

Peer-Reviewed Article

# The Status of Diversity Research in Public Relations: An Analysis of Published Articles

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**Abstract:** This study analyzes diversity research in public relations scholarship through a content analysis of published articles between 1990 and 2016. It aims to understand the status of diversity research and identify directions for future inquiry. Findings suggest that the field of public relations needs to go beyond studies of gender, race, and ethnicity in terms of diversity issues, to correspond with broader categories of people and communicate effectively with their diverse publics. Scholars need to include topics that include diversity in their curriculum and prepare students to communicate with diverse audiences.

**Keywords:** Diversity; Inclusion; Public relations; Trend studies; Peer-reviewed public relations articles.

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## 1. Introduction

As the population in countries around the world has become more diverse, diversity has become increasingly essential as a topic of scholarship. Countries such as Brazil, France, and Canada have laws protecting women, people with disabilities, and socioeconomically disadvantaged groups. There are four official languages in Singapore and people celebrate all the various religious/festive days (Heggertveit-Aoudia, 2011). Fifty-four percent of the U.S. population will consist of minorities by 2050 (Thomas et al., 2008) and U.S. companies are slowly developing gender diversity in their boards (Thompson, 2019). To reflect this change, public relations professionals communicate with groups that differ in gender, ethnicity, culture, power, and class and seek relationships not only with local publics but with global publics who differ in literacy, religion, poverty, technology, and language (Toth, 2009). This rapid change requires public relations professionals to correspond with diverse groups so they can communicate efficiently with their publics (Wills, 2020).

Several attempts have been made to improve diversity in the field. For example, in 2000, the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) initiated the National Diversity Initiative, and for six years the PR Council and *PRWeek* have partnered to honor those who served as a model for others to follow, facilitating greater diversity and inclusion in organizations. Likewise, as diversity issues have gained more attention in scholarship, a wider range of studies have covered these topics. For example, Jiang et al. (2016) investigated the current status and practices of members of the Arthur W. Page Society to help the public relations industry embrace diversity. Brown et al. (2016) also examined the collegiate development of public relations students to uncover any differences based on race, and gender and diversity rose to inclusion in the top 10 important topics of public relations research in 2016 (Kochhar, 2017). However, scholars (e.g., Hazleton & Sha, 2012; Sha & Ford, 2007) have called for more studies to examine diversity issues in public relations because defining diversity is still problematic (Jiang et al., 2016). Earlier studies used the term “difference” more often than diversity and focused on different components. Specifically, Pompper (2005) analyzed diversity as

“difference by race, ethnicity, and culture” (p. 140), whereas Sha and Ford (2007) focused on differences by age, gender, religious beliefs, veteran status, and other attributes. Recently, the definition has been expanding because it has become important to consider more factors such as race, gender, personality, and perspective to create an inclusive culture (Wills, 2020). Scholars (e.g., Bardhan, 2016; Kochhar, 2016) have started to embrace the term “diversity,” but this term is also defined differently from scholar to scholar. There is still no universally accepted definition of diversity. Therefore, this study attempts to provide a constructive definition of diversity and inclusively defines diversity in a way that represents all categories of people across all aspects. As Wills (2020) has emphasized, having a clear definition is important to integrate diversity into the organizational culture and the field of public relations.

Although the number of studies covering diversity in public relations scholarship has been increasing, a systematic literature review of academic articles has not been conducted. A systematic literature review of diversity-related academic articles helps scholars see the results of diversity research for the benefit of current and future studies (Tomasello, 2001). Thus, this study can identify research directions for public relations scholars in the area of diversity. It remains unclear, however, how studies examining diversity in public relations have evolved and the current stage of diversity studies. Because the public relations industry has started to pay more attention to diversity issues (Wills, 2020) identifying the current stage of diversity studies can also help public relations scholars to improve current public relations education by identifying what topics are missing in the curriculum. This will not only help students to improve their knowledge about diversity issues in the field but also help the public relations industry to have practitioners who have knowledge about the challenges of communication with diverse publics. Therefore, this study analyzes published articles on diversity to understand the status of diversity research, identify directions for future inquiry, and to formulate a constructive definition of diversity. This study focuses on the type of diversity, research topics, the definition of diversity, and the role of public relations in diversity issues in scholarship.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Defining diversity

While the term diversity has several interpretations, it is often defined by its focus on differences based on demographic categories, identities, cultural distinctions, power, etc. For example, Riccucci (2003) emphasized that as a subject of managerial concern, diversity arises from federal equal employment opportunity and affirmative action initiatives. Sha and Ford (2007) defined diversity as a representation category of people based on differences that cannot be changed (age, race, etc.) with differences that can be (language, religion, etc.). Clearly, researchers have stated numerous dimensions for demographic categories, and some have differentiated the effects of diversity depending on cultural, physical, inherent and immutable, or role-related differences (Ely & Thomas, 2001). Therefore, uncertainty remains concerning a constructive definition of diversity.

Defining different categories of people is a fundamental process in constructing a comprehensive and inclusive definition of diversity. The term *race* is a “geographic pattern of variation in some biological traits that distinguish different human populations” (Annemone, 2011, p. 5). Even if religion, language, and nationality are important parts of human culture, their effects on human biology are small. Accordingly, Annemone (2011) believes that they should not be addressed in the same context as the concept of race because it is an important idea in diversity issues, especially in the workplace. For example, African American public relations professionals have acknowledged that they have experienced discrimination in their careers and cannot rise to top positions because of their race (Tindall, 2009).

