Linking diversity and public relations in higher education

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This research examines public relationships and diversity issues at a large, Southeastern public university and a mid-sized, Midwestern public university in the United States of America. The Hon and Grunig (1999) scale was modified to measure the relationship factors. In general, students at both universities described their relationships with their university as founded in trust, commitment, and satisfaction. The students also seemed to believe their university was committed to diversity issues, which may be related to Weick's (1979) concept of Requisite Variety. This research provides a starting point for future work measuring dialogue and public history in relationships. In addition, this research may contribute to finding additional relationship factors in nations other than the United States.

Introduction

Researchers suggest one key to organisational success in the 21st century will be relationships (DeSanto & Garner, 2001; Wilson, 2001). Using such a perspective means that managers will use communication, especially public relations, as a strategic tool to build and maintain relationships (Ledingham, 2003; Wilson, 2001). In addition, attention to relationships can help reduce organisation-public conflicts and help foster cooperation between an organisation and its constituents (Huang, 2001). However, examining what the organisation does is only half the picture. The actions and opinions of the public must also be considered. Given the link between good relationships and supportive behaviours between organisations and publics, it is not surprising that researchers have attempted to measure organisation-public relationships; however, few have actually measured relationships or

relationship indicators (Jo, Hon & Brunner, 2004). This study examines public relationships and diversity issues by exploring how students at a large, Southeastern United States public university and a mid-sized Midwestern United States public university describe their relationship with their university and perceive their university's commitment to diversity.

It is important to measure relationships in public relations because increasingly academics and practitioners have come to believe that the essence of public relations is building and maintaining relationships with key publics (Hon & Grunig, 1999). There is a need for studies, such as this one, that measure the perceptions identified publics have of their relationships with organisations. This quantifiable evidence can be used by leaders to help manage organisations and demonstrate the value of public relations (Hon & Grunig, 1999).

Public relations relationships

Relationship is a term that is used frequently among practitioners when defining public relations, and it is defined in public relations literature as a primitive term that stands for "a complex phenomenon for which few practitioners and scholars share a common definition and set of measurements" (Broom, Casey & Ritchey, 1997, p. 86). Although Ferguson (1984) identified the need for research in this area more than 20 years ago, such studies have only come to the forefront of public relations research in recent years (Sallott, Lyon, Acosta-Alzuru & Jones, 2003).

Ferguson (1984) and more recently Broom et al. (1997) and Grunig and Huang (2000) have worked to demystify the term relationship and develop factors that measure relationship outcomes. Ferguson suggested that relational

attributes, such as dynamic versus static, open versus closed, degree of satisfaction, distribution of power, and mutual understanding, agreement and consensus, could be used by academics and practitioners to define and measure organisational relationships. Her initial conceptualisations helped Broom et al. develop a three-stage model of relationships that includes relationship concepts, antecedents to relationships, and consequences of relationships. They define relationship antecedents as "social and cultural norms, collective perceptions and expectations, needs for resources, perceptions of uncertain environments, and legal/voluntary necessity" (Broom et al., 1997, p. 96). Ledingham and Brunig (1998) used the interpersonal communication, marketing, and social psychology literature to build their research programme (Jo et al, 2004). These measures had the goal of determining if relationship indicators could be linked to bottom line contributions of organisational effectiveness (Hon & Brunner, 2002).

Huang (1998) provided further insight with her dissertation work. She culled from the interpersonal communication literature those variables that represent positive relationships – trust, commitment, satisfaction, and control mutuality (Hon & Brunner, 2002). It was soon found that these same variables had great promise for understanding organisation-public relationships (Hon & Brunner, 2002).

Trust is widely accepted as a critical part of organisation-public relationships (Grunig & Huang, 2000). It is the cornerstone of successful relationships and can only be built with time (Davidson & Kapelianis, 1996; Dumoulin & Boyd, 1997). In fact, Vercic and Grunig (1995) go so far as to state that trust is the characteristic that allows an organisation to exist. Trust can be defined as one party's willingness to open itself to another and it is comprised of three underlying dimensions – integrity, dependability, and competence (Hon & Grunig, 1999). Integrity is the belief that an organisation is fair and just, dependability is the belief that the organisation will do what it says it will, and competence is the belief that the organisation has the ability to do what it says it will (Hon & Grunig, 1999).

Control mutuality is similar to the concept of power (Grunig & Huang, 2000) and refers to the degree of agreement that exists between an organisation and its publics about who has the power to influence the other (Hon & Grunig, 1999). Grunig and Huang state that some imbalance of power is unavoidable in many relationships and that control mutuality recognises this asymmetry. However, if one party attempts to have total control over the relationship, the other outcome factors – trust, satisfaction and commitment – will suffer (Hon & Grunig, 1999).

