PUBLIC RELATIONS IN PRIMETIME:
A FRAMING ANALYSIS OF THE WEST WING

By

STACI L. PRIEST

A THESIS PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS IN MASS COMMUNICATION

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

2004
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by

Staci Priest
This document is dedicated to my grandmother, Virginia Word Priest.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank Arron Angelo for always believing in me. I thank my parents for all of their love, support, and encouragement. I thank Dr. Spiro Kiousis for his patience and guidance. I thank Dr. Meg Lamme, Dr. Debbie Treise, and Dr. Leonard Tipton for their assistance and support in completing my thesis.
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This study analyzed the portrayal of public relations and its practitioners in seasons two and three of the primetime television drama *The West Wing*. The research questions were (1) how is public relations framed on *The West Wing* and what frames dominated, (2) what models of public relations are presented on *The West Wing*, and (3) how are public relations practitioners portrayed on *The West Wing*?

The three frames that emerged were “image building,” “puppet master,” and “patriotism.” The most common frames in the two seasons were “image building” and “puppet master” (39.5%, n=17 episodes, respectively). The “image building” frame defined public relations as the management function of keeping up appearances. It most often involved making the public relations practitioner’s organization and employer look better than the other guy—no holds barred. The “puppet master” frame defined public relations as the management function that incorporates any means possible to control a particular situation, circumstance or event. The five main public relations characters
were the “puppet masters” who pull the strings of all the other characters getting them to do and act as they wish. The “patriotism” frame occurred in 21% (n=9) of the episodes. This frame occurred when the public relations practitioner characters acted on behalf of a love for the United States.

The dominant model of public relations practiced on seasons two and three of *The West Wing* was the public information model (n=34), followed by the two-way symmetrical model (n=22).

Contrary to previous public opinion and content analysis research, public relations and its practitioners were portrayed positively or favorably on *The West Wing*. On average, the five public relations practitioner characters were found to be trustworthy, honest, responsible, moral, and to possess a strong work ethic.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Years of public relations research has indicated that while one function of public relations is to maintain favorable images, the profession does not maintain a favorable image of its own. The major professional organization for public relations practitioners, the Public Relations Society of America, recognized this in 1994 and decided to conduct a five-year credibility study. The results, which were released in 1999, revealed that public relations practitioners ranked 42\textsuperscript{nd} in credibility out of 44 public figures (Supreme Court justices ranked first). Other perception studies have shown that journalists are antagonistic toward the profession and its practitioners (e.g., Aronoff, 1975; Brody, 1984; Kopenhaver, 1984), and that the general public believes public relations practitioners and the organizations they represent are not credible (e.g., Callison, 2001). Researchers have attempted to determine where the negative reputation of public relations originated from through content analysis studies. Everything from mass communication textbooks (e.g., Cline, 1982) to newspapers (e.g., Bishop, 1988; Spicer, 1993) to network television news (e.g., Keenan, 1996) to film and fiction (e.g., Miller, 1999) has been examined.

Still lacking in the content analysis research is an examination of how public relations is portrayed in entertainment television. Cultivation theory has shown that beliefs and attitudes of the public often correlate with what the public views on entertainment television. A framing analysis of \textit{The West Wing} will build on previous perception and content analysis studies while providing a description of entertainment
television content from which to build future theory and research on public perceptions of public relations.
CHAPTER 2
BACKGROUND

**Past Perception Studies**

Survey research examining journalists’ and public relations practitioners’ attitudes and perceptions held about each other has evolved over the past three decades to content analysis of news and entertainment media in an effort to determine how public relations is framed for the general public. Aronoff (1975) is credited with starting this long line of research when he examined the attitudes and perceptions of Texas journalists toward public relations practitioners and the attitudes of Texas public relations practitioners and public information officers toward journalists (Kopenhaver, 1984; Spicer, 1993; Keenan, 1996). Aronoff attempted to ascertain journalists’ and public relations practitioners’ attitudes toward each other by administering a questionnaire to members of each group. Aronoff (1975, p. 49) found that “the role of the public relations practitioner is perceived quite differently by the two groups.” For example, 59 percent of journalists agreed that “public relations and the press are partners in the dissemination of information”; however, 72 percent disagreed with the statement that “public relations is a profession equal in status to journalism” (Aronoff, 1975, p. 50). Aronoff concluded that journalists are much more antagonistic toward public relations practitioners than vice versa and that journalists believe their news values are much more credible than practitioners.

Brody (1984, p. 11) recognized that “a certain aura of antipathy long has enshrouded relationships between journalists and public relations practitioners.” In order to determine how journalists perceive public relations practitioners, he surveyed
reporters, editors and public relations practitioners in Tennessee. Brody found that while both groups respect the quality of each other’s work, journalists feel that public relations practitioners are far more unethical. Brody (1984, p. 11) noted, however, that the differences between the groups “were not as great as street gossip sometimes makes them appear.”

Kopenhaver’s (1984) survey of journalists, editors, and public relations practitioners in Florida reinforced previous studies that revealed journalists have negative attitudes toward public relations practitioners. Kopenhaver’s survey was designed to measure attitudes the two groups have toward one another and how much understanding they have of each other’s goals. One portion of the survey asked respondents to rank-order 16 professions in the order of their respect for them—“Editors ranked journalists first on the list and public relations practitioners 15, ahead of only politicians, which were 16” (Kopenhaver, 1984, p. 39).

Callison (2001) set out to answer the age-old questions, “Do PR practitioners have a PR problem?” In an attempt to determine public perception of source credibility, Callison conducted a 2 x 2 factorial experiment in which information source type—public relations spokesperson or generic spokesperson—and message topic—client-neutral or client-negative—were varied. The results of his study suggest, “public relations professionals and the organizations they represent are perceived as less credible than unidentified sources and their employers” (Callison, 2001, p. 219).
Past Content Studies

While previous research had revealed that journalists show disdain for public relations practitioners, it had not shown exactly how that disdain was conveyed to the public. Cline’s (1982) seminal content analysis examined how journalists show their antipathy for the profession and its practitioners to the public. Cline compared how public relations is taught in 12 introductory mass communication texts and found “while there are few exceptions, students in the introductory mass media courses which use these texts are receiving a negative introduction to public relations” (Cline, 1982, p. 64). Cline found mass communication text books teach students that telling half-truths is an integral part of the public relations business; the prime function of public relations is to obtain space free of charge; and public relations is “prostituting” media skills. Cline argued that biased teaching materials perpetuate negative images current journalists have of public relations and its practitioners to new and future generations of journalists.

Bishop (1988) conducted a content analysis of three well-known regional newspapers to determine what newspapers say about public relations. While there were no mentions of the terms public relations, press relations, public information, government information or press officer and the term PR occurred only once, the term publicity occurred 121 times during the month of June, 1987. Bishop (1988, p. 51) reached the limited conclusion that “public relations is equated solely with publicity.”

Spicer (1993) analyzed 84 print articles to determine if the negative attitude journalists hold towards the profession and its practitioners resulted in connotative use of the terms public relations and PR in the print media. Spicer’s analysis revealed seven different connotative themes or definitions of the two terms: distraction, disaster, challenge, hype, merely, war and schmooze. While it is difficult to draw conclusions
from this data sample because of its small size, and because Spicer may have been biased in choosing the sample because “public relations practitioners are possibly more likely to attend to articles using the terms public relations and PR in a pejorative manner” (Spicer, 1993, p. 52), Spicer found that more than 80% of the sample used public relations or PR in a negatively embedded context.

Analyses of print media have been extended to include network television news coverage. Keenan (1996) built on Spicer’s analysis by examining 79 stories mentioning public relations or PR on evening newscasts on ABC, CBS and NBC that aired between 1980 and 1995. According to Keenan (1996, p. 216), “PR is usually presented as being synonymous with publicity or press agentry and is often associated with negative connotations.” He contended that there is not much of an explanation as to why public relations is portrayed in such a manner except for previous research attributing them to journalistic attitudes. Keenan felt it was imperative that he discover why public relations is often associated with press agentry and publicity; therefore he coded his sample for which model of public relations was used. Of the 67 stories Keenan identified that dealt with public relations practices, 31 stories dealt with the press agentry model, while 18 dealt with two-way asymmetrical, 16 with public information and 2 with two-way symmetrical.

Keenan also found that public relations is receiving more network news attention each year; the average number of public relations stories per year increased from 1.6 in the eighties to 10.5 in 1995. While Keenan found that television news stories with a negative tone in regards to public relations were more common than those with a positive tone, “television news tends to take a neutral tone in reporting public relations and it
appears that television is more neutral than the print media in covering the field” (Keenan, 1996, p. 225).

Content analysis of print and television news media was extended to entertainment media when Miller (1999) analyzed 202 different public relations practitioner characters in film and fiction released from 1930 to 1995. Miller’s sample was not representative of all images of public relations practitioners in film and fiction from 1930 to 1995 because she relied on peer recommendation. While “no attempt at formal content analysis was made,” Miller did develop exhaustive categories based on archetypal characters. The categories were named after the following recurring character traits: ditzy, obsequious, cynical, manipulative, money-minded, isolated, accomplished, and unfulfilled. In addition to coding for character traits, Miller coded for: definitions of public relations, strategies and tactics employed by practitioners, the moral life of the practitioner, effectiveness, consequences of choices made by the practitioner, and relationships with key groups (peers, clients and employers, etc.). While there are several limitations to the study, Miller found that “representations of PR are woefully inadequate in terms of explaining who practitioners are and what they do, and it shows that writers dislike primarily PR’s apparent effectiveness” (Miller, 1999, p. 3). Miller concluded that the media has relayed misconceptions about and stereotypes of public relations to the public, setting the stage for the enduring quality of representations the public receives.

Still lacking in the literature on this issue is a consideration of how entertainment television presents public relations and public relations practitioners. Researchers have used content analysis to examine how the entertainment media portray the medical and legal professions and their practitioners (e.g., Pfau & Mullen, 1995; Pfau, Mullen,
Diedrich, & Garrow, 1995). To date, this line of research has not been extended to the public relations profession and its practitioners.
According to Gerbner, Gross, Signorielli, and Morgan (1980), decades of research investigating the relationship between television content and constructed social realities developed into cultivation theory. Cultivation theory offers a useful framework for explaining how public perception is built on entertainment television content. Cultivation theory holds that “television viewers who say they are exposed to greater amounts of television are predicted to be more likely (compared to viewers who say they are exposed to lesser amounts) to exhibit perceptions and beliefs that reflect the television world messages” (Potter, 1994, p.1).

