In direct contrast, in the eighth and final component of the theoretical framework for PPR, Ströh (2007) asserts that PPR practitioners should

enter into relationships *without* planned strategies of how they are going to achieve success in those relationships.

These three related, but somewhat contradictory assertions get at what is perhaps the very heart of questions about PPR's practicality. They also bring about the need for a practical resolution to this conflict in theory. As a result, it is in this category where one component of the theoretical framework for PPR is demonstrated to not hold up to the real-world rigors of practical application.

Organizations inevitably are formed with a purpose, be it a nonprofit mission to serve a certain altruistic goal, or a corporation's objective at securing a profit for its investors. Thus, the likelihood that any public relations discourse could be embarked upon without motives for directing the outcome seems quite small. Indeed, if practitioners are to contribute to improving the reputation of the public relations field, aren't they obligated to undertake the planning and strategizing required in order to do their jobs well and advance the goals of the organization?

A look at the case study artifacts provides practical answers to these questions. The issue of AAIDD's name change highlights how even the most altruistic of organizations must inevitably have *raison d'être*—goals and objectives the organization exists to fulfill (e.g., the AAIDD mission). This fact demonstrates that the idea of engaging in discourse without planned strategies for success is not a realistic component for a practical model of PPR.

A look at the artifacts in the AAIDD case demonstrates that PPR can and does accommodate strategic public relations planning. For example, the messages of Address

A-3 are constructed to relate to the intended audience and gain their participation in a course of action that Bersani feels to be right and just. Such attention to audiences suggests that a strategy does, indeed exist. In fact, from a PPR perspective, the absence of such a strategy in Address A-3 would be even more problematic because it would minimize the effectiveness of the communication and therefore the organization's ability to reach its objective. Again, that objective being equal human rights for people with intellectual disabilities, it appears that PPR in practice likely requires strategy and does not reject it.

Letter A-1 also illustrates the need for planned strategies. Because they are not included in the process that Letter A-1 identifies for achieving consensus on the organization's name, self-advocates, although invited to attend events and given more opportunities to speak out, will continue in their disempowered role. In this regard, and in terms of the overall purpose of engaging members in the name change process, Letter A-1 does not meet the PPR theoretical standard for entering into relationships without planned strategies for success. Indeed, the immediate goal of the letter is to garner support for the name change strategy Bradley sets forth. This goal is in keeping with the organization's long-term need to maintain its role as a leader in the field, which it must do in order to effectively carry out its mission.

In further evidence for the need for strategy, although Bersani's Letter A-2 seems to do a better job than Bradley's Letter A-1 at meeting the PPR principle of engaging in relationships without pre-determined strategies for success, it seems likely that Letter A-2 is less likely to help the organization meet its objectives than Letter A-1. Despite its

impassioned plea for what is just and right, Letter A-2 does nothing to build consensus for change among those who may hold differing views from self-advocates. By neglecting to acknowledge those powerful audiences, Bersani may in fact be sowing the seeds for potential dissensus, endangering the organization's success at carrying out its mission. And, since that mission is dedicated in part to securing the human rights of people with intellectual disabilities, it appears that a lack of stakeholder-focused strategy may in fact run counter to the overall goals of PPR.

BP's case also helps inform the question of the role of strategy in a practical PPR practice. As public concern about the environment makes eventual regulation more and more likely, organizations like BP may gain a strategic advantage from early action and a corporate environmentalist approach. By taking action before it is required, BP both makes progress on environmental issues and also maintains its own power so that it can continue to protect its bottom line. And, while BP's profitability benefits its shareholders most directly and significantly, it also seems likely that a successful BP is also more likely to have the resources available to continue in its corporate environmental efforts. For, what company is less likely to invest in environmental efforts than a bankrupt company?

The same argument can be made regarding BP's discourse about its recent accidents and other operational shortcomings. Certainly, BP's *mea culpa* serves a certain strategic purpose, namely, to put these difficulties in the past and continue on in its otherwise successful and responsible efforts. On the other hand, BP's efforts to address those wrongs do appear substantial and sincere, such as its comprehensive new program

for employee safety training, support for surviving families in Texas City, and voluntarily committing to more stringent facility safety standards.

