

A GROUNDED THEORY OF GLOBAL PUBLIC RELATIONS BY DIASPORA  
ORGANIZATIONS: BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS, COMMUNITIES, AND GROUP  
IDENTITY

By

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To my mother and father, for being my compass and inspiration

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

DCO	Diaspora Community Organization
OPR	Organization-Public Relationship

Abstract of Dissertation Presented to the Graduate School  
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Diasporas are a result of the constant flow people through international migration. They are imagined communities of people who are members of two societies: home and host. In both, they have rights and responsibilities, as well as issues they need to advance and address. To do so, these immigrants create Diaspora Community Organizations (DCOs), that provide the services and representations that their community needs to improve their situation and adapt to their new host environment.

Research on diaspora organizations suggest that they employ public relations to communicate with their community and achieve goals. Members of the diaspora organizations play the roles of educators, advocates and information providers, as well as the roles of communicating, counseling and negotiating contained in Hutton's (1999) public relations framework. This points to an opportunity to develop public relations research and knowledge about the public relations dynamics of the organizations that serve these increasingly influential transnational communities.

From this perspective, this study contributes to building the body of knowledge of the societal and communitarian perspective of Public Relations, by exploring and

describing how diaspora community organizations employ public relations, studying the specific case of the Dominican diaspora in the United States. The purpose of the study is to understand how public relations efforts contribute to diaspora organizations and their ability to serve their communities. Additionally, this study provides insights as to how the diaspora organizations communicate their home-country identity (internally and externally); promote community engagement and attachment, and establish relationships with the organizations they affects and that are affected them.

Findings propose a theory of diaspora community organization (DCO) public relations. This theory is centered on the DCO's interest in nurturing a sense of community among the diaspora in the United States. A model and theoretical propositions are proposed for the further refining and testing of this theory. Limitations and avenues of future research are also discussed.

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this dissertation is to build theoretical knowledge of how the use of public relations by diaspora community organizations (DCOs) contributes to their ability to achieve their goals and serve their communities. This study is pursued with the aim of contributing to the understanding of the contributions that public relations makes to society, and build an understanding of public relations in community and diaspora organizations.

Large and organized diasporas are very common in the United States. Towns and cities all over the United States are hosts to a growing number of diaspora communities of a variety of ethnicities and national origins. These diasporas are composed of long-time and recent immigrants to the country who still maintain close cultural, social, and economic ties to their homeland (Horboken, 2004). Members of these diaspora communities lead dual lives, constantly moving between two political, economic, and cultural environments (Portes, 1998). In essence, they are members of two societies — home and host — where they have interests to pursue, issues to advance, and needs to address that motivate collective action.

Constant international migration flows have resulted in the formation of more, larger, and stronger diaspora communities (Massey, 1995; Sheffer, 2003). This, in turn, has revived the interest in diasporas as subjects of scholarly research in sociology, anthropology, political theory, ethnicity, and international relations, among other fields (e.g. Alicea, 1997; Faist, 2000; Itzigsohn, et al. 1999; Kaya, 2004; Waldinger & Fitzgerald, 2004; Werbner, 2002; Westwood, 2000). Likewise, diasporas have been the subject of study in the fields of interpersonal, intercultural, international, and mediated

communication (e.g., Bonfadelli, Bucher, & Piga, 2007; Georgiou, 2006; Keshishian, 2000; Wilkin, Katz, & Ball-Rokeach, 2009).

Recent research in these fields has shown how diaspora communities are influential in home and host economic, cultural, and civic life (e.g., Kyle, 1999, Sana, 2005); how they construct their identity and express their culture (e.g., Itzigsohn & Dore-Cabral, 2000; Mandeville, 2001, Tsagarousianou, 2004); how they share and receive information (e.g., Georgiou, 2006; Rinderle, 2005); and how they have organized to advance their political interests (e.g., Paul, 2000; Sheffer, 2003). Much of this literature has included some focus or mention of the mediated and non-mediated communication efforts with and within a community. Yet, studies of the use of public relations efforts by diaspora or community organizations are both absent from present scholarly work.

However, the transnational nature of diasporas, the density of their home and host country networks, and the existence of common needs and goals suggest that their community organizations employ public relations to build relationships and distribute information within and outside their community. For example, Sheffer (2003) explains that members of diaspora groups have gained self-confidence and assertiveness, kept their ethnic identity, participated in diaspora organizations, and have not been “reluctant to act publicly on behalf of their homelands and dispersed co-ethnics” (p. 3). Additionally, research has documented how diaspora members participate in their home and host country political processes and engage in efforts to mobilize other members to support or rally against policies that may affect them (e.g. Bernal, 2006; Kaya, 2004; Parham, 2005).

Similarly, scholarly research has documented how diaspora organizations make strategic use of communication. In a study about the Iranian diaspora in California, Gorashi (2004) found that diaspora organizations contribute to forming a sense of identity and belonging for community members, while acting as intermediaries between the people and the state. Similarly, in a study of the construction of identity in Polish diaspora in the United States, Drzewiecka (2002) explained how the agenda of the leading diaspora organization included helping members of the community be informed U.S. citizens, and informing the U.S. public and government about the situation of Poland and how this could affect the United States. Also, from the perspective of social capital, Reynoso (2003) studied the Dominican diaspora in New York, and found diaspora organizations have “helped breach the gap between the immigrant community and North American society,” as well as led to increased participation in community institutions at all levels (p. 65).

Research on diaspora organizations suggest that they employ public relations to communicate with their community and achieve goals. For example Orozco (2006) explained how Guatemalan associations also promote cultural links between Guatemalans at home and abroad through activities such as the sponsorship of visits by Guatemalan musicians to the United States and funding the repatriation of remains for immigrants who have passed away in the U.S., but wish to be buried in their hometown. Research like this shows how members of the diaspora organizations play the roles of educators, advocates and information providers, as well as the roles of communicating, counseling and negotiating contained in Hutton’s (1999) public relations framework. This points to an opportunity to develop public relations research and knowledge about

the public relations dynamics of the organizations that serve these increasingly influential transnational communities.

Therefore, this dissertation builds theoretical knowledge of how DCOs public relations contributes to the organizations' ability to achieve their goals. In doing so, it aims at joining the discussion about the role of public relations in society, of diasporic and community organization public relations practices, and of the potential that public relations has to contribute to community development, and through it, to society

### **Societal Public Relations Perspective**

Ihlen and van Ruler (2009) described a societal or sociological approach to public relations, as one that focuses of the role of public relations in society, and the way in which practice and research can “contribute to the free or controlled flow of information and its meanings and to the development of the public sphere in size, level and quality” (p. 10).

A societal view of public relations changes the focus from organizations to communities and allows practitioners “to become community and organizational activists and to be part of the development of grassroots democracy” (Holtzhausen, 2000, p. 110). Sociological approaches to the practice and research of public relations are popular among scholars in Latin America, Britain, Germany, Denmark, New Zealand, and, to a lesser extent, in the United States (Ihlen & van Ruler, 2009; Molleda, 2001). For example, the Latin American school of public relation focuses on the social roles of public relations, the interests of the community, contributing to people's well-being and equality, and the social environments where organizations operate; responding to the context of the region (Molleda, 2001). In this region, Molleda (2001)

explained, public relations is seen as a vehicle to establish confidence in organizations and to building consensus between organizations and publics. Similarly, Holtzhausen (2000) explained the role of public relations as a change function, and of practitioners as key agents in defining and bringing on organizational and societal change.

Scholarly research in public relations has been informed by perspectives from social theory such as communitarism, critical theory, post modernism, and constructivism, among others (Ihlen & van Ruler, 2009). These approaches seem to be gaining popularity as evidenced by the growing number of research and writings about social theory foundations for public relations (e.g. Hallahan, 2004; Holtzhausen, 2000; Ihlen & van Ruler, 2009). In fact, Botan and Taylor (2004) have argued that public relations research is moving from a functionalist to a co-creational perspective, viewing publics as co-creators of meaning. Curtin and Gaither (2005) articulated the process of meaning co-creation between organizations and publics in proposing a Circuit of Culture as a basis for public relations theory and research. This circuit incorporates what Curtin and Gaither identified as the five moments at which meaning is co-constructed: representation, production, consumption, identity, and regulation.

Curtin and Gaither's (2005) circuit overlap with the major themes regarding society and public relations identified by Ihlen and Verhoeven (2009): power and the distribution of power in society, equality and inequality in communication, identity building through communication, and communication's role in social change. By focusing on diaspora community organizations (DCOs), this dissertation studies public relations practice within these themes, especially those related to identity building and social change.

Also contained within this societal view, is the conceptualization of public relations' role in building and strengthening not only relationships, but also communities. Smith (2007) argued that most of the literature about public relations deals with the potential of this construct for embracing various theoretical perspectives and guides public relations research; a perspective through which to study the societal role of public relations; and the fostering of a sense of community (or of belonging to a community) through public relations. However, the communitarian perspective of public relations has received most attention in the area of corporate community relations and from the perspective of the corporation (e.g., Heath, Bradshaw & Lee, 2002; Ledingham, 2001; Starck & Kruckeberg, 2001; Wilson, 2000), which have not studied the role of public relations in building communities.

In fact, the review of this literature shows that greater part of the discussion of communitarianism in public relations has focused on one of two views: how communitarianism can server as an ethical approach to public relations; and community building and/or restoration as a goal for public relations practice. The ethical approach relates to the role that corporations have in society and the need to shift to a more inclusive and collaborative — rather than solely economic — view of business and society (Wilson, 2001); so that corporations and communities understand that they have responsibilities to each other (Leeper, 1996). The community building/restoration approach was introduced by Kruckeberg and Starck (1988), who proposed that public relations be defined as the efforts to maintain and restore a sense of community that has been lost with the advent of modern technology and transportation. Similarly, Hallahan (2004) argued that community building summarizes an ideal for public relation as a proactive

effort to bring people together and that “idea of integrating organizational goals and activities with the needs, concerns, and interests of people is the very essence of public relations and creating community” (p. 265).

Despite the increasing attention being given both perspectives to communitarianism in public relations research, they are still narrow conceptualizations of the potential for community as a focus in public relations research and practice. Therefore, there are still ample opportunities for new public relations research to study the role of public relations in community organizing — which “involves bringing people together to combat shared problems and increase peoples’ say about decisions that affect their lives” (Rubin & Rubin, 2001, p. 3), and therefore can incorporate the strategic use of diverse communication approaches.

Similarly, public relations research has scarcely explored how public relations actors in the community work to co-create meaning and a sense of identity, and to identify and address issues and priorities. These are but a few avenues of research that public relations from a communitarian perspective has not explored. A database search of *Public Relations Review* and *Journal of Public Relations Research* — two leading peer reviewed publications in the field — for studies containing the term “community” in the title encompassing nearly 20 years (1989 to November 2009), yielded only 15 and 7 articles respectively. Additionally, the majority of articles found in both journals were about community relations, or the public relations activities targeted within a community to create a mutually beneficial environment (Wilcox & Cameron, 2009). The few exceptions dealing with communities themselves included in the search results were: a study of community-building effects of government public relations (Ledingham, 2001);

an exploration of the community member's perception of the university's engagement with the community (Bruning, Lagenhop, & Green, 2004); and dialogue on a college community Web site (McAllister-Greve, 2006).

Additionally, public relations literature has not studied diasporas or other transnational communities, even though these groups engage in complex and cross-national and cross-cultural communication efforts. In fact, research about transnational communities or publics has only been included to some extent in a limited number of public relations scholarly work (e.g., J. Grunig, 1992; Molleda & Quinn, 2004; Starck & Kruckeberg, 2003; Verčič, 2003). However, to date these communities have not yet been the subject of study.

Therefore, this dissertation addresses these significant gaps in the public relations literature, by contributing to knowledge and understanding about transnational public relations by diaspora community organizations. It expands on existing research in the societal and communitarian perspectives of public relations, by exploring and describing how these transnational groups employ public relations to coordinate community efforts or to engage with diverse types of home and host organizations, in an effort to build theory that might guide further studies into this arena.

As an initial exploration, this study would contribute to the field of public relations in several ways. First, it will incorporate the literature from community sciences—more specifically community communication, community politics, and community organizing, building and development — into the realm of public relations, identifying how public relations has been used, commonalities between the fields, and opportunities for further inquiry. Second, it will provide an overview of these efforts in the context of diasporas,

as a special type of community, with transnational reach. Third, it will build theoretical knowledge for understanding the public relations practices by diaspora organizations, using the Dominican diaspora in the United States as a comprehensive analysis case. Finally, it will point to several potential avenues for research, and the opportunities to continue to build public relations knowledge from a community and societal perspective.

The Dominican diaspora was chosen as the case study for three main reasons. First, because it is one of the youngest and largest immigrant communities in the United States (Pew Hispanic Center, 2010). Second, because research into diasporas and transnationalism has documented the extension and density of the network of people and organizations that make up the Dominican diaspora. For example, Castro and Boswell (2002) found that the Dominican diaspora has a group of Dominican-Americans active in the political and democratic process of home and host countries, as well as not-for-profit organizations and a growing business sector. Similarly, Itzigsohn, Cabral, Medina, and Vazquez (1999) documented how members of this transnational community engage in business and politics in both the United States and the Dominican Republic.

The final, and probably most important, motivation to study this community is that the Dominican Republic is the country of origin of the researcher. Her personal interest, familiarity with the culture, as well as ties in both the home country and the diaspora in the United States, inform and enrich this research. However, the researcher will be mindful of this fact to take the steps necessary to account for any possible bias that could interfere with theoretical conceptualization, data collection, and analysis of the data.

## **Methods Employed**

The methodological approach to this study is grounded theory research. This qualitative approach will help understand the phenomena from the perspective of the diaspora members. Additionally, this methodology is best suited for studying processes that are not already explained by theory (Creswell, 2007), such as the process under study here.

Grounded theory, as defined by its original proponents, is both a product and a method of research; it refers to theory derived directly from the data being analyzed (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Charmaz (2006) explained that grounded theory methods “consist of systematic, yet flexible guideline for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to construct theories ‘grounded’ in the data themselves” (p. 2). The specific approach to grounded theory taken in this study is constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006). This approach differs from other ways of conducting grounded theory in that it is based on the belief that the informants and researcher produce data together (Bernard & Ryan, 2010). As a result, the theory that is constructed is an interpretation of the phenomenon studied, cocreated by the informants and researcher.

Data was collected through in-depth interviews with leaders of diaspora community organizations under study, and textual analyses of the communication material employed by these organizations. The data analysis employed traditional grounded theory methods, such as constant comparison, and theoretical sampling. Through constant comparison method involves making comparisons among the data as soon as the first data is collected and at each stage of the analysis (Glasser & Strauss, 1967). Theoretical sampling refers to developing the sample of the study guided by the

research. In other words, instead of concentrating of a pre-determined group number of interviewees or of documents to review, the analysis of the data leads the researcher to identify which data she needs to collect next and where she may find it (Goulding, 1998). These and the other stages of the grounded theory methodology are further detailed in the methods section.

### **Organization of the Study**

In the following chapter, a review of the pertinent literature is provided. This review incorporates the sociological and communitarian perspective of public relations; and incorporates the development communication perspective, as it informs public relations and the subject of this study. In addition, the concept of community is also explained, as well as the perspective of community studies that informs this dissertation. Finally, diasporas as transnational communities are introduced, followed by a description of the Dominican diaspora, as well as the research questions that will be addressed by this dissertation.

The third chapter describes the methodological approach used to address the research questions. This study employs constructivist grounded theory. Therefore, the chapter provides an overview of the different approaches of grounded theory are explained and compared, as well as the rationale for choosing this specific approach to grounded theory. Likewise, the processes involved in a grounded theory study are detailed. The fourth chapter details the research findings, and includes the theory and model of public relations by diaspora community organizations (“DCO public relations”). In chapter five, the theoretical framework for the theory of DCO public relation is

provided, followed by the conclusions of the study, areas of future research, and the implications for the study and practice of public relations in the final chapter.

## CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The social perspective of public relations is concerned with the roles that public relations play in benefit to society (Ihlen & van Ruler, 2009). The social perspective is fitting with the present study's purpose to understand how public relations efforts contribute to diaspora organizations and their ability to serve their communities. Literature from the fields of public relations, development communication and community studies is incorporated to set the framework for this study. In the following sections, the public relations foundations for the study are described, followed by the explanation of the social or sociological perspective of public relations and a review of past research of community in public relations scholarship and practices. The work and views of the leading scholars in these fields are presented.

Because of the interdisciplinary nature of this study, it is also necessary to explain key concepts in community studies, starting with the definition of community and description of how communities are formed. This is followed by a discussion of the social construction of community identity, and an explanation of the concepts of community organizing, community building and community development, as they fit in the scope of this study. Then, the role that communication –strategic, mediated, and interpersonal– plays in shaping these identities and in the processes of organizing, building and developing communities is explained. This includes the role of development communication, which also serves as a foundation for this research.

The review of the literature concludes with a discussion of diasporas as transnational communities, diaspora organizations, and a description of the Dominican diaspora in the United States. Following the review of the literature, the research

questions that will be addressed in this study are presented. The review of the literature begins with a discussion of how public relations has been defined and studied in previous research.

### **Definitions and Domain of Public Relations**

As both an academic field and a practice, there are various interpretations of what public relations is and what is involved in doing public relations. In the words of Hutton (1999): “In terms of both theory and practice, public relations has failed to arrive at a broadly accepted definition of itself in terms of its fundamental purpose, its dominant metaphor, its scope, or its underlying dimensions” (p. 199). In fact, people usually understand public relations in terms of the techniques and tactics practitioners employ (Wilcox & Cameron, 2009).

Harlow (1976) analyzed and summarized over 400 definitions of public relations before building his own elaborate and detailed definition:

Public relations is a distinctive management function which helps establish and maintain mutual lines of communication, understanding, acceptance and cooperation between an organization and its publics; involves the management of problems or issues; helps management to keep informed on and responsive to public opinion; defines and emphasize the responsibility of management to serve the public interest; helps management keep abreast of and effectively utilize change, serving as an early warning system to help anticipate trends; and uses research and sound and ethical communication techniques as its principal tools (p.36).

Later, J. Grunig and Hunt (1984) provided a more parsimonious and widely accepted definition of public relations as “the management of communication between an organization and its publics” (p. 6). Along the same lines, Cutlip, Center, and Broom (2000) defined public relations as the “management function that identifies, establishes, and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the various

publics on whom its success or failure depends” (p. 4). Hutton (1999) explained that a common thread in these definitions is their focus mostly on public relations from the perspective of an organization, which ignores the work that public relations does for groups and individuals. Kruckeberg and Starck (1988) identified several key words in definitions of public relations, such as “planned” and “persuasive” and “communication.” Similarly, following a review of a variety of definitions of public relations, Wilcox and Cameron (2009) also detailed key words in public relations definitions including: “deliberate,” “management function,” “two-way communication,” and “public interest.” The last pair of key words — “two-way communication and “public interest” — recognize the importance of publics in the conceptualization and practice of public relations. As explained by Wilcox and Cameron (2009), the two-way communication aspect refers to the need to engage publics in communication give and take; while the public interest aspect refers to ensuring that public relations activities strive for benefitting both the organizations they represent and the publics these organizations serve.

Hutton (1999) went beyond the study of key words to analyze and compare definitions and domains of public relations, and propose a definition and framework for public relations in an effort to promote general agreement on what public relation is and the work that public relations does. He proposed public relations be defined as “managing strategic relationships” (p. 211), a concept contained in some of the frequently cited definitions included above. Hutton judged this a “parsimonious definition of public relations that is easily communicated, relevant to both theory and practice, and not so broad as to be meaningless nor so narrow as to be overly limiting” (p. 211). Additionally, Hutton proposed a framework of public relation’s primary roles, functions,

and tactics (Table 2-1) that could be employed to study public relations roles, functions, and tactics.

Hutton's (1999) explanation of the situational roles that public relations practitioners may assume is especially important for the present study because the nature of the organizations included in the research suggest that they may not have a public relations department or person in play. In the absence of a public relations title, the roles can aid in identifying the people involved in public relations efforts.

As defined by Hutton, (1999) the persuader role focuses on getting support for the organization. This role, he explains, focuses on promotion and obtaining consent. The advocate role is similar in that it seeks to persuade audiences, but it is assumed in response to a controversy or opposition. In other words, it responds to publics with opposing or contradicting views or efforts. The information provider and educator roles are often equivalent, in that they are assumed in the provision of public information, or as sources of information.

Another role, the crusader, works in benefit of a community. This role, like the advocate role, can be adopted following a triggering event or it can be assumed in can be another dimension of the advocate role, in serving the public interest. Finally, the reputation manager role, is mostly concerned about the image or reputation of the organization before its key publics.

Hutton's framework (1999) has been employed in studies of public relations in the United States and abroad (e.g Curtin & Gaither, 2005; Hallahan, 2004; Jones, 2002; Verčič, van Ruler, Butschi, & Flodin, 2001). However, Verčič et al., (2001) argued that this framework, as well as many of the definitions cited above, define and study public

relations from a North American perspective. Verčič and colleagues compared the framework to the findings of their study on public relations in Europe and proposed that to avoid the bias of previous questions as to the definition of public relations, researchers focus on “the special view it brings to our understanding of the world” (p. 383); i.e., exploring public relations by questioning what the public relations view of an organization can contribute to other disciplines.

The question of worldviews and perspectives guiding research are also present in other introspective public relations studies (see Botan & Taylor, 2004; Hallahan, 1993; Holmström, 2005; Holtzhausen, 2000, Ihlen & van Ruler, 2009; Sallot, Lyon, Acosta-Alzuru, & Jones, 2003) In fact, the paradigmatic approach of the researchers is implicit in the conceptualizations made by Hutton (1999) and others in the definitions provided above.

This study adopts Hutton’s (1999) framework, as well as Cutlip, Center, and Broom’s (2000) public relations definition. Under this framework and definition, the variety of efforts employed to cultivate relationships with publics and other organizations can be studied from the perspective of public relations. In addition, this research follows a co-creational/social paradigm. A discussion of the contemporary worldviews and paradigms in public relations practice and research follows below.

### **Paradigms in Public Relations Research**

Despite being a relatively young academic field, public relations research and practice has increasingly become more theoretical based (Botan & Taylor, 2004). Scholars have used several analytical approaches to explore the use of theory in public relations research and practice. For example, Hallahan (1993) used Kuhn’s concept of

scientific paradigms to examine contemporary public relations practice and identify seven possible paradigms for public relations practice: the (1) process, (2) plan (or program), (3) communication/practice style; (4) organizational/managerial effectiveness, (5) behavioral, (6) the social problems, and (7) systems paradigms.

As defined by Hallahan (1993) the process, plan and communication style paradigms are concerned with the way public relations is practiced. The organizational/managerial effectiveness paradigm, suggests that public relations success “is a function of meeting organizational expectations and the development of effective working relationships with the organization” (p. 202). The behavioral paradigm, examines public relations efforts and their impact on individual or groups, while the social problems paradigm is concerned with the role of the organization in society. Finally, the systems paradigm is concerned with the organization and its attempt to reduce conflicts and reach consensus with their key publics.

Similarly, Botan and Taylor (2004) reviewed seminal works in public relations research surveying the themes studied and theories employed in research over the span of approximately 20 years showing how these have evolved over the years. Additionally, they identified and described two broad perspectives under which the assumptions guiding public relations theory and research could be classified, functional and co-creational.

Botan and Taylor (2004) explained that the functional perspective is concerned with how public relations can serve to advance organizational goals, focusing on “techniques and production of strategic organizational messages” (p. 651). Therefore, in this perspective, communication tools and publics are means to reaching organizational

ends. Based on the description provided by Botan and Taylor (2004), this perspective could encompass the communication/practice style and organizational/managerial and behavioral paradigms defined by Hallahan (1993).

On the other hand, the co-creational perspective sees publics as equal participants, co-creators of meaning and communications. Here, public relations is more concerned with building relationships and advancing understanding between the organization and various publics. This perspective would include theories with relational or community approaches and that value relationships beyond achieving organizational goals and could encompass the social problems and systems paradigms described by Hallahan (1993). This perspective can also incorporate the relationship management paradigm prominent in contemporary public relations literature. The following section described the relationship management paradigm of public relations.

### **Cultivating Relationships**

The concept on relationships as being at the core of public relations practice and research was introduced by Ferguson (1984). Since then, scholars have contributed to developing what is referred to today as relationship management theory.

An organization-public relationship is defined as “the state which exists between an organization and its key publics, in which the actions of either can impact the economic, social, cultural or political wellbeing of the other” (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998, p. 62). Relationships between organizations and publics begin when the organization’s actions create consequences that affect publics, or when publics’ actions have an impact on an organization (Hon & J. Grunig, 1999). Contemporary research focuses on defining organizational-public relationships, identifying relationship

cultivation strategies, describing relationship outcomes, examining relationship types and measuring relationships (e.g. J. Grunig, 2002; Hon & J. Grunig, 1999; Hung 2000, 2005; Ledingham, 2001, 2003; Lendingham & Brunig, 1998, 2000).

The premise of relationship management theory is that “effectively managing organizational-public relationships around common interests and share goals, over time, results in mutual understanding and benefit for interaction organizations and publics” (Lendingham, 2003, p.190). Similarly, relationship management theory contends that public relations can use communication strategically to build mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and its key publics (Ledingham, 2003).

There are two distinct research streams in public relations scholarly work in OPR. The first, focused on the outcomes of managing relationships with key publics, is led by the work of J. Grunig (1992) and Hon and J.Grunig (1999). The second, stemming from the work of Lendingham and Bruning (1998) is more concerned with understanding OPR types and the motivations that lead stakeholders to have different types of relationships with the organization.

Lendingham and Bruning (1998) identified and defined five key dimensions of relationships: openness, investment, commitment, trust and involvement. These dimensions present opportunities for public relations to attempt to build relationships with publics by employing communication to have an impact on their perceived trust or involvement, for example. For example, organizations can engage stakeholders in dialogue and communicate understanding in order to change the relationship to one that will be, ideally, mutually beneficial (Bruning & Lambe, 2008; Kent & Taylor, 2002).

In an effort to focus more on dialogic and symmetrical relationships, public relations OPR literature and research has made the shift from referring to managing or maintaining relationships with publics, to cultivating relationships (Hung, 2005; Waters, 2007). The concern has been that “managing” relationships could involve manipulation or one side attempting to control or exert power over the other. On the other hand, cultivation involves more back and forth and negotiation of power. In agreement with Hung’s (2005) assertion that “behaviors in relationships are an on-going cultivating process” (p. 23), this study adopts the concept of relationship cultivation to describe what public relations efforts do for organizations, groups and individuals.

In their efforts to establish relationships with the organization’s key publics, public relations practitioners employ relationship cultivation strategies. Relationship cultivation strategies “are the communication methods that public relations people use to develop new relationships with publics and to deal with the stresses and conflicts that occur in all relationships” (J. Grunig, 2002, p.5). Hon and Grunig (1999) proposed that organizations can engage in employing the following main cultivation strategies: Access, positivity, openness, assurances, networking, and sharing of tasks.

As explained by Hon and J. Grunig (1999), access involves organizations opening their decision-making process to the publics and both parts being open and available for communication, such as attending to queries or answering emails. Similarly, Hon and J. Grunig describe that openness refers to the willingness that both parties have to engage each other in discussions. Even though openness by itself cannot guarantee a positive relationship, an open discussion of points of contention can lead to building trust on the other party (Hung, 2000; Waters, 2007).

Assurances are efforts to communicate to the other party that they value and understand their concerns. In other words, it is when “each party in the relationship attempts to assure the other that it and its concerns are legitimate and to demonstrate that it is committed to maintaining the relationship” (L. Grunig, J. Grunig, & Dozier, 2002). This strategy can help foster satisfaction and commitment from both parties (Hung, 2000). Along those same lines, positivity refers to efforts to make either side enjoy or feel more content about the relationship (Hon & J. Grunig, 1999). Organizations can include positivity in any effort they do, be it providing information through their website, providing verbal feedback, or excelling in customer service.

Another cultivation strategy, networking, refers to the development of relationships with other organizations or coalitions with similar publics (Hon & J. Grunig, 1999). One example would be charitable organizations working collaboratively in order to address a social issue. Lastly, a related strategy, sharing of tasks, involves organizations and its publics working together to solve shared or individual problems. For example, fundraisers commonly use this strategy with planned-giving donors (Kelly, 1998; Waters, 2007).

Despite the prominence of the relationship-building paradigm, there is no single predominant paradigm in the practice or study of public relations (Hallahan, 1993). Therefore, it seems paramount that public relations researchers first identify the ontological perspective guiding their research. In fact, Ihlen and van Ruler (2009) argue that every public relations research has its own deontological background which influences its perspective of what public relation is and does, and should be studied, and thus, it is important that researchers make their background explicit.

This research falls under the co-creational perspective described by Botan and Taylor (2004) and correspondingly, to what Ihlen and van Ruler (2009) named a societal or sociological approach to public relations. The central premises and existing research under this public relations perspective are discussed in the following section.

### **Societal View of Public Relations**

Ihlen and van Ruler (2009) described a societal or sociological approach to public relations as one that focuses on the role of public relations in society. This view is concerned with how public relations practice and research can contribute to “the free or controlled flow of information and its meanings and to the development of the public sphere in size, level and quality” (Ihlen & van Ruler, 2009, p. 10).

A societal public relations perspective is oriented towards understanding the relationship between public relations and the context in which it is practiced, in other words, the social system in which meaning is co-constructed (Ihlen & van Ruler, 2009). In this view of public relations, society is seen from the perspective of what is known and can be publically debated, rather than focusing on publics or audiences.

Sociological approaches to public relations are common among scholars in Latin America, Britain, Germany, Denmark, New Zealand, and, to a lesser extent, in the United States (Ihlen & van Ruler, 2009; Molleda, 2001; Molleda & Ferguson, 2004). In the case of Latin America, Molleda (2001) described the region’s school of public relations as focused on the social roles of the practice, the interests of the community, contributing to human well-being and equality, and the social environments where organizations operate in accordance with the socio-political context of the region. Public relations professionals in Latin America are viewed as change agents and part of the

organization's conscience, attending to the needs of communities and society in general and empowering the disempowered voices. In this region, Molleda explained, public relations is seen as a vehicle to establish confidences in organizations and building consensus between organizations and publics.

Similarly, in a study of public relations practices in Brazil, Molleda and Ferguson (2004) found that the focus of public relations in service to society was central to the roles that this country's professionals played. The scholars observed four social roles portrayed by public relations professionals in Brazil: employee well-being, community well-being, ethics and social responsibility and government harmony. These roles refer to how public relations professionals "increase his or her involvement as the social conscience of the organization and perhaps as a change agent of agent of social transformation" (p.346).

Logically, this public relations view borrows from sociological theory to conduct research under the theoretical umbrellas of communitarism, critical theory, post modernism, and constructivism, among others (Ihlen & van Ruler, 2009). For example, Holtzhausen (2000), took a critical approach to public relations theory, suggesting that public relations was an organizational change function, and that public relations practitioners were key agents in defining and bringing on organizational and societal change. Furthermore, Holtzhausen (2000) argued that this view of public relations "takes it out of organizations and into communities and transforms public relations into a discipline of immediate and just action" which in turn would make it possible for practitioners "to become community and organizational activists and to be part of the development of grassroots democracy" (p. 110).