*Ethnicity*, however, is about cultural differentiation. An ethnic group consists of people who have a common cultural background embedded in language and religion (Konrad et al., 2006). This definition demonstrates that concepts of culture, language, and religion can be subcategories of ethnicity.

*Culture* is broadly defined as “the process by which meaning is produced, circulated, consumed, commodified, and endlessly reproduced and renegotiated in society” (Curtin & Gaither, 2007, p. 35).

*Language* is “a set of sentences, each finite in length, and constructed out of a finite set of elements” (Chomsky, 1957, p. 13). This component is important to build dialogue with locals (such as citizens, residents) and non-locals (such as international visitors, non-residents). For instance, Louhiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta (2012) emphasized that language issues need to be addressed because of globalization. They suggested characterizing a new language that differs from Standard English for international communication that can share knowledge and construct trust more effectively. For example, international communication in a business context could have a version of English known as Business Lingua Franca (BELF).

There is widespread disagreement about the definition of *religion*. The most notable attempted definitions fall within three basic categories: intellectual, affective, and functional (Harrison, 2006). Intellectual definitions focus on a belief about a sort of object (Harrison, 2006), whereas affective definitions consider faith and are about “inner feelings, attitudes, or existential orientations” (Harrison, 2006, p. 136). A functional definition of religion focuses on the search for emotional comfort, meaning, self-development, and physical health (Pargament, 2002). Having analyzed organized religion’s use of public relations functions and the use of religion for public relations purposes, Lamme (2011) stated that the importance of the relationship between religion and public relations has increased over time.

*Gender* is defined as the relationship between biological sex and behavior. It refers to the socially constructed roles and behaviors that are considered appropriate for men and women (Udry, 1994; WHO, n.d.). Studies of diversity issues mostly focus on gender. For example, scholars have developed gender theory (Aldoory & Toth, 2002), and they also have aimed to increase awareness of gender issues in organizations (e.g., Tindall & Waters, 2012).

The term *minority* is considered to be a group of people differentiated from the social majority in social sciences. The differentiation can be based on human characteristics such as ethnicity, race, and religion (Barzilai, 2010).

In addition to the above-mentioned terms, this study also examines the functional definition of *disability*, which focuses on a person’s functional limitations (Gronvik, 2007) because most studies about disability in public relations scholarship have focused on people’s functional limitations (ICDR, 2006; Singer, 1998).

No consensus exists about the definition of *class*. The Marxist conception defines class as a group of people with a common relationship to the structures of political and economic power within a particular society. The Weberian conception defines class as a group of people who are labelled according to common socio-economic indicators (Grant, 2001, p. 161). Under these definitions, economy is the common term. In this study, the term “class” does not just describe people of the same economic status but also people of the same social, educational, and power status.

This study also considers *intersectionality* when identifying different categories of people because this term indicates that individuals have more than one social identity. Crenshaw (1991) introduced this interdisciplinary term and indicated the importance of the interaction of multiple identities in

the construction of social worlds. Moreover, Vardeman-Winter and Tindall (2010) introduced the significance of intersectional approaches to publics in public relations because intersectional approaches provide deeper understanding of the characteristics of publics and help to improve the quality of messaging strategies by filling the gaps in current segmentation strategies (Vardeman-Winter, et al., 2013).

## 2.2 Diversity in public relations

With demographic changes and communication technology, the influence of diverse groups has accelerated within the domestic and international practice of public relations. Ravazzani (2006) emphasized that a principal task for public relations professionals consists of reflecting on the complexity of the environment and understanding different attitudes, values, and expectations. Wakefield (2007) stated that public relations professionals face even greater diversity and need to operate “across different time zones, with different values, within different political, economic and social systems and with varying media constraints” (p. 141). Therefore, professionals need to build relationships with diverse publics who differ in nationality, literacy, language, ideology, technology, and other aspects.

Organizations are more effective when they are diverse enough to deal with and invest in the diversity of their internal and external environments (Hon & Brunner, 2009). As global industry becomes more competitive, U.S. companies have started to perceive the importance of hiring a culturally diverse and globally connected workforce (Tsetsura, 2011). Grunig et al. (1992) and Hon and Brunner (2009) emphasized that diversity helps organizations identify their various strategic publics and have productive relationships with them.

Diversity issues have long been emphasized in public relations scholarship. Dozier et al. (1995) stated that public relations is more effective when the organization’s culture supports gender and cultural diversity. Choi and Hon (2002) suggested that organizations need to increase the number of women in power positions and change their value systems related to gender. Subsequently, the Public Relations Coalition (2005) published a report which identifies three areas – recruiting, mentoring, and advocacy – for improving ethnic and gender diversity in any public relations organization. However, scholars indicated that public relations scholarship was not diverse in its early stage. For example, Pompper (2004) indicated the dominance of whites based in the U.S. in the field. Pompper and Ertem-Eray (2018) mentioned that the history section of most public relations textbooks does not mention any women at all beyond Doris E. Fleischman<sup>1</sup>.