Cultivation theory posits that television is a dominant source of shared perceptions or images, and it maintains that network television, in particular, is a powerful source of shared images, which in turn provide lessons for viewers about “the ways of the world” (Gerbner & Gross, 1976, p. 178; Signorielli, 1987; Pfau & Mullen, 1995).

A cultivation analysis is typically conducted via two methods, content analysis and survey research. A detailed content analysis serves to determine how a topic is presented in the media. Subsequently, survey research serves to measure level of media exposure and audience perceptions or the topic under study. Combined, the two methods allow conclusions to be reached about media influence on perceptions of social reality.
According to Gitlin (1980), primetime television programming has the ability to transform reality for many viewers. Schramm, Lyle, and Parker (1961) explain this reality transformation. “The viewer goes to television for entertainment and stores certain items of information without seeking them” (Schramm, Lyle, & Parker, 1961, p. 75). Malmsheimer (1988) maintains that storing items of information found in entertainment television distorts reality. “Such distortions, routinely presented to a receptive mass audience, have great potential for affecting people’s attitudes and expectations about the everyday world around them” (1988, p. 130).

Cultivation theory has been used to examine audience contentions of reality concerning a range of phenomena, including violence (e.g., Gerbner et al., 1980), mental illness (e.g., Gard, 2001), crime (e.g., Valkenburg and Patiwacl, 1988), aging, women’s rights (e.g., Holbert, Shah, and Kwak, 2003) and much more. Pfau and Mullen (1995) used cultivation theory to examine the influence of television viewing on public perceptions of physicians. Pfau, Mullen, Diedrich, and Garrow (1995) also examined the influence of television viewing on public perceptions of attorneys.

Pfau and Mullen (1995) found that primetime network television programming does transform reality for many television viewers in their attempt to ascertain the influence of television viewing on public perceptions of physicians. Pfau and Mullen (1995, p. 458) argue “contemporary network primetime television programming often illuminates a broader range of professional behaviors than direct experience.” Goffman (1973) explains the range of professional behaviors by dividing them into the “front region” where professionals play their public roles and they “back region” or “backstage” which is nonpublic, and where professionals may act inconsistently with their frontstage
performance. In Pfau and Mullen’s (1995) study of physicians, front region activities may include meeting with patients to diagnose ailments, conducting tests, etc. Back region or backstage activities may include arguing with a coworker, having lunch with a spouse, etc.

In their study, Pfau and Mullen (1995) found that contemporary primetime television depictions of physicians feature both front and back regions. According to Pfau and Mullen (1995, p. 458), “Meyrowitz (1985) argues that television exerts a powerful, though subtle influence on attitudes by opening access to previously restricted back regions, thus exposing the foibles of parents, politicians, physicians, and others.”

Pfau and Mullen (1995) conducted their cultivation research in three phases. Phase one consisted of a content analysis of network primetime shows that depicted characters who work as medical professionals in a medical setting. The three shows analyzed were *Doogie Howser M.D.*, *Northern Exposure*, and *Nurses*. Phase two was a mail survey of a random sample of practicing physicians in a midwestern state. This phase was conducted to provide a link between fiction and reality (i.e., were television portrayals representative of real world physicians?). The third phase consisted of a telephone survey of a random sample of households “in order to gather relevant demographic data, examine television viewing habits and preferences, and evaluate public perceptions of physicians” (Pfau & Mullen, 1995, p. 446).

According to Pfau and Mullen (1995, p. 450), the results “clearly indicated that television depictions of physicians influence public perceptions.” Content analysis revealed that television’s depiction of physicians stressed front region behaviors; however, back regions were often exposed, revealing character and morality traits that
were unflattering (adultery, arrogance, etc.). Cultivation analysis revealed that the back regions portrayed in television caused viewers to lose trust in physicians. The results also revealed that the number of medical programs that people watch is positively related to their tendency to perceive physicians as primetime network television depicts them.

Pfau and Mullen’s (1995) use of cultivation theory to explore how television portrayals of physicians and attorneys effect public perception of those professions can be useful to the public relations profession. Just as *Doogie Howser M.D.*, *Northern Exposure* and *Nurses* depicted physicians in their occupational setting, *The West Wing* depicts public relations practitioners in their occupational setting. In addition, *The West Wing* portrays a great deal of the back region of public relations.

A full cultivation analysis to examine the relationship between television coverage to audience perceptions of public relations is beyond the intentions of the current study; however, in supplement to previous researchers’ attempt to examine how public relations is portrayed, this study will provide a description of entertainment television content from which to build future theory and research based on a cultivation approach to the subject.
CHAPTER 4
THEORY OF FRAMING

The theoretical lens through which this analysis will be conducted is media framing. A framing analysis is the first step in detecting how public perception of public relations is formed. While cultivation theory explains how public perception is built on entertainment media content, framing theory explains how media content is created. According to Entman (1993, p. 52), “to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described.” Entman’s definition of framing also entails both salience and selection. Making an issue more salient consists of making a piece of information more noticeable, meaningful, or memorable to an audience (Entman, 1993).

By conducting a framing analysis of *The West Wing*, the researcher attempts to discover how the writers, creators and producers of *The West Wing* select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in such a way as to promote a particular definition of public relations, causal interpretation of the profession, and moral evaluation of the profession and its practitioners.

**Framing Background**

Framing is a relatively new concept that did not emerge until the 1970s. While it is a concept most commonly used in disciplines such as political communication, advertising, public relations and marketing, the roots of framing theory are sociological and anthropological. Gregory Bateson (1972), an anthropologist, and Erving Goffman...
(1974), a sociologist, are credited as the first to examine communication using a framing paradigm (Zoch & Molleda, 2000; Hallahan, 1999). Bateson (quoted in Hallahan, 1999, p. 209) defined a frame psychologically, saying it is “a spatial and temporal bounding of a set of interactive messages.” Goffman (quoted in Hallahan, 1999, p. 209) elaborated on Bateson’s idea, defining framing as “the definition of a situation . . . built up in accordance with principles of organization that govern events—at least social ones—and our subjective involvement in them.”

**Framing Defined**

Gitlin (1980) defines framing as a process of selection, emphasis, and exclusion, used by communicators or “symbol handlers” to routinely organize verbal and/or visual communication activities. In this study, the “symbol handlers” are the creators, writers and producers of *The West Wing*. By selecting, emphasizing or excluding the aspects of public relations portrayed in the show, the communicators or “symbol handlers” may influence how audiences perceive public relations.

Framing is social and cultural in nature according to Hertog & McLeod (2001, p. 140). “Frames are organizing principles that are socially shared and persistent over time, that work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world” (italics in original). However, frames that are social in nature carry with them cultural structures with ideas and broad concepts that are central to the cultural nature of the frame; therefore, the frame cannot be understood outside of the culture it is used in (Hertog & McLeod, 2001).

Framing is essential to the construction of social reality, according to Hallahan (1999), because it helps shape the perspectives through which people see the world. The processes of inclusion and exclusion, selection, as well as emphasis, are crucial to framing because they allow key elements of a message to be focused on (Duhe & Zoch,
By determining what attributes of public relations and its practitioners are included and excluded, selected and emphasized on *The West Wing*, the researcher will determine what elements of public relations are focused on and how they might contribute to the perspectives through which people see public relations.

According to Hertog and McLeod (2001), frames also define the roles of individuals, groups, organizations and institutions in the defined reality. For example, Pfau and Mullen (1995, p. 441) found that “past prime-time television depictions of physicians were consistently positive, offering an ‘idealized’ view of physicians contributing ‘... to a cultural predisposition to hold the entire medical profession in ... awe ...’.” A framing analysis of *The West Wing* will determine how prime-time depictions of public relations define the reality of public relations for the general public.

According to framing theorists Gamson and Modigliani (quoted in Maher, 2001, p. 86), a frame is “a central organizing idea...for making sense of relevant events, suggesting what is at issue. Pan and Kosicki (1993) agree, with the organizational role of framing, defining it as a form of “news discourse construction.” They view the idea behind framing as “viewing news text as an organized system signifying elements that both indicate the advocacy of certain ideas and provide devices to encourage certain kinds of audience processing of the texts” (p. 61).

Frames are largely relational. Framing implies relationships among a message’s elements. Thus, the messages within a frame are organized by a communicator and communicated to the receiver as being mutually relevant, while those outside of the frame are less important (Maher, 2001). Framing thus implies that some items will be identified as facts, while others will not (Miller & Riechert, 2001). Cognitive
psychologist Friedman defines framing as “a function that specifies the relations that hold among the arguments comprising a particular conceptual bundle at a particular level of abstraction (Maher, 2001, p. 86).

Framing can have a significant influence on public understanding and public opinion of a particular issue, and thus, policy formation (Andsager & Smiley, 1998). Actors and interests compete to dominate the text presented through the media. The topic and the relative power of those individuals or groups will affect the degree to which they influence the frame of an issue (Andsager & Smiley, 1998).

The study of framing aims to identify the dominant frame for a particular social issue or phenomenon, while also identifying alternative frames that arise due to the position of opposing groups (Hertog & McLeod, 2001). Issues are topics that acquire public attention, and that usually require policy decisions be made (Miller & Reichert, 2001). Framing includes the context, content, topic, coverage and packaging of news events (Palenchar, 2001).

Framing attempts to detect the strategies and tactics used by various groups in their attempts to influence the frame of the particular issue. Finally, framing seeks to discover what is present in the form of reading material for the general public, such as newspaper stories and news coverage on television (Hertog & McLeod, 2001).
CHAPTER 5  
THE WEST WING

*The West Wing* is a prime-time network television drama that depicts a fictional, but seemingly accurate, account of the life of a present-day President of the United States and his various staff members who have established personal and professional relationships with him during his two presidential campaigns and first few years in office. According to Aaron Sorkin (August & McDowell, 2002), creator of the series, the idea behind *The West Wing* was to give the American public an idea of what happens the two minutes before and the two minutes after the president appears on CNN. Central to those two minutes, and of particular concern to this study, are the main characters of the show who carry out public relations duties—the chief of staff, deputy chief of staff, communications director, deputy communications director, and press secretary.