Similarly, Curtin and Gaither (2005) proposed the Circuit of Culture model of public relations, which takes into account the role that power and culture have in the construction and interpretation of messages. This model, rooted on Marx's circuit of capitalism, incorporates postmodern traditions and a critical perspective to explain the moments in which meaning is created, as well as the points of articulation in which the meaning is contested and negotiated (Curtin & Gaither, 2005). The authors argue in favor of taking into account not only the culture of the community in which meaning is being created and negotiated, but also the situational context that is influencing this process. This includes the regulatory environment, including "the formal or legal controls of technological infrastructures, regulatory bodies, and institutionalized educational systems to the informal or local controls of cultural norms and expectations" (p.103). In doing so, they provide a framework to understand the practice of public relations in contexts other than the developed Western economies.

In sum, social theories have served to explore what Ihlen and Verhoeven (2009) called the four major themes regarding society and public relations: power and the distribution of power in society; equality and inequality in communication; identity building through communication; and communication's role in social change. These themes can be found in contemporary public relations literature (e.g. Curtin & Gaither, 2005; Hallahan, 2004; Leeper, 1996; L'Etang & Pieczka, 2006; Pal & Dutta, 2008; Toth, 2002). In fact, Botan and Taylor (2004) argued that public relations has developed beyond being only a corporate communication practice, into a field with its own theory and original research and the potential to unify other communication areas in the service of a variety of organizations.

Holtzhausen (2000) argued that public relations has far reaching effects on society and therefore, it “needs to be understood and examined in a broader social, cultural, and political context rather than in a narrowly defined organization function” (p. 95). This study attempts to answer Holtzhausen’s call for a broader understanding of public relations and to contribute to building theory and understanding in the social perspective of public relations research by analyzing public relations efforts by diaspora community organizations. Following a co-creational perspective and social view of public relations, this study builds upon theory and research in the areas of international public relations, community relations practices, and community development. The following section discusses the study of community for a public relations perspective, and is followed by a discussion how communities are defined.

### **Community in Public Relations Research**

Contained within the social perspective of public relations is the conceptualization of public relations as an instrument for cultivating and strengthening not only relationships, but also communities. In fact, some public relations scholars have argued for community building to be a central focus of the practice and research (Kruckeberg & Starck, 1988; Hallahan, 2004).

Kruckeberg and Starck (1988) were pioneers in proposing that public relations be defined as the efforts to maintain and restore a sense of community that has been lost with the advent of modern technology and transportation. They proposed that public relations practitioners could help people form relationships within the community. They posited:

Public relations practitioners can take an active part in helping community members become aware of and interested in common ends. This requires communication, in which the public relations practitioner presumably has practical expertise. Practitioners can help various public and the organization they represent become conscious of common interests that are the bases of both their contentions and their solutions. (p. 65)

Krukeberg and Starck (1988) proposed that organizational public relations people could serve this function through the organization's community relations programs.

Their description of the roles that practitioners could play in the community highlight the fact that these scholars were concerned with more than the organization's benefits to becoming involved in the community.

However, much of the focus of community relations in public relations research and practice has been studied from the perspective of the private sector — with little or no focus on the non-for-profit and government organizations — and with a focus on how these interventions can help the organizations' reputation and/or bottom line (e.g. Lendingham & Brunig, 2001; Starck & Kruckeberg, 2001; Wilson, 1996, 2001). For example, Ihator (1999) argued that becoming involved with the community is more beneficial and productive for corporations than philanthropy. Along those same lines, Wilson (1996) proposed corporate public relations engage communities following a cooperative community perspective, which would involve members of the corporation and of the community work together to achieve mutual benefits. Similarly, Swan (2008) described community relations from a public relations perspective as efforts through which organizations can balance their needs and those of the community and attend to both. Yet, these scholars have focused mostly on the organization's interests and how they could be adjusted to serve both the community and the company. The focus has been more on achieving win-win exchanges than on cultivating communities.

Retaking Starck and Kruckerber's (1988) original argument for a public relations focus on restoring a sense of community, Hallahan (2004) posited that community building summarizes an ideal for public relation as "a proactive (nonreactive) effort to bring people together through involvement, nurturing and organizing" (p. 264). More recently, Smith (2007) identified that most of the literature about public relations deals with the potential of this construct for embracing various theoretical perspectives and guiding public relations research. Similarly, Smith found that community is seen as perspective through which to study the societal role of public relations and that much research in our field is concerned with fostering of a sense of community (or of belonging to a community) through public relations. Yet, this potential has not led to the exploration or increased understanding of public relations role in cultivating or organizing communities.

Regardless of the focus of the study — be it community restoration or building, or private sector community relations — contemporary public relations literature focusing on communities has been limited. For example, a search of two leading scholarly publications in our field (*Public Relations Review* and *Journal of Public Relations Research*) found that only a total of 22 articles from 1989 to 2009 contained the term community in the title. Even those articles that did research public relations and community, were focused mostly on corporate community relations. In the few exceptions found of articles that dealt with different topics, the research was focused on studying the community-building effects of government public relations (Ledingham, 2001); exploring community members' perception of an university's engagement with the community (Bruning, Lagenhop & Green, 2004); and how a college community

website encouraged, or not, dialogue (McAllister-Greve, 2006).

However, research in other fields such as public health, community sciences, and nonprofit management suggested that community based organizations do in fact use public relations strategies and tactics to mobilize resources, advocate for their causes, and engage members of the community. For example, Alcalay, Alvarado, Balcazar, Newman, and Huerta (1999) studied how the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute designed and implemented a community-based communication intervention to raise awareness about cardiovascular diseases among Latinos. Holder and Treno (1997) analyzed the use of media relations by the Community Trials Project to increase influence policy and raise awareness about high-risk drinking. Becker, Longjohn and Christoffel (2008) studied efforts to raise awareness and influence policy about childhood obesity through community-based interventions. Burn and Oskamp (1986) documented the effectiveness of using persuasive communication techniques in increasing community recycling. Similarly, research in these fields have explored diaspora community organizations (DCOs) efforts to raise money for addressing issues in their home-countries (Fagen, Dade, Feliz, Nicholas, Dathis & Maher, 2009; Newland, Terrazas & Munster, 2010) or how they've educated the host-country diaspora (Chaudhary, Vyas & Parrish, 2010). However, none of this research has focused on the role of public relations plays in contributing to a community organizations' ability to fulfill its mission.

Therefore, community continues to be fertile ground for new public relations research. More specifically, there is a need to address some of the questions presented in Kruckeberg and Starck's (1988) original theory about how public relations can help

restore a sense of community. This study contributes to addressing this question by studying how organizations serving a community foster community development through their public relations efforts. The following section provides a discussion of the concepts of community and community development.

### **Defining Community**

The first question in any study of community development should be how the term community is defined. “Community” is a concept that, despite being widely used both in social sciences and in every-day life, is difficult to define (Blackshaw, 2010; Shore, 2002). Several scholars have analyzed and redefined the term many times (e.g. Amit, 2002; Calhoun, 1980; Hillery, 1955; Weisenfeld, 1996). But these definitions usually present the term as a dichotomy: as both something that exists in real life, and something that can only be imagined (Blackshaw, 2010). For example, Rubin and Rubin (2001) explained that the term is used to describe a geographic place; the bonds that people share (such as ethnicity and culture); as well as a group of people who share interest in the same issues. From their conceptualization, we can recognize that geographic communities are real and tangible, while the communities formed by shared culture or issues are more subjective.

Hillery (1955) conducted a comprehensive review of 94 definitions of community, identifying emerging categories of communities based on certain elements in the definition. First, Hillery separated the definitions into generic community and rural community and then, enumerated the common characteristics by which community is defined. Following this initial analysis the definitions were later divided into those that mention a group of people and social interaction, in a) a geographic area or

b) ecological relationships. As a result, Hillery provided seven subclasses of definitions combining social interaction and geographical location, describing (1) community as self-sufficiency, (2) common life as a key element, (3) class consciousness, (4) common ends, means, or norms, (5) collection of institutions, (6) emphasis on localism, and (7) community as an individuality or entity. From this analysis, he concluded that a common element in all these definitions was that they dealt with people, and that “beyond this common basis there is no agreement” (p. 12).

Shore’s (2002) conceptualization of community seems to concur with Hillery’s (1955) findings. He described community as a group of people in a geographical area who share a sense of interdependency and belonging. Both Hillery’s categories and Shore’s definitions incorporate the real-world phenomena and imaginary aspects of a concept of community; i.e., the emphasis on place, self-sufficiency, and collection of institutions, versus consciousness and sense of belonging.

Additionally, Shore (2002) explained that interacting in the same territory was not sufficient to constitute a community if the individuals in that locale did not consider themselves members. Rubin and Rubin (2001) concurred with this view, stating that “just because people live near one another or have a shared history or surname, however, doesn’t mean they consider themselves part of that community” (p. 108). What binds people in a community is consciousness; in other words, the realization or awareness that they belong to that community (Shore, 2002).

Given the lack of clarity in the concept and the dichotomy present in many of the definitions provided, Blackshaw (2010) proposed conceptualizing community as an ideal type, “not a description of reality, but an analytical tool which they use to try to

understand it” (p. 10). Blackshaw explained how the concept of community has evolved from a classical idea of interdependency and group-defined identity, to a modern ‘consciousness of community’ in which identity precedes identification with the group, and in which people can identify with many groups and consider themselves members of several communities. In this consciousness of communities women, homosexuals, ethnic groups, cultural groups and people with similar tastes or lifestyles can now be ‘imagined as communities.’

The concept of imagined communities comes from Anderson’s (1991) proposed definition of a nation as “an imagined political community” (p. 6) because members of a nation will never meet or interact with most of their fellow members. Cohen (1985) and Wegner (2002) concur with Anderson’s evaluation of the imaginary nature of contemporary communities under which community “will only be found again by trying to find new ways of meaning of it through interpretation” (p. 7). In summary, the view of communities as imagined entities stems from the belief that communities are socially constructed and that people have the freedom to belong, or not, to a community.

Under this modern approach of understanding community we can define an immigrant community as an imagined community and describe it in terms that will allow us to understand and study it (Blackshaw, 2010). With this in mind, this study adapts Fitzpatrick’s (1966) definition of community as:

A group of people who follow a way of life or patterns of behavior which mark them out as different from people of another society, or from other people in the larger society in which they live or to which they have come. They are people who have generally come from the same place, or who are identified with the particular locality where they now live or to which they have come. They speak the same language, probably have the same religious beliefs. They tend to "stick together," to help and support each other. They have expectations of loyalty one to the other and methods of social control (p.6).

This conceptualization of community implies that communities exist within imaginary boundaries delimited through the communication of the community's customs, rituals, and habits (Blackshaw, 2010). Along those same lines, Cohen (1985) explained that sharing culture and rituals is vital to defining membership to a community. In the words of Cohen: "People construct community symbolically, making it a resource and repository of meaning and a referent of their identity" (p. 118). Put another way, members of a community socially construct the defining characteristics of a community; i.e., the community's identity. Because of the centrality of the community identity to the formation and organizing of immigrant groups, the following section further explains this concept and the role that communication plays in identity formation.

### **Community Identity**

Weisenfeld (1996) explained that community is socially constructed and cannot "be viewed as having an existence prior to its member's actions" (p. 339). Following an analysis of how individuals form the collective 'we' of communities, Wiesenfeld (1996) defined community as "a set of individuals who have built an identity from shared experiences and process which homogenize them in regard to characteristics, actions and perspectives" (p. 345).

Community identity "refers to a large-scale collective which is continually produced and reproduced in discourse by positioning process, and social categories construction" (Colombo & Senatore, 2005, p. 52). Shotter (1993) affirmed that to live in a community, a person must be more than a reproducer of it; he or she must participate in the creative sustaining of the community, and carrying on of its traditions. Blackshaw (2010) explained that people expect communities to be like their identities: "flexible,

disposable and amenable to change” (p. 117). Therefore, the fit of the community identity to their own will determine if they remain or retract as members of the community.

Recently scholars from the fields of community studies and social psychology have become increasingly concerned with the study of community identity as means to understanding how it is constructed, how it can be measured and how its members are mobilized (e.g. Hosking & Morley, 2004; Puddifoot, 1995; Wiesenfeld, 1996; Woliver, 1996). Wiesenfeld (1996) discussed the intersubjective nature of community and social construction of community identity, explaining the conditions for the creation of a community come from the individual characteristics of the people that share an environment. She affirmed that community members’ feelings of identification (the community’s identity) are what make it “more than a sum of its parts” (p. 341).

On the other hand, Puddifoot (1995) was especially concerned with the dimensions of community identity and how these may serve to measure it and allow for comparisons across communities. From his analysis, Puddifoot (1995) concluded that even though providing an operational definition of community identity was difficult, the concept incorporated six broad elements:

1. *Locus*: the perception of residents of the limits — physical, environmental, and socio/cultural — of their community.

2. *Distinctiveness*: the perception of how the community differs from others.

This element could also incorporate physical and socio/cultural aspects of the community.

3. *Identification*: the perceived sense of belonging and attachment to the delimited community.

4. *Orientation*: “the personal orientation of the individual to his/her community on a number of more specific dimensions” (p. 366). These dimensions include the degree of involvement and personal investment that the individuals have in the community, as well as their perceived future prospects, and emotional safety.

5. *Evaluation of the quality of community life*: the community member’s perception of the quality of life obtainable in the community, including their perception of how friendly the community is, how cooperative people are and the commitment to the community.

6. *Evaluation of community functioning*: perception of how the community’s services function, as well as of the opportunities and their ability to influence decision making in the community, among other things.

Puddifoot’s (1995) elements have been employed as guiding principles to explore expressions of community identity in real world settings (e.g., Arcidiacono & Procentese, 2005; Green, Cohen, & Pooley, 2006; Puddifoot, 1997, 2003). Therefore, these dimensions can provide valuable insight for understanding the community identity of a group under study.

In addition to defining and identifying the elements of community identity, this concept is closely tied to that of social and group identity. Social identity is “that part of the individual’s self-concept which derives from their knowledge of their membership in a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership” (Tajfel, 1982, p. 2). It is a result of social relationships

(Goonasekera, 1990) and social discourses (Duff, 2002; Wodak, de Cillia, Liebhart & Reisigl, 2009).

Reicher (2004) posited that people can define themselves in two ways: based on of what makes them different to other individuals (personal identity) or based on their membership in social groups (social identity)” (p. 928). Additionally, Reicher explained how social identity is formed on the bases of what makes one group different from another, which contains the basic element of distinctiveness which is contained in the formation of community identity (Puddifoot, 1995).

Similar to Puddifoot’s (1995) analysis of community identity, Abdelal, Herrera, Johnston, and McDermott (2006) proposed a framework for identity as a variable, identifying two dimensions of social identity: content and contestation. The first, “describes the meaning of a collective identity” (p. 696), while the latter referred to the degree to which members of the group share the conception of the identity.

Implicit in these frameworks for community and social identity is the role that communication plays in shaping community identity and promoting a sense of belonging. In fact, Friedland (2001) articulated that today, communities are “constituted by the integrating framework of communication. As the binding ties of traditional community have dissolved, new forms of communicative connection have developed to take their place” (p. 361).

Similarly, a group of researchers at the University of Southern California’s Annenberg School of Communication have articulated a communication infrastructure perspective to facilitate understanding how members of a community use communication in solving their personal and collective problems (Metamorphosis,

2010). As part of this effort, these researchers have developed the communication infrastructure theory, “a theoretical framework that differentiates local communities in terms of whether they have communication resources that can be activated to construct community, thereby enabling collective action for common purpose” (Kim & Ball-Rokeach, 2006, p. 176).

Within this theoretical perspective, Wilkin, Katz, and Ball-Rokeach (2009) defined 'communication infrastructure' as the system that communities rely on for their everyday information, which is made up of two elements, the storytelling network and the communication action context. The first refers to a network of community members that motivate others to talk about the neighborhood, including residents, families, ethnic media, and community organizations. The second refers to the sum of community elements that facilitate or hinder the communication in the community, such as the transportation, social services, and public spaces available to members of the community.