Although scholars have investigated diversity in the field, the scope of the studies has been relatively limited (Sha & Ford, 2007) to gender, ethnicity, and race issues (e.g., Aldoory, 2005; Brown et al., 2011; Edwards, 2010; Gower, 2001; Munshi & Edwards, 2011). Some studies have analyzed published articles to understand different types of diversity. For example, Pompper (2005) focused on race, ethnicity, and culture by analyzing two journals: *Public Relations Review* and *Journal of Public Relations Research*. Likewise, analyzing the same journals, Grunig (2006) examined feminist theory. These studies have focused on specific diversity types, whereas this study analyzes diversity types more inclusively and expands the journals examined. A few studies (e.g., Bardhan, 2016) focused on diversity trends in published articles. The broader and more inclusive concept of diversity still needs to be addressed. Although this study shares some similarities with Bardhan’s (2016) study (e.g., both studies focus on diversity topics), this study differs from hers at some points. For example, she addressed only Gallicano’s (2013) study as an academic article for future suggestions, whereas this

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<sup>1</sup> Doris E. Fleischman was married to Edward Bernays and has been considered his “ghostwriter” at the firm they ran in partnership during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Pompper & Ertem-Eray, 2018). She also described public relations as a possible career for women (Creedon, 1989).

study reviews all articles published between 1990 and 2016 in the eight journals in public relations. In this regard, this study is more comprehensive. Bardhan's (2016) study primarily focused on the industry, whereas the current study only includes academic research. Furthermore, this study follows her suggestion about the definition of diversity and attempts to construct a broader definition of diversity, one that comprises more than race, ethnicity, and gender.

### 2.3 Research questions

A goal of a trend study is to explore the state of research about a specific topic, to assess the development of that research topic, and to comprehend the future directions of that research topic in a specific field. Such studies help the field understand future directions to improve knowledge about a specific topic (Cho & Khang, 2006). Therefore, the term “*trend*” means a general aspect of a specific topic during a specific time period in this study. Scholars have examined different topics in published articles such as the organization-public relationship research (Ki & Shin, 2006), crisis communication research (An & Cheng, 2007), and corporate social responsibility research (Lee, 2017). However, no comprehensive trend study has been conducted on the topic of diversity. To fill the gap, this study examines the trends of published articles focused on diversity in public relations. Therefore, this study proposes the following research questions:

*RQ.1: What are the trends of diversity research in published articles in public relations peer-reviewed journals?*

Identifying individual scholars and universities that focus on diversity research in the public relations field can provide knowledge of contributors to this type of research. Knowing the affiliation of authors especially helps young scholars and graduate students who are interested in diversity related research in terms of networking, employment, and selection of universities (Cho & Khang, 2006). This leads to the second research question:

*RQ.2: What are the names and affiliations of authors who have studied diversity issues in public relations?*

A constructive definition of diversity is not yet available. For instance, participants of Jiang et al.'s (2016) study hesitated to define diversity and stated that people still tend to focus on the color of a person's skin when defining diversity. Hon and Brunner (2009) emphasized that some of the debate surrounding diversity may come from the vagueness of the term. Therefore, the third research question of the current study is:

*RQ.3: What is a comprehensive and prevalent definition of diversity in public relations?*

Suggestions from future studies can help understand the directions public relations should take. For example, promoting from a diverse pool of candidates (Groysburg & Connolly, 2013) or recruiting people who are diverse based on various combinations of race, ethnicity, and gender has been shown to be an important step to demonstrate a commitment to diversity in public relations. However, recruiting diverse people is just an initial step (Gallicano, 2013). Bardhan (2016) stated that if there are no changes in the realm of diversity, the public relations profession will fall behind other sectors, and its lack of diversity will be increasingly questioned. Therefore, the fourth research question is:

*RQ.4: What are some suggestions for improving the level of diversity in the public relations field?*

### 3. Method

This study examined diversity research through a content analysis of published articles in public relations peer-reviewed journals. Analyzing the content of published articles is an effective and

popular method for understanding the development of academic research in a field (Riffe & Freitag, 1997).

### 3.1 Article selection

The sample for this study consists of articles addressing diversity in public relations peer-reviewed journals from 1990 to 2016. The year 1990 was selected as a start date because that was the year a broad review of academic research on diversity in the public relations profession revealed some noticeable trends (Bardhan, 2016; Edwards, 2015). In addition, the multicultural communications committee started in the 1990s as a part of PRSA (Sha, 2013). This study considers diversity in public relations research that focuses on gender, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT), religious, race/ethnicity, and disabilities because definitions of diversity in the field include these terms as dimensions. Articles covering work culture, organizational culture, and the like were excluded unless the context emphasized the differences among cultural groups (see Figure 1).