According to Holbert, Pillion, Tschida, Armfield, Kinder, Cherry, and Daulton (2003), the show offers a “unique a vision” of what it is like to be president on a daily basis to the American public. In short, they argue, “The West Wing represents the fly on the wall that the media wish they could be” (Holbert et al., 2003, p. 428). The “unique vision” of the show is due in part to the show’s consultants: President Jimmy Carter’s policy and strategy advisor, Lawrence O’Donnell, press secretary to the Clinton White House, Dee Dee Myers, and a former adviser to Senator Patrick Moynihan (Topping, 2002).
The West Wing, which originally aired September 22, 1999, has achieved high critical acclaim. The series was honored with 13 Emmy Awards for its debut season, including Outstanding Drama Series, and went on to receive Emmys for Outstanding Drama Series in 2001 and 2002. The West Wing currently holds the record for most Emmys won by a series in a single season. In addition to receiving nods from Emmy voters, the show has received a Peabody Award for excellence in television.

The program not only has achieved high critical acclaim, but also has become extremely popular as well. For example, the April 3, 2002 airing was viewed by 12,027,000 television households (Broadcasting & Cable, 2002). In short, this popular program has the potential for influence, given the large number of people who watch this fictional account of the daily activities of a sitting president and his staff.

According to Pfau and Mullen (1995), “whenever television programming communicates a coherent set of images about professionals, those who consume a greater quantity of such fare will tend to accept part or all of such images.” Before a cultivation study is conducted to determine if viewers of The West Wing accept part or all of The West Wing’s portrayal of public relations, it must be determined how public relations is actually portrayed on The West Wing.

The following research questions will guide this analysis covering the portrayal of public relations and its practitioners in primetime entertainment television.

Research Question 1: How is public relations framed on The West Wing? What frames dominate?

Research Question 2: What models of public relations are presented on The West Wing?
Research Question 3: How are public relations practitioners portrayed on The West Wing?

Based on the previous content analysis of public relations’ portrayal in the media (e.g., Cline, 1982; Bishop, 1988; Spicer, 1993; Keenan, 1996; Miller, 1999), the following hypothesis has been formed.

Hypothesis 1: The public relations profession and its practitioners will be negatively or unfavorably portrayed on The West Wing.
A framing analysis conducted via content analysis was chosen for purposes of this study. Krippendorff (1980, p. 198) defines content analysis as a “research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from data to their context.”

Content analysis may be conducted on two levels—manifest content and latent content. Manifest content is content that can be seen and counted. For example, the number of times the word *publicity* is mentioned or the number of times public relations characters employ publicity as a tactic is manifest content. Latent content deals with the underlying or deeper meanings of a message and is more qualitative in nature. Analysis of latent content is crucial because the underlying meaning of a message may be more important than the number of times the message is presented. For example, analysis might reveal that public relations characters employed 10 publicity tactics in one episode; however, one of the publicity tactics may be so dramatic and over-the-top that it weighs more heavily with viewers. According to Kaid (1989, p. 199) “a researcher who engages in counting alone might incompletely describe the programming content as well as miss the chance to correlate content with communication effects.” In order to provide a more complete, well-rounded picture of how public relations is framed on *The West Wing*, and because the ultimate goal of this research is to “correlate content with communication effects,” both manifest and latent content were coded for.

Kaid (1989) posits that reliability is typically of great concern to most researchers conducting a content analysis because the objectivity or “degree to which data are
independent of the measurement instrument” (Kaid, p. 208) is often questionable, especially where latent content is concerned. Reliability is achieved by recruiting additional coders. When different coders reach the same inferences with the same coding protocol, the analysis is reliable (Kaid, 1989).

While validity is not as easy to determine as reliability, Kaid (1989, p. 199) argues, “Content validity is satisfactory if the researcher intends only to provide a description of a particular sample.” Since a framing analysis functions to provide a description of a particular sample, in this case, *The West Wing*, validity was considered satisfactory.

**Sample Selection**

Interested in exploring the framing of public relations in United States entertainment television, the researcher concentrated on NBC’s primetime television drama *The West Wing* because it is critically acclaimed, and a large portion of the American public has an opportunity to view it since it airs on NBC, one of the four major broadcast networks. The fact that *The West Wing* airs on a network, which is free television, is important to note because more viewers have an opportunity to see it, therefore, improving the likelihood that cultivation takes place. Additionally, *The West Wing* is one of only a handful of current U.S. television programs that portray the public relations professions and its practitioners.

The current study analyzed seasons two (2000-2001) and three (2001-2002) of *The West Wing*. Those seasons were chosen because season one garnered much attention from critics. For its first season, the show received Emmys for Outstanding Drama, Outstanding Supporting Actor, Outstanding Supporting Actress, and Outstanding Writing For A Drama Series. Receiving numerous awards after its first season may have
recruited new viewers to the series in addition to maintaining first season viewers. According to Tucker (2001), 25 million viewers watched the second season premier of the series. *The West Wing* received numerous Emmys for its second season, including, Outstanding Drama and Outstanding Supporting Actor. These acclamations again recruited new viewers and maintained regular viewers. The writers, producers, and actors were the same during seasons two and three.

To gather the episodes to be analyzed, the researcher made videocassette recordings of reruns of *The West Wing* on the cable channel BRAVO. *The West Wing* began running in syndication on the channel during August 2003 at 7 and 11 p.m. Monday through Thursday. The entire sample consisted of 43 episodes—22 from season two and 21 from season three (See Appendix A).¹

**Instrument**

An individual episode served as the unit of analysis. The coding protocol (see Appendices B and C) was pretested. An additional coder trained in framing analysis was recruited to code a random sample of 10 percent of the episodes, and to determine the degree to which the coders agreed upon the frames. An intercoder reliability of 89% was achieved (coders agreed on 117 out of 132 judgments).

After an identification number was assigned to each episode, the name of the episode, the date it originally aired, the date it aired in syndication, the writers, the plot of the episode, and the main characters in the plot were all recorded.

Public relations is often seen as a broad concept that is difficult to define. In order to determine what public relations is on *The West Wing*, coders referred to Cutlip,

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¹ A documentary episode about the making of *The West Wing* was omitted from season 3.
Center and Broom’s (2000, p. 6) definition of public relations, which is in a core public relations textbook, “Public relations is the management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the public(s) on whom its success or failure depends.” For purposes of this study, the organization was the President of the United States (or office of the President) and the publics were the White House staff (secretaries, FBI, interns, etc.), Congress (House and Senate), media, the American public (voters, taxpayers, etc.), foreign governments, state governments, military, lobbyists (activist groups), etc.

Building on Keenan’s 1996 research of network television news coverage of public relations, the researcher coded for the model of public relations practiced in each episode. Keenan posited that public relations is often presented as being synonymous with publicity and press agentry, and is often associated with negative connotations. Recording the strategies and tactics employed by public relations characters in *The West Wing* aided in determining which model, public information, press agentry, two-way asymmetrical, or two-way symmetrical, was practiced. In addition to strategies and tactics, scholarly definitions of each model were used to determine which model was practiced.

Cutlip et al. (2000, p. 14) define press agentry as “creating newsworthy stories and events to attract media attention and to gain public notice.” According to Kelly (1998), the public information model works to bring about unbalanced effects. “No effort is made to balance the organization’s needs with the needs of its donor prospects (its publics); the model is asymmetrical because the organization is right and its interests take precedence” (Kelly, 1998, p. 165). The public information model is characterized
by incomplete messages, selected to place the organization in a favorable light (Cutlip et al., 2000). According to Grunig (1984, p. 165), the two-way asymmetrical model consists of “finding out what the public likes about an organization and then highlighting that aspect . . . or by determining what values and attitudes public had and then describing the organization in a way that conformed to those values and attitudes.” The two-way symmetrical model is characterized by an ongoing dialogue between an organization and its public according to Cutlip et al. (2000).

Coders were trained to recognize, via strategies and tactics, which model of public relations was being practiced. By coding for the models of public relations practiced in each episode, the researcher attempted to ascertain how public relations is framed in *The West Wing*.

Building on Miller’s (1999) analysis of film and fiction and Pfau and Mullen’s (1995) analysis of physicians in primetime network television shows, the researcher coded for the demographics, personality traits and moral life of public relations practitioners, and the overall tone (positive, negative or neutral) of public relations in each episode.

Miller (1999) found that characters who portray public relations practitioners are predominately male, when in practice, public relations practitioners are predominately female. Miller (1999) also found that public relations practitioners are often portrayed as being dishonest, ditzy, manipulative and cynical. Miller (1999) contended that the aforementioned factors all contribute to the negative image of public relations. Pfau and Mullen (1995) found that contemporary television’s depictions of physicians are negative
in tone. More importantly, they found that negative portrayals of physicians on television cultivate negative opinions of physicians in viewers.

Also building on Pfau and Mullen’s (1995) research, the researcher coded the tone of front and back region behaviors. Since Pfau and Mullen’s (1995) cultivation analysis showed that negative back region behaviors caused viewer trust in physicians to decline, it is important for future cultivation research to discover the tone of front and back region behaviors in *The West Wing*. A positive portrayal in one region versus a negative portrayal in the other region may weigh heavily with viewers as it did in Pfau and Mullen’s (1995) study.

In addition to coding for the personality of public relations characters, the researcher evaluated the practitioner characters’ relationships with key groups (the public, peers, superiors and journalists). Analyzing such relationships offered insight into how viewers come to understand public relations as a profession. For example, in Pfau and Mullen’s (1995) analysis of television physicians, physicians often treated nurses and other medical staff as “peons.” Cultivation analysis revealed that this caused viewer’s respect of physicians to decline.

The researcher took extensive notes on the plot lines, characterizations, and dialogue in order to provide insight into how public relations is defined and to discover what public relations responsibilities are attached to each character. Recording responsibilities is key, according to Miller (1999), because that is how the public (viewer public in this case) will build their definitions of what public relations is.

Finally, the researcher recorded miscellaneous items such as powerful dialogue spoken by public relations characters.
Analysis

Using the coding sheet and guidelines, the researcher coded all 43 episodes. A second coder coded approximately 10 percent (n=5) of the episodes. In addition to establishing reliability, the second coder aided the researcher in negotiating categories and enriching established categories. Analysis essentially consisted of examining coding sheets for themes.

The constant comparative method was used to discover emergent themes and categories. This method advocates a cyclical process that is key to all qualitative research (Boeije, 2002). Glaser and Strauss (1967) developed this four-step method as a strategy for developing grounded theory.

The first step of constant comparison began by comparing data within a single episode to form categories. Categories were defined, expanded and created as new information emerged. Categories were labeled according to the most appropriate codes. From the categories, it was possible to formulate the core message from a single episode (Boeije, 2002).