Such a pragmatic understanding of corporate social responsibility may not lead to change as sweeping or satisfying as that advocated by activist groups; nevertheless, BP's corporate environmentalism illustrates how practical PPR would indeed require strategies for corporate success. Thus, the final category for practical PPR, "strategy," retains two principles set forth in the theoretical framework, but rejects the last. On the subject of strategy, then: PPR practitioners will strategically plan discursive actions to support organizational goals based on an informed knowledge of stakeholders.

Theoretical Framework for Practical PPR

To sum up the findings of this evaluation, based upon analysis of the AAIDD and BP cases, a theoretical framework for practical PPR would meet the following guidelines:

1. *Practical relativism:* The PPR practitioner will choose discursive action based on what is in keeping with organizational objectives and what is right and just in the context of a particular event or situation.
2. *Power relations:* The PPR practitioner will be aware of power relations, acknowledging irony and contradiction, and avoiding claims of objectivity.
3. *The dual role of practitioners:* The PPR practitioner will form alliances with those who may be marginalized by the organization and also with those who can help empower it.

4. *Strategy*: PPR practitioners will strategically plan discursive actions that are as transparent as possible, supporting organizational goals based on an informed knowledge of stakeholders.

Conclusions

The present study fills an important need for the advancement of PPR. Up until now, many have theorized about PPR, but very little has been offered in the way of a roadmap for the real-world application of PPR. It is essential that the field move forward, so that the significant amount of theoretical work that has taken place does not languish in library stacks and electronic journal archives, but is instead tested and shown to be relevant in the living, breathing world of public relations practice. Bridging public relations theory with practice will ensure that the significant amount of scholarly effort that has been invested in PPR will bear real, tangible results for the improvement of public relations practice and all those who are affected by it. Toward that end, this thesis research project sought to offer a practical model for the application of postmodern ideas to the practice of public relations. Application of the theoretical framework to real-world public relations practice has yielded answers to the questions about the practical usefulness of what has, until now, been only a theoretical model of PPR.

Research Questions

RQ1 asked, “Can professionals effectively practice PPR while also serving as an activist for disempowered stakeholders?” Analysis of the AAIDD and BP cases demonstrates that public relations practitioners can indeed act as activists for disempowered stakeholders. It is important to note, however, that practitioners have

competing ethical obligations in this sense. While PPR requires that practitioners do what is just and right based on the context of a given situation, the nature of the public relations field also requires practitioners to meet obligations to the organizations they serve.

RQ2 asked, “Can PPR be practiced ethically without imposing new metanarratives?” The impetus for this research question can be found in the circularity of the PPR ideal of avoiding privileging one particular viewpoint over others. As the AAIDD and BP cases demonstrate, this theoretical dilemma is answered by the requirements of real-world practice. For, while PPR must recognize the socially constructed nature of truth and acknowledge that conflict and dissensus will inevitably result from those diverse understandings, the practice of PR on an organization’s behalf would not be possible without a goal, purpose or mission for that organization. And, by agreeing to practice public relations on the organization’s behalf, the practitioner implicitly agrees to uphold that organizational mission. Thus, the practical PPR practitioner will make ethical decisions about how to engage in discourse that meets two criteria: 1) just and right discursive actions based on the context of the situation; and 2) discursive action that contributes to the overall business objectives of the organization. It seems likely that, in the event that both criteria cannot be met, the organization’s objectives are not compatible with PPR. However, examination of the BP case yields insights into how even the most profitable of corporations could engage in PPR by making subtle changes. And, rather than detracting from the organization’s bottom line,

those subtle changes are instead likely to contribute to greater success for the organization as a whole.

RQ3 asked, “Can PPR theory be bridged with public relations practice to reveal the pragmatic side of postmodernism?” Based on the case analyses in this project, a practical model of PPR requires only one significant change from the theoretical, and that is deletion of the assertion that relationships should be initiated without strategies for how the organization will achieve its goals. Instead, the practical model of PPR requires strategy, which is developed based on knowledge of stakeholders.

A Practical Model

The cases of AAIDD and BP demonstrated that organizations can, indeed, engage with stakeholders in ways that coincide with the PPR framework. With the exception of the theoretical PPR principle of engaging in relationships without planned strategies for success, these cases suggest that potential does exist for practical application of PPR. Based upon evaluation of the cases in this project, the practical application of PPR theory could be enacted through the following steps. (A summary of this practical model for PPR is given in Appendix A.)