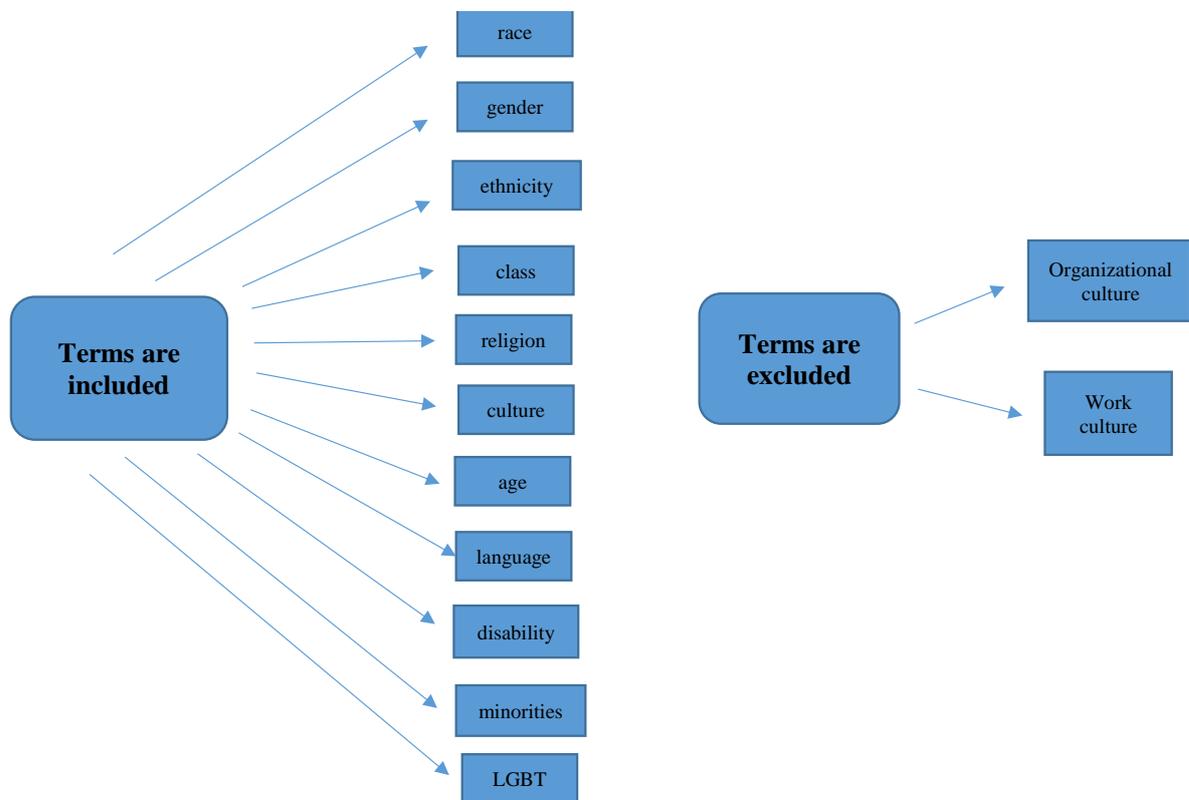


Figure 1. Inclusion and Exclusion Search Strategy.

Multiple steps were taken to locate the relevant articles. First, this study reviewed the following three journals—*Public Relations Review* (PRR), *Journal of Public Relations Research* (JPRR), and articles indexed as public relations in *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* (JMCO) because these are considered leading journals in the field and used to analyze the status of public relations research in other topical areas (e.g., Pasadeos et al., 1999; Ye & Ki, 2012). Second, several journals that have been recognized as important players (Bartlett, 2011; Ki et al., 2019) were examined: *Journal of Communication Management* (JCM), *International Journal of Strategic Communication* (IJSC), and *Corporate Communications: An International Journal* (CCIJ). Last, this study included the *Public Relations Journal* (PRJ) and *Public Relations Inquiry* (PRI) because these journals have seen increased significance in public relations scholarship in recent years (Lee, 2017).

To locate the articles on diversity across the eight journals, the authors initially reviewed titles, abstracts, and introductions. Once an article was identified as diversity-related, the entire article was

reviewed and analyzed for detailed diversity issue coverage. Relevant articles were retrieved from authors' affiliated universities' databases. Full-length published research articles and "research in brief" articles in *Public Relations Review* were analyzed. Editorials, book reviews, commentary, and responses were excluded because they are not peer-reviewed articles. One of the authors and one graduate student served as coders to conduct analysis using Microsoft Excel. Each article was coded into categories in accordance with its publication date in chronological order. For analysis, "Data → Sort" in the Excel function was used for each category to identify the names of the authors, their affiliations, types of diversity researched, research topics, theoretical framework research methods, and sample type. If an article contained a definition, that definition also was coded into the Excel file, and this study's authors identified the similarities and differences in those definitions by looking at the key components of the definitions. The same process was followed for the suggestions of future research. If the article contained suggestions for future research, these suggestions were coded according to their focus, such as education, development of theory, and going beyond gender.

### 3.2 Measures

Each article was coded based on the following categories: (1) general information, (2) definitions of diversity, (3) types of diversity, (4) research topics, (5) theoretical framework, (6) research methods and type of sample, and (7) suggestions for the future. We used categories similar to those used by previous trend studies in the public relations field (Ha & Boynton, 2014; Lee, 2017; Ye & Ki, 2012). Several categories were added, such as types of diversity. Some articles represented more than one subcategory, especially in the category for types of diversity. Each category is described briefly as follows:

- (1) General information: the name of the journal was coded to guide scholars to a possible outlet to submit their manuscript about diversity; and the year published helped us identify diversity research trends.

The articles were coded based on the names of the authors and their affiliations, which were useful for identifying scholars and affiliated universities with diversity research in addition to monitoring the degree of variety among contributors (Ye & Ki, 2012).

- (2) Definitions of diversity: If an article contained a definition of diversity, the definition was coded to demonstrate the constructive definition of diversity.
- (3) Types of diversity: We coded diversity types according to gender, race, ethnicity, class/power, disability, age, and minority. We coded culture, language, and religion in the ethnicity category because the definition of ethnicity (Konrad et al., 2006) states that they are subcategories of ethnicity.
- (4) Research topics:
  - Diversity groups' perception, attitudes, and beliefs (how they rate their relationships, policies, and other groups' behaviors toward them);
  - Majority perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs about diversity groups (how people and companies perceive diversity groups, locate them in organizations, and evaluate the policies about them);
  - Effects of diversity group/type (impacts of diversity groups on communication strategies, how changes within an organization are influenced by diversity groups);

- Role of public relations (what public relations departments do about diversity issues in organizations, how public relations professionals act towards diverse employees, how public relations professionals solve conflicts/crises about diversity);
  - Role of diversity group/type (what diversity groups do to change/improve behaviors, policies about them).
- (5) Theoretical framework: This refers to whether there are explicit theoretical linkages in an article. If a specific theory was mentioned, the name of the theory was coded (Ha & Boynton, 2014).
- (6) Research methods and sample type: By coding the research methods, we could determine which methods were used frequently in diversity research in the field. Research methods were coded into three categories: quantitative methods (i.e., surveys, content analysis), qualitative methods (i.e., discourse analysis, in-depth interviews), and mixed methods (Lee, 2017).