Having satisfaction means that the organisation and its publics feel positively toward each other and the benefits of keeping the relationship outweigh the costs of maintaining it (Hon & Grunig, 1999). Lastly, commitment examines the degree to which both the organisation and its publics believe that the relationship is worth spending time and resources on to maintain and promote (Hon & Grunig, 1999).

Another important addition to this developing scholarship came from psychologists Clark and Mills (1993). Their work distinguished between the concepts of exchange and communal relationships, which became a fifth and newly added indicator of relationship measurement. This new indicator examines the degree to which an exchange or communal relationship exists between the parties (Hon & Grunig, 1999). In addition to Clark and Mills, Thibaut and Kelley (1959) suggest that social interdependence exists. Their work has done much to influence relationship research and suggests that parties involved in a relationship compare the outcomes of the current relationship with those experienced in the past, looking at the perceived rewards in contrast to perceived costs.

An exchange relationship is one in which the parties involved are interrelated only because one has provided benefits in the past or has the potential to provide them in the future (Clark & Mills, 1993). The organisation and public are in this relationship because of an obligation and debt. A communal relationship provides benefits to both parties because each is concerned with the other's welfare; however, such arrangements

are not completely altruistic since the relationship could merely be about attaining more goals by lessening opposition and increasing support (Clark & Mills, 1993).

The body of literature delineated here, as well as input from public relations executives, created the framework for Hon and Grunig's (1999) guidelines for measuring relationships in public relations, published by the Institute for Public Relations Commission on Public Relations Measurement and Evaluation (Hon & Brunner, 2002).

However, researchers must be careful to recognise that the relationship theories and scales developed in United States may not translate well or at all in the international sector because of cultural and societal differences (Holtzhausen, Petersen & Tindall, 2003). Cultural groups are complex; they have their own symbols, rules and customs, which are then individualised (Hoskins, 2003). It is questionable if a social norm that is applied and derived in one country can be applied in another country that might have different social, cultural, and economic traditions and climates (Holtzhausen, Petersen & Tindall, 2003). Relationships in other countries might be better explained with different outcome factors because of different cultural norms. Therefore, practitioners in other countries might take these ideas and learn from them to develop their own ways to measure relationships. The Hon and Grunig (1999) scale can serve as a starting point for such studies, much as the Grunig and Hunt (1984) models have served as the basis for discovering new models of public relations in the international sector.

Public relations and diversity

A reason for fostering public relations relationships and building the field's reputation as a management function is to support diversity programmes and bring them under public relations' wing. One arena in which such programmes can be observed and examined is a college campus. Improving diversity and subsequently relationships, on campus and in the workforce, is not just an altruistic, politically correct goal; it is necessary for both social and economic reasons. Carnevale (1999) argues that diversity gives the United States a unique advantage to continue as a world power in the 21st century.

Diversity issues in higher education

This issue of successful relationship management is of particular concern now because of the changing demographics of the United States and the world. If a university chooses to ignore diversity issues, it may risk losing a significant strategic opportunity, and possibly incur many costs. "Diversity is one of the largest, most urgent challenges facing higher education today. It is also one of the most difficult challenges colleges have ever faced" (Levine, 1991, p. 4). Institutions that have taken this challenge seriously demonstrate how hard the United States must work to be a multiracial yet cohesive nation (Bensimon & Soto, 1997). At the same time, many administrators and faculty members do not recognise the importance of diversity and some even consider it a threat (Hallock, 1994).

Diversity has become a buzzword and some even say it is a smoke screen hiding the real issues of minorities because a common understanding about the term's meaning is lacking (Allen, 1995; Levine, 1991; Myers, 1997). In a study about race, gender, and ethnicity on college campuses, Levine discovered that although most college administrators believed diversity to be important, few were able to define the term or express what their diversity programmes were meant to achieve. Since the term is so central and commonly used, it has become overextended and indiscriminate (Adelma, 1997).

Opponents of diversity and affirmative action believe that these initiatives reflect a liberal agenda, that such policies emphasise differences, and that ethnic or racial background is used as an excuse to admit and graduate students who would not otherwise make it. As Clegg (1999) suggests, diversity causes students to be rewarded or punished based on their skin colour and ancestry, which further stigmatises the beneficiaries of diversity programmes in

both the eyes of their peers and members of their own race. Lastly, Clegg (1999) argues that ensuring a racial mix of students is nothing more than "discrimination for its own sake" (p. 35).

Such backlash at the university level has been seen most recently with decisions to end race-based policies in California, Florida, and Texas. However, some scholars argue that this approach is not the solution. Chang, Witt-Sandis and Hakuta (1999) state that race-neutral policies do not work either, as racism has always and still does exist in society. They suggest that using the same standards to judge minority and non-minority students is unfair because differences in power, social perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs put minorities at a disadvantage.