1) Plan strategically.

For any public relations opportunity, discursive action should be strategically planned to support organizational goals based on an informed knowledge of stakeholders and power relations.

Strategic communication planning is a well-developed area of public relations theory and research. There exist many guides and templates for helping public relations

practitioners to carry out this important function (i.e., Bayerlein, 2005; Ferguson, 1999; Smith, 2004; Smudde, 2000). While the literature on strategic communication planning offers a variety of methods and guidelines, any effective model will include attending to organizational objectives (Shaffer, 1997; Gronstedt, 1997) and stakeholders (Gronstedt, 1997; Likely 2002). Because strategic communication planning practices require attention to stakeholders and the environment, they enable practitioners to carry out the four PPR tenets presented in this research: attending to power relations, developing strategies to support organizational goals based on informed knowledge of stakeholders, enacting ethical relativism, and performing a dual role with regard to activists and the organization.

One model for strategic communication planning is presented in Smudde's (2000) use of rhetorical theory combined with organizational theory to examine General Motors' successful communication response to issues surrounding alleged fuel-system defects of its 1973-1987 C/K pickup trucks. Smudde's (2000) Communication Plan Template guides communication practitioners through strategically planning for a public relations opportunity by defining key messages; key audiences; objectives; goals; strategy; tools, tactics, and methods; critical success factors; leading indicators; a calendar; needed budget and resources; and, finally, evaluation of the plan's effectiveness.

Smudde's (2000) Communication Plan Template contains several steps that would be particularly helpful for the PPR practitioner. On the subject of key audiences for the organization's public relations discourse, Smudde (2000) directs the practitioner to identify key groups of people both inside and outside the organization, their

characteristics, the kinds of things they want to know about the organization, and the ways in which they may be able to help the organization to achieve its objectives. Such attention to stakeholders affected by the organization's discourse will be essential to the practice of PPR, which requires practitioners to develop an informed understanding of stakeholders.

Strategic communication planning can also help practitioners attend to power relations. The previously cited example of Smudde's (2000) Communication Plan template also demonstrates how strategic communication planning requires PPR practitioners to pay attention to conflict and dissensus. Under the heading of "critical success factors," Smudde's (2000, p. 215) Strategic Communication Plan template calls for practitioners to identify opportunities, "occasions where an organization can capitalize on the situation to garner support and build its image" (Smudde, 2000, p. 215); barriers, "opposition to or... restrictions on an organization doing what it believes it should to solve the problem in the way it wants" (Smudde, 2000, p. 215). In doing so, the PPR practitioner will further identify and draw out details about the organization's power relations with the stakeholders identified by noting areas where conflict and dissensus may exist.

Practical relativism is another tenet of PPR set forth in this thesis research report. Strategic communication planning can also help practitioners enact practical relativism. Because strategic communication planning requires close attention to the organization's environment in which the organization carries out its public relations discourse, it can help practitioners to answer PPR's questions about what is right and just in a particular

case. Smudde's (2000) Communication Plan Template again serves as an example in this area. Another of Smudde's (2000) "critical success factors" (p. 215) is that of the environment, or the "business issues that fuel communications" (p. 215). Such attention to the context in which communications are to be carried out will help practitioners identify ethical behaviors based on the particulars of the communications environment.

On the subject of attention to the environment, an additional strength of strategic communication planning and its ability to help enact practical relativism lies in strategic communication planning's recursive nature. Perhaps the most important part of strategic communication planning is evaluating the plan's success and making new plans based on that evaluation. Thus, strategic communication planning is "recursive, because from the time an issue commands an organization's attention and action, public relations practitioners cycle within and throughout the phase any number of times" (Smudde, 2000, p. 168). Thus, strategic communication planning assists PPR practitioners to enact ethical relativism because it accounts for how the communication process stops and starts in sync with the environment.

Finally, PPR also calls for practitioners to take on a dual role, forming alliances with those who may be marginalized by the organization and also with those who can help empower it. This researcher asserts that strategic communication planning also serves to help practitioners to carry out this dual role. First, because it requires attention to key audiences and power relations, strategic communication planning helps the PPR practitioner identify stakeholders who could be marginalized by the organization's discourse as well as those who can help the organization achieve its objectives. Indeed,

the overall process of carrying out a strategic communication plan represents the very essence of the PPR practitioner's dual role.