This initial research describing how ethnic communities communicate is part of a larger discussion on the role of communication to improving or strengthening communities. In the following section, communication's role in community building, organizing and development efforts is discussed.

### **Communication in the Service of Community**

Before entering a discussion on the role of communication for constructing and developing community, some key terms need to be explained and clearly differentiated. The idea of constructing community stems from the aforementioned discussion of the social construction of community and it being defined as a group of people who have

constructed a collective identity from shared experiences and processes (Wiesenfeld, 1996). Additionally, this community identity incorporates its members perception of the community's delimitations, distinctiveness, and their own identification with and involvement in, the community; as well as evaluations of how the quality of life in the community and of how the community functions (Puddifoot, 1995).

The terms community development, organizing and building are clearly defined in Rubin and Rubin's seminal work *Community organizing and development* (2001). These scholars explained that community development "occurs when people strengthen the bonds within their neighborhoods, build social networks and form their own organizations to provide a long-term capacity for problem solving" (p. 3). In order to do so, people need to feel empowered; i.e., they have to feel able to make choices and act on those choices (Alsop & Heinsohn, 2005).

Community organizing and community building are means through which community development can occur. Organizing is the process of making people aware of their shared problems and encouraging them to participate in addressing them (Rubin & Rubin, 2001). Community building refers to "creating or increasing peoples' feelings of *social solidarity*, that is, the sense of belonging to and feeling responsible for a group or territory" (Rubin & Rubin, 2001, p. 97, emphasis in the original).

As these definitions highlight, organizing and building are necessary for achieving community development, and require the active participation of the members of the community. In other words, these efforts are dependent of the community's social capital.

Scholars in the field of community development argue for the importance of building social capital — social relationships and ties within the community — for mobilizing community residents and contributing to community development (Green & Haines, 2008; Pyles, 2009; Rubin & Rubin, 2001). Green and Haines (2008) listed some of the ways in which community organizations can contribute to building social capital, including promoting social gatherings as opportunities to make new connections in the community; using public debates (in person or online); motivating dialogue among community residents; and ensuring diverse leadership to promote community norms and people's engagement.

Community members also have to understand the problems that the community faces, which usually involves carefully framing the community's main concerns, as well as the ways of addressing these (Rubin & Rubin, 2001; Pyles, 2009). Rubin and Rubin (2001) described community organizers' role in framing the issues and encouraging participation and how these men and women employ interpersonal communication, printed materials, public speaking, and sometimes fundraising to achieve this objective. Additionally, organizers engage in issue identification, in studying a situation or context, which informs the development of a strategy or plan for the community (Pyles, 2009).

Blackshaw (2010) expanded:

The ideal community development practitioner is a facilitator or enabler rather than an expert, whose role it is to build community capacity, *social capital* and collective organization. This is supported by the adjunct role of *cultural intermediary*, whose responsibility it is to encourage individuals and communities to become more aware of their own circumstances and, importantly, those of others. (p. 165)

Similarly, community professionals influence the construction of the community identity. Weisenfeld (1996) stated that the construction of community follows:

From the participation of professionals whose objectives, involvement and relationship with the members of a given community varied over time. Hence, the meaning of community should be understood as representing a co-construction in which the professional's presence influences the sense of community experienced by its members. (p. 339).

One of the core assumptions of this study is that communication agents, including public relations practitioners, are among those professionals that influence the construction of community and of its identity. Although this has not been directly studied in public relations research, Blackshaw's (2010), Rubin and Rubin's (2001), and Weisenfeld (1996) conceptions of the community development worker show how the roles and approaches to community development taken by these practitioners are similar to those undertaken by public relations professionals. In fact, it could be argued that these are comparable to the roles of persuader, advocate, and information provider identified in Hutton's (1999) public relations framework. Likewise, the tactics listed — including publicity, speeches, interpersonal communications, and Web sites — are also contained within Hutton's framework.

Additionally, framing of issues is an important role in both community and public relations work. Pyles (2009) argued that framing in community organizing efforts should be strategic, aiming toward serving the community's change agenda and potential opportunities to build alliances. In public relations Hallahan (1999) argued that framing was essential in public relations programs and that public relations professionals "serve as frame strategists, who strive to determine how situations, attributes, choices, actions,

issues, and responsibility should be posed to achieve favorable outcomes for clients” (p. 224).

Despite the seemingly evident intersection between community development and public relations roles, this has not been documented in existing public relations research. However, insights from the development communication and international public relations also highlight the public relations contribution to improving communities and working in developing countries and can serve to shed some light on the potential for public relations research and practice in this arena. Therefore, what follows is a summary of some of the ways in which the questions of community building, organizing, and development; as well as social and group identity has featured in development communication research. This literature will serve as a foundation and starting point for studying public relations efforts by the diaspora community organizations serving the Dominican diaspora in the United States.

### **The Development Communication Perspective**

Moody (2003) explained that development is historically seen as an international, rather than national, issue. Therefore, it is not surprising that the study of communication for development is usually focused on developing nations. However, when seen from the perspective of improving people’s quality of life, we can see the value of communication for development interventions in countries such as the United States. In fact, Melkote and Steves (2001) argued that there are disadvantaged communities in every country which could be served by development communication interventions.

Likewise Fraser and Restrepo's (1998) definition of communication for development can be applied to development efforts anywhere. They defined communication for development as:

The use of communication process, techniques, and media to help people toward a full awareness of their situation and their options for change, to resolve conflicts, to work toward consensus, to help people plan actions for change and sustainable development, to help people acquire the knowledge and skills they need to improve their condition and their society, and to improve the effectiveness of institutions (p. 63).

The study of, and approaches to, communication for development has evolved from a media effects model, which assumed that development would be a consequence of exposure to messages (Scharm, 1964) to a neomodernization approach which promotes participatory communication and empowerment (Kim, 2005; Melkote, 2003). Today, many development communication programs incorporate local participation in a strategic communication framework that represents the cultural, political, and context specific to the communities at the center of the development programs (Kim, 2005). The strategies and tactics used in development communication programs are similar to those used by public relations. For example, development communication efforts use mass media and social marketing campaigns, folk music, community media, theater, advocacy efforts, multi-sector partnerships, and advertising (e.g. Fuglesang, 2005; Gamucio-Dagron, 2005; Huesca, 2000; Kotler, Roberto, & Lee; 2002; Molleda, Martinez, & Suarez, 2008).

A key concept in development communication that is especially useful in studying communication efforts for community organizing and development is empowerment. Empowerment has been defined as "the process of enhancing an individual's or group's capacity to make purposive choices and to transform those choices into desired actions

and outcomes.” (Aslop, Bertelsen, & Holland, 2005, p.1). Melkote (2003) explained that empowerment focuses on fostering symmetrical relationships between communication participants, facilitating the participation of individuals and communities in their community’s political and economic processes.

Waisbord (2001) explains that community empowerment has become one of the main contributions of the development communication field. He goes on to explain that empowerment can be achieved only if the members of the community reflect on their experiences and understand the reasons behind the failure and success of development interventions. Arguing for the central role of community empowerment, Waisbord (2001) adds:

Development communication should not only be concerned with instrumenting specific outcomes as defined in the traditional paradigm, but also with the process by which communities become empowered to intervene and transform their environment. Community empowerment should be the intended outcome of interventions (p.30).

Although little public relations work has considered empowerment as a public relations outcome, J. Grunig (2006) argued that his proposed symmetrical approach to public relations called for empowering the members of the organization as well as external stakeholders. Similarly, in his discussion of the influence and potential of public relations research and practice to informing communication for development, Martinez (2005) noted that the focus on building and maintaining relationships to serve public relations efforts — including the use of strategic use of two-way symmetrical communication and the involvement of inactive publics — could contribute to communication efforts for development. In fact, Taylor (2000) argued that public relations has an important role to play in nation-building efforts, through public

communication campaigns and the use of public relations to attract foreign investment and international aid (e.g. Pratt, 1985; Taylor & Kent, 1999). Taylor (2004) also stated that “a public relations approach to nation building focuses on relationships between governments and publics as well as the creation of new relationships between previously unrelated publics” (p.182). This focus on relationships makes the role of public relations in development communication efforts more significant.

The communication for development field offers some insights as to public relations efforts targeting diasporas could contribute to constructing community and community development. Likewise, because development communication, including nation building programs, are usually executed either in developing country or among the disenfranchised of a developed society, such as immigrants, it can be seen as an international public relations practice. A broad introduction to the scope and core ideas of international public relations is provided in the following section. Then, transnational communities (or diasporas) are introduced, as well as the organizations that serve these communities, and the specific community subject of the study: the Dominican diaspora.

### **International Public Relations**

International public relations is a broad field, including the study of public relations practices in other countries (e.g. Culbertson & Hugh, 2004; Huang, 2000; Molleda & Ferguson, 2004; Molleda & Suarez, 2005), public relations programs and problems across countries (Spellman, 1994; Taylor, 2000; 2004), the practices of multinational corporations (e.g. Henderson & Williams, 2000; Starck & Kruckeberg, 2003), development communication efforts (e.g. Snyder, 2000; Taylor, 2004) and, to some, the practice of public relations across cultures (e.g. Curtin & Gaither, 2005;

Martinez, 2005; Sha, 2006). Likewise, public diplomacy studies –i.e. “the way in which both government and private individuals and groups influence directly or indirectly those public attitudes and opinions which bear directly on another government’s foreign policy decisions” (Signitzer & Coombs, 1992, p.138)— have increasingly been incorporated into the international public relations literature (e.g. Fitzpatrick, 2007; Signitzer & Coombs, 1992; Signitzer & Wamser, 2006)

Even though initially, international public relations focused mainly in the study of public relations outside of the United States (see Sriramesh, & Verčič, 2009; J. Grunig, L. Grunig, Sriramesh, Huang, & Lyra, 1995), now scholars understand that it applies to the practice of public relations across national and cultural boundaries (Curtin & Gaither, 2005, 2007; Wakefield, 1997, 2008). In the words of Wakefield (1997), international public relation is “a multinational program that has certain coordination between headquarters and various countries where offices and/or publics are located, and that carries potential consequences or results in more than one country” (p. 355).

Other scholars have expanded the definition to include international/intercultural groups within a nation’s boundaries. For example, Curtin and Gaither (2007) argue that public relations occurs across realms, rather than territories, giving a central role to the interplay of culture and communication. This can be interpreted to include publics within a country’s territory that belong to other imagined communities or “nations” (as defined by Anderson, 1991). Such would be the case of diaspora communities, for example, which live within one nation’s territory, but share the culture, language and history of another nation.

All in all, international public relations can be studied from many perspectives and focusing on many types of publics or organizations. Even though there is no single agreed-upon approach to the study of international public relations, Sriramesh and Verčič (2003) provide a theoretical framework for research and practice, which takes into account the contextual variables that can influence public relations in a foreign environment. This framework includes three variables: country infrastructure, culture, and media.

The first variable, country infrastructure, includes the political, economic and legal environment of the country, which can either restrict or facilitate the practice of public relations. The second, culture, can explain either the social environment or the organizational environment. Either way, culture represents “the context or the stage, on which public relations activities play” (Curtin & Gaither, 2007, p.19). Sriramesh & Verčič (2003) explain that there is no universally accepted definition of culture, but adapt Kroeber and Kulchohn (1952) understanding of culture as a group of attributes and products of a society that are transmissible through communication and social interaction. As such, culture affects the way messages are constructed and interpreted, as well as how people communicate and interact in a society (Curtin & Gaither, 2007). The final variable, media, refers to the channels available to communicate with mass publics. The media outreach, control and access of a country are going to be as influential to the practice of public relations, as the two other variables discussed above.

Questions of country infrastructure, culture and media have all been explored in existing research about diaspora communities (e.g. Bernal, 2006; Braziel & Mannur, 2003; Georgiou, 2006; Newland, 2010; Newland & Patrick; 2004; Parham, 2005;

Sheffer, 2003; Shi, 2005). However, none of this research as explored the use of public relations by DCOs to achieve community goals. In this sense, the present study can contribute to scholarship in international public relations, by providing theoretical knowledge of the public relations practices of organizations serving a diaspora in the United States.

However, before a study of DCO public relations efforts can be conducted, it is necessary to understand what a diaspora is and how a diaspora community is formed and sustained. The following section explains diasporas as transnational communities, followed by a description of the Dominican diaspora in the United States.

### **Diasporas or Transnational Communities**

The constant immigration flow between the United States and other parts of the world has created large cultural communities where immigrants from the same origin concentrate (Massey, 1995). According to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, over one million immigrants obtained citizenship in 2008 (DHS, 2008). Additionally, it is estimated that immigrants and their children will account for 82% of the population growth of the United States in the next 40 years (Census Bureau, 2003).

Transnationalism is increasingly salient in U.S. communities.

However, upon coming to the United States, immigrants do not necessarily sever ties with their places of birth. On the contrary, many chose to maintain and nurture social, political, and economic links in their home countries (Alicea, 1997; Itzigsohm, Cabral, Medina & Vazquez, 1999; Portes, 1998). In doing so, these new immigrants become members of transnational communities; people who “are at least bilingual, move easily between different cultures, frequently maintain homes in two countries, and

pursue economic, political, and cultural interests that require a simultaneous presence in both” (Portes, 1998, p. 16).

Portes (1998) explained that the members of transnational communities probably keep homes and pursue economic, political, and cultural interests in both their home and host countries. The transnational connections that immigrant communities keep are part of their every-day activities and affect all aspects of their lives, economic, political, social, and individual and group identities (Itzigsohn, et al., 1999).

Horboken’s (2004) definition of diasporas as “communities of people who left their ancestral homes and settled in foreign countries, but who preserve the memory of and links with the land of their fathers and forefathers” (p. 201), is similar to the concept of transnational communities. Although commonly the term Diaspora (capitalized) has been used to refer to the communities of Jews living outside Palestine and Israel. Today the term has a wider meaning, as it describes the dispersal of people of a nation and their settlement in a foreign (host) country (Sheffer, 2003).

Sheffer (2003) provided a more detailed definition of diaspora as “an ethno-national diaspora is a social-political formation, created as a result of either voluntary or forced migration, whose members regard themselves as of the same ethno-national origin and how permanently reside as minorities in one or several host countries” (p. 9). Additionally Portes (1998) explains that members of these communities maintain contacts with their homelands and with groups or individuals of the same origin living in a host country.

Braziel and Mannur (2003) explained that although related, the terms of transnationalism and diaspora are not synonymous. Diaspora refers to the movement of

people, while transnationalism refers to impersonal forces, such as the movement of capital, information, and business. Additionally, they argued that transnationalism can describe NGOs and political organizations as well as individuals, while diaspora is a human phenomenon. This research will adopt Braziel and Mannur's (2003) conceptualization and use the term "diaspora" to refer to the people of Dominican origin who have settled in the United States, and the term "transnational community organizations" in reference to those government and non-governmental organizations and businesses serving this community.

As explained before, the concept of imagined community (Anderson, 1991) also applies to diasporas because they exist beyond the delimited boundaries of a nation state (Webner, 2002). Diasporas organize and form organizations in order to maintain their shared identity and further their causes (Ghorashi, 2004; Sheffer, 2003).

Organizations serving the diaspora community include cultural centers, NGO, host-country civic society organizations, government agencies (for both home and host country), religious organizations, kinship groups, and advocacy groups, among others (Faist, 2000; Sheffer, 2003). In fact, Sheffer (2003) noted that diaspora groups are progressively more involved in national and transnational cultural and political affairs. Many of the members of the diasporas become involved through their diaspora organizations.

Another organization serving diaspora groups is the ethnic media which can help convey social norms and values and offer the diaspora members opportunities to participate in the host society (Bonfadelli, Bucher, & Piga, 2007). Similarly, the emergence of interactive communication media facilitates the establishment of

diasporas' transnational networks, serving to help their members keep maintain homeland relationships (Sheffer, 2003).