Lastly, scholars who support the need for diversity contend that the diversity of a university's student body benefits all students. Students learn to be accepting of other cultures, participate more in community and civic organisations, and feel a greater commitment to racial understanding when they are engaged in a diverse environment (Chang et al., 1999). Further, retention rates and students' overall satisfaction with universities increase when there is a more diverse representation in the student body (Bowen & Bok, 1998; Chang et al., 1999). Gurin (1999) adds that a strong institutional commitment to diversity is associated with less racial tension and higher average grades for all students.

These researchers also imply that higher education has a responsibility to the rest of society to lead the way in diversity programmes (Hill, 1991; Rosser, 1990). To live up to the responsibility of seeker of truth and knowledge, institutions of higher education must be the "carriers of civilization" and the "engines of change" (Rosser, 1990, p.224), and challenge overt and covert attempts to limit ethnic diversity at institutions of higher learning (Jones, 2000). As Bowen and Bok (1998) state, universities must help to build a society in which access to positions of leadership and respect is not limited by race. "Institutions of higher education have an obligation, first and foremost, to create the best possible educational environment for the young adults whose lives are likely to be significantly changed during their years on campus" (Gurin, 1999, p. 36).

Holtzhausen and Voto (2002) suggest that public relations is needed to promote awareness and understanding of diversity issues within organisations. This would help bring about necessary changes to organisational structures in institutions of higher education. In order to do this, such organisations need to demonstrate to the student body that factors such as trust, commitment, and satisfaction exist in both the building of relationships and diversity programmes. Organisations that communicate effectively with publics develop better relationships because mutual understanding has been reached. Negative consequences are also less likely to arise when a good relationship exists, as publics are less likely to interfere with the goals of the organisation (Hon & Grunig, 1999).

Institutions of higher education are microcosms of society at large; issues of justice and society values are learned there (Scisney-Matlock & Matlock, 2001). Since students come to universities at a critical time in their development as human beings, diversity is essential. During this time, students define themselves in relation to others, experiment with roles, and begin to make permanent commitments to careers, social groups, and personal relationships (Bowen, 1999; Gurin, 1999). Since residential campuses separate students from their past, university environments are especially influential in students' identity development (Gurin, 1999). Students attending a racially diverse campus are exposed to new ideas, relationships, and roles. In addition, these students engage in more complex and deeper thinking; a homogeneous campus may cause students to be more accepting of the perspective offered by an authority figure, while students at a diverse campus are forced to debate their points of view rather than succumb to group think (Gurin, 1999). Students must be prepared for global and multicultural society, and they must be confident of their own beliefs and values and how they can affect attitudes and behaviours.

The best place for this to happen is in the university environment (Morey, 2000).

With changes in demographics, it is inevitable that different cultural norms and values will emerge and potentially cause tension (Allen, 1995; Henderson, 1992). Therefore, as higher education moves into the 21st century, learning about and interacting with diverse people will be increasingly more important (Rowan, 1997). Universities must make campuses places where students from different backgrounds can take part in conversations and share experiences to help them to understand the perspectives of others so they become better citizens of the nation and world (Adelma, 1997; Gurin, 1999).

Yet, diversity does not end with education. It is also an important aspect of workforce management and global society. This issue of successful relationship management is of particular concern now because of changing demographics. It is imperative that the challenges and opportunities brought by diversity are not overlooked. One way that these opportunities and challenges can be addressed is with multicultural education. Multicultural education focuses on diversity within a nation, while global and international education focus on relationships among countries (Morey, 2000). Although they have developed separately, some scholars contend they are inter-related. For example, both areas share the goals of developing cross-cultural skills, promoting social justice, improving inter-group relations, and reducing prejudice.

Public relations scholars and practitioners must work together to determine how public relations can build and maintain relationships with diverse and increasingly vocal publics. Although universities' efforts to have a diverse student population have been linked to strategic benefits for students and society, little research has examined students' perspectives on these issues. Therefore, the following research questions were posed:

- what are students' perceptions of their relationship with their university?;
- what are students' perceptions of their university's commitment to diversity?; and
- are students' perceptions about relationships and their university's commitment to diversity related?

Two additional questions – does students' ethnicity influence their perceptions of relationships, and does students' ethnicity influence their perceptions of their university's commitment to diversity – were addressed at the Southeastern university.

Method

A survey of questions using a seven-point Likert scale was developed to measure students' perceptions of relationships and diversity at a large Southeastern and a mid-sized Midwestern university. Researchers at the University of Maryland developed a questionnaire that measures an organisation-public relationship. The scales used are based on the six relationship indicators (trust, commitment, satisfaction, control mutuality, communal relationships, and exchange relationships) that were identified by Grunig and Huang (2000).