The following types of samples were coded to indicate the source from which the authors collected data: general publics, public relations professionals/scholars, students, media articles/magazines, academic journal articles, mixed, and others (Ha & Boynton, 2014).

- (7) Suggestions for future research: We coded each article according to its future research suggestions. This information could offer a direction of future research agendas in diversity research (Ye & Ki, 2012).

### 3.3 Intercoder Reliability

Twenty-one articles, representing approximately 10% of the total articles, were randomly selected to test intercoder reliability. By using Scott's Pi, this study found acceptable levels for each category. Scott's Pi was 1.0 for general information and definitions of diversity, .85 for types of diversity, .81 for research topics, .93 for theoretical framework, .85 for research methods, and .84 for types of sample.

## 4. Findings and Discussion

### 4.1 Trend of diversity articles in the public relations field

In response to RQ1, this study found that a total of 207 articles addressed a diversity topic. As indicated in Figure 2, 81 (39.1%) were published in *Public Relations Review (PRR)*, 48 (23.1%) in *Journal of Public Relations Research (JPRR)*, 24 (11.5%) in *Public Relations Journal (PRJ)*, 17 (8.2%) in *Journal of Communication Management (JCM)*, 12 (5.8%) in *Public Relations Inquiry (PRI)*, 12 (5.8%) in *Corporate Communications: An International Journal (CCIJ)*, nine (4.3%) in *International Journal of Strategic Communication (IJSC)*, and four (1.9%) in *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly (JMCQ)*. Two reasons explain the high proportion of articles published in *PRR*. First, in comparison with European journals such as *JCM* and *CCIJ*, *PRR* has a longer history. Second, it publishes significantly more articles in each issue than does any other journal examined. For example, *PRR* published 4.6 times more articles than *JCM* and 4.4 times more articles than *JPRR* between 2010 and 2015 ( $n = 615$  for *PRR*,  $n = 132$  for *JCM*, and  $n = 138$  for *JPRR*).

The quantity of diversity research has continuously increased between 1990 and 2016. Forty-two articles (20.25%) were published between 1990 and 2000, 68 (32.9%) between 2000 and 2010, and 97 (46.6%) between 2010 and 2016. The largest number of articles (22 articles) was published in 2011 and 2013.

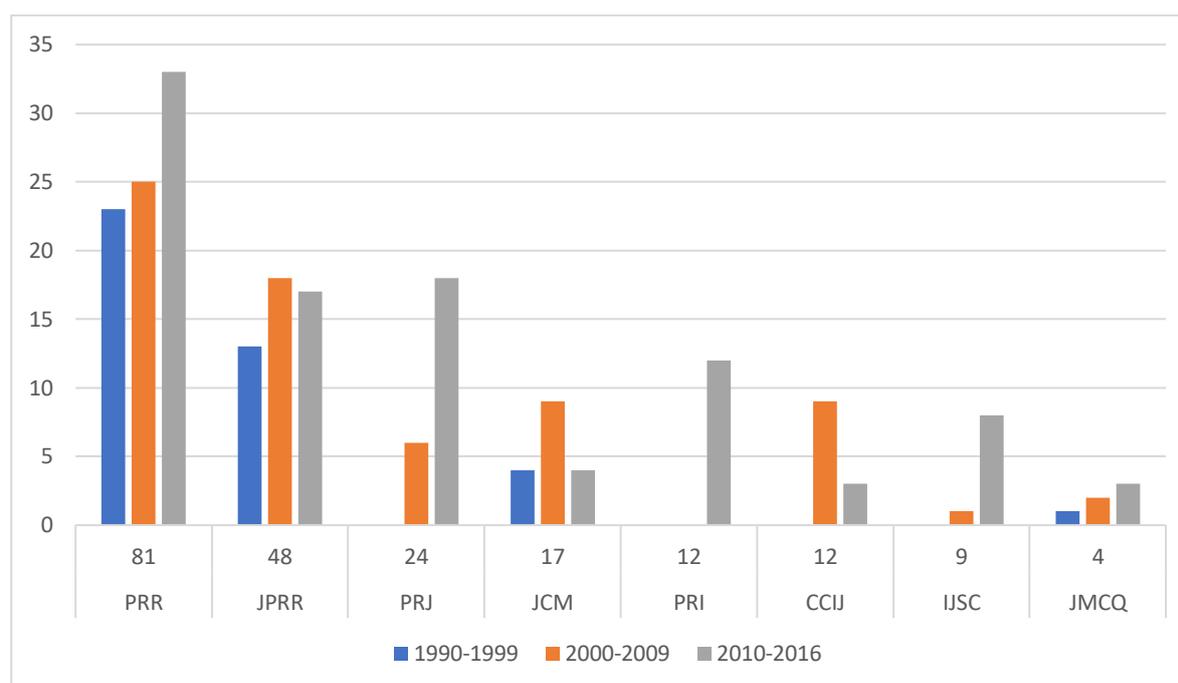


Figure 2. *The Number of Public Relations Articles about Diversity in 1990–2016.*