Together these organizations provide support to the diasporas serving as intermediaries between the community members and state organizations and “play an essential role in the new forms of identity and sense of belonging created by diasporas” (Ghorashi, 2004, p.330). Likewise, these organizations contribute to building community member's sense of belonging by reproducing their culture (Ghorashi, 2004).

Also included in the term diaspora is the idea of a shared culture and identity. Sheffer (2003) explained that even though over time diasporas are influence by their environment, they maintain cohesion to their homeland's culture and rituals. The culture of diasporas is “premised on the institution of diasporic imaginaries and communication infrastructures (diasporic media and cultural spaces) upon which multiple and diverse processes of identity and community are constructed, and depend on the production of narratives and discourses that reproduce and sustain relevant frames of self-identification, and collective action” (Tsagarousianou, 2004, p. 64).

Diaspora organizations are charged with perpetuating the culture and ties to the homeland. Also, these organizations facilitate the creation of social networks that make migration and settlement into the host society easier (Boyd, 1989; Massey, Alarcon, Durand & Gonzalez, 1987). Despite their importance of immigrant organizations, there are few empirical studies focused about their work (Portes, Escobar & Radford, 2005). Still, the following section provides some insights as to the roles of diaspora organizations detailed in contemporary research.

## **Diaspora Community Organizations**

Today, the presence of immigrants in U.S. society has changed the rural and urban landscape (Donato, Tolbert, Nucci & Kawano, 2007). Referring to immigrants from Latin America, Westwood (2000) asserted:

The U.S. is everywhere in Latin America but it is also clear that Latin America is everywhere in the U.S.. Miami is a bilingual city as are parts of Chicago, Los Angeles and New York. Colombia's Independence Day is celebrated in the huge Flushing Meadows Corona Park in Queens in New York City (p. 61).

This lingering link and identification with the home country is a vital requisite for the diaspora to continue to exist (Sheffer, 2003). Sheffer (2003) suggests that the members of these diasporas form organizations to ensure the well-being of their communities in the host country, and to aid in addressing home country problems.

Diaspora organizations can take many forms. They may be hometown associations, religious associations, charitable organizations, political parties, social clubs, schools, and professional organizations, among others (Newland, 2010). The main purpose of these organizations is equally as diverse. Bloemraad (2005) explained that these organizations can mobilize the community members towards common purposes, help individuals become involved in political and civic life, and act as a representative on behalf of the diaspora.

For example, diaspora organizations try to affect the status and regard that the receiving society has of their immigrant community. Donato, et al. (2007) explain that receiving community may as easily welcome the arrival of immigrants for their potential social and economic contribution, or view them with suspicion because of the cultural difference or racial tensions. In response, immigrant groups will come together and adopt a defensive stance toward the receiving environment if they feel discriminated

against or view themselves in an otherwise disadvantageous position (Portes, Escobar & Radford, 2005). Additionally, diaspora organizations not only facilitate, but also encourage the flow of both social and economic exchanges from the host to the home country (Levitt, 1998; VanWey, Tucker & McConnell, 2005).

Previous research has documented the role that hometown and other types of diaspora organizations play in providing development assistance to the home country (Levitt, 1997; Newland, 2010; Newland & Patrick, 2004; Van Hear, Pieke & Vertovec, 2004). For example, Levitt (1997) studied the Miraflores Development Committee, a group of immigrants from the Dominican Republic living in Jamaica Plain, Boston, which work together to contribute to the situation of the community they left behind. In this study, Levitt described how members of the community raised funds to build a community center, health clinic, school and funeral in their hometown. A well-organized community encourages diaspora members to provide support for community projects in the homeland (VanWey, Tucker, & McConnell, 2005). In addition, in the context of community organizations, the diaspora is more likely to provide social remittances, which Levitt (1998) defines as “ the ideas, behaviors, identities, and social capital that flow from receiving to sending-country communities” (p.927).

In addition to having diaspora communities through which to channel transnational efforts, there are several other factors that influence the connectedness of the diaspora to the homeland. Smith (1997) explains that factors such as the ease of travel and communication between the countries, the role that the immigrants play in the home-country economies, and the importance of the host country in the home country's economic and political future all affect the strength of the ties between the countries.

Levitt (1998) explains how these conditions are present in the Dominican diaspora, making the link with the home country very strong. The Dominican Republic is close to the United States, it is relatively inexpensive it is to travel back and forth; and the U.S. already asserts a strong cultural, economic and political influence in the Dominican Republic.

Similarly, Hoffnung-Garskof (2008) described Dominicans living in New York as immigrants and workers that brought with them parts of their homeland's norms and culture to their new host country, while remaining engaged with the Dominican politics and economy. In essence, the Dominican diaspora is "a group whose territory is a borderless, transnational space" (Reynoso, 2003, p. 71).

The Dominican diaspora's strong ties with the homeland, as well as the transnational and active nature of this diaspora is the main reason they were chosen for this study of transnational public relations. Therefore, the following section of this review of the literature provides some key background information on the Dominican diaspora in the United States, which is the subject under study for this dissertation.

### **The Dominican Diaspora**

Dominicans, people originating from the Dominican Republic, are one of the youngest and largest immigrant communities in the United States (Pew Hispanic Center, 2008), and the fifth largest Hispanic population in the country. An estimated 1.33 million Dominicans reside in the United States (Pew Hispanic Center, 2010). Eight out of every 10 Dominicans live in the Northeastern United States (51% in New York), 17.5% reside in the South (11.6% in Florida), 1.8% in the West and 1.3% in the Midwest (Pew Hispanic Center, 2010).

Additionally, the Dominican diaspora in New York has access to resources and to a network that expands beyond the United States' city, state, or country limits. Castro and Boswell (2002) explained that many members of the Dominican diaspora are active political and democratic actors in both their home and host country, lead non-for-profit organizations in the service of the community, have a burgeoning business sector, and retain close ties with other Latino organizations. Likewise, the diaspora boast high-profile members such as more than 200 major league baseball players (Baseball Almanac, 2010), award winning novelists Junot Diaz and Julia Alvarez (Marceles, 2003), and other prominent business people and public officials, including 28 U.S. elected officials of Dominican origin serving in six states (Dominican Roundtable, 2010).

The Dominican community in the United States is prominent in literature studying transnationalism (Dicker, 2006). According to Itzigsohn, et al., (1999) the study of Dominican transnationalism emerged in the 1990s following the mass migration of Dominicans to the United States in the 1980s, and the increased participation of expats in their homelands economic and political life as the country became dependent on remittances and on expats political support and contributions to political fundraising efforts.

In a recent case study exploring the community's social capital, Reynoso (2003) articulated the complex transnational nature of the Dominican immigrants, writing:

Despite their social, educational, and regional heterogeneity and precisely because of their shared migratory and social experiences in the United States and Dominican Republic, they have become a group whose territory is a borderless, transnational space. They — unlike Cubans — are here and there and in between. Dominican migrants will continue a process of socio-cultural accommodation (rather than assimilation) and economic articulation (rather than adaptation) in both North America and their native land attempting to fabricate positive social contexts. (p. 71)

Several studies with transnational focus have provided insight into this community's strong ties to the Dominican Republic. For example Dicker's (2006) study of language use and cultural assimilation of young New-Yorkers of Dominican origin in Washington Heights found that the participants did not identify themselves as purely American, but rather, they felt attachment to both cultures. In an earlier study, Duany (1994) had documented the ongoing flow of people, goods, and ideas between Washington Heights and the homeland. Additionally, Duany had found that diaspora members identified New York as the place where to work and make money, and the Dominican Republic as their place, "where one belongs, enjoys, rests, lives peacefully and happily" (p. 39). Similarly, in the study of Dominican transnationalism, Itzigsohm, Cabral, Medina, and Vazquez (1999) identified how members of the diaspora engage in cross-border economic, political, civil societal, and cultural practices.

Based on interviews with key informants of the Dominican transnational community, Itzigsohm, et al. (1999) distinguished two ends of a continuum of transnational practices: broad and narrow. These types of transnational practices were defined by three dimensions: institutionalization, involvement, and movement. Broad transnationalism "refers to a series of material and symbolic practices in which people engage that involve only sporadic physical movement between the two countries, a low level of institutionalization, or just the occasional personal involvement, but nevertheless includes both countries as reference points" (p. 323) and the narrow "refers to those people involved in economic, political, social, or cultural practices that involve a regular movement within the geographical transnational field, a high level of institutionalization, or constant personal involvement" (p. 323).

Despite the insights provided by the research cited above, this community and the organizations that serve it have not been subject of academic research in public relations. Therefore, this study focuses on the Dominican diaspora and the community organizations serving it in order to gain new insight into the transnational public relations by community organizations. The Dominican diaspora was chosen as the case study for three main reasons: First, because as detailed above, the Dominican diaspora is one of the youngest and largest immigrant communities in the United States. Also, research has shown that this diaspora has a number of community organizations serving its needs and interests (e.g. Reynoso, 2003; Levitt, 1997). Second, because of the documented density and extension of the Dominican diaspora's network in the United States and the Dominican Republic. This existing network provides the opportunity to explore not only public relations practices in the United States, but also across country, in efforts targeting people in the homeland. Lastly, because the Dominican Republic is the country of origin of the researcher, her personal interest, familiarity with the culture, as well as ties in both the home country and the diaspora in the United States, inform and enrich the constructivist and co-creational approach of this research.

Through the study of the Dominican diaspora community, this dissertation seeks to expand on existing research in the societal and communitarian perspectives of public relations. The central purpose of this study is to explore how public relations by diaspora community organizations (DCOs) contribute to these organizations' ability to achieve their goals and serve their communities. The following research questions guide this inquiry into diaspora community organizations public relations efforts:

RQ1. How do diaspora community organizations (DCOs) employ public relations to promote a sense of community and collective identity?

RQ2. How these DCOs use public relations strategies and tactics for community organizing, building, and development?

RQ3. To what extent to the DCOs' public relations efforts serve to accommodate the Dominican culture and identity?

RQ4. How do these DCOs use public relations to engage with diverse types of home and host organizations?

RQ5. Can a model of DCO public relations can be created and supported?

RQ6. How can the public relations practices of DCOs inform the societal and communitarian perspective of public relations?

The methodological approach used to address these questions is grounded theory approach. The data collection and analysis are discussed in the following chapter.

Table 2-1. Hutton's (1999) Public Relations Framework

Definition	"Managing strategic relationships"
Situational roles	Persuader, advocate, educator, crusader, information provider, reputation manager.
Primary functions performed	Research, image making, counseling, managing, early warning, interpreting, communicating, negotiating.
Tactics/tools utilized	Publicity, product placements, news releases, speeches, interpersonal communications, Web sites, publications, trade shows, corporate identity programs, corporate advertising programs, etc.

## CHAPTER 3 METHODS

This study employed grounded theory methodology to analyze how public relations efforts by diaspora community organizations helps achieve organization goals, build a sense of community, and construct the community's shared identity. Grounded theory, as defined by its original proponents Glaser and Strauss (1967), is both the product and method of research. It refers to theory derived directly from the data being analyzed.

Charmaz (2006) explained that grounded theory methods “consist of systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to construct theories ‘grounded’ in the data themselves” (p. 2). This methodology is best suited for studying processes that are not already explained by theory and where little is known (Creswell, 2007; Goulding, 1998), such as the process of public relations targeting diaspora groups.

Goulding (1998) defined grounded theory as “an interpretivist mode of enquiry which has its roots in symbolic interactionism, and as such language, gestures, expressions and actions are all considered primary to the experience” (pp. 51-52). Although originally designed for building theories in sociology (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), the early proponents of the method have spoken to its usefulness for other social sciences, such as anthropology, business, education, social work, and communications (Glaser, 1978; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Hence, grounded theory serves the purpose of this study which is concerned with questions of belonging and identity, which Cohen (1985) explained were socially constructed through the communication of symbols, customs, and rituals.

However, before delving into grounded theory research, it is necessary to describe the approach to grounded theory the researcher is following. Since its introduction in 1967, the method has divided into at least three schools of thought with differing opinions as to the role of the researcher and the need for verification, among other key characteristics of the method (Babchuk, 2009; Charmaz, 2006; Mills, Bonner & Francis, 2006; Rennie, 1998). Mills, Bonner, and Francis (2006) labeled these schools of thought as original (referring to Glaser & Strauss, 1967), evolved (referring to Strauss, 1987; and Strauss & Corbin, 1998), and constructivist (referring to Charmaz, 2000, 2006). On the other hand, Charmaz (2006) has differentiated her approach from the previous ones labeling Glaser, Strauss, and Corbin's work as objectivist grounded theory and her own perspective as constructivist grounded theory.

Contemporary grounded theory scholars have argued that researchers need to be familiar with the methodology in all its forms in order to decide how they will employ the methodology (Babchuk, 1996, 2009; Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). Therefore, what follows is a brief overview of the different approaches to grounded theory as well as the rationale for the chosen approach for the present study.

### **Approaches to Grounded Theory**

Since the original formulation of the methodology, several schools of thought of grounded theory research have emerged. Bernard and Ryan (2010) recounted that originally Glaser and Strauss (1967) shared their vision of grounded theory as an inductive approach, but Strauss, working with Corbin, later introduced more deduction into the method, including the need for verification (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). More recently, Charmaz (2006) developed an alternative approach labeled constructivist

grounded theory, which differs from traditional grounded theory in the belief that the informants and researcher produce data together (Bernard & Ryan, 2010).

These three approaches all have commonalities, such as the constant comparative analysis and theoretical sampling as being central elements in any grounded theory study. However, they disagree mainly on their logic for justifying, or explaining, the method (Rennie, 1998). Bernard and Ryan (2010) stated that Glaser's approach is more inductive; while Strauss and Corbin, with their focus on hypothesis testing and axial coding, allow for the use of deduction in their interpretation of the method. Along those same lines, Rennie (1998) explained that Strauss and Corbin modified the method in the following areas:

The investigator's recalled experiences pertaining to the phenomenon under study are accepted as legitimate empirical data; hypothesis testing is made integral to constant comparison; consideration of the conditions influencing the phenomenon should *not* be limited to those indicated by the data themselves; and the application of an axiomatic schema that converts all social phenomena into process is made mandatory. (p. 105, emphasis in the original)

Additionally, Strauss and Corbin's method is characterized by a strictly structured coding model, which Glaser believed forced the data to conceptual descriptions and incorporates the verification methods that the grounded theory approach was designed to avoid (Babchuk, 2009). On the other hand, Charmaz (2006) argued that Glaser and Strauss, and Corbin's grounded theory methodology had strong positivist underpinnings, evident in the importance they warrant to objectivity in the process, and their concern with verification of the findings.

Charmaz (2006) differentiated her constructivist view of grounded theory arguing that the theory resulting from the research offers interpretations of the world studied. She proposed that the grounded theory methodology be used more as a set of

guidelines rather than a set of rules, which guide the interpretation — instead of discovery — of the theory (Babchuk, 2009). Charmaz (2006) explained:

In the classic grounded theory works, Glaser and Strauss talk about discovering theory as emerging from data separate from the scientific observer. Unlike their position, I assume that neither data nor theories are discovered. Rather, we are part of the world we study and the data we collect. We *construct* our grounded theories through our past and present involvements and interactions with people, perspectives, and research practices. (p. 10, emphasis in the original)

However, it is important to note that Charmaz's (2006) practical guide for constructing grounded theory shows an approach that is closely related to Glaser and Strauss' (1967) original grounded theory method. Her approach accepted Glaser and Strauss' (1967) invitation to use the grounded theory strategies flexibly and adapt them, and proving "a way of doing grounded theory that takes into account the theoretical and methodological development of the past four decades" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 9).

Because of this study also adopts a social constructivist perspective, the constructivist grounded theory approach was employed in data collection, analysis, and understanding of the phenomenon. The methods proposed by Charmaz (2006) represented the set of principles and practices used to understand the use of public relations by community organizations serving the Dominican diaspora. How the constructivist grounded theory methodology was employed in this study is explained in the following section.