A pilot study was conducted by Grunig and Huang (summarised in Hon and Grunig, 1999) to see how respondents perceived their relationships with five well-known organisations. Reliability for each of the scales was determined using Cronbach's Alpha. With the exception of the items measuring exchange relationships (Alpha of .70), the other indicators all produced Alphas between .80 and .90. Grunig and Huang found that their original questionnaire containing 52 questions about the six indicators was too long and most respondents did not complete the entire questionnaire. Hon and Grunig then developed a shortened version of the instrument, which was adapted for this study. Questions did not use terms such as control mutuality, exchange relationship, and communal relationship since it was thought such wording might confuse respondents. Instead questions were worded so that the essence of these terms was expressed in common, ordinary language. In addition, the research developed a scale to measure students' perceptions of diversity on campus. Reliability for each of the scales was determined using Cronbach's Alpha. With the exception of the

items measuring exchange relationships (Alpha of .70), the other indicators all produced Alphas between .80 and .90.

The large Southeastern university has a total student population of about 45,000, of which approximately 23% is minority. In addition, the state in which this university is located has a minority population of about 22%. The mid-sized Midwestern university has a total student population of about 13,000, of which 9% is minority. The state in which this university is located has a minority population of 7%. These universities were chosen because of the differences in minority population at the universities and within the states.

The researcher worked with the Division of Housing of both universities to obtain a random sample of students living on campus. E-mail could not be used due to university policies. In addition, the researcher had no funding to produce a mail survey. Therefore reaching students through housing was the most viable way to acquire a random sample of students. In addition, since the students surveyed lived on campus it could be reasoned that they were more attuned to what happened there. To acquire the sample, every fifth student on the master list for each dorm was selected. Resident Assistants brought the returned questionnaires to the Division of Housing where they were collected later by the researcher. The response rate for the surveys completed at the Southeastern university was 46% and the response rate at the Midwestern university was 30.5%.

Participants

Two hundred and forty-six students participated in the survey at the Southeastern university. Most participants were female (**see Table 1**). Although the majority of the respondents were Caucasian, other ethnic groups were represented at the same level or better than the actual make-up of the university campus (**see Table 2**).

Table 1: Gender representation at Southeastern university

	N	Percentage
Female	166	67.5
Male	78	31.7
No Response	2	0.8
Total	**246**	**100**

Table 2: Ethnicity representation at Southeastern university

	N	%
African-American/Black	19	7.7
Asian	16	6.5
Biracial/Multiracial	7	2.8
Caucasian	163	66.3
Hispanic/Latino	32	13.1
Native American	3	1.2
Pacific Islander	2	0.8
Other	4	1.6
Total	**246**	**100**

One hundred and sixty-five students participated in the survey conducted at the Midwestern university. Again most of the participants were female and Caucasian, however, other ethnic groups were represented at the same level or better than the actual make-up of the university campus (**see Tables 3 and 4**).

Table 3: Gender representation at Midwestern university

	N	Percentage
Female	121	73
Male	44	27
Total	**165**	**100**

Table 4: Ethnicity representation at Midwestern university

	N	%
African-American/Black	6	3.6
Asian	2	1.2
Biracial/Multiracial	2	1.2
Caucasian	152	92.2
Hispanic/Latino	2	1.2
Native American	0	0.0
Pacific Islander	0	0.0
Other	1	0.6
Total	**165**	**100**

Results

RQ1: What are students' perceptions of their relationship with their university?

Tables 5 and 6 show that students overall do trust their universities based on the means reported (survey questions 1, 6, 24, 33, and 35). At the Southeastern university these means ranged from to 4.18 to 5.15, and at the Midwestern university they ranged from 4.25 to 5.54. In addition, these tables also show that most respondents agreed with the items measuring commitment (survey questions 3, 8, 18, and 25) and they indicate that students are even more positive about the satisfaction items (survey questions 7, 19, 27, and 29) than they were about trust or commitment. At the Southeastern university the commitment means ranged from 4.38 to 5.06, while the satisfaction means ranged from 4.60 to 5.35. At the Midwestern university the commitment means ranged from 4.57 to and 4.85, and the satisfaction means ranged from 4.99 to 5.45.