#### 4.2 Authors and institutions

Regarding RQ2 which asked the authorship and institutions of diversity research, a few productive scholars are noteworthy: Elizabeth Toth (10 articles), Larissa Grunig (seven articles), and Linda Aldoory (six articles) have mostly focused on gender issues. Bey-Ling Sha (six articles) has investigated different types of diversity such as age, culture, and gender. Tiffany D. Gallicano (six articles) examined diversity in general or millennials. Donnalyn Pompper and Katerina Tsetsura (five articles respectively), Linda Hon and Pamela Creedon (four articles respectively) are scholars who also have frequently studied gender issues. Krishnamurthy Sriramesh (four articles) has specialized in cultural issues. By far, these productive scholars in the diversity area have focused heavily on gender issues. As these issues are a fraction of diversity, scholars need to go beyond gender and pay more attention to other important issues of diversity such as language, disability, and sexual orientation. This finding indicates that most of the articles about diversity were written by scholars based in the U.S. As McKie and Munshi (2007) have observed “the publication possibilities for non-U.S. authors are restricted and the dominance of the U.S.-based scholars in communication journals has been much greater than the other disciplines” (p. 9). Therefore, public relations scholars from other countries need to discuss diversity issues in the rest of the world, and the editors need to be more open to international manuscripts. This will not only balance the dominance of U.S. scholars in the field but also provide knowledge about diversity issues around the world.

The most published institutions in diversity were the University of Maryland (22 articles), University of Florida (17 articles), University of Oregon, San Diego State University (15 articles), University of Alabama (13 articles), University of Georgia (13 articles), and Syracuse University (11 articles).

#### 4.3 Definitions

Only one article provided its own definition of diversity, and ten other articles provided definitions from other sources. Serini et al. (1998), Grunig et al. (2000), and Choi and Hon (2002) focused on the concept of gender in their definitions, whereas Munshi and Edwards (2011) focused on race. Other definitions (e.g., Austin, 2010; Gallicano & Stansberry, 2011) considered diversity by

combining different aspects such as gender, race, and age. Based on the most commonly adopted definitions, this study attempted to find a comprehensive definition for diversity to answer RQ3. One of the most prevalent definitions of diversity, which was used in at least five articles, was “*difference in ethnicity, race, gender, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, disability, veteran status, age, national origin, and cultural and personal perspectives [emphasis ours]*” (Bhawuk & Triandis, 1996, p. 85). Another definition is “*Diversity represents categories of people based on differences that cannot be altered, such as age, race, sexual orientation, gender, ethnicity, and physical abilities/qualities; and differences that can be altered, such as class, language, income, marital status, religion, geography, and military experience [emphasis ours]*” (Sha & Ford, 2007, p. 386). These two definitions are more inclusive in representing more aspects of diversity, such as disability, class, and income. Thus, according to these two definitions, and along with others (e.g., Commission on Public Relations Education, 2006, p. 27; Tsetsura, 2011, p. 532), a comprehensive definition of diversity needs to represent all differences among people that are biological and involve primary identities such as race, gender, ethnicity, age, and physical abilities/qualities. This definition also includes other categories that can be changed, such as class, religion, geography, and marital status. Thus, this study inclusively defines diversity as representing all differences among people that are biological and cannot be changed such as race, gender, and age, and all categories that can be changed such as class, religion, and geography. Having a comprehensive definition of diversity avoids confusion and can provide the basis for organizational policies and programs (McMorran et al., 2008; Wills, 2020) as well as for academic research. Lack of a unified and comprehensive definition of diversity would delay the field’s progress indefinitely. In addition, if a comprehensive definition is communicated efficiently, it can help integrate diversity not only into the organizational culture but also into the public relations field (Wills, 2020). It can also help public relations agencies and organizations to target clear and measurable diversity goals and avoid various differences being overlooked.

#### 4.4 Suggestions for future research

To answer RQ4, this study analyzed future research suggestions. Most of the articles (35 articles) mentioned the need for additional research to develop a new theory that addresses diversity issues and to increase awareness about diversity (Aldoory et al., 2008; Tsetsura, 2011). For example, Aldoory (2001) mentioned that developing a new theory that addresses diversity issues in the public relations field can enrich the scholarly body of knowledge. In a similar vein, Pompper (2005) stated that it is significant to expand our worldview by being conscious of race, ethnicity, and culture to test and build theory to continue to be a legitimate field in social science (p. 158). There were calls for making organizations more effective and excellent with regard to diversity (Serini, et al., 1998; Tindall & Waters, 2012). Another suggestion was that professionals need to treat differences equally, banish stereotypes, and serve as an example for younger generations (Choi & Hon, 2002; Lariscy et al., 1994; Tindall & Waters, 2012). Common suggestions (18 articles) were to go beyond gender studies (Grünig, 1995) and to expand people’s point of view by being conscious of race, ethnicity, and cultural issues (Pompper, 2004). Another suggestion was about education and educators (17 articles), in that they need to talk about diversity in the classroom, incorporate topics about diversity, and prepare students to face the challenges of communication with diverse audiences (Sriramesh et al., 2009; Taylor, 2001; Waymer & Dyson, 2011). Therefore, these findings can guide public relations scholars and graduate students who focus on diversity issues to identify research directions as well as help them to improve current public relations education by adding missing topics in public relations curricula.