The second step of constant comparison involved analyzing all episodes in a single season and comparing them with each other. Categories were continually defined, expanded and created as new information emerged. A code tree or inventory of characteristics of each category was created. Finally, categories were examined to see if they could be combined or eliminated.

The third step consisted of comparing season two with season three. Categories were refined and developed until they became saturated or “so well defined that there was no point in adding further exemplars to them” (Lauffer, 2002, p. 101).
Analysis was completed in the fourth step when explanatory and predictive frames emerged. It is important to note that more than one frame existed in numerous episodes. Despite the existence of more than one frame, however, one frame was always dominant. The dominant or primary frame in each episode was easily identified by the number of times characteristics of that frame were present in a given episode. Characteristics of the secondary frame occurred often, but not as often as those of the primary frame.
CHAPTER 7
RESULTS

A total of 43 episodes of The West Wing were coded for this study. A second coder analyzed 10% of the episodes. An intercoder reliability of 89% was achieved (coders agreed on 117 out of 132 judgments). All of the original episodes aired Wednesdays on NBC at 9 p.m. Eastern Standard Time, with the exception of episodes 202 and 302, which aired at 10 p.m. immediately following season premier-episodes 201 and 301. All episodes were an hour long or approximately 40 minutes without commercials.

Public relations functions, activities, and positions were most commonly referred to as communications, not public relations. The term public relations was not used in any of the episodes (see Table 1); however, the term PR was used twice in the second season premier. The term spin and various forms of spin such as unspinnable were used four times in season two and 13 times in season three. The term press secretary was used 10 times in season two and three times in season three. The term spokesperson was used four times in season two. The term communications, as in Communications Director, communications office, and “I’m in communications,” was used 14 times in season two and 11 times in season three. The term damage control was used once to refer to public relations activities. Eleven of the 23 episodes in season two contained none of the aforementioned terms, and 10 of the 21 episodes in season three contained none of the aforementioned terms.
A chi-square goodness of fit test was calculated comparing the total mentions of the references to public relations for both seasons. A chi-square value of 62.645(6), p< .05, was found, indicating that there are differences in the proportions of terms used to refer to public relations.

Table 1. References to public relations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Terms used</th>
<th>Season two</th>
<th>Season three</th>
<th>Total mentions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public relations</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PR</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spin</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Press Secretary</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spokesperson</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communications</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damage Control</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Seasons two and three of *The West Wing* portrayed public relations favorably or positively overall (46.5%, n=20) (see Table 2). Public relations was portrayed negatively 37.2% of the time (n=16) and neutrally portrayed 16.3% of the time (n=7). Public relations was negatively or unfavorably portrayed in season two (n=10) and positively or favorably portrayed in season three (n=13). The overall positive or favorable portrayal of public relations in *The West Wing* contradicts years of content analysis research that has found that the portrayal of public relations in the mass media (television news, text books, print, film and fiction books) is predominantly negative (e.g., Cline, 1982; Bishop, 1988; Spicer, 1993; Keenan, 1996; Miller, 1999).

Table 2. Tone of public relations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tone</th>
<th>Season two</th>
<th>Season three</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Negative/unfavorable</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive/favorable</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A chi-square goodness of fit test was calculated comparing the total tone of public relations for both seasons. A chi-square value of 6.186(2), p< .05, was found, indicating that there are differences in the proportions of the total tone of public relations.

**Strategies and Tactics**

There were 197 strategies and tactics mentioned and/or implemented in both seasons. Thirty-six percent (n=71) of strategies and tactics were only mentioned and never implemented, 48% (n=92) were only implemented, and 18% (n=35) were both mentioned and implemented (see Table 3).

A chi-square goodness of fit test was calculated comparing the total mentions and implementations of public relations strategies and tactics for both seasons. A chi-square value of 25.182(2), p< .05, was found, indicating that there differences in the proportions of strategies and tactics mentioned, implemented or mentioned and implemented.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Season two</th>
<th>Season three</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mentioned</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implemented</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentioned and Implemented</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>95</strong></td>
<td><strong>102</strong></td>
<td><strong>197</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An example of a strategy that was only mentioned and never implemented occurred in episode 209, “Galileo,” when the communications team strategizes that they organize a photograph opportunity of the president eating green beans to make up for a damaging statement in the press that the president hated green beans (Falls, Sorkin, & Graves, 2000). The most common strategy or tactic that was implemented without being discussed prior (mentioned) was press briefings and conferences. A strategy or tactic that
was mentioned and implemented, for example, occurred in episode 216, “Somebody’s Going to Emergency, Somebody’s Going to Jail.” In a meeting with the communications team, Leo discusses strategies and tactics that will aide in building relationships with various publics. These strategies and tactics are implemented throughout the episode in the form of meetings with various groups that normally would not get to talk one-on-one with White House staff.

Strategies and tactics mentioned, implemented or both included: press conferences, press briefings, leaking information to reporters, polling, special events, blackmail, attending events, meetings with various publics, feasibility studies, photograph opportunities, and refraining from saying “no comment.” The most commonly used tactics were press conferences and briefings (n=45).

**Frames**

*RQ#1: How is public relations framed on The West Wing? What frames dominate?*

Many similar frames were found in seasons two and three of *The West Wing*. The most common dominant frames were: “image building,” “puppet master,” and “patriotism.”

**Image Building**

The image-building frame dominated 39.5% (n=17) of the episodes. This frame defines public relations as the management function of keeping up appearances. It most often involves making the public relation practitioner’s organization and employer look better than the other guy – no holds barred. Of the episodes that were dominated by this frame, 53% (n=9) were overall positive in tone and 18% (n=3) were overall negative in tone. Strategies and tactics employed in each episode that contributed to this frame
included creating photograph opportunities (photo-ops) for the press, staging events to make up for communication blunders, being forthright about mistakes with the press, environmental scanning to avoid potential image damaging situations, sending White House representatives to meet with different publics, lying to various publics, including the press, hiding or covering the truth, and making sure the press secretary or other White House spokespersons did not say “no comment.”

The image-building frame often portrayed public relations as the practice of lying to various publics, including the press, and hiding or covering the truth in order to make the White House and/or president look good. For example, in episode 212, “The Drop-In,” C.J., the press secretary, asks a well-known black comedian to decline from hosting a dinner that the president will be attending because of an incident that happened two years ago—the president laughed at a joke about New York City cops shooting black men. When the press asked C.J. about the incident, she lied and said the president did not laugh at the joke (Sorkin, O’Donnell, & Antonio, 2001). C.J. needed to get the comedian to decline from hosting the dinner, so the story about the president laughing or not laughing at a racial joke does not become news again.

While the image-building frame often involved using lies or employing tactics to hide the truth, it also involved being forthright with mistakes and blunders made by the president and White House staff. For example, in episode 213, “Bartlet’s Third State of the Union,” the president invites a Detroit policeman to attend the State of the Union so he can be recognized as a hero. It later comes to C.J.’s attention that the white policeman got an official reprimand for using excessive force on a black suspect seventeen years ago. Trying to keep a lid on the story, C.J. quizzes the policeman after the address,
asking him why he didn’t tell them about his past when he was invited. She informs him that she’ll have to alert the press so it doesn’t look like they’re hiding anything. The policeman doesn’t understand why she has to tell the press. C.J. replies, “Cause they’ll find out and I have to stay ahead of the pitch. If I issue it in a brief statement then it looks like we’re not trying to hide anything, and I get to control the story for a while” (Sorkin, Abner, Myers, & Mislano, 2001).

Environmental scanning or looking for potentially image damaging events and situations also contributed to the image-building frame. For example, in episode 211, “The Leadership Breakfast,” Sam, the deputy communications director, writes a memo about moving the press corps out of the White House and across the street so the communications staff will have more office space in the west wing. C.J. protests, saying, “We can’t exile the press! The press doesn’t want physical distance from the president and the American people would prefer it if the president didn’t have physical distance from the press” (Redford & Winant, 2001).

C.J. goes on to argue that it would look like the White House and president are trying to hide something from the press. Sam says, “We are trying to hide things from them. But I don’t think we’re going to be any better at it if they’re across the street” (Redford & Winant, 2001).

The image-building frame occurred when the communications staff staged events and created photo opportunities to rectify potentially damaging statements published in the news. In episode 209, “Galileo,” the president’s aide tells some food writers that the president doesn’t like green beans. A small Michigan newspaper prints a story about it. Hours later it becomes big news, especially in Oregon, a big bean-producing state. This
is a problem because the president won Oregon by less than 10,000 votes in the last election. Toby, the communications director, suggests, “Let’s do a photo-op with the president eating green beans. We can drop in a quote—‘He’s always looking for new green bean recipes’” (Falls, Sorkin, & Graves, 2000).

**Puppet Master**

The puppet master frame dominated 39.5% (n=17) of the episodes. This frame defines public relations as the management function that incorporates any means possible to control a particular situation, circumstance or event. The five main public relations characters are the “puppet masters” who pull the strings of all the other characters getting them to do and act as they wish. Of the episodes dominated by this frame, 56% (n=9) were overall negative or unfavorable towards public relations and 12% (n=3) were overall positive or favorable to public relations in tone. Underhanded and sneaky strategies and tactics such as blackmail, bribes, and leaking information to the press were characteristic of this frame.

The puppet master frame was most often recognizable when any of the five major characters leaked information to the press in order to get momentum behind an issue. In episode 303, “Ways and Means,” for example, C.J. decides to take a congressional investigation of the president into her own hands. The president is being investigated for failing to disclose to the American public that he has Muscular Sclerosis (he knew before he was elected). C.J. wants a different prosecutor to investigate the case. “We’re not going to get anywhere putting on a calm face,” she says. “We need to pick a fight! We need a different enemy” (Sorkin, Attie, Sperling, & Graves, 2001).
A conversation between C.J. and Leo leads C.J. to drop clues to the press that ultimately force the replacement of the prosecutor with someone more favorable to the president:

C.J.
Leo, We need to be investigated by someone who wants to kill us just to watch us die. We need someone perceived by the American people to be irresponsible, untrustworthy, partisan, ambitious and thirsty for the limelight. Am I crazy or is this not a job for the U.S. House of Representatives?”

Leo
Well, they’ll get around to it sooner or later.

C.J.
So let’s make it sooner. Let’s make it now. Rollins (the prosecutor) is driving them slow, he won’t talk to the press, they’re ready to jump... I swear to God, Leo, I think we can move the show.

Leo
You got a briefing now?

C.J.
Yeah.

Leo
Show me what you’re starting with.
(Sorkin, Attie, Sperling, & Graves, 2001).