The tables also show that students are less likely to report a positive relationship with their university in relation to control mutuality (survey questions 13, 16, 28, and 30) than they are for the other variables. At the Southeastern university these means ranged from 3.51 to 4.60, and at the Midwestern university they ranged from 4.05 to 4.67. However, the low scores do reflect that some questions were written in reverse, meaning the lower the score or the more disagreement students presented, the better for the university. The responses for the items measuring exchange relationships (survey questions 2, 10, 14, and 20), show a range of answers. Means ranged from 4.00 to 5.25 at the Southeastern university and from 3.86 to 5.23 at the Midwestern university. Responses for the four questions about communal relationships (survey questions 15, 21, 26, and 32) show that the participants in these surveys generally believed that their university did participate in communal relationships with students and outside constituents. At the Southeastern university these means ranged from 4.15 to 4.93, and at the Midwestern university they ranged from 2.98 to 4.52. Reverse scaling also explains the low means associated with communal relationships.

RQ2: What are students' perceptions of their university's commitment to diversity?

The questionnaire items included to address this research question (survey questions 4, 5, 11, 12, 17, 22, 23, 31, and 34) show that students generally believed diversity was important at the universities as seen in Tables 5 and 6. At the Southeastern university these means ranged from 3.76 to 5.33, and at the Midwestern university they ranged from 2.81 to 5.44. Again, some of the questions on this scale were written in reverse, which explains the low means reported for items 4 and 36. Therefore, the lower the mean score for the items written in reverse, the more students actually agreed diversity existed on campus. Reverse questions were added to help avoid response bias.

RQ3: Are students' perceptions about relationships and the university's commitment to diversity related?

To answer this research question, a separate index for the trust, control mutuality, satisfaction, commitment, exchange relationship, communal relationship, and diversity was calculated by using the compute function in SPSS. Pearson's correlation coefficients were computed between the composite diversity variable and the composite relationship variables. At the large Southeastern university, a significant, positive correlation was

found between diversity and every relationship outcome except exchange relationship: diversity and trust (r = .600, p<.01); diversity and control mutuality (r = .461, p<.01); diversity and satisfaction (r = .574, p<.01); diversity and commitment (r = .594, p<.01); and diversity and communal relationship (r = .547, p<.01).

In other words, the more positive students are about trust, control mutuality, satisfaction, commitment, and communal relationships, the more positive they are about their university's efforts to foster diversity on campus.

At the mid-sized Midwestern university a significant, positive correlation was found between diversity and three other factors: trust (r=.413, p<.01); commitment (r=.432, p<.01); and satisfaction (r=.386, p<.01). In other words, the more positive students are about trust, satisfaction, and commitment the more positive they are about their university's efforts to foster diversity on campus.

RQ4: Does students' ethnicity influence their perceptions of relationships?

This question was only answered with the data at the Southeastern university. The number of minority student responses at the Midwestern university was too low for any meaningful statistical analysis. To answer this question, participants' ethnicity was coded as either minority or non-minority.[1] When ANOVA was performed using minority/non-minority status as the dependent variable and the composite relationship variables as the independent variables, only one outcome factor ─ control mutuality [F (1, 241) = 3.723, p<.055] ─ produced a statistically significant relationship.

To further explore this research question, crosstabulations were performed between each individual ethnicity and each composite relationship variable. Although responses are similar among all of the ethnicities, it is notable that African-American/Black students are less likely to agree with statements about satisfaction, commitment, and communal

relationships. African-American/Black students are also more likely to agree that an exchange relationship exists between the university and students.

RQ5: Does students' ethnicity influence their perceptions of their university's commitment to diversity?

Again, this question was only answered with the data at the Southeastern university and ANOVA was used to examine whether or not ethnicity influenced students' perceptions of the university's commitment to diversity. Again, respondents were coded as minority and non-minority. No significant results were found.

A crosstabulation of ethnicity and diversity was also performed. Students of different ethnicities have similar responses to questions about diversity. However, African-American/Black students are less likely to agree that the university is attentive to diversity issues than are their Asian, Caucasian, and Hispanic/Latino peers.

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[1] A dichotomous variable was created because the number of cells for individual ethnicities was too small for meaningful statistical analysis.