#### 4.5 Types of diversity

As indicated in Table 1, the most frequently studied type of diversity was gender (82 articles), followed by ethnicity (69 articles), race (24 articles), age (nine articles), class/power (three articles), and minorities (two articles). Six of the articles covered multiple types of diversity. Twelve of them

covered diversity in general. The most frequently studied type of diversity has not changed over the past 26 years. In recent studies on gender issues, sexual orientation is one of the issues that has become as important as gender (e.g., Tindall & Waters, 2012; Ward, 2013). In examining minority issues, scholars prefer to focus on separate diversity issues rather than take a holistic approach that covers race, gender, and other aspects of diversity. For example, Zerbinos and Clanton (1993) focus on race in their study addressing minority practitioners. This might be a reason why scholars do not pay attention to minority issues as a whole in diversity research.

Between 2010–2016, scholars paid more attention to race issues than previously. As Munshi and Edwards (2011) emphasized, scholars pay attention to social and cultural issues but bypass race as an inherent part of society and culture. Race is one of the topics that requires further study because it is important to consider race in managing diversity issues. As countries and societies have become more racially diverse, an important expectation from public relations professionals is to help organizations build a relationship with more diverse publics. In recent studies, diversity issues have increased as a whole which could be the result of the need to overcome the limitations (gender, race, and ethnicity) which have been emphasized by most scholars (e.g., Sha & Ford, 2007).

Moreover, issues around age have gradually received more attention from scholars over the years examined because a significant labor force from a new generation has gradually increased in the workplace. Millennials are the most racially and ethnically diverse generation today (Brown et al., 2016). They support diversity and inclusion and consider differences more important than have previous generations (Bardhan, 2016). Therefore, scholars and professionals alike need to pay more attention to millennials and diversity issues. More importantly, as diversity issues gain more attention among millennials, it could be important to discuss these topics in the classroom.

Table 1. *Types of Diversity in Public Relations Articles from 1990 to 2016.*

Types of Diversity	1990–2000		2000–2010		2010–2016		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<i>Gender</i>	19	45.2%	33	43.4%	30	33.7%	82	39.4%
<i>Ethnicity</i>	18	42.9%	27	35.5%	24	27.0%	69	33.2%
<i>Race</i>	1	2.4%	6	7.9%	17	19.1%	24	11.5%
<i>Diversity in general</i>	0	0.0%	4	5.3%	8	9.0%	12	5.8%
<i>Age</i>	0	0.0%	2	2.6%	7	7.9%	9	4.3%
<i>Mixed</i>	2	4.8%	1	1.3%	3	3.4%	6	2.9%
<i>Class/power</i>	1	2.4%	2	2.6%	0	0.0%	3	1.4%
<i>Minorities</i>	1	2.4%	1	1.3%	0	0.0%	2	1.0%
Total	42	100	76	100	89	100	207	100

#### 4.6 Research topics

The most frequently researched topics were effects of diversity (69 articles), perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs about diversity (48 articles), diversity groups' perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs (46 articles), role of diversity (22 articles), and the role of public relations (22 articles). As indicated in Table 2, the most frequently studied topic has not changed over the past 26 years. Perceptions,

attitudes, beliefs about diversity, and diversity groups' perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs were addressed in similar proportions in research in each period. Between 2010 and 2016, scholars paid more attention to the role of public relations in diversity issues and the role of diversity group/type than earlier. As the composition of the U.S population has become more diverse, the importance of how public relations addresses diversity issues has increased because these diverse publics can have both positive and negative impacts. While cultural diversity can have negative effects in the workplace, such as miscommunication and adaptation issues (Martin, 2014), it can also be highly effective in workplace in terms of motivating each other to understand others' perspectives and exploring new opportunities and ideas (Fassinger, 2008). This societal change affects not only professionals but scholars and might serve as a signal for more research on the role of public relations in diversity issues.

Table 2. *Research Topics Most Frequently Published About Diversity from 1990 to 2016.*

	1990–2000		2000–2010		2010–2016		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<i>Effects of diversity group/type</i>	19	45.2%	25	32.9%	25	28.1%	69	33.3%
<i>Perceptions, attitudes, beliefs about diversity</i>	11	26.2%	17	22.1%	20	22.5%	48	23.1%
<i>Diversity groups' perceptions, attitudes, beliefs</i>	5	11.9%	21	27.3%	20	22.5%	46	22.1%
<i>Role of public relations</i>	4	9.5%	7	9.1%	11	12.4%	22	10.6%
<i>Role of diversity group/type</i>	3	7.1%	6	7.8%	13	14.6%	22	10.6%
Total	42	100	76	100	89	100	207	100

#### 4.7 Theoretical framework

Of the total articles, 77 applied a theoretical framework. The most frequently applied theories were feminist theory (10 articles) followed by Hofstede's cultural dimensions (eight articles), and role theory (seven articles). Other theories used were situational theory, leadership theory, excellence theory, models of public relations, critical race theory, intersectionality theory, queer theory, relationship management theory, cultural theory, and critical theory.