Despite the many advantages of strategic planning noted above, it is important to note that this step is one that is necessary, but not sufficient on its own, for the practice of PPR. For, while strategic planning requires attention to power relations, it does not necessarily require practitioners to acknowledge irony and contradictions, nor does it require them to avoid claiming objectivity, in their communications. And, while strategic planning helps practitioners gain an understanding of the environment and context for their discourse, it does nothing to help the practitioner settle the question of what might be just or right in any particular context. Thus, two additional steps are needed for the practice of PPR beyond strategic planning.

2) Use awareness of power relations to direct construction of messages.

The PPR practitioner will evaluate messages produced by the organization in order to avoid the creation of new metanarratives, avoiding claims of objectivity, and acknowledging the ironies and contradictions inherent in the organization's discourse.

Part of the strategic communication process is the development of messages that will help public relations to carry out the organization's objectives. The discursive nature of these messages is intended to gain cooperation or support for the organization. Models for strategic communication have clearly detailed how such messages should be constructed. But, PPR adds a new requirement for the practitioner in the construction of those messages: they must avoid making claims of objectivity, and instead acknowledge the contradictions and ironies in their own discourse. Thus, a new element of message-

checking must be added to the strategic communication process. For each message the practitioner develops, the following questions must be asked: “Does this message make claims of objectivity to disempower other stakeholders? Does this message acknowledge the ironies and contradictions inherent in the organization’s discourse?” In so doing, the practitioner will avoid the creation of new metanarratives.

For many practitioners, avoiding the creation of new metanarratives will go a long way toward upholding the postmodern value of ensuring a voice for those who have traditionally been disempowered. But, as is the case with strategic communication planning, this step is necessary but not sufficient for the practice of PPR. Therefore, an additional step is required for the practice of PPR.

3) Use understanding of context to engage in discourse that is right and just.

The PPR practitioner will evaluate messages produced by the organization to ensure that they are fitting with particular ethical circumstances of each situation, and also to ensure they are as transparent as possible. Strategic communication planning helps practitioners assess and meet their ethical obligation to effectively support the objectives of the organizations they serve. But PPR—with its focus on power relations and other stakeholders—offers a more nuanced understanding of that obligation. Thus, the PPR practitioner must add another element to the evaluation of message construction: that of adherence to particular ethical standards based upon the context of the situation. Doing so effectively requires that the messages developed during the strategic planning process be checked for two additional standards: first, they must fit with the particular ethical circumstances of the situation; secondly, they must be as transparent as possible.

The steps provided above offer a practical model to enact what has, up until now, been only a theoretical model for PPR. Theoretical scholars of postmodernism have offered an important basis for the practice of PPR. Indeed, practice is as much a way of thinking as a way of doing. Therefore, practitioners' understanding of PPR should not be limited to going through the motions of the three practical steps listed above. In keeping with the spirit of bridging theory with practice that provided the impetus for this thesis research project, the theoretical framework for PPR presented elsewhere in this report should be used as a way of thinking that guides the practical steps for "doing" outlined in this section.

Practical PPR Applied

Given this project's focus on bridging theory with practice, it is not enough simply to provide the model for PPR above without also addressing how the model could be carried out. The two cases examined in this thesis research report offer appropriate subjects for such an application. Indeed, this project's evaluation of the AAIDD and BP cases revealed exactly how the organizations could effectively implement PPR in their real-world public relations practice.

PPR for AAIDD.

The case of AAIDD revealed that, even for a nonprofit organization dedicated to advocating for the rights of a disempowered minority, issues of power and discourse must be attended to with great care. In several instances, even while communicating about how to make its own discourse as just as possible, individuals with intellectual disabilities seemed to have been left out of the conversation. For example, in Letter A-1, Bradley's

plan for a resolution to the organization's name change vote excluded mention of any involvement in the decision by people with intellectual disabilities. And, while Bersani's Letter A-2 sought to empower the organization's leadership by placing its handling of AAIDD's first name change vote beyond question, it still did not address the irony and contradiction inherent in the fact that people with intellectual disabilities were not invited to vote about the language being chosen to describe them. Both of these omissions were avoidable. The authors of these presidential addresses could have attended to this issue of power by acknowledging dissenting stakeholders and describing the organization's efforts to continue to include those stakeholders in other ways.