Table 5: Mean responses from students at Southeastern university

	Mean	Std. Dev
1. University treats students like me fairly. (trust)	5.02	1.143
2. University will make exceptions for students like me when it knows that it will gain something. (exchange)	4.34	1.582
3. I can see that University wants to maintain a relationship with students like me. (commitment)	4.48	1.296
4. Students like me do not matter to University. (diversity)*	4.91	1.508
5. University believes that there is value in having students from different backgrounds and cultures attend the university. (diversity)	5.33	1.144
6. Whenever University makes an important decision, I know it will be concerned about students like me. (trust)	4.18	1.168
7. Generally speaking, I am pleased with the relationship University has established with students like me. (satisfaction)	4.60	1.190
8. Compared to other universities I am familiar with, I value my relationship with university more. (commitment)	5.06	1.516
9. Students like me are respected in class at University. (diversity)	5.05	1.168
10. University takes care of students who are likely to benefit it. (exchange)	5.25	1.215
11. Diversity among students is a basic part of the culture of University. (diversity)	5.13	1.273
12. University can be relied on to keep its promises. (trust)	4.65	1.228
13. University really listens to what students like me have to say. (control mutuality)	4.12	1.374
14. Even though students like me will have a relationship with University for a long time, it still expects something in return whenever it does us a favor. (exchange)	4.20	1.378
15. I think that University succeeds with little consideration of students like me. (communal)*	4.15	1.288
16. University believes the opinions of students like me are legitimate. (control mutuality)	4.60	1.056
17. University believes that having a diverse environment is a way to build long-term relationships with students like me. (diversity)	4.72	1.056
18. I feel that University is trying to maintain a long-term commitment to students like me. (commitment)	4.38	1.265
19. Most students like me are happy in their interactions with University. (satisfaction)	4.77	1.284
20. Whenever University gives or offers something to students like me it generally expects something in return. (exchange)	4.00	1.260
21. University is very concerned about the welfare of students like me. (communal)	4.43	1.171
22. University appears to have many students of different ethnicities but it does not "feel diverse" because students do not mix. (diversity)	3.76	1.654
23. Students like me are treated fairly by University. (diversity)	4.70	1.308
24. I feel very confident about University's ability to achieve its mission. (trust)	5.01	1.127
25. There is a long-lasting bond between University and students like me. (commitment)	4.57	1.288
26. University does not especially enjoy giving help to community organizations and groups. (communal)*	4.93	1.430
27. Students like me are very important to University. (satisfaction)	4.70	1.308
28. University and students like me are attentive to what each other say. (control mutuality)	4.48	1.116
29. I am happy with University. (satisfaction)	5.35	1.400
30. I feel that students like me must stand up for themselves to be treated fairly by University. (control mutuality)*	3.51	1.465
31. University is working to correct the under representation of minority students. (diversity)	4.60	1.314
32. University has a tendency to ignore students like me. (communal)*	4.40	1.393
33. University has the ability to accomplish what it says it will do. (trust)	5.15	1.056
34. Both University and students like me benefit from their relationship. (satisfaction)	4.89	1.022
35. I believe that University takes opinions of students like me into account when making decisions. (trust)	4.27	1.254
36. University lacks a deep commitment to bringing students from different cultures and backgrounds to the university. (diversity)*	4.70	1.333

* denotes questions written in reverse

Table 6: Mean responses from students at Midwestern university

	Mean	Std. Dev
1. University treats students like me fairly. (trust)	5.54	1.029
2. University will make exceptions for students like me when it knows that it will gain something. (exchange)	3.86	1.526
3. I can see that University wants to maintain a relationship with students like me. (commitment)	4.85	1.175
4. Students like me do not matter to University. (diversity)*	2.81	1.328
5. University believes that there is value in having students from different backgrounds and cultures attend the university. (diversity)	5.44	1.149
6. Whenever University makes an important decision, I know it will be concerned about students like me. (trust)	4.25	1.243
7. Generally speaking, I am pleased with the relationship University has established with students like me. (satisfaction)	4.99	1.051
8. Compared to other universities I am familiar with, I value my relationship with university more. (commitment)	4.67	1.624
9. Students like me are respected in class at University. (diversity)	5.58	0.905
10. University takes care of students who are likely to benefit it. (exchange)	5.23	1.130
11. Diversity among students is a basic part of the culture of University. (diversity)	4.56	1.441
12. University can be relied on to keep its promises. (trust)	4.42	1.025
13. University really listens to what students like me have to say. (control mutuality)	4.15	1.246
14. Even though students like me will have a relationship with University for a long time, it still expects something in return whenever it does us a favor. (exchange)	4.18	1.194
15. I think that University succeeds with little consideration of students like me. (communal)*	3.76	1.056
16. University believes the opinions of students like me are legitimate. (control mutuality)	4.67	0.977
17. University believes that having a diverse environment is a way to build long-term relationships with students like me. (diversity)	4.58	1.088
18. I feel that University is trying to maintain a long-term commitment to students like me. (commitment)	4.77	1.054
19. Most students like me are happy in their interactions with University. (satisfaction)	5.16	1.179
20. Whenever University gives or offers something to students like me it generally expects something in return. (exchange)	4.02	1.246
21. University is very concerned about the welfare of students like me. (communal)	4.52	1.088
22. University appears to have many students of different ethnicities but it does not "feel diverse" because students do not mix. (diversity)	4.08	1.392
23. Students like me are treated fairly by University. (diversity)	5.30	0.944
24. I feel very confident about University's ability to achieve its mission. (trust)	4.85	1.048
25. There is a long-lasting bond between University and students like me. (commitment)	4.57	1.204
26. University does not especially enjoy giving help to community organizations and groups. (communal)*	2.98	1.251
27. Students like me are very important to University. (satisfaction)	5.10	1.204
28. University and students like me are attentive to what each other say. (control mutuality)	4.48	1.009
29. I am happy with University. (satisfaction)	5.45	1.245
30. I feel that students like me must stand up for themselves to be treated fairly by University. (control mutuality)*	4.05	1.469
31. University is working to correct the under representation of minority students. (diversity)	4.22	1.586
32. University has a tendency to ignore students like me. (communal)*	3.32	1.272
33. University has the ability to accomplish what it says it will do. (trust)	4.78	0.985
34. Both University and students like me benefit from their relationship. (satisfaction)	4.93	1.057
35. I believe that University takes opinions of students like me into account when making decisions. (trust)	4.41	1.263
36. University lacks a deep commitment to bringing students from different cultures and backgrounds to the university. (diversity)*	3.55	1.389