### **Grounded Theory Methods**

Discovering grounded theory starts with a research problem and opening research questions (Charmaz, 2006). The steps outlined include initial data collection, followed by coding the data to identify emergent categories; writing memos with the initial codes and tentative categories identified; collecting specific data through

theoretical sampling; coding and comparing that data; and writing memos refining the concepts and categories — a process that continues until theoretical saturation is achieved. Later, the memos are sorted and a first draft is prepared. If necessary, the researcher can recur to further theoretical sampling for new data, and further analysis. Each of these methods of data collection and analysis is described in more detail below.

### **Data Collection and analysis**

Having identified a research problem or situation, the researcher attempts to understand the phenomenon (Dick, 2005). In this effort to understand the problem or situation the researcher begins acquiring data. Charmaz (2006) explained that grounded theorists construct data through observations, conversations, and materials collected about the situation under study. The kind of data pursued depends on the topic of study and on access to primary data (Charmaz, 2006).

Qualitative researchers may face challenges accessing data because of limitations gaining entry to an organization, or potential ethical issues with the type of information collected (Creswell, 2007). In grounded theory research participants need to provide the researcher with permission to be studied, and the researcher needs to establish rapport, build trust and credibility, and get people to respond in order to obtain rich data and details about their perspectives (Creswell, 2007).

Creswell (2007) further explained that grounded theorists typically start with a homogeneous sample of individuals who have experienced the process or phenomenon under study. Following this practice, this study uses the Dominican Organizations list provided by the City University of New York's Dominican Studies Institute (Aponte, n.d.)

as a starting point for data collection. The organizations included in this study all had to meet the following criteria:

1. Serve the Dominican diaspora community, which was defined as Dominican immigrants and Dominican-Americans living in the United States
2. Dominican immigrants and/or Dominican-Americans compose the majority of their publics (i.e., service recipients, members, etc.)
3. Are non-profit organizations
4. Have no known political affiliation
5. Be headquartered in the United States

Initially, all of the organizations in Aponte's (n.d.) list that met these criteria (15 in total) were contacted and invited to participate in the study. People in leadership roles in the initial list of organizations were approached for the interview. The majority were invited to participate via email (Appendix B), while others were approached by phone and fax invitation. In some cases, during the interview the participants would mention names of other organizations, for which the researcher would obtain contact information and invite to participate. If other organizations were not mentioned, the researcher would ask if the respondent could recommend another organization to be included in the study at the end of the interview. Many of the recommendations were organizations already in the initial list, although some others were contacted through recommendations by participants. To expand the pool of potential participants, the researcher conducted Internet searches using terms such as "Dominican-American Organization" and "Dominican Diaspora Organization." As an additional effort to reach

more organizations, the researcher contacted her connections living and working in New York and Florida in order to obtain contacts with other organizations.

Not all organizations were invited to participate at the same time. The method for incorporating new interviewees followed the grounded theory principle of theoretical sampling, which involves recruiting people and information that may help illuminate the boundaries and categories of the phenomenon under study (Charmaz, 2006).

The process of finding and inviting new organizations to the study continued until theoretical saturation was reached, i.e., until no new insights could be gained with freshly collected data (Goulding, 1998; Charmaz, 2006). For this study, theoretical saturation was reached at ten organizations. An additional eight organizations were included to confirm and expand on the findings.

At the end a total of 28 organizations were approached to participate in the study. Nineteen organizations responded to the interview request. Despite several attempts, the researcher received no response from nine of these organizations. Only one organization that responded declined to participate in the study. Additionally, one of the interview participants was the representative of two organizations (one national and one regional), and one of the interview sessions had three participants. Therefore, this study includes insights from a total of 19 interviewees representing 18 organizations.

The organizations included in this study varied in their purpose. Several were service organizations, providing the community members services such as free HIV testing and skill courses. Others were dedicated to the promotion of Dominican culture. Yet others were advocacy organizations representing the interests of Dominican immigrants and Dominican-Americans. Seventeen of these organizations had official

not-for-profit status in the United States. The last one was an association of student organizations, which despite lacking official 501c3 status had bylaws, a board and an organizational structure in place. Most of the organizations had been in existence for over a decade. The oldest organization was 29 and the youngest four years old. Seven of the interviewees were female and 12 were male. All but two of the interviewees were Dominican-born immigrants.

### **Recruitment process**

When the representatives of these organizations were approached for an interview they were provided with an informed consent form (via email or fax), which advised them of the purpose of the study, the use of their information, as well as their right to confidentiality and to leave the study at any point (Appendix A). The informed consent and the personal communication with representatives of these organizations served as an initial effort to establish the foundation for building trust and rapport. At the beginning of the interview, the researcher and the interviewee discussed the informed consent form and resolved any questions. Once the consent was obtained, the researcher began the interview. All interviews were recorded with the knowledge of the interviewees.

The researcher's Dominican origin also facilitated building rapport with the interviewees and knowing how to manage the interviews. Several interviewees asked about the researcher's background and Dominican origins before beginning the interview. Likewise, several shared information about their own migratory experience either before or during the interview (e.g., how long they had been in the United States, why they emigrated, the family members living with them or left behind in the Dominican

Republic, their hometown, the last time they visited, etc.). This small talk usually set the tone for the interview, which was informal and friendly. The familiar and informal treatment characteristic of Dominican culture led to uncertainties and last-minute changes when it came to keeping to a meeting time. Being cognizant of the culture, the researcher was able to handle uncertainty by making sure not to schedule interviews too close together, being understanding and accommodating of changes in dates and time, and providing adequate reminders and follow-ups as necessary.

### **Interview process**

Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with the representatives of these organizations. As explained by Charmaz (2006), in-depth interviews facilitate deep exploration of the topic under study and are valued as a useful method for interpretive research. A questionnaire was designed to guide the interview (Appendix C). However, additional questions were asked as they came up in the conversation. All but two of the interviews were conducted by telephone. The first two were conducted in person. Similarly, all but two of the interviews were conducted in Spanish, the native tongue of the interviewees and the researcher. Two interviews were in English, because participants were first generation Dominican Americans who felt more comfortable speaking in English. The average length of the interviews was 50 minutes.

At the end of the interviews, the interviewees were asked for documents that provide insights about how they communicate with the diaspora community and their intentions in doing so. The aim of including this textual analysis was to potentially illuminate intended purposes and audiences, as well as discern significant embedded meanings (Charmaz, 2006). Some organizations did not provide anything beyond what

was available on their websites. Others provided additional documents including organizational bylaws, mission statements, public information material (such as fact sheets, fliers, and news releases), advertisements, publications, and newspaper clippings.

To protect the confidentiality of the organizations, they were assigned names and numbers based on their U.S. geographical location: NE for North Eastern United States, S for the South, and MW for those in the Midwest. These regions reflect the areas with largest concentrations of Dominican immigrants. The only region not represented was the West, were only 0.02% of Dominican population in the United States resides (Pew Hispanic Center, 2010). When necessary, in the findings these organizations are referred to as NE one through 13, S one to four, and NW one.

As suggested by Glaser (1978) data collection and analysis occurred simultaneously in this grounded theory study. The analysis of the data involved the processes of coding and memoing, which are described below.

### **Coding and memoing**

Starting with the first interview, each new interview or text under studied was coded. The interviews were transcribed immediately and translated directly from Spanish into English. Being experienced in both, the researcher simultaneously translated and transcribed all interviews herself. Therefore, the researcher is responsible for any technical error in the translation. There is some debate in qualitative research as to the impact that translation can have on the interpretation and findings of a qualitative study (e.g. Birbili, 2000; Larkin, de Casterlé, & Schotsmans, 2007; Temple, 1997; Temple & Young, 2004). However, as Larkin et al. (2007) explain, the preparation

and interpretation of the information in another language is a co-creative process, and given that a constructivist approach to grounded theory allows for the researchers and participants to co-create meaning, the translation of the data could be viewed as another step in the analysis.

The coding process involved “naming segments of data with a label that simultaneously categorizes, summarizes and accounts for each piece of data” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 43). During the analysis, the researcher used constant comparison to identify categories and find relationships among these categories with the aim towards identifying emerging conceptualizations, which formulate the theory (Dey, 1999).

Charmaz (2006) explained that in grounded theory coding includes at least two phases: the initial phase in which each work line or segment in the text is named and the focused phase in which the most significant codes are sorted, synthesized, and organized. In this study, initial coding was conducted line-by-line, leading to the more selective (focused) coding that facilitates theoretical integration (Charmaz, 2006).

Each piece of data was coded as it was collected. The majority of the texts from the organizational websites were coded first, resulting in a list of 87 preliminary codes, which was then compared to each piece of the interview data shortly after the interviews were concluded. Interview notes were analyzed first followed by the interview transcripts. For each one, the researcher marked each repetition of a pre-identified code and listed the new codes that emerged from the interviews. At the end of the initial coding phase, over 100 codes had been identified. The texts and transcripts were

revisited in focused coding and organized into theoretical categories and sub-categories.

As an additional step in focused coding the researcher analyzed the data utilizing Hutton's (1999) public relations framework explore the use of public relations by the DCOs. The data was analyzed for the presence of the situational roles, public relations functions, and tactics or tools included in the framework.

Additionally, while the researcher was coding, theoretical propositions emerged and were recorded first as notes and later in the form of memos (Dick, 2005; Charmaz, 2006; Schreiber 2001). This "process of making notes of ideas and questions that occur to the analyst during the process of data collection and analysis" (Schreiber, 2001, p. 71) is called memoing. In grounded theory studies, memoing helps the researcher in recording intermediary findings, keeping the involved in the analysis, and aiding in the abstraction of the researcher's ideas (Charmaz, 2006). This intermediate step was useful in pointing to the need for exploring further data or revisiting previous data and identifying weak categories or gaps in the information collected. The memos were sorted, compared, and analyzed until theoretical saturation was reached. Then, the memos were used to integrate and construct a first draft of the propositions of the proposed theory and model of diaspora community organization public relations.

Before the final draft of the theoretical propositions and model could be prepared, it was necessary to consider the role of previous literature on the subject and where it fits in the study. The use and collection of literature on the topic is a central point of contention in grounded theory research as it has to do with how it may affect the

researcher's theoretical sensitivity (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, Charmaz, 2006). This is discussed in the section that follows.

### **Literature review and theoretical sensitivity**

Glaser and Strauss (1967) originally recommended that the researcher leave the review of pertinent literature until the analysis had been completed. The idea behind this argument is that researchers not bring preconceived ideas into the analysis which may taint their ability to identify the theory that emerges (Charmaz, 2006). This is called theoretical sensitivity, which is maintained when the researcher comes into the research setting with as few predetermined views as possible (Glaser, 1978).

However Charmaz (2006) pointed to the ambiguity and shifting views of these authors in their continuing work. She cited Strauss and Corbin's (1998) argument that researchers bring to their work considerable background and prior knowledge of their discipline. Similarly, she cited Glaser's (1978) position on the need of researcher to be familiar with many theoretical codes, which facilitate their sensitivity to observe subtle relationships in the data.

This topic has been of much debate in recent years, but there seems to be growing consensus on reviewing the literature that will help focus the study, although researchers should view it critically so that it does not drown theory or prevent the researcher from addressing the phenomenon creatively (e.g., Charmaz, 2006; Goulding, 1998; Schreiber, 2001). In fact, Goulding (1998) argued that "the idea that findings are theory laden rests on the basic proposition that researchers approach the research situation with a theoretical perspective developed from their academic background and personal interest" (p. 53). Similarly, Schreiber (2001) posited that

researchers need to be aware of existing literature in the topic if they are to develop a proposal that can contribute something new and gain insight as to the importance of conducting their proposed study. Reviewing prior literature should not contaminate the theory development process as the researcher should understand that their first goal in grounded theory research is to understand the problem from the participant's perspective (Schreiber, 2001).

Charmaz (2006) proposed that researchers complete a thorough and focused literature review which can help them in setting the stage for the research and that they include key points in the introductory parts of an article or report. Then, researchers should revisit the literature and expand their literature review once the analysis is concluded. She suggested:

Analyze the most significant works in relation to what you addressed in your now developed grounded theory. Assess and *critique* the literature from this vantage point. Your literature review can do more work for you than merely list, summarize and synthesize major works. (p. 166, emphasis in the original)

In doing this, Charmaz (2006) explained, the researcher enters the current conversation in the substantive area of research. Additionally, she recommended that the researcher make connections outside their immediate substantive area to make the most of the contributions derived from the analysis.

In following with Charmaz's (2006) and Schreiber's (2001) suggestions, the literature review for this study was conducted in two phases. Initially, the central ideas and theories in public relations, community studies, and diasporas were incorporated to focus and delimitate the study, as well as identify to which areas this dissertation could contribute new knowledge. Following the analysis, the literature was revisited and, as found appropriate, new literature was reviewed to examine and help explain the findings

and conclusions of the study; as well as to delineate the resulting theory's place in the scholarly discussion on international and community public relations.

### **Trustworthiness of the findings**

Angen (2000) argues that in an interpretive study, the validation of the research is defined as an evaluation of its trustworthiness. In other words, whether the findings are an accurate representation of the phenomena studied (Hammersley, 1992). In this study, several measures were taken to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings. One commonly used method to improve trust in the study is to use triangulation, or a combination of methods to collect the data (Creswell, 2007). In this study the data was collected through a combination of in-depth interviews, solicited texts and readily available texts. Additionally, in the later interviews the participants in the study were asked to confirm or expand on preliminary findings. Similarly, the researcher conducted follow-up interviews with three of the participants to discuss and refine, if necessary, the proposed model and theory of DCO public relations. The findings detailed in the following chapter reflect their insights and recommendations.

Following this explanation of the method and how it is employed in this research, the next chapter details the findings of the study. Then, the discussion and conclusions are presented, including an analysis of the contributions and limitations of this study, and potential avenues for further research.

## CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS

The main purpose of this study was to understand how public relations efforts contribute to diaspora community organizations' (DCOs) ability to serve their communities. To do so, the researcher used the constructivist grounded theory approach detailed by Charmaz (2006) and sought to build theoretical understanding on DCO public relations. This chapter contains the findings constructed from the textual and interview data collected, which explain the roles performed as well as the functions and tools utilized in DCO public relations. Additionally, theoretical categories and a theoretical model derived from these findings are also presented. Likewise, the theoretical framework for the proposed theory of public relations by DCOs is detailed in the following chapter.

As a starting point to understand DCO public relations, the researcher first explored the purpose of the DCOs included in the study. The interviewees were asked to explain why their organization had been founded and why it existed today. All of the interviewees said that their organizations had been founded and still existed to address a need that had been identified in the diaspora community. Some of the needs these organizations are addressing are location-based, such as representing the interest the Dominican immigrants residing in certain Manhattan neighborhoods. Others were social service needs, such as providing after-school programs for children in the community. Other organizations focused on the needs of representation and advocacy of Dominican immigrants and Dominican-Americans in the United States.

Based their reported purpose, the organizations in this study can be grouped in three categories, service, cultural, and advocacy. The service organizations are most

concerned with providing social services to the community. The range of services include referrals and advice on immigration issues, information about health services, HIV testing, information about job opportunities, after-school programs for underprivileged children, English as a Second Language (ESL) classes for adults, and computer training for adults, among others. The variety of services offered depended on the financing available to the organization and the needs of the community. In the words of one interviewee:

We try to affect an iceberg with many peaks, and what our organization can do is chip away at it [ . . . ] The situation is so immense it isn't as if you are going to change it, but we can make some changes at the community level and among those changes our organization has had some effects (In-depth interview, December 30, 2010).