The lack of attention to the disempowered stakeholder group of people with intellectual disabilities in the AAIDD presidential letters suggests lack of strategic planning in the creation of these texts. Because this disempowered but important audience was not included in the process that Letter A-1 identified for achieving consensus on the organization's name, people with intellectual disabilities continued in their disempowered role. Letter A-2 also illustrated the need for planned strategies. Although the messages in Bersani's Letter A-2 seemed to suggest the presence of a strategy for the organization's overall handling of the name change process, the lack of acknowledgement of self-advocates in Letter A-2 suggests that AAIDD's discourse on this issue was not well-planned in terms of attention to those disempowered audiences. By neglecting to acknowledge important stakeholder groups, Bersani's Letter A-2 runs the risk of creating dissensus that would endanger the organization's ability to carry out its mission. And, since that mission is dedicated in part to securing the human rights of

people with intellectual disabilities, it appears that a lack of stakeholder-focused strategy may in fact run counter to the overall goals of both PPR and AAIDD.

How would a PPR approach to these communications have differed from what was observed in the AAIDD artifacts? First, a postmodern public relations practice would call for AAIDD to begin with strategic planning for its presidential communications. In doing so, the organization would be forced to consider all audiences, including self-advocates. As a result, the discursive action of the AAIDD presidential letters would be planned to support the organization's goals based on an informed knowledge of stakeholders and power relations. Despite its impassioned plea for what is just and right, Letter A-2 does nothing to build consensus for change among those who may hold differing views from self-advocates.

Secondly, the practical model for PPR would call for AAIDD to evaluate the messages in its communications. In practicing PPR to its practice, AAIDD would examine its presidential communications with attention to avoiding the creation of new metanarratives and claims of objectivity while also acknowledging the ironies and contradictions inherent in the organization's discourse. This would involve acknowledging the power its discourse holds to determine the circumstances of people with intellectual disabilities, pointing out the ironies of AAIDD's ongoing dialogue about, but not always with, those it intends to serve. In so doing, AAIDD could more carefully attend to the power relations inherent in its discourse.

Finally, a PPR practice would call for AAIDD to evaluate the messages in its presidents' letters and addresses to ensure they are fitting with the particular

circumstances of each situation while also ensuring transparency. The artifacts in this case suggested that, perhaps as a function of its altruistic mission, AAIDD probably requires little guidance to make ethical, context-based decisions about its discourse. Indeed, the very purpose of AAIDD's presidential communications was to engage in discourse about what constitutes the most right or just way for the organization to serve people with intellectual disabilities. The organization's mission will continue to provide grounding for its ethical decisions. That being said, performing this third step in the PPR model would help ensure that the organization pays proper attention to the overall communication context while deciding what is, in fact, just and right in keeping with its mission.

PPR for BP.

While AAIDD's case illustrates how context-based, ethical decision-making may be easier for a nonprofit organization, BP's case illustrates the corporate sector's existing strengths in terms of strategic planning. The artifacts examined in this study revealed that, as public concern about the environment have made eventual regulation more and more likely, BP used strategic communication planning to protect its bottom line and thus serve its key stakeholders' interests. Fortunately for other stakeholders, BP's effective communications also serve to benefit others, although to a lesser degree. Clearly, BP's profitability benefits its shareholders most directly and significantly, but BP's financial success also makes it more likely to have the resources available to continue in its corporate environmental efforts. Therefore, the first PPR step would be easy for BP to

implement; the organization would have to continue in its current strategic approach to communication planning.

That is not to say that BP is already meeting all the requirements for the practice of PPR. For a profit-driven organization as BP, implementing the second and third steps of the PPR model would require an intentional effort. Specifically, with regard to BP's CEO letters, the second step of the PPR model would call for the company to evaluate the messages in its CEO letters to avoid claims of objectivity and the establishment of new metanarratives. This is an area in which BP's communications currently do not meet the standards for PPR. The clearest example of this shortcoming can be seen in Hayward's Letter C-3, introducing BP's annual Statistical Review of World Energy. Hayward's Letter C-3 claims BP's authority to present this report, presents the data as objective, and then proceeds to use the data to support BP's own bottom-line driven objective of continuing to focus its business primarily on securing and marketing its highly profitable but carbon-emitting fossil fuels. Furthermore, while all of the BP artifacts examined in this analysis addressed climate change to some degree, none acknowledged the many ironies and contradictions inherent in a petroleum company's discourse about the environment.