* denotes questions written in reverse

Discussion

Overall the students surveyed for this study described positive perceptions of their relationship with their respective universities. The means reported for the items measuring trust, commitment (defined by Hon & Grunig, 1999 as the degree to which both the organisation and its publics believe that the relationship is worth spending time and resources on to maintain and promote), and satisfaction (meaning that the organisation and its publics feel positively toward each other and the benefits of keeping the relationship outweigh the costs of maintaining it, see Hon & Grunig, 1999), were all high on the seven-point Likert scale. Similar to Grunig and Huang's results (summarised in Hon & Grunig, 1999), items related to control mutuality (the degree of agreement that exists between an organisation and its publics about who has the power to influence the other, see Hon & Grunig, 1999) were the weakest indicators of a positive relationship.

Perhaps this finding is due to the general nature of a university. Universities have set rules and abide by them; it is often difficult and time consuming to make a change to policy. These findings about control mutuality present an opportunity for public relations. Given the competitiveness of the market for top students, universities would be wise to ensure they have meaningful policies and programmes in place for hearing about and acting on students' concerns. Students in this study perceived their relationship with their respective universities to have dimensions of both exchange (a relationship in which the parties involved are interrelated only because one has provided benefits in the past or has the potential to provide them in the future, see Clark & Mills, 1993) and communality (a relationship provides benefits to both parties because each is concerned with the other's welfare, see Clark & Mills, 1993), although overall students were more likely to agree with the indicators of a communal relationship. Such positive scores for the other relationship indicators also imply that students feel their relationship with their university runs deeper than mere exchanges that ultimately serve the university's own interests.

The questions about diversity show that students perceive their universities to be genuinely committed to diversity. On Hon and Brunner's (2000) continuum, the universities seem to be somewhere between "diversity as organisational culture" and "diversity as social responsibility." Most of these students clearly believe that diversity is part of the organisational ethos and that the universities embrace diversity because they value the richness it brings to the educational experience. At the same time, though, a lot of students reported feeling neutral about whether their university has a deep commitment to diversity.

Students' ambivalence about their university's stance on diversity for the long haul is probably not surprising given how little ethnic diversity is present on the Midwestern campus. However, there may be another explanation for these findings. Weick (1979) developed the theoretical concept of requisite variety, which suggests that for an organisation to be optimally effective, there must be as much diversity within it as outside it. This diversity, or requisite variety, ensures that decision-makers are not isolated—that is, they have an understanding of those publics who are different from themselves (Dozier, Grunig, & Grunig, 1995; Grunig, Grunig & Ehling, 1992). It seems the universities examined in this study exist in a state of requisite variety since the diversity of the student body is close to that of the state in which they are located. Perhaps requisite variety explains the findings that suggest the more students trust, are satisfied, and feel commitment from their respective universities, the more positively they view their university's diversity efforts.

The findings that African-American/Black students were more likely to think about the relationship and diversity factors are not all that surprising. Many university studies conducted in the United States have found that African-American/Black students are more likely to have negative perceptions of their college experiences (Ancis, Sedlacek, & Mohr, 2000; Cabrera & Nora, 1994; Hurtado, 1992; LaSure, 1993; Sedlacek, 1987). However, these findings

suggest that the Southeastern university needs to further build relationships with this public. It seems that the university needs to begin a dialogue with this public, as suggested by Taylor, Kent, and White (2001), and acknowledge its past actions and history with this group, as suggested by Coombs and Holladay (2001). Once these steps are taken, perhaps African-American/Black students' perceptions will change and be more in line with those of other students at the Southeastern university.

Both universities seem to be communicating the importance of diversity to their students, which means they are providing open-minded leaders for the 21st century who are better prepared for the workforce and global society. Hopefully other American universities are also living up to responsibilities of being carriers of change by helping students be better citizens of the world. However, these efforts need not stop with American institutions of higher education. Universities in other countries also need to worry about the impact of our global society and the diversity within their own countries.