Before the briefing, C.J. discovers that the prosecutor was a college buddy of an important White House employee. Rather than state this bluntly, C.J. tells the press about an article the prosecutor wrote while he was the editor of the Yale student newspaper; the White House employee was the coauthor of the article. The press takes C.J.’s proverbial “bait” and discovers the last bit of information. It shows up in the news the next day and the House of Representatives decide that the prosecutor is too soft, and they speed the hearings along and absolve him of his duties. The press secretary effectively manipulated the situation and took control.
Blackmail was another tactic that is characteristic of the puppet master frame. In episode 205, “And It’s Surely to Their Credit,” an army general who is about to retire sends an aide to talk to C.J. The aide says the general “has some concerns about the readiness of the armed forces, and he feels it’s his patriotic obligation to voice them to the public before he retires” (Sorkin, Falls, Glasser, & Misiano, 2000). C.J. doesn’t like this “act of cowardice,” that will make her organization look bad. She takes it upon herself to prevent the general from doing this.

General
Well, I'll be telling my story to Tim Russert. [turns to the door]

C.J.
No, I don't think you will, General.

General
[turns back] I'm sorry?

C.J.
I said, "I don't think you will." I notice among your many decorations is the Distinguished Combat Service Medal. You're wearing it now, as well as in numerous photographs, including some taken with enlisted men in the field. You won it while on temporary duty with the Navy's U.S.S. Brooke. The thing is, the Brooke was never fired on, and it never shot its guns. Right now, and in photographs, you're wearing a medal you never won. How does that usually go over with the boys? [long pause]

General
He never served in uniform, not once... and he presumes...

C.J.
Is there anything else, sir?
(Sorkin, Falls, Glasser, & Misiano, 2000).

The puppet master frame occurred when the five key public relations characters bribed other characters. For example, in episode 307, “The Indians in the Lobby,” Josh bribes a Georgia district attorney to do what is in the administration’s best interest. A 13-year-old Georgia boy shot his teacher in the head. His parents immediately sequestered
the boy out of the country, and Interpol arrested him in Rome. The state governor wants
the boy back, but Italy won’t extradite to a country with the death penalty. Josh flies to
Atlanta to meet with the district attorney, who happens to be a prospective Democratic
candidate for senator.

Josh
You raised $232,000 in four months, but then the well dried up after you
prosecuted a corporate polluter and got stuck as anti-business. You were left with
41,500 for the last two months and that was the ball game.

They stare at each other. A voice comes through the airport announcing the
boarding of a flight to Dallas/Ft. Worth.

District attorney
[looks up to the ceiling towards the voice] That's my flight.

Josh
[reaches into jacket and pulls out an envelope, then places the envelope on the bar
top] Guarantee you won't seek the death penalty, and you'll have endless media to
explain it to your district.

District attorney
Josh, please don't tell me there's any money in that envelope.

Josh
Well, in a manner of speaking.

District attorney
Names.

Josh
Yeah, three of them. None of them local. Do it, I'm telling ya, and all three of
them will take your call.
(Sorkin & Barclay, 2001).

Patriotism

The patriotism frame dominated 21% (n=9) of the episodes. Of the episodes
dominated by this frame, 100% (n=8) were overall positive or favorable towards public
relations in tone. A patriot is “one who loves his or her country” (Merriam-Webster
Dictionary, 1997, p.540). The patriotism frame occurred when the five main public relations characters acted as patriots. This frame is characterized by American values, particularly democratic values. Episodes dominated by this frame may be described as heart-warming.

American values most often characterized the patriotism frame. Episodes dominated by the patriotism frame were in the spirit of the infamous poem at the foot of the Statue of Liberty—“Give me your tired, your poor, Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, The wretched refuse of your teeming shore, Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door!” (Lazarus, 1883). For example, in episode 216, “Somebody’s Going to Emergency, Somebody’s Going to Jail,” Leo informs all of the White House staffers that it is “Big Block of Cheese Day.” He explains, “Andrew Jackson, in the main foyer of the White House had a big block of cheese. The block of cheese was huge. . . the block of cheese was two-tons, and was there for any and all who might be hungry. It was there for the voiceless, the faceless. . .” (Redford, Sorkin, & Yu, 2001). He goes on to remind his staff that, in the spirit of Big Block of Cheese Day, they will all take on meetings with various people and groups that wouldn’t ordinarily be able to “get the ear of the White House” (Redford, Sorkin, & Yu, 2001).

In several episodes, the patriotism frame occurred when characters acted according to their personal sense of American values. In episode 319, “Enemies Foreign and Domestic,” C.J. makes a potentially damaging statement in a press briefing about 17 Saudi Arabia girls who died in a fire; no one would help them because they weren’t dressed properly.
Reporter
Well, do you have a comment?

C.J.
I don't. No.

Reporter
I'm sorry, C.J., but you're not outraged by this?

C.J.
Outraged? I'm barely surprised. This is a country where women aren't allowed to drive a car. They're not allowed to be in the company of any man other than a close relative, they're required to adhere to a dress code that would make the Maryknoll Nun look like Malibu Barbie. They beheaded 121 people last year for robbery, rape, and drug trafficking, they've no free press, no elected government, no political parties, and the royal family allows the religious police to travel in groups of six, carrying nightsticks and they freely and publicly beat women. But "Brutus is an honorable man." Seventeen schoolgirls were forced to burn alive because they weren't wearing the proper clothing. Am I outraged? No, Steve. No Chris. No, Mark. That is Saudi Arabia, our partners in peace. Bonnie, then Scott. (Redford, Sorkin, & Graves, 2002).

**Dominant Frames**

While more than one frame existed in many episodes, one frame was always dominant (i.e., primary frame). Frames that did not receive as much attention (did not dominate) were labeled secondary frames. When primary and secondary frames are combined (see Table 4), the puppet master frame occurs 44.6% (n=25) of the time and the “image building” frame occurs 34.5% of the time (n=20).

A chi-square goodness of fit test was calculated to examine the distribution of the aggregate of primary and secondary frames used. A chi-square value of 22.857(5), p< .05, was found, indicating that there are differences in the proportions of primary and secondary frames used.
Table 4. Distribution of primary and secondary frames.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frames</th>
<th>Season two</th>
<th>Season three</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Puppet master primary</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image building primary</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patriotism primary</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puppet master secondary</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image building secondary</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patriotism secondary</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Models

*RQ#2: What models of public relations are presented on The West Wing?*

All four models of public relations—press agentry, public information, two-way assymetrical, two-way symmetrical—were presented on *The West Wing* during seasons two and three. The public information model was presented in 79% (n=34) of the episodes. The two-way symmetrical model was portrayed in 51% (n=22) of the episodes. Both the press agentry and two-way asymmetrical models were portrayed in 33% (n=14) of the episodes.

Most episodes, 63% (n=27) presented more than one model of public relations; however, one model typically dominated (see Table 5). The public information model was portrayed in the most episodes (n=34), followed by two-way symmetrical (n=22), and press agentry (n=14) and two-way asymmetrical (n=14). The public information model was also the dominant model practiced (53.5%, n=23). It was followed by two-way symmetrical, 37.2% (n=16), press agentry, 25.6% (n=11), and two-way asymmetrical, 7% (n=3). While the press agentry and two-way assymetrical models were each
portrayed in 14 episodes, the press agentry model was the dominant model practiced in 11 episodes and the two-way assymetrical model was the dominant model practiced in only three episodes.

A chi-square goodness of fit test was calculated comparing the dominant models of public relations presented for both seasons. A chi-square value of 16.057(3), $p< .05$, was found, indicating that there are differences in the proportions of dominant models of public relations presented on *The West Wing*.

Table 5. Models of public relations presented in *The West Wing*.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Season two</th>
<th>Season three</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Press agentry</td>
<td>Total portrayals</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dominant portrayals</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public information</td>
<td>Portrayals</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dominant portrayals</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two-way assymetrical</td>
<td>Portrayals</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dominant portrayals</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two-way symmetrical</td>
<td>Portrayals</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dominant portrayals</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Practitioner Portrayals**

*RQ#3: How are public relations practitioners portrayed on The West Wing?*

There are five public relations practitioner characters on *The West Wing*—four male (Leo, Josh, Toby and Sam) and one female (C.J.). None of the characters are married and two are divorced. The public relations characters on *The West Wing* hold a lot of power in their organization. They are all a part of the dominant coalition.

Leo, Josh, Toby, Sam, and C.J. predominantly interacted with each other (61%, $n=265$). Thirty-nine percent of interactions ($n=169$) occurred with other characters such
as: the media (reporters), congressmen and women, refugees, foreign dignitaries, ambassadors, the FBI, attorneys, other White House staff (secretaries, interns), U.S. citizens, the president and voters. The characters never describe their jobs to anyone; they only tell others their job title. The majority of interactions, 92% (n=398) take place in the White House and are work related (72%, n=312). Interactions that did not take place in the White House occurred in: Air Force One, bars, hotels, restaurants, the Capitol Building, the Hill, parks, and homes.

There was no difference in the tone of front and back-region behaviors. Characters were overwhelmingly portrayed in the back region. When characters were portrayed in front regions, their behavior did not differ. For example, C.J. was just as sarcastic and witty with reporters during press briefings and conferences (front region) as she was with her fellow employees behind the closed doors of the west wing (back region).

All five characters were rated on their work ethic, morality, and how trustworthy, honest and responsible they are on a five-item Likert-type scale (see Table 6). The mean rating (of all five characters) for work ethic was 4.71; responsibility, 3.98; morality, 3.9; honesty, 3.73; trustworthiness, 3.99. Sam was the only character to receive a rating less than 3, receiving a rating of 2.86 for responsibility.

Table 6. Mean character ratings for seasons two and three on a five-item scale.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Trustworthiness</th>
<th>Honesty</th>
<th>Work Ethic</th>
<th>Responsibility</th>
<th>Morality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leo</td>
<td>4.37</td>
<td>4.28</td>
<td>4.86</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>4.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Josh</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>3.65</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>4.37</td>
<td>3.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toby</td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>3.42</td>
<td>4.37</td>
<td>4.12</td>
<td>3.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>3.93</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>4.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C.J.</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>3.58</td>
<td>4.93</td>
<td>3.91</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean for all characters</td>
<td>3.99</td>
<td>3.73</td>
<td>4.71</td>
<td>3.98</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
An independent sample \( t \) test was calculated comparing the mean scores of trustworthiness, honesty, work ethic, responsibility and morality for female characters (C.J.) to the mean scores of trustworthiness, honesty, work ethic, responsibility and morality for male characters (Leo, Josh, Toby and Sam). A significant difference was found for trustworthiness (\( t(213) = -4.047, p< .05 \)) and work ethic (\( t(213) = 2.934, p< .05 \)). C.J.’s mean score for trustworthiness was significantly lower (\( m = 3.47, sd = .827 \)) than the men’s mean score for trustworthiness (\( m = 4.12, sd = .981 \)). C.J.’s mean score for work ethic was significantly higher (\( m = 4.93, sd = .258 \)) than the men’s mean score for work ethic (\( m = 4.66, sd = .596 \)).