Another of the needs identified by the interviewees was maintaining a connection with their immigrant roots and with the culture of the homeland. In fact, all but two of the interviewees said that a key goal of their organization was building or maintaining a sense of Dominican identity with their membership and the people they serve. For some organizations, this was their main focus. These organizations placed strong value on educating Dominican immigrants and Dominican Americans about their home-country's history, culture, and traditions.

Interviewees from cultural DCOs concentrated on kindling the interest in and connection to the homeland's culture, especially first-generation Dominican-Americans.

Two interviewees explained the need this way:

It is what identifies us: Our language, what we eat, our cultural expressions, what we read, our entertainment, our carnivals, the community and political leaders that fought for social peace (In-depth interview, January 31, 2011).

If we don't know where we come from or where we've been, many times we don't know where we are headed. We need to know about our independence, our

dances, our food, our political leaders, and our founders. We need to know what happened in the past and what is going on now (In-depth interview, February 17, 2011).

In many of these cases, the cultural efforts were linked in the interviewees' responses with the representation of Dominicans before a larger group (e.g., the city, state, or country). In others, the representation and advocacy efforts of the organization were seen as its main reason for the organization's being. Such was the case for advocacy DCOs, which were mainly concerned and representing the interests of Dominican immigrants and Dominican Americans at the local, state or national levels. For example, one of the advocacy organizations has a mission to represent the different voices of all people of Dominican origin in the United States, while another seeks to guarantee the equal participation of Dominican Women in American life.

Some of these organizations combined service provision with promoting culture or cultural activities with advocacy efforts, but in all of their cases their strongest focus was easily identifiable as one of the three (service, culture, or advocacy). From this initial understanding of the types of organizations working within the Dominican diaspora community, the researcher analyzed the use of public relations and addressed the research questions posited in this study. The following sections detail the findings for research questions one through six.

### **DCO Public Relations**

The first research question asked how DCOs employ public relations to promote a sense of community and collective identity. To answer this question it was necessary to first explore the way in which these organizations use public relations. As detailed by the interviewees, only two out of the 18 participating organizations had a public relations

department or person. The main reason given for this was lack of resources. One interviewee explained:

Nobody is going to give a community agency money to do public relations. Not that anybody gives you money. [. . .] You have to be writing grants and competing and then you get the money to do A, B, and C. But in no grant you can write that you want to do public relations. (In-depth interview, December 30, 2010)

However, the collective responses from the interviewees revealed that despite not having a formal public relations department or person in place, these organizations do carry out public relations efforts. Interviewees explained that the people in charge of the community programs and the organizational leadership would handle public relations tasks as needed. These tasks included publishing material on the website, preparing newsletters, organizing events, publishing brochures, and/or speaking to the media. In other words, these organizations use many of the tactics contained in Hutton's (1999) public relations framework (Appendix D).

In addition, the organizations use interpersonal connections and communications to conduct their public relations efforts. In many cases they are doing reactionary public relations, responding to the requests from community members and the media. Most of the organizations communicate through email with the media and community. One interviewee from a service DCO explained their organization's relationship with ethnic media in the North Eastern United States:

We've been an important source. We have responded to crises, 9/11, the flight 587, problems of Dominican crisis, hurricanes, storms [. . .] then we have the press on us. (In-depth interview, December 30, 2011)

In terms of interpersonal communication, several of the interviewees said that community members approach them because they hear about their programs or services through a friend or neighbor. One interviewee explained:

People like to talk about word of mouth, but the truth is that we've been here, and people know us. The other day someone came and visited us from Massachusetts. He was trying to reach a Dominican organization and he said he stood in the corner and asked someone and the told him: "Got to [their organization] because they always have the answer to all my questions." (In-depth interview, December 30, 2011)

Another interviewee from an advocacy DCO explained that even though they did not have a formal public relations person or department –the work was divided up among the members of the board– their programs had a very strong communication component.

We are always on TV and the radio and going to the [local Hispanic newspaper] in everything we do. When we need to go building-by-building and door-by-door, we go and talk to people. We leave fliers when we can, or post on buildings when we can, so that people know what is going on. (In-depth interview, January 14, 2011)

Information from the interviewees showed that this combination of mediated and in-person communication is a common approach for the three types of DCOs studied. These efforts were included both mass and interpersonal communication. For example, the organization's leadership would communicate with members and partners individually through Facebook™ or email, while also providing mass messages through their Facebook™ or websites. Similarly, personal communication could take place in a small group setting, one-on-one meeting, or large community event. The combination of mediated and in-person communication efforts had to do with the fact that, as several organizational representatives explained, many people in the community rely on both interpersonal and mass media sources for their information.

A couple of the organizations (both cultural DCOs) said that their outreach efforts are mainly online. Speaking of a national conference one organization puts together every year, the interviewee explained:

The way we primarily promote our event is Facebook™. Before starting the conference, I started a Facebook™ group, which grew into thousands of people; and it was that group that I used to start the first conference. From that, we have a running email list of people that have attended and we ask them to tell people, in addition to the Facebook™. (In-depth interview, February 10, 2011)

Similarly, other organizations have found value in combining the traditional mediated and interpersonal methods with online communication. Another interviewee explained:

During the first years we used to communicate using fliers, phone calls, radio, TV, word of mouth, doing presentations in schools, visiting the directors of cultural centers... Later, we decided to make it paperless, not to invest so much money on printing. Now, we are focused online. We created lists and groups. We use Facebook™, Twitter™, our website. [. . .] Now we can reach from 20,000 to 25,000 people that way. (In-depth interview, January 26, 2011)

Additionally, all interviewees said that they rely on their relationship with other organizations to reach people in the community and beyond. Interviewees explained that the community organizations support each other by bringing people from their own membership or publics to support their organization in meetings and events. One interviewee explained that they have established a network by working with most of the organizations in the area and with some international organizations, so that they have had exchanges and collaborative work.

This evidences how public relations is important to the work of these DCOs. In fact, several of the interviewees explained that they do value the contribution of public

relations to their organization, but cannot afford to conduct their efforts another way.

One interviewee said:

Public relations are always underlying, but we do not have mechanisms or a system in place, such as a spokesperson or a public relations person, because we can't afford it. (In-depth interview, December 30, 2011)

Logically, we would have to ask who is doing public relations, in the absence of an organizational employee specifically tasked with this role. The answer, as explained by the interviewees, is that most people in a leadership role (i.e., CEO, presidents, and board members) are involved in the organization's public relations efforts. We can think of these people as public relations leaders, the ones that, as needed, take on the roles of a public relations practitioner and manage not only internal and external communication for the organization, but also its relationship cultivation efforts. For example, interviewees mentioned the value of their personal relationships with the ethnic media in their community, and at the national level, to inform Dominican-Americans of what is going on and to call attention to the issues of the community. Similarly, several interviewees spoke of their role as spokespeople of the organization, talking to the community and media as necessary.

An analysis of their outreach efforts, based on the information provided and collected through the interviews and the organizational texts, shows some differences in how public relations is practiced in the organizations according to their main purpose (Appendix E). In terms of the situational roles that the organizational leaders assume when practicing public relations, the data showed that the crusader and advocate roles were most common in advocacy organizations, while the educator and information roles were most common in service organizations. Meanwhile, in the cultural DCOs and the

service organizations, public relations leaders usually take on the roles of information providers and to a lesser extent, advocates.

Similarly, the functions performed differed by organization type. Advocacy organization used more research than the others. However, all organizations are involved in reputation managing and in communicating. The interpreting role (which is equated with a cultural interpreter function in the context of this study), was common to most of the organizations in their efforts to help the community understand and navigate U.S. society. This function was present in most of the organizations, but less in cultural DCOs.

Lastly, the tactics and tools used by these organizations were similar across the board, with the exception of more elaborate media relations tools such as news conferences and speeches for advocacy organization. However, all organizations relied on interpersonal communication and used news releases and publicity (mainly in the form of events), and all but one of them had a website. Several had accounts with social media sites such as Facebook™, Twitter™, and YouTube™.

Upon examining how these organizations employed public relations roles, functions and tools, the data was revisited and coded to identify emerging theoretical categories. Though the process of open and focused coding, memoing and analysis described in the methods section, four theoretical categories were identified: Organizing the community, fostering community leadership, constructing Dominican-American identity, and representing the diaspora members. These categories are discussed below.

## Theoretical Categories

### Organizing the Community

Organizing the community referred to the efforts made to bring together community members and mobilize them to address common issues and to solve the problems that hinder community unity. This involved offering opportunities to meet, such as town-hall meetings, fairs, and congresses, as well as leading efforts to strengthen community organizations, which included membership drives and capacity-building activities. Additionally, more experienced organizations also spoke of helping other communities get organized by using some of the approaches listed above.

When asked why they use public relations, one of the main reasons reported by the interviewees was to bring community members together. The interviewees from the organizations that have advocacy at the core of its efforts spoke of the need to unite the community and encourage them to mobilize and claim their rights. One interviewee said:

We want the community to identify as a community and to claim not only their individual rights, but also for the collective rights that affect the community. (In-depth interview, February 1, 2011).

Similarly, the text from one organization's factsheet refers to their efforts for "bringing together the voices of Dominicans in the U.S." (NE3 factsheet, 2011). Also, several organizational leaders commented on the outreach done by their organizations to raise awareness among community members about the issues that affected them. These issues included, for example, the lack of translators in hospitals located in communities in which many of the residents spoke little to no English; the poor quality of

education that the children in the community receive; and proposed immigration reforms at the state or federal level.

In some cases, community members were provided with information about their rights and responsibilities within the community. In others they were given opportunities to express their opinions in membership meetings or assemblies. Additionally, a few organizations mobilized members to participate in protest demonstrations on issues affecting the community, such as gentrification and immigration reform.

One of the interviewees presented the example of the relationship that recent immigrant parents have with their children's school. The interviewee explained that because they lack knowledge about the school system or are insecure about the language, immigrant parents do not approach the school or they approach it in a submissive attitude, "as if asking a favor, rather than demanding a right" (In-depth interview, December 15, 2010). The interviewee explained how their organization helps prepare the community members for this situation:

The immigrant in an unknown society feels afraid. What we do is a process of raising awareness, and through workshops we tell people: "look, you don't have to be afraid. You are in this country and the laws protect you even if you do not have documents." We tell them where to file complaints, but above all to the Dominican community, which is one of the ones with less problems with documents, we tell them that they have the right to file a complaint; to sue if they are being discriminated. So, we offer workshops with the Human Rights Department of the State and they tell people when they can be in a situation of discrimination, and they explain that you have to know the law. (In-depth interview, December 15, 2010)

An analysis of the concerns that these organizations attempt to address showed that many focus on common issues. Together, their answers and organizational texts present a combined Dominican DCO agenda, which can be summarized in nine main issues, which are (from most to least salient): education, housing and living conditions,

political representation, divisionary politics, loss of Dominican identity, immigration, community empowerment, economic development, and community health. Below is a list of the agenda issues identified in the data, as well as the attributes associated with each:

1. Education: Dropout rates; poor quality of education; lack of parent involvement in education; lack of leadership in education; internship and fellowship opportunities for Dominican and Dominican-American students; and encouraging immigrants and Dominican-Americans to pursue University education.
2. Housing and Living Conditions: Cost of housing; tenant's rights; displacement of Dominican community; and gentrification.
3. Political Representation: Need for Dominican-American elected officials; need for political education; applying for citizenship; voting; fostering Dominican leadership; need for a unified political agenda.
4. Divisionary Politics: Home-country politics dividing the community, and politics limiting community involvement.
5. Loss of Dominican Identity: Lack of knowledge of or interest in Dominican culture; and second-generation Dominican-American's disconnect with Dominican identity.
6. Immigration: Immigration reform; need to educate about; advocacy for immigrant rights; need for immigration advocates; mobilizing the community to protest/discuss immigration reform; and naturalization education.

7. Community Empowerment: Educating for empowerment (e.g. workshops, technical classes, ESL education); empowerment through organizing (e.g. community councils); and need to empower women.

8. Economic Development: Raising awareness of employment opportunities, financial education, and poverty reduction.

9. Community Health: Poor access to services; health education; and healthcare reform.

All of the organizations interviewed organize the community around some or most of the issues detailed in the agenda listed above. In other words, the identification of these issues leads the DCOs to community organizing. These findings address to the second research question, which inquired as to the use public relations efforts for community organizing, building, and development. The interviewees spoke of the efforts and opportunities to form bonds and collaborate to solve problems as a community.

Interviewees said:

Women approach us because they know what we are doing in favor of women, and in favor of social justice in general [ . . . ] We have a lot of young women that have approached us and are getting organized, and I like that (In-depth interview, January 14, 2011).

We have tried to get the Dominican community to become involved, because the education problem, the housing problem, these are local problems that affect the Dominicans and non-Dominicans. (In-depth interview, February 1, 2011)

Along those same lines, in a speech available in one of the DCO's websites the organization's president explained how they "launched a national campaign to recruit thousands of new committed members who will help us realize our mission consisting in advocating on behalf of over 1.6 million Dominicans in the United States and Puerto Rico" (NE3 website, 2010).

Community organizing was a central focus of the advocacy organizations in the study. For these organizations, representing the community was a key component of all communication efforts. However, the responses suggest that the DCOs are more concerned with community organizing than community building. In fact, in several organizations the leadership seemed to take on the responsibility of addressing the community problems and only allowing the community members to either receive the benefits of their service or to participate in the implementation of their pre-prescribed solutions. This was especially true for the service organizations, which had established programs to address the needs they had identified as community priorities.

Only two of the interviewees spoke of empowering community members to take ownership of their problems and their potential solutions. For example, one of these interviewees explained how they help community members learn to speak in their own terms:

When people are aware of their own problems they can speak in their own terms. Imagine if it is a *cibaeco* [northern] Dominican, they will say: "Listen, I'm gonna tell you something; here they want to push us out. So what are we gonna do? We are gonna organize neighborhood associations, because if not, what? Are we gonna let them mess with us?" (In-depth interview, February 1, 2011).

A related theoretical category, *fostering community leadership*, refers to the organizational efforts made to cultivate, recruit, and train community leaders. It also includes capacity-building efforts within the organization. For example, one organization has a board leadership development program for its members to encourage members to move up the organization's ranks. In another organization, this took the form of calling members or people in the community to rally around existing leaders, and promoting the role of community members as leaders (e.g., business people, teachers,

parents). Also, many organizational texts and interviewees mentioned the need to strengthen or build Dominican leadership in the diaspora community.

In their efforts to bring the community together and foster leadership among its members, many organizations appeal to the shared identity as Dominicans to motivate participation in the organization's activities and efforts. For example, one of the interviewees explained that people approach their organization because of the cultural events they offer, not because of an interest in the organization itself (In-depth interview, February 28, 2011). Additionally, the interviewees' answers showed that the majority of organizations make sure to incorporate Dominican culture and identity in their effort to address these issues in order to bring the community together. Likewise, they incorporate culture in their communications efforts, which was the focus of the third research question. Findings show that the DCOs manage their communication strategically, using culture in their information and outreach efforts. The incorporation of Dominican culture and identity in DCO public relations efforts is discussed the following section.

### **Constructing the Dominican-American Identity**

In most of the organizations, incorporating aspects of Dominican culture was a central component of their communication efforts, even if they were not essentially cultural organizations (i.e., advocacy or service DCOs). The main way in which the organizations incorporated culture into their efforts was by celebrating cultural events. For example, all of the organizations included in this study prepared celebrations for the Dominican Republic Independence Day (February 27) and many participated in local Dominican Day Parades (Appendix F).

Similarly, interviewees spoke of how Dominican food and dance was present in most activities. Merengue, the national music of the Dominican Republic, could be heard in several organizational websites and event videos. One interviewee explained that beside the discussion of the issues affecting the community or the capacity-building opportunities, one of the main reasons they came together as a group was to enjoy the culture by having music, food, and cultural exhibitions (In-depth interview, February 10, 2011). Another interviewee explained that their organization's focus on culture was important because it was the means "to preserve the identity of Dominicans, to preserve the language" (In-depth interview, March 2, 2011), something that his organization believes is important to the Dominicans and Dominican-Americans they serve.