For example, according to Metcalfe's (2005) NationMaster website, which collates international demographic statistics: England's population is approximately 90% Caucasian, which means 10% fall into other categories such as Indian, Pakistani, Black, Asian, etc.; in Bahrain, 63% of the population is Bahraini (but 37% is not); the Netherlands' population is 83% Dutch (17% is not Dutch, and 9% is non-Western); and Australia's population is 92% Caucasian, 7% Asian and 1% Aboriginal. The list could continue. In addition, universities in Australia, the United Kingdom, and New Zealand are intensely recruiting international students and drawing them away from the United States (Dillon, 2004). Lapayese (2003) states that work of Osler and Vincent (2002) found that England, Ireland, Denmark, and the Netherlands are all nations with great cultural diversity but that they are in need of research examining diversity and education. Taylor and Henry (2003) state that the increase in cultural diversity in Australia is hurting social cohesion in educational institutions. Nations, universities and other organisations also need to be aware of

diversity in order to function well within and beyond their national borders. Educators need to prepare students for a multicultural world because we are living at a time when nations are more interdependent and cooperation will rely on respect and tolerance for cultural diversity (Lapayese, 2003). This study could be replicated in other countries so administrators could gain a better understanding of student perceptions of diversity and perhaps help students manage change. Diversity education could be the way to equality and justice in the world (Lapayese, 2003).

Future research

This study could also be used as a stepping-stone for future research. A new scale could be added to determine students' perceptions of globalisation and how well prepared they are for it based on their university's efforts. Yet another scale could measure dialogue, an element some researchers believe is missing from current public relationship measures (Taylor, Kent & White, 2001). Researchers suggest that conversation is vital for organisations and publics to reach mutual satisfaction (Esrock & Leichty, 1998; Esrock & Leichty, 2000; Kent & Taylor, 2002). Kent and Taylor also state that new research needs to add dialogue into the relationship scales. The measurement of dialogue may help public relations researchers and practitioners to develop strategies and tactics to build more supportive relationships while enhancing image (Kent & Taylor, 2003).

Other researchers suggest that a measure of organisational/public history is missing from relationship theory (Coombs & Holladay, 2001). Coombs and Holladay contend that publics' perceptions of organisations are based on the history of their interaction. They propose that publics that have had positive interactions with an organisation are more willing to think positively of an organisation after a crisis and vice versa if those perceptions were originally negative. Future studies could delve further into this dimension and perhaps develop a scale that would measure organisation/public histories to more fully understand how relationships work. Other organisations could also adapt the current

and future scales to determine employee perspectives on diversity and help organisations become better global citizens.

Researchers need to recognise that the relationship factors identified by American scholars may not be at work in other nations. However, these can be a starting place for international scholars who can add to and better explain the phenomena at work in their nations, which could lead to the identification of even more relationship factors. Research such as this could lead to greater collaboration between practitioners and faculty in diverse regions of the world, leading to greater understanding of globalisation and public relations. Lastly, continued research could lead to the establishment of a dialogic/historical model of relationships.

Limitations

This study has several limitations. First and most obvious, this study cannot be generalised to students other than those living in the four dormitories that were selected. Students living off campus may have very different opinions about their relationship with the university and its level of diversity.

This study is also limited by sample size. Although the study did have an acceptable response rate, overall the survey is based on the opinions of a small number of students. (The margin of error for a sample of this size using a 95 percent confidence interval ranges from four to seven (c.f. Broom & Dozier, 1990).) Furthermore, women are overrepresented and ANOVAs could not be performed on the data set from the Midwestern university because the number of minority students was too low.

Researchers must also remember that terms like trust, commitment, satisfaction, control mutuality, exchange relationship, and communal relationship are difficult to define and difficult to measure because of their subjective natures.

Another possible limitation of this study is the interrelationship of some of the relationship factors. The high correlations found among some of the factors could mean discriminant validity is in doubt. However,

some researchers believe this same finding is very important because it shows that these factors are closely related to each other (Jo, Hon & Brunner, 2004).

Conclusion

The success of public relations in this example is showing how a measure such as the Hon-Grunig scale can be adapted and used to better understand the climate and state of public relations relationships with important internal constituents. The study also establishes diversity's link to the relationship factors identified by Grunig and Huang (2000) and by Hon and Grunig (1999). This study helps show the reliability of the scale as called for by Hon and Grunig. It is one of the growing collection of studies that attempts to measure public relationships in real life settings; for this reason it is worthy of sharing (Hon & Brunner, 2002). In addition, such work may also help university leaders develop more innovative approaches to achieve diversity and global education using public relations tools and measures, which will help students of all nations become better citizens of the world.

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