If BP enacted PPR, the company would have to evaluate the messages in its CEO communications to ensure that irony and contradiction are acknowledged, and that objectivity and truth claims are avoided. That is not to say BP should not continue to produce statistical reports on energy, or claim authority to speak on climate change issues. But, from the PPR perspective, BP should avoid editorializing about the statistics

in the same publication that presents them as “objective. Neither would PPR call for BP to stop engaging in discourse on climate change. Instead, PPR would simply require that BP’s CEO communications engage in such discourse while also acknowledging its bottom line-driven motivations for doing so. Such a frank acknowledgement of that motivation and its effect on the organization’s discourse is likely to strike audiences as both surprising and refreshing.

Finally, the third step for enacting PPR would require BP to evaluate the messages in these CEO communications to ensure that they are fitting with particular ethical circumstances of each situation, and also to ensure they are as transparent as possible. Because BP already has in place a corporate value regarding integrity, the company has the tools in place to help determine what is right and just in particular situations. But, PPR would require BP to pay closer attention to each particular situation where that corporate standard is applied. In doing so, BP likely would need to become even more transparent in its communications. It could do so by describing its failures, such as the Prudhoe Bay oil spill, in more detail, and by exposing some of the factors that caused the failures. Rather than attempting to neatly wrap up every aspect and activity of the organization within the “sustainability” message, then, BP would focus on transparency and integrity in each unique situation.

Clearly, as demonstrated in the discussion of the AAIDD and BP cases above, public relations can indeed make practical use of PPR. Following the three steps of the model for PPR would result in communication that is both more ethical and more effective. As a result, organizations enacting PPR stand to become more successful in

reaching their organizational goals while also treating other, less powerful stakeholders in ways that are just and right.

One Practitioner's Perspective

In addition to academic study of public relations and postmodernism, this researcher brings her own, practical experiences to the study of postmodern public relations. This researcher's experiences, both as a scholar and as a practitioner having served organizations similar in nature to both AAIDD and BP, provided the impetus for this project. Based on her own experiences as a scholar, this researcher became interested in the idea of PPR as a theory with great promise that had yet to be realized for the practice of the field. And, based on her more than eight years' experience as a practitioner working for both a developmental disability service organization and an energy company, this researcher believes that a theory-based approach such as that of PPR can indeed make public relations practice more effective and more ethical.

Counter Arguments

One possible argument to the use of practical PPR may come from the relatively recent movement toward "post-postmodernism." Some theorists have put forth the idea of post-postmodernism in an attempt to address the more challenging features of post-modernism, such as its focus on cultural differences and its (in some ways circular) rejection of meta-narratives.

A common criticism of postmodernism is related to its attention to differences. When we embrace the postmodern idea that reality is based in cultural contexts, we are then expected to embrace and value diversity. But, according to Braidotti (2005), a

negative result of this shift can be the co-opting of diversity, resulting in a new path for the powerful to maintain their position, as well as “a vampiric consumption of ‘others’” (Braidotti, 2005, p. 170).

Another post-postmodern criticism, this one from the field of human development, focuses on postmodernism’s apositivistic approach to knowledge and truth. “Once truth is relative to a system then there is no way of judging the truth of the system itself, and no ground for making one commitment rather than another,” asserts Leicester (2000, p. 77). In essence, Leicester’s (2000) problem with postmodernism is its circular nature: “The postmodernist implicitly seeks to state a ‘grand truth’ which, on her own terms, cannot be done” (p. 78). Furthermore, post-postmodernists argue, postmodernism’s relativism can open the door not just to differing perspectives of morality, but to outright immoral practices and “totalitarian political systems where might defines right, at least as well as anything defines it” (Kahn & Lourençais, 1999, p.103).