Leo McGarry is the chief of staff. He is the hierarchical superior to all of the other public relations characters. Leo is clean-shaven and always dressed in a suit. He is approximately 60-years-old. It is revealed in seasons two and three that Leo is a recovering alcoholic and drug addict who regularly attends AA (Alcoholics Anonymous) meetings. He is a veteran of the Vietnam War and a former pilot. Leo is divorced, from Chicago, and has an Irish Catholic background.

Leo interacts more with the president (his boss) and Joint Chiefs of Staff more than any of the other characters. All of his interactions with other characters take place in the White House. Leo is very powerful, oftentimes, making decisions for the president. All of Leo’s interactions with others result in some sort of action being taken—the other characters do as Leo says. Leo’s job responsibilities include: managing the other four characters, advising the president, and monitoring local and global news for potential opportunities and threats.
Josh Lyman is the deputy chief of staff. He is second in command to Leo. Josh is approximately 40-years-old and is typically dressed in business attire. From seasons two and three, it is revealed that Josh is Jewish and likes baseball. He was born in Connecticut and is a graduate of Harvard and Yale. He does not drink alcohol because he has a “sensitive system.”

Josh interacts more with his secretary/assistant than with any other characters on the show. There is a lot of sexual tension in their relationship. Josh is “not good with women;” however, he starts a relationship with a prominent women’s rights activist at the end of season three. He is the only character shown as having a sexual relationship.

Josh’s main job duties are: assisting Leo, deciding when polls need to be conducted and what questions should go on the polls, and meeting with various congressional committees and special interest groups.

Toby Ziegler is the director of communications. He reports to Leo, and has equivalent hierarchical status as Josh. Toby is 48-years-old, Jewish, divorced, and was born in Brooklyn, New York. He is always dressed in a suit, but his tie is typically loosened, and he appears to be disheveled. Toby is balding and has a beard and mustache. Toby is shown in bars and drinking alcohol more than any of the other characters; however, he does not have a drinking problem.

Toby is usually grumpy or melancholy at best—he never smiles or laughs. He has a dry sense of humor and is a pessimist. Toby interacts with Sam more than the other characters because Sam is his deputy, and they write the president’s speeches together. In addition to writing speeches, Toby’s responsibilities include: supervising C.J. and
Sam and helping Leo decide what should go on the president’s agenda (this is often done when he writes speeches).

Sam Seaborn is the deputy communications director. He is approximately 40-years-old. Sam was a prominent lawyer before he came to work at the White House. He is a native Californian and a graduate of Princeton and Duke Law. He cares what other people think about him, especially women. He is notoriously known for having slept with a call girl (from season one), and is formerly engaged, however, he does not have an ongoing relationship with any women in seasons two or three.

Sam is a strong advocate of the environmental lobby and an excellent speechwriter—all of the other characters think so. He tends to overreact when proper attention is not paid to his speeches. In addition to writing speeches, Sam’s responsibilities include meeting with various publics on behalf of the president. In episode 216, “Somebody’s going to emergency, somebody’s going to jail,” for example, Sam researches criminals who have applied for a presidential pardon and makes recommendations to the president.

C.J. (Claudia Jean) Cregg is the press secretary. She is approximately 50-years-old and is the lowest person on the totem pole. Prior to becoming secretary, C.J. worked for a public relations firm in Hollywood, California. She is a graduate of Berkley. C.J interacts with reporters more than any of the other characters. This is mainly due to the fact that this is the primary function of her job. C.J. is humorous, witty and sarcastic. She typically makes reporters laugh during press briefings.

C.J. is shown drinking socially in a few episodes and gets drunk with the First Lady in episode 316, “Dead Irish Writers” (Sorkin & Graves, 2002). Her sexuality is
often a topic of conversation; however, she is not shown in any sexual situations. She
does not date anyone in seasons two or three, mainly because she works too much. It is
revealed in season two that she would date a certain reporter if he weren’t a reporter and
she wasn’t the press secretary.

C.J.’s primary responsibility is conducting and preparing for press briefings and
conferences. She is constantly monitoring U.S. and global news and happenings of the
White House in order to anticipate any and all questions members of the press may ask
her. C.J.’s position causes her to work and interact more with the media than any of the
other characters. One of her duties is to prepare the president for every press conference
and address he makes. C.J. is also responsible for various events at the White House (not
all events). In episode 208, “Shibboleth,” for example, C.J. is in charge of the annual
White House Thanksgiving event of pardoning a turkey. Specifically, she must choose
the most photogenic turkey for the president to pardon from being eaten on Thanksgiving
Day. She describes herself as the “Thanksgiving Cruise Director.”

**H1: The public relations profession and its practitioners will be negatively or
unfavorably portrayed on The West Wing.**

Hypothesis one was not supported. Contrary to previous content analysis research
that has found that the portrayal of public relations in the mass media is predominantly
negative, the portrayal of public relations on *The West Wing* is predominantly positive.
Additionally, public relations practitioners were found to be trustworthy, honest,
responsible, and moral and to possess a strong work ethic.

The positive or favorable portrayal of public relations on *The West Wing* is due in
large part to the models practiced of public relations practiced. The public information
model was portrayed most often, and it dominated more episodes than the other models. Oftentimes, the public information model is characterized by incomplete messages, selected to place the organization in a favorable light (Cutlip et al., 2000), however, that is not the case in *The West Wing*. The main characteristic of the public information model on *The West Wing* was simply the one-way dissemination of information to various publics via press conferences or briefings.

The two-way symmetrical model was the second most portrayed model and second most dominant model of public relations practiced by the characters on *The West Wing*. This model, which epitomizes public relations, is characterized by an ongoing dialogue between an organization and its publics (Cutlip et al., 2000). The public relations characters are constantly meeting with various publics and conducting formative research to see what direction the American public wants the president to go with his policy formation.

Finally, the fictional aspect of an entertainment television show may have contributed to the positive portrayal of public relations. The writers of *The West Wing* may have framed public relations, particularly the practitioner characters, positively, so viewers would relate to them and, therefore, comeback to watch the show week after week. Therefore, the findings of this study may differ from previous content analysis studies because the writers of the subject matter in previous studies (reporters, textbook authors, etc.) were obligated to be objective.
CHAPTER 8
DISCUSSION

This study explored how public relations is portrayed in entertainment television. Specifically, how public relations is framed, and which frames dominate, what models of public relations are presented, and how practitioners are portrayed. Past content analysis studies have focused on mass communication textbooks, newspapers, television news, film, and fiction novels. This study offers new insight into how public relations is portrayed in entertainment television. Additionally, this study offers new insight into the use of framing theory.

This study suggests that while public relations practitioners, scholars and students should easily be able to identify the job duties and functions of Leo, Josh, Toby, Sam, and especially C.J., as being typical of a public relations practitioner, viewers who are unfamiliar with public relations may not be able to. Because the term public relations is never used and the term PR was only used twice in one episode, viewers who are ignorant about public relations may not recognize it when they see it. Viewers, however, may identify the job duties and functions of all five characters as communications since that word was used 25 times to describe their jobs. Additionally, viewers may label the characters or some of the characters as “spin doctors” since spin and various forms of the word were used 17 times. Viewers may not, however, associate spin with public relations, since the term public relations was never used.

The ability of a viewer to identify the jobs of the five characters as a public relations job is complicated by the fact that the characters never describe their job in any
of the episodes. Also, viewers may not be able to distinguish between the nature of public relations or “communications” jobs and politics, because the two are so intertwined.

This study suggests that public relations is portrayed positively or favorably on The West Wing. This is due in large part to the social responsibility exhibited by all of the characters. From researching unjustly prosecuted criminals to receive presidential pardons to meeting with a cartographers association to better understand why the world map used in public schools should be changed, the characters took on numerous meetings and tasks in an effort to better understand and work for their publics.

The study revealed that public relations practitioners are not accurately represented on The West Wing. All public relations practitioners on the show are Caucasian, and male practitioners outnumber female practitioners four to one. According to Grunig (2001, para. 15), however, public relations is “a profession with a female majority and with practitioners of many racial and ethnic backgrounds.”

All of the public relations practitioners on The West Wing are part of the dominant coalition. Being part of the dominant coalition is something that all practitioners should strive for, however, most are not part of the powerful elite in their organization (Kelly, 1998).

The public relations characters are portrayed as having a strong work ethic. This is due in part to the small amount of time devoted to showing their personal lives on the show. The show is named The West Wing for a reason – most of it takes place in the west wing of the White House, and it centers on the work that goes on in the west wing. The strong work ethic of the characters examined may be interpreted as devotion and loyalty
to their jobs or a love for their job. The practitioners’ strong work ethic may lead viewers to think that all of the public relations characters are workaholics or it may lead viewers to think that working for the President is very demanding.

Viewers may think that public relations practitioners are extremely well educated. Characters discuss their prestigious alma maters in several episodes. It is well known among White House staffers that C.J. graduated from Berkley, Sam from Duke and Princeton, and Josh from Harvard and Yale.

Most of the characters were found to be trustworthy, honest, responsible and moral. Sam is the only character that is somewhat irresponsible. In numerous episodes, Sam acts according to his strong convictions about the environment and need for others’ approval (especially women’s approval) instead of acting appropriately for his position or on behalf of the President. He speaks without considering the ramifications of what he is saying.

The definition of public relations used during the coding process was “public relations is the management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the public(s) on whom its success or failure depends” (Cutlip, Center and Broom, 2000, p. 6). The organization is the President of the United States (or office of the President) and the publics are the White House staff (secretaries, FBI, interns, etc.), congress (House and Senate), media, the American public (voters, taxpayers, etc.), foreign governments, state governments, military, lobbyists (activist groups), etc.