The expressions of Dominican culture were also seen as a means to communicate a different identity of Dominicans to a wider U.S. community. Some interviewees explained that cultural exhibitions were an opportunity to break down stereotypes so that other groups could see *Dominicanness* — i.e., the quality or qualities that make a person or thing Dominican — as going "beyond bodegas, baseball and drug trafficking" by being exposed to the "poetry, dance and music" of the Dominican Republic (In-depth interview, January 31, 2011). One interviewee put it this way:

There are many organizations that offer services and benefits to immigrants, but they don't have a cultural focus. I thought [our organization] would be an alternative to preserve and enhance the identity of Dominicans. (In-depth interview, January 31, 2011)

Several interviewees shared the desire that community members, be they immigrants or Dominican-Americans, tie these cultural expressions to their sense of belonging to a community and sharing in the Dominican identity. Therefore,

incorporating culture in outreach was seen as a way for bringing people together and building a sense of community.

Related to this category are the efforts of representing the diaspora community before both home and host country publics. This theoretical category is described in the following section.

### **Representing the Diaspora Community**

One of the concerns of several organizations was the current role and status of Dominicans in U.S. society. Some focused mainly on community issues (such as those detailed in the previously detailed issue agenda), while others were more concerned with the incorporation of immigrants and second generation Dominican-Americans into U.S. life outside of the diaspora community.

Some organizations spoke of the need to encourage immigrants to obtain U.S. citizenship, viewing it as a precursor to civic engagement and participation and as a way of earning the “privilege of having the right to vote” (In-depth Interview, February 18, 2011). Similarly, other interviewees were concerned with the need to highlight the contributions that Dominicans immigrants and people of Dominican ascent make to U.S. society. Also, several organizational texts referred to gaining recognition for the potential contribution of the immigrants and their children. In a message to the community, one organizational board member wrote:

The future of this country is in the hands of a 10-year-old girl who just arrived from the Dominican Republic and who likes to intervene in favor of younger classmates who sometimes are bullied; and the future also rests in the dreams of a child born in the heart of Corona, Queens who hopes to become a lawyer (NE5 newsletter, 2009).

This category also includes sharing insights from the community organization's membership experience as Dominican Americans. For example, one organization of professionals visits schools in neighborhoods with a large number of Dominican immigrants to speak about opportunities in higher education and their experience as young professionals in highly competitive industries (In-depth interview, February 2, 2011). Another organization puts together a yearly event called Dominican Week, which includes business, cultural and sports activities (Appendix G). The interviewee in charge of organizing Dominican Week explained that the event "was born the intention of highlighting the contributions made by the people that come from the Dominican Republic to the States make, and made by our children" (In-depth interview, February 28, 2011). The interviewee went on to explain that she thought that it was important for keep Dominican culture alive among the immigrants and Dominican Americans "as long as we understand that it is in this country that we vote, and that we pay taxes, so it is here that we have to make space for ourselves" (In-depth interview, February 28, 2011).

Several organizational members spoke also about the role of "ambassadors" that their leadership plays before not only U.S. publics, but those in the Dominican Republic as well. One interviewee explained:

I always tell Dominicans, we Dominicans are much more than merengue and baseball. We have so much more to offer; we have so many talented people; we have so many good professionals... It is the same stereotype that thinks that everyone that is an 'Absent Dominican,' as we are called there, is a delinquent. That is not true, here there are many Dominicans that have never known what it is to make a dollar illegally; that came here to work, to become professionals, to look for the positive things on this country. (In-depth interview, February 28, 2011)

These representation efforts were one of the motivations for DCOs to cultivate relationships with host and home country people, such as elected officials and

businesspeople, as well as with public, private, and non-for-profit sector institutions in both home and host countries. They also include the advocacy efforts in which several of the organizations in this study are engaged. These include advocating for recently arrived immigrants and Dominican-American's civil, educational, economic, and human rights. In the words of one interviewee, it is what they do to look out for the interest of the community (In-depth interview, March 2, 2011).

Likewise, in serving or representing the diaspora community, these DCOs not only communicate and establish relationships with the diaspora members, but also maintain relationships with a network of home and host country organizations. Research question four addressed the use of public relations to engage with diverse types of home and host organizations. The in-depth interviews showed that these organizations have a network of key publics that include other organizations in both the home and host country, but closer relationships with host-country organizations. Many of the organizations studied maintained close relationships with at least one other Dominican DCO. Some had close relationships with local and state-level U.S. government agencies and others collaborated with educational institutions.

For example, one interviewee explained that their organization depended on the support of local U.S. politicians in fundraising and establishing relationships with government (In-depth interview, December 15, 2010). Likewise, he spoke of the value that the politicians place on the support they receive from the Dominican-American community:

Dominicans are very passionate about baseball and politics. So, politicians have taken Dominicans very seriously, because Dominicans aren't only concerned with politics in the Dominican Republic, but also here in the United States (In-depth interview, December 15, 2010).

Similarly, several of the organizations work with the Dominican consulate to put together local drives so that members of the community can renew their passports and get other consular services. Also, one of the cultural organizations included in this study has an agreement to offer cultural programming to the city library once a month. An organization in the Southern United States was chosen to implement a leadership development program sponsored by the Dominican Republic's Office of the First Lady. A Northeastern organization is working with the Finance Ministry in the Dominican Republic to contribute to the development of the financial sector and the people working in this sector. In addition, some of the organizations have ongoing charitable efforts conducted in combination with U.S.-based and Dominican charitable organizations and many organizations receive donations from Dominican-American businesses in their community. In sum, all of the interviewees spoke of collaboration with government, private, and/or non-for-profits organizations in the host and home country. As one organizational representative wrote in a message to the community:

[Our organization] has worked to build and strengthen its ties with non-profit organizations, local politicians, business owners and members of the community at large. We understand that only by fostering critical partnerships with community stakeholders we will be able to identify the factors that will help us leverage and strengthen the resources necessary to better serve our community. (NE5 Organizational newsletter, 2009).

Despite the fact that all of the organizations interviewed have ties in the home country, their transnational network was weaker than their national network. This is evidenced in the number of activities and collaboration opportunities with U.S. organizations versus those in the Dominican Republic. Most of the organizational leaders interviewed stated that they only collaborate with homeland not-for-profits in cases where they channel aid from the community to the country, such as when

national disasters occur. Also, only two of the organizations had an ongoing relationship with a governmental institution in the Dominican Republic, but several organizations had connections with educational institutions in the country. Regardless of the number of the homeland organizations with which the DCOs said they work, all but two of the interviewees reported that these relationships were sporadic and their main focus was on their work and relationships in the United States. In fact, the relationships with the homeland seemed to be sustained mostly through interpersonal networks. In other words, members of the DCO organizational leadership would have a relationship with individuals in the Dominican Republic and would travel and collaborate in programming sporadically, but only rarely would these relations exist at institutional and formal levels.

In fact, many of the interviewees made it a point to clarify that their main focus was on the community in the United States. When asked about their work with people or organizations in the Dominican Republic, one interviewee answered:

It is important, but our organization is very clear: We do not deal with situations in the Dominican Republic. That doesn't mean that every once in a while we won't invite someone to come from there, but our focus is the Dominican and Latina women in the United States, because we are very clear on the fact that here, we have many needs. (In-depth interview, January 14, 2011)

Seen together, these theoretical categories — organizing community members, fostering community leadership, constructing Dominican-American identity, and representing the diaspora members — can be combined into one core category: nurturing a sense of community in the diaspora. In the texts analyzed and the interviewee's statements, it was clear that through their programming and public relations efforts, this was an overarching objective that factored-in in their service and cultural offerings, and advocacy efforts. Also, together, the insight gained in addressing

these questions point to a theoretical model of DCO public relations, explaining the key constructs in the public relations efforts put forth by these organizations. The model is detailed in the following section.

### **A Model of DCO Public Relations**

Research question five asked if a model of DCO public relations could be created and supported. The information collected from the Diaspora Community Organizations (DCO) suggests a model of public relations which incorporates the triggers for public relations efforts (i.e., why they are put in place), the public relations approaches used by the DCOs, and the desired outcomes.

First, findings show that all of the organizations have both home-country and host-country publics (Figure 4-1). To a greater or lesser extent, all three types of organizations communicate with the same host and home country publics. In both countries, they communicate and cultivate relationships with government agencies, elected officials and politicians, private companies, universities, and the news media. However, in the United States media relationships are formed exclusively with the ethnic media, while in the home country, relationships are forged with the national media. Understandably, their efforts are directed towards their own diaspora and other diaspora communities only in the host country. Similarly, charitable organizations (to which they contribute) are important publics in the home country, but not the host country.

The Model of DCO Public Relations (Figure 4-2) shows how these organizations use different public relations efforts to pursue distinct public relations outcomes. This model includes public relations triggers, or motivations for engaging in public relations

efforts; public relations approaches; and corresponding desired organizational outcomes. Each one of these is detailed below.

### **Public Relations Triggers**

The first two levels of the proposed model shows the public relations triggers. These have to do with two main factors: the needs or issues in the community that the DCO is trying to impact, and the main purpose of the DCO. The purpose of the DCO is going to influence what they determined is a need, because the community's needs and issues are identified by the DCO. These issues or needs will result in a communication effort by the DCO.

### **Public Relations Approaches**

Once the need for a public relation effort arises or is identified, the organization will use one of several approaches to communicate with their key publics. Regardless of the organizational purpose, the DCO's included in this study all employed four main public relations approaches: fundraising, relationship cultivation, public diplomacy and advocacy. These approaches were used in the context of the organization's conducting their daily business. In other words, they were not necessarily viewed as public relations efforts, but are identified as such as they fall under Hutton's (1999) public relations framework, as detailed earlier.

The first of the public relations approach identified was public diplomacy. Although traditionally considered "a communication function designed to garner support among people abroad for a particular nation's foreign policies, ideals and values" (Fitzpatrick, 2007, p.196), the concept of public diplomacy has evolved to include the proactive engagement with foreign publics in dialogue and the consideration, or even

accommodation, of different views (Fitzpatrick, 2007; Melissen 2005). Similarly, contemporary public diplomacy also recognizes the role of non-government actors in the promotion of the nation's values, policies and ideals (Council on Foreign Relations, 2003; Nye, 2004; Zatepilina, 2009). In fact, Signitzer and Coombs (1992, p.138) include in their definition of public diplomacy the role that individuals and groups play in influencing the attitudes and opinions that affect another government's foreign policy. Here is where the DCOs' work fits. They use public diplomacy as a public relations approach in their efforts to influence the opinion that people outside the diaspora have of the Dominican Republic and its people.

Their philanthropic and fundraising efforts were mostly guided to organizing the community, as they motivated members to contribute and rally around causes such as natural disasters, or attend fundraising events. Also, the philanthropic efforts reaching the Dominican Republic serve as an opportunity to renew the community's tie with the homeland.

Likewise, advocacy efforts were frequent in the DCOs studied. As defined by Hutton (1999) advocacy efforts attempt to persuade or act in benefit of the organization or its ideals. The efforts to gain support for organizational leadership, to participate in the promotion of the organization's ideals, and to mobilize in protest or response to a community need being forwarded by the organization, could all be considered advocacy efforts.

Finally, the relationship cultivation efforts were also employed in all of the DCOs included those described in this study. As detailed in the findings section, the DCOs employed a variety of relationship cultivation strategies in their public relations efforts,

forming relationships and partnerships with other organizations in the private, public or third sector, and forming relationships with the members of the community. These efforts were vital to the DCO's ability to fulfill its purpose and address the issues they've identified as important to the community.

### **Desired Organizational Outcomes**

The public relations approaches used by the DCO can result in, or support a, desired organizational outcome. Logically, fundraising efforts served to fulfill the organization's desire to contribute to other organizations, to community members in need, or to the home-land in philanthropy efforts. Also, as one interviewee explained, the fundraising activities they organized served as opportunities for the community members to come together and collaborate on a common cause (In-depth interview, February 18, 2011), therefore contributing to the DCO's desire to organize the community.

As detailed in the findings the public diplomacy efforts are likely to have identity management outcomes, i.e., serve to construct the Dominican-American identity through the combined portrayal of the role of immigrants in the host society and the culture and customs that make them different. In the words of one interviewee, outside of the Dominican-American community "it becomes very easy to see yourself as an ambassador, because you are the only one that is like this [ . . . ] everything you say about being Dominican is the truth to other people, because they have no other reference" (In-depth interview, February 10, 2011). Similarly, these efforts would impact the way in which the organization represent the community, furthering the interests of the community and portraying the achievements and contributions of Dominicans and

Dominican-Americans in the community and the country. Also, these public diplomacy efforts, when directed toward diaspora members, can contribute to organizing the community members. For example, one interviewee explained that their cultural efforts help the community members come together and share common interests (In-depth interview, February 28, 2011).

Likewise, the advocacy efforts were central to the organization's ability to represent and organize the diaspora, especially through communication of the issues affecting them. Advocacy efforts that discussed the role and importance of the organization itself, also contributed to fostering community leadership.

Relationship cultivation strategies were central to achieving the five main public relations outcomes identified in this study. In fundraising efforts, the relationships with business, government agencies and private foundations were the ones on which these organizations relied. Also, in their efforts to organize the community, the DCOs employed relationship cultivation strategies (such as networking, open dialogue, and sharing tasks) in their host-country network to motivate people to come together. Many times these community organizing efforts included approaching their home-country networks (e.g. bringing celebrities from the Dominican to perform in organizational fundraising events) to appeal to the community. In fostering community leadership, the interpersonal networks and connections of the individual community members played a central role. Calls for membership and capacity-building opportunities placed a strong value on networking and interpersonal relationships.

In representing the diaspora, cultivating relationships with members of key publics was vital. In many cases the interviewees spoke of the importance of having a

close relationship with the media, elected officials and politicians in both the host and the home countries. Likewise, constructing the Dominican-American identity requires for members to interact with each other, openly share information and establish a strong network within the community.

Because only one of the organizations interviewed had a communication plan in place, these outcomes are likely part of their larger community efforts, and not their main objective in using public relations efforts. Also, it should be noted that even though the public relations approaches and desired outcomes were listed separately, there is often overlap on these. For example, fundraising efforts may include public diplomacy efforts or vice-versa and advocacy efforts will most likely incorporate relationship cultivation strategies. Similarly, a single relationship cultivation effort could support more than one desired organizational outcome. In sum, this model is more an explanation of the likely approaches used to lead to the desired DCO outcomes rather than a linear depiction of a one-dimensional process.

Together, the model and the theoretical categories explained previously support a theory of diaspora community organization public relations closely grounded on the data. The proposed theory of DCO public relations incorporates the context, process and outcomes of the public relations efforts employed by this type of community organization. The following section discusses this theory as well as the limitations and contributions of this study and the areas for future research.

### **A Grounded Theory of DCO Public Relations**

A theory of public relations by diaspora community organization describes how, and towards what ends, public relations efforts are used by these organizations. The

proposed theory is built upon the core category identified in the analysis of the data: Nurturing a sense of community in the diaspora. The central focus on building and maintaining the sense of community in the organization's relationship cultivation, philanthropic, public diplomacy, and advocacy efforts speaks to the centrality of both communication for the work of the DCOs and the role of culture plays in their efforts. Based on the findings detailed above, the following propositions of diaspora community organizations public relations are derived:

**Proposition 1: DCO** public relations efforts will contribute to constructing the diaspora identity.

Rationale for Proposition 1: The organizational leaders interviewed and the texts analyzed place a lot of importance on giving community members the opportunity to express their identity, by participating in events celebrating Dominican holidays (such as the Independence day) or by sharing Dominican music, food, or art. Most organizations considered expressions of *Dominicanness* a necessary component of any public relations effort.

**Proposition 2:** DCOs will place more importance on their host-country than their home-country network.

Rationale for Proposition 2