A remedy to this dilemma, assert Leicester (2000) and others (c.f. Kahn & Lourençais, 1999), is a return to the more certain epistemologies of modernity. Kahn and Lourençais (1999) write, “It is our hope that postmodernity—for those who believe that that is where we are—will give way to the post-postmodern era: modernity itself, reinvigorated” (Kahn & Lourençais, 1999, p.92). Leicester (2000) suggests we can avoid postmodernism’s “incoherence” by adopting a form of “limited relativism” that avoids both the transcendental truth claims of modernism and the self-contradiction of postmodernism (p. 78).

It seems doubtful, however, that this proposed “post-postmodern” solution truly constitutes a truly “post”-worthy paradigm shift. In fact, such a simplistic, dualistic approach to the relationship between the modern and postmodern instead seems to be based on a somewhat confused or incomplete understanding of postmodernism. Postmodern writers recognize postmodernism as being rooted in modernism, rather than the next “great idea” in some continual march toward intellectual advancement. Thus, the supposedly new ideas espoused by “post-postmodernists” really only represent what postmodernists have long considered to be the inseparable nature of the modern and the postmodern.

Perhaps a more accurate prefix for an approach to addressing concerns about postmodernism is not yet another “post” at all, but the “practical.” It is important to note, however, the emphasis that the present research places on the practical for in its examination of PPR. In fact, it seems the aforementioned concerns about relativism and the potential co-opting of differences point to exactly why a practical model is needed for PPR. The practical model for PPR effectively addresses these so-called “post-postmodern” concerns because it requires ethical grounding and guidelines such as those offered by professional codes of ethics, as well as attention to power relations in one’s own use of discourse.

Another possible counter argument to PPR lies in the model’s use of practical relativism. To be sure, the word “relativism” will raise red flags for some readers of this report. One of the biggest issues surrounding the idea of relativism is the concern that, lacking predetermined guidelines and standards, even the most aberrant behaviors could

be justified in certain particular circumstances. Frankena (1973) provides the label “act-deontology” for this approach. In act deontology, both acts and their consequences are weighted “to determine ethical action, relying on rigorous application of concepts of duty, justice, and rights” (Curtin & Boynton, 2001, p. 412). Frankena (1973) points to the danger in taking such an approach: “It offers us no standard whatsoever for determining what is right or wrong in particular cases” (Frankena, 1973, p. 23). Frankena (1973) continues on to say that, in effect, act-deontology “gives no guidance whatsoever, for merely looking at the facts does not tell one what to do if one does not also have some aim, ideal, or norm to go by” (p. 23). Curtin and Boynton (2001) add, “This approach is inherently difficult to apply” (p. 412). In light of concerns that such an act-deontological approach is both lacking in the provision of guidance and difficult to enact, it is important to note that the model for PPR given in this report differs from act-deontology. The key difference lies in the fact that PPR is predicated on the practical and informed by theory.

In real-world practice, rhetors cannot retain their discursive power if they continuously violate the ethical standards imposed upon them. These standards include laws, professional codes of ethics, corporate values and ethical guidelines as given in personnel handbooks. These code-based systems, which Frankena (1973) would label as “rule-deontology,” rely on standards consisting “of a number of rather specific rules like those of telling the truth, or keeping agreements, each one saying that we always ought to act in a certain way in a certain kind of situation” (p. 23). Curtin and Boynton (2001) offer examples of rule deontology including “the Golden Rule, the Ten Commandments,

or a professional code of ethics” (p. 412). The existence of these codes provides practical grounding for PPR’s context-focused theoretical orientation.

The cases of AAIDD and BP provide evidence for the feasibility of PPR’s practical relativism. In the AAIDD artifacts, the organizations make frequent reference to the organization’s mission and values, which direct its members to protect the rights of people with intellectual disabilities. Thus, while the implications of the organization’s name change may be different in various contexts, the moral code necessitated by the organization’s very existence provides direction for what the organization should do. Similarly, BP’s discourse is also guided by organizational values. The company expects all of its employees to comply with its code of conduct, which requires integrity of all its employees in areas including health, safety, security and the environment (BP, 2006b). Furthermore, public relations practitioners in both organizations are expected to comply with professional standards, including the PRSA (2000) and IABC (n.d.) codes of ethics, which call for transparency and fairness in public relations practice.