All of the episodes present public relations as a management function. Through meetings strategizing how to create, maintain or change public opinion and/or build
relationships, the characters are constantly managing communication and relations with various publics. All of the episodes, however, do not portray public relations as the management of mutually beneficial relationships. This is evident in the dominant model of public relations practiced – public information.

The main characteristic of the public information model is the one-way flow of communication/information from the organization to its publics. There is no discourse between the organization and its publics, simply dissemination of information on behalf of the organization. The public information model was the dominant model portrayed in seasons two and three because the dominant tactic was press conferences and briefings. C.J. would stand behind a podium and tell reporters what the White House wanted them to know. If the reporters were lucky, she might answer one of their questions. If the reporters were unlucky, she would deflect their questions.

Some of the episodes did portray public relations as the management of function of building and maintaining mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and its publics. This is evident in the second dominant model of public relations practiced in seasons two and three – the two-way symmetrical model. The main characteristic of this model shown in *The West Wing* is an ongoing discourse between the organization and its publics or the two-way flow of information/communication.

Strategies and tactics employed that were characteristic of this model included meetings with various publics and acting on behalf of various publics. In episode 210, “Noel,” for example, C.J. fields a question in a press briefing about a female tourist who screamed and fainted after seeing a painting in the White House that was donated by the French government. C.J. researches the incident and discovers that the woman’s father
owned the painting before he was sent to Auschwitz, and the painting was confiscated by the Nazi’s. C.J. negotiates with the French government to give the painting to the woman.

Not all strategies and tactics mentioned during seasons two and three were implemented. The majority was simply implemented – no forethought or planning was shown. Only a full cultivation analysis would reveal if mentioning a strategy or tactic, implementing a strategy or tactic, or both mentioning and implementing a strategy or tactic would weigh more heavily with viewers. For purposes of this study, all three scenarios were considered equal. However, a tactic that is simply mentioned and not implemented may weigh as heavily or more heavily with viewers than a tactic that was only implemented. For example, strategizing in a private meeting that C.J. should lie and tell the press, “The president really likes green beans, in fact, he is always looking for new green bean recipes” may weigh just as heavily with viewers if it is or isn’t said to the press (implemented).

Frames

Interestingly, the image-building frame and puppet master frame were used equally. Additionally, the number of negative, neutral, and positive portrayals of public relations in each frame was proportionally the same. The image-building frame was predominately positive (39.5%, n=17) and the puppet master frame was predominantly negative (39.5%, n=16). Both frames were concerned with maintaining a favorable image of the President; however, the puppet master frame took maintaining a favorable image to a different level. Episodes in the puppet master frame employed more underhanded and sneaky tactics than episodes in the image-building frame.
It is not surprising that one frame was inherently positive and the other inherently negative. Items on the coding sheet such as strategies and tactics, tone, and model of public relations practiced, were used to develop the categories and code tree that aided in defining the frames. The tone thus became an innate characteristic of the frame.

All of the episodes framed as patriotism were positive or favorable to public relations in tone. Even if there were underhanded or sneaky strategies and tactics mentioned, implemented, or both, the high sense of morality and values, particularly American and democratic values, associated with this frame, overshadowed any negativity. However, only a full cultivation analysis will reveal if negativity can be overshadowed by a high sense of morality or by a character doing the right thing.

**Image Building Frame**

The image-building frame dominated 39.5% of the episodes. It communicated that public relations is concerned mainly with maintaining a favorable image. The practice of maintaining favorable images is a stereotype of public relations that is perpetuated by the media according to Saunders (1993).

Saunders (1993) found that 71% of first time public relations students at four Florida universities agreed or strongly agreed that public relations specialists “make flower arrangements of the facts.” Because *The West Wing* perpetuates this image of the profession through the image-building frame, viewers may develop the same thoughts about the profession as the students in Saunders’ study.

After watching episodes framed as image building, viewers may think that public relations practitioners will do anything to make themselves and their organization look good. Viewers may come to distrust public relations practitioners.
Episodes that framed public relations as image building also show viewers that public relations is not simply “making flower arrangements of the facts.” This frame reveals that public relations practitioners do not simply react to situations, they prevent them. As it is aptly named, the image building frame shows that a big part of the public relations practitioner’s job is to build relationships. Building strong relationships contributes positively to the image of the organization.

*The West Wing* may frame public relations as the practice of image building because of the nature of politics, not public relations. The underlying plot in most of the third season was the president’s reelection campaign. In order for the president to get reelected, he must have a pristine image.

**Puppet Master Frame**

The puppet master frame also dominated 39.5% of the episodes. It communicated that public relations practitioners will do just about anything and everything to ensure that their organization/employer comes out on top. Blackmail, bribing, and leaking information to the press characterized this frame. Viewers may question the ethics of these practices.

The puppet master frame may lead viewers to believe that public relations practitioners are fraudulent. On numerous occasions, characters deliberately deceived the public by leaking news stories to the press in order to get information into the public domain without having it be attributed to someone at the White House.

While *The West Wing* portrays public relations negatively, as part of this frame, it is uncertain if viewers will attribute this frame to public relations or to politics. Viewers may attribute the “string pulling” the characters engage in as a characteristic of politics or they may view it as a characteristic of public relations.
Patriotism Frame

According to Topping (2002), the very nature of *The West Wing* makes viewers proud of “the red, white, and blue.” The patriotism frame reveals that the five main public relations characters play an important role in making viewers feel proud of the United States.

Viewers may feel like they can relate to episodes framed as patriotism, especially since the plots of many episodes in this frame are directly related to current issues in the United States. The public relations characters on the show have dealt with war, gun control, and Big Tobacco.

The public relations characters act according to their own values – American and democratic values – in episodes framed as patriotism. Viewers may relate to characters who act on behalf of their morals and sense of American values rather than what is appropriate for their job.

Framing Theory

This study offers new insight into the applications of framing theory. Framing studies typically examine nonfiction media, i.e., newspapers, television news, journals, magazines. Little to no framing studies have examined how information is framed in fictional media, particularly primetime television programming.

This study shows that framing is a useful paradigm for determining how an occupation and its professionals are portrayed in entertainment television programming. Specifically, it is useful in examining what elements of the profession and its professionals are emphasized and what are excluded. This is contrary to previous studies that have simply relied on content analysis to determine how various professions and their professionals are portrayed. By discovering the emergent frames of a television
show depicting a particular profession, professionals can see how the social reality of their profession is constructed for viewers.

**Implications for the Public Relations Profession**

Most public relations scholars, practitioners, and students would agree that the general public does not know much about the profession or its practitioners. Generally, the American public does not encounter public relations practitioners as often as they do other professionals such as doctors, attorneys, salesmen, etc. The public typically experiences public relations through the media; therefore, it is important how the profession is portrayed in the media.

Numerous studies, including this one, have attempted to determine how public relations is portrayed in the media. Historically, the media channels that most often portray the profession are news media; however, because the profession is one of the fastest growing occupational fields in the United States (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2004), its portrayals in the media, particularly entertainment media, are increasing. Public relations professionals, scholars, and organizations, such as the Public Relations Society of America, need to be more attentive to how the profession is portrayed in all types of media, particularly entertainment media.

Public relations practitioners have long indicated that the profession has its own public relations problem. Studies, including this one, indicate that the profession is misunderstood. One problem that needs to be addressed is the name of the profession – public relations. According to Sparks (1993, p. 27), “the credibility of our industry – public relations – is so low that many practitioners are distancing themselves from the term public relations while continuing to practice the discipline of public relations.” She declares that the term public relations is being replaced with alternative terminology such
as public communications, public affairs, corporate communications, and marketing communications.

As aforementioned, *The West Wing* is modeled after the real-life drama of the communications office in the White House. The term public relations is never used in seasons two or three, yet “communications” is used numerous times. Perhaps that is simply a reflection of reality. Does the U.S. government rely on terms such as public affairs, press secretary and communications director to describe the public relations discipline and its practitioners because they recognize that low credibility is associated with the term public relations?

**Limitations of Study and Recommendations for Future Research**

What makes good politics may not make good public relations and vice versa. The political premise of *The West Wing* is a limitation. While the characters function as public relations practitioners, they also function as political strategists; therefore, it is difficult at times to determine if a character is acting according their political motivations or if they are acting in an effort to build and maintain mutually beneficial relationships for the President.

A framing analysis of public relations in the primetime television drama *The West Wing* cannot suffice for a framing analysis of public relations in entertainment television. *The West Wing* is not representative of the entire public relations field. The models of public relations practiced, strategies and tactics employed in politics may vary greatly from models practiced and strategies and tactics employed in nonprofits, public relations agencies, and industry. Framing and content analysis of other entertainment television shows portraying public relations should be conducted.
A full cultivation analysis to examine the relationship between television coverage of public relations in *The West Wing* and audience perceptions of public relations should be conducted. A full cultivation analysis would exhaust or add credibility to this study. It would either create cause for concern or lay-to-rest any concerns public relations practitioners and scholars have about how public relations is portrayed in entertainment television.

A cultivation analysis would examine several things. First, it would determine if viewers of *The West Wing* are knowledgeable of the public relations profession. Second, it would determine if viewers of the show recognize Leo, Josh, Toby, Sam, or C.J. as public relations practitioners or if they simply see them as political strategists. Third, a cultivation analysis would reveal if viewers’ knowledge and opinion of the public relations profession and its practitioners changes after watching the show. Finally, a cultivation analysis would determine if the amount of time spent watching *The West Wing* effects viewers’ perceptions of public relations.

While a causal relationship cannot be determined from this study, recent public opinion data suggests that while Americans still do not trust the public relations industry, the amount of trust in public relations may be on the rise. According to a 2002 survey of more than 700 Americans, the public relations industry is more trustworthy than the following industries: advertising, marketing, journalism, telecommunication, insurance, accounting, oil/gas, utilities, and airlines/travel (Lohman, 2002). A cultivation analysis would reveal if *The West Wing* has created an increase in trust in the public relations profession.
Research should be conducted to determine how the general American public views the public relations profession and its practitioners – even if a full cultivation analysis of *The West Wing* is not conducted. Perhaps, simply surveying the general public about their knowledge and opinion of public relations would suffice.

Finally, it is highly recommended that future studies be conducted in order to determine if the name of the public relations profession should be changed, and implications associated with a name change. Would changing the name of the profession make it more or less credible? Would a name change help or harm the profession?
CHAPTER 9
CONCLUSION

Research has shown that the public relations profession suffers from a poor reputation. A poor reputation due in part to the negative stereotypes perpetuated by the mass media. This study reveals that while negative stereotypes of the profession are evident in primetime entertainment television via *The West Wing*, entertainment television (*The West Wing*) provides a more balanced picture of the profession than other mass media outlets.