Feminist theory is one of the most appropriate theories for exploring gender issues in public relations (Grunig & Toth, 1991; Hon, 1995; Rakow, 1989). Therefore, it is natural that most of the articles in gender studies applied this theory. Public relations scholars' arguments generally address feminist theory in terms of a structural framework. For example, O'Neil (2013) analyzed "whether the perceived organizational influence of men and women in corporate public relations was related to formal structural power, relationship power, or gender" (p. 151), whereas Hon (1995) argued that a male-dominant environment is responsible for discrimination against female practitioners. Studies examining cultural influence applied Hofstede's cultural dimensions to explore a role of different cultures in relationship management and workplace communication. This theory is regarded as "one of the best treatments of culture" (Taylor, 2000, p. 278) in the public relations literature and is used to analyze cultural values in public relations. For example, Vasquez and Taylor (2000) explored what cultural values affect American public relations practitioners, whereas Kiambi and Nadler (2012) looked at these values in Kenya. Future studies could focus on how these values influence public relations in other countries. Articles applying role theory mostly analyzed gender issues and focused

on the dichotomous role of women in public relations—manager or technician (i.e., Molleda & Ferguson, 2004; Toth & Grunig, 1993). These studies frequently analyzed women's issues (salary, rank, power) in the field of public relations and suggested ways to address this concern. Gender issues have been a main issue in the public relations field for decades. Scholars highlighted the need to improve women's positions in organizations because improving women's conditions will help improve the field of public relations as well. Therefore, not surprisingly, one of the most used theoretical frameworks in public relations is role theory.

#### 4.8 Research methods/type of sample

As shown in Table 3, qualitative methods (135 articles) were more dominant than quantitative methods (72 articles). However, on closer examination of specific research techniques used across qualitative and quantitative methods, surveys were used most (46 articles) followed by critiques/essays (45 articles), in-depth interviews (25 articles), mixed (24 articles), content analysis (21 articles), case studies (16 articles), other (11 articles), discourse analysis (eight articles), focus groups (six articles), and experiments (five articles). Qualitative methods presuppose that there are various realities that are socially defined where the researcher is also involved in the situation, whereas quantitative methods eliminate researcher bias and errors (Firestone, 1986). This result differs from other studies that analyzed different topics in public relations (e.g., Huang et al., 2017; Ki & Shin, 2006). Although qualitative methods were more prevalent, surveys were the most used technique, which is inconsistent with other studies (e.g., An & Cheng, 2007; Lee, 2017). Because both methods are considered complementary, a balance approach is encouraged (Khang et al., 2012). Therefore, to reach a balance, the use of quantitative methods could be increased in examining diversity issues in the field of public relations.

Table 3. *Research Methods in Public Relations Research about Diversity from 1990 to 2016.*

Method	Number of Articles	Percent %
<i>Survey</i>	46	22.1%
<i>Critique/essay</i>	45	21.6%
<i>In-depth interview</i>	25	12.1%
<i>Mixed</i>	24	11.5%
<i>Content analysis</i>	21	10.1%
<i>Case study</i>	16	7.7%
<i>Others</i>	11	5.3%
<i>Discourse analysis</i>	8	3.8%
<i>Focus groups</i>	6	2.9%
<i>Experiment</i>	5	2.4%

Among the articles specifying a type of sample, 69 used samples of public relations professionals, followed by others (63), the general public (31), mixed (17), students (11), media articles/magazines (11), and academic journals (five).

#### 5. Conclusions

A trend study often projects directions scholars should take for the future. Analyzing a particular topic in published articles (Ye & Ki, 2012) is helpful in understanding the stage of the given topic to improve its scholarship. Even if the significance of diversity issues has increased in public relations scholarship, there is no systematic literature review of the academic articles that cover diversity issues. With this purpose in mind, this study attempted to provide a broad framework for issues of diversity in public relations scholarship.

By analyzing the status of research about diversity in public relations, this study found that trends in peer-reviewed journals show that most articles have focused on diversity issues by examining different types of diversity rather than examining them as a whole. Generally, early studies focused on gender issues. And although most of the articles analyzed different types of diversity, people's ability/disability was the subject that lacked a presence. These trends indicate that to go beyond issues of gender, race, and ethnicity, public relations studies need to diversify the issues, excluding no differences and focusing on diversity issues as a whole. Comprehensive coverage of diversity includes what people are born with as well as the choices they make. Public relations needs to adopt this more inclusive and comprehensive understanding and direction of diversity. By going beyond gender, race, and ethnicity issues, public relations professionals can understand attitudes, values, and expectations of different groups. Thus, public relations scholars and professionals should endeavor to be more considerate to both internal and external diverse publics.

This study also found that the number of articles about diversity has increased over the past 26 years. This finding indicates that diversity issues have had an influence on the public relations field and that scholars have paid more attention to diversity issues. As populations have become more diverse, the public relations industry has searched for candidates who can manage these differences. Moreover, millennials expect more diversity than do previous generations. These are the most important reasons for scholars to teach their students not to ignore differences, to build relationships with diverse groups, and to add classes related to diversity issues to their curriculum.

Overall, this study indicates the content of published diversity related research in the most leading journals in the public relations field. Therefore, it helps to see the status of the diversity research efforts of scholars in the field. It also indicates the importance of diversity issues as a research topic in the public relations field. Thus, this study tries to encourage public relations scholars to include diversity issues in their research agendas.

### 5.1 Limitations

Every study has some limitations which can guide future research directions. First, this study was limited to articles published in peer-reviewed journals. Therefore, it can be expanded by adding trade press articles to analyze perceptions of the industry. This could help to identify differences and similarities between academic and industry thinking on diversity issues. In addition, this study was also limited to the journals that have played significant roles in the public relations field according to previous related studies. Research has used these journals as sources to examine the status of public relations research (e.g., Ki & Shin, 2006; Pasadeos et al., 1999; Tomasello, 2001). Therefore, it can also be expanded by adding other journals, such as the *Howard Journal*, that include diversity issues in communication. Third, this study analyzed diversity research articles only in the public relations disciplines. Other scholars might need to compare and contrast how diversity research has been conducted in other related disciplines. Doing this will help us see where we are in terms of diversity issues across disciplines and draw a bigger picture of diversity research.

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