PPR is both practical and informed by theory, allowing for context-based decision making that also complies with standards for what is right and just. The real-world cases presented in this report provide strong support for the feasibility of a practical model of PPR. They provide a more nuanced understanding of how, for public relations, doing what is right in a particular situation necessarily requires attention to the ethical codes and organizational goals present in the context of any particular case. In this way, the PPR practitioner honors postmodernism’s rejection of metanarratives while also meeting real-world expectations for ethical practice.

Limitations

Clearly, the model for practical PPR set forth in this report is limited in that it is, as of yet, untested in industry settings. However, this project has shown that the PPR framework can be bridged with practice to provide useful case analyses. There is every reason that it should be used in the planning of future public relations actions (cf. Smudde, 2004, 2007a). Further research should be conducted to test the Practical PPR model's usefulness in situations where public relations practitioners overtly employ it. Such testing through real-world application would reveal the model's true usefulness and usability.

Another limitation of this study may be found in the difficulty of attributing particular discursive acts to organizational motives. A tenet of PPR is that practitioners must pay attention to what is right and just in each particular situation. Unfortunately, without interviewing the rhetors in any given situation, it is not always possible to say with certainty whether the communication strategies employed were developed with concern for what was right and just in the situation. That being said, this researcher would assert that it is likely much more clear when an organization decides to act *without* regard for justice and fairness. And, while any isolated discursive act may well appear motivated by fairness and justice by mere accident even if the organization acts on other motivations, it is not likely that such accidents will continue to occur regularly. Thus, it seems likely that thorough, careful analysis of an organization's actions across multiple situations can reasonably be expected to make accurate assumptions about the organization's motivations.

Contribution to Theory and Practice

PPR requires practitioners to take a new look at previously accepted universal, prescriptive approaches to public relations such as that set forth in Excellence Theory. As we reconsider these concepts with a postmodern focus on communication context, we begin to see how the universal approach to PR prescribed by Excellence Theory in fact results not in symmetry, but an engineered form of consent for the benefit of the organization. The alternative proposed in this thesis project, a practical approach to PPR, offers practitioners a means to continue working for the benefit of the organization, but in a way that is more just, effective and fair.

The practical model for PPR set forth in this thesis research project contributes to both theory and practice of PPR. By answering questions about the circular nature of PPR's relativism and addressing the real-world requirements associated with organizational objectives, the practical model for PPR resolves questions about the theoretical framework for PPR and bridges theory with practice, providing a roadmap for the real-world application of PPR. The model also advances the field of public relations by helping it keep up with current ideas in other fields.

The work undertaken in this research project appropriately examines and evaluates the practicality of PPR. The comprehensive literature provided a solid foundation for the theoretical framework for PPR. This framework provided a system of thought to serve as a framework for a rhetorical criticism of two current cases of public relations practice. Applying this theoretical framework to real-world public relations

practice has yielded answers to the identified research questions about the practical usefulness of what has, until now, been only a theoretical model of PPR.

Perhaps most importantly for practitioners, practical postmodern public relations offers guidance for how practitioners can ethically and effectively engage in discursive actions while also acknowledging the importance of activists for the success of the organization. In this dual role, practitioners will help organizations to both maintain discursive power and wield it in ways that meet society's ethical expectations.

In conclusion, while the proposed model for practical PPR requires further research and refinement, the findings of the present report represent significant progress toward a practical model of PPR that derives directly from theory and is directly applicable to industry. As such, the present research contributes to the continued relevance of the academy and improved public relations outcomes for organizations, enabling both to better prepare for challenges and changes yet to come.

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Appendix A

Steps for the Practical Application of Postmodern Public Relations

1) Plan strategically.

For any public relations opportunity, discursive action should be strategically planned to support organizational goals based on an informed knowledge of stakeholders and power relations.

2) Use awareness of power relations to direct construction of messages.

The PPR practitioner will evaluate messages produced by the organization, avoiding the creation of new metanarratives and claims of objectivity while also acknowledging the ironies and contradictions inherent in the organization's discourse.

3) Use understanding of context to engage in discourse that is right and just.

The PPR practitioner will evaluate messages produced by the organization to ensure that they are fitting with particular ethical circumstances of each situation, and also to ensure they are as transparent as possible.