*The West Wing* shows both positive and negative aspects of the public relations profession and its practitioners. Approximately 50% (n=20) of the episodes in seasons two and three were positive or favorable towards public relations in tone, and approximately 40% (n=16) were negative or unfavorable towards public relations in tone. The most idealized model of public relations, two-way symmetrical, was portrayed in 51% of the episodes (n=22). And practitioners were shown to be trustworthy, honest, responsible, moral, and possessed a strong work ethic.

It is fairly evident through the work of other researchers that the public may not understand the purpose of public relations and what its practitioners do. *The West Wing* gives the public a look at what public relations is and what its practitioners do without referring to public relations—the term was never used in either season. Only a full cultivation analysis will reveal if the public understands the profession after viewing *The West Wing*.
Viewers of *The West Wing* may not be able to tell where public relations ends and politics begin and vice versa. At times, politics and public relations are indistinguishable. This is evident in the frames that emerged.

Through the “image building” frame, which dominated 39.5% (n=17) of the episodes, public relations was framed as a profession concerned with building and maintaining images. Image building must occur in the political arena because a candidate’s image is what gets him or her elected and reelected. Through the “puppet master” frame, which also dominated 39.5% (n=17) of the episodes, public relations practitioners were framed as “string-pullers” who do anything and everything to manipulate others and events so their organization comes out on top. Politicians and their employees must pull strings to get bills passed and make their constituents happy. Through the “patriotism” frame, public relations practitioners were as people who act out of love, respect and a sense of duty to their country. Politicians act patriotically as well.

The effects of *The West Wing* on the public’s perception of public relations and its practitioners will not be fully known until a cultivation analysis is conducted. The picture the media paints of public relations and its practitioners can affect how the profession is perceived. How the profession is perceived greatly affects how organizations that employ public relations are perceived. In order for the profession to overcome its image problem, and improve credibility, it must work to change how the media portrays it.

If *The West Wing*, an entertainment television show, has the ability to change how the American public perceives the President of the United States (Holbert et al., 2003), it
may have the ability to change how the American public perceives public relations and its practitioners.
APPENDIX A
EPISODE GUIDE

Season Two

201: In The Shadow Of Two Gunmen: Part I
202: In The Shadow Of Two Gunmen: Part II
203: The Midterms
204: In This White House
205: And It's Surely To Their Credit
206: The Lame Duck Congress
207: The Portland Trip
208: Shibboleth
209: Galileo
210: Noel
211: The Leadership Breakfast
212: The Drop-In
213: Bartlet's Third State Of The Union
214: The War At Home
215: Ellie
216: Somebody's Going To Emergency, Somebody's Going To Jail
217: The Stackhouse Filibuster
218: 17 People
219: Bad Moon Rising
220: The Fall's Gonna Kill You
221: 18th And Potomac
222: Two Cathedrals

Season Three

300: Isaac And Ishmael
301: Manchester, Part I
302: Manchester, Part II
303: Ways And Means
304: On The Day Before
305: War Crimes
306: Gone Quiet
307: The Indians In The Lobby
308: The Women Of Qumar
309: Bartlet For America
310: H.Con-172
311: 100,000 Airplanes
312: The Two Bartlets
313: Night Five
314: Hartsfield's Landing
315: Dead Irish Writers
316: The U.S. Poet Laureate
317: Stirred

318: Documentary Special

319: Enemies Foreign And Domestic

320: The Black Vera Wang

321: We Killed Yamamoto

322: Posse Comitatus
APPENDIX B
CODING SHEET

ID# _____

1. Name of Episode

2. Date originally aired
_____/_____/_____

3. Day of week

4. Date aired in syndication
_____/_____/_____

5. Day of week

6. Plot

7. Subplots

8. What is the overall tone of public relations in this episode?
   -negative/unfavorable- neutral +positive/favorable+

9. References to public relations:
   PR
   Public relations
   Publicity
   Spin doctor/doctoring
   Public information officer
   Press Secretary
   Gatekeeper
   Media relations
   Spokesperson
   Other:
10. List the public relations strategies and tactics mentioned and implemented.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy/Tactic</th>
<th>Mentioned</th>
<th>Implemented</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

11. Models of public relations practiced.

- Press Agentry
- Public Information
- Two-way asymmetrical
- Two-way symmetrical

12. Provide the demographics of each public relations character. This will not be necessary for every episode.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>~ Age</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CJ</td>
<td></td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leo</td>
<td></td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td></td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toby</td>
<td></td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Josh</td>
<td></td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Character __________

13. Does the character describe their job to anyone in this episode? If so, what do they say?

14. Who did they interact with in this episode?

15. What was the context of the interaction? Was it work-related or personnel?
16. What was the topic of conversation?

17. What was the outcome of the interaction?

18. Where did the interaction take place? (At the white house, a bar, on a plane, press conference, etc.)


20. What are the recurring traits of the character?

21. Rate the character on each of the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trait</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>Absolutely</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trustworthiness</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honesty</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work ethic</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morality</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX C  
CODING GUIDE

Refer to the following definition for answering, “what is public relations?”
Public relations is the management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the public on whom its success or failure depends.

In the case of *The West Wing*, the organization is the office of the President. The publics are: White house staff (secretaries, FBI, interns, etc.), congress, media, the American public (voters, taxpayers, etc.), foreign governments, state governments, military, lobbyists (activist groups), etc.

Therefore, public relations in *The West Wing*, is the management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between the President of the United States (or office of the President) and the aforementioned publics on whom its success or failure depends.

For purposes of this study, only public relations activities thought of or carried out by the five main public relations characters (Leo, CJ, Sam, Toby and Josh) will be considered.

ID# _____ (Episode number)

13. Name of Episode

14. Date originally aired—dd/mm/yy.

15. Day of week. All Wednesday.

16. Date aired in syndication—dd/mm/yy.

17. Day of week. Write the day of week the episode aired in syndication.

18. Plot
   Briefly describe the plot of the episode. This information can be obtained from the NBC web site. This will be professional related. For example: In this episode, the president and staff prepare to run for reelection. Meanwhile, CJ makes a potentially damaging statement to the press.
19. Subplots—briefly describe the subplots of the episode. This will be drama related—it will not deal with public relations activities. For example: Josh is having an affair with a White House intern.

20. What is the overall tone of public relations in this episode?
   -negative/unfavorable- neutral +positive/favorable+

   Circle the appropriate tone.

21. References to public relations:
   Record how many times each of the terms below are used in the episode. Record alternate terms for public relations that are not listed.

   PR
   Public relations
   Publicity
   Propaganda
   Spin doctor(ing)
   Public information officer
   Press Secretary
   Gatekeeper
   Media relations
   Spokesperson
   Other:

22. List the public relations strategies and tactics mentioned and implemented. For example: The public relations characters could meet to discuss specific strategies and tactics to use in the reelection campaign; however, they may not implement any of those strategies or tactics in that episode. If that is the case, you will record the strategy or tactic and place a (x) in the corresponding box—mentioned or implemented.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy/Tactic</th>
<th>Mentioned</th>
<th>Implemented</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
23. Models of public relations practiced.
Based on the following definitions, and the strategies and tactics above, rank-order the model practiced in the episode. 1 = predominate model to 4 = least used model. If two models are used equally, place the same number next to each model. For example: If press agentry and public information are the only models used in the episode, and they are used equally, place a 1 next to each model. If you are unable to determine which model is being practiced, mark N/A. If a model is not used, leave it blank.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Press Agentry</th>
<th>Public Information</th>
<th>Two-way asymmetrical</th>
<th>Two-way symmetrical</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definition</td>
<td>Creating newsworthy stories and events to attract media attention and to gain public notice.</td>
<td>No effort is made to balance the organization’s needs with the publics needs. The org.’s interests take precedence.</td>
<td>Research is conducted to find out what the public likes about the organization and that aspect is highlighted.</td>
<td>Mutually beneficial relationships are maintained between the organization and its publics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>Propagandize a cause</td>
<td>Disseminated needs information</td>
<td>Persuade</td>
<td>Reach mutual understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature of communication</td>
<td>One-way Unbalanced effects Truth not important</td>
<td>One-way Unbalanced effects Truth important</td>
<td>Two-way unbalanced effects</td>
<td>Two-way balanced effects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example strategies and tactics:</td>
<td>The president visits a red press conference.</td>
<td>Polling. The PR staff shows voters</td>
<td>The president visits a red cross shelter after a hurricane and talks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
cross shelter after a hurricane and the media are notified.

3 different delivery methods of the same state of the union speech to determine which delivery method the pres. should use.

with victims. Victims tell him that evacuation routes were not publicized. The president gets someone to correct the problem with the evacuation routes.

___ Press Agentry
___ Public Information
___ Two-way asymmetrical
___ Two-way symmetrical

24. Provide the demographics of each public relations character. This will not be necessary for every episode. Give the approximate age of each character and provide a brief description of how they dress, how they look, etc. For example: Toby is balding, has a beard and mustache. He wears a suit, but his tie is always loosened.

<table>
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<tr>
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<td>Josh</td>
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<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Male</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Character __________

22. Does the character describe their job to anyone in this episode? If so, what do they say?

23. Who did they interact with in this episode? The press, each other, significant others, congress, etc.
24. What was the context of the interaction? Was it work-related or personnel? A press conference, a date with a significant other, dinner with a senator, etc.

25. What was the topic of conversation?

26. What was the outcome of the interaction?

27. Where did the interaction take place? (At the white house, a bar, on a plane, press conference, etc.)


29. What are the recurring traits of the character? Bossy, driven, isolated, lazy, pushy, understanding, sympathetic, grumpy, etc.

30. Rate the character on each of the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>Absolutely</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<tr>
<td>Morality</td>
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<td></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF REFERENCES


r_management)


BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Staci Lyn Priest is a lifelong resident of north central Florida. She received her Bachelor of Science in Public Relations degree from the University of Florida in Gainesville, Florida, in May of 2002. Priest decided to pursue a career in public relations because of the creative and learning opportunities it affords. Priest’s ultimate career goal is to own and operate her own public relations firm.

Priest’s interest in how the general public perceives public relations came after years of unsuccessfully explaining what public relations is to others (i.e., trying to answer the question “what are you getting your degree in, again?”). This interest was furthered because Priest feels that public relations practitioners, scholars and organizations should do something to change the somewhat soiled reputation of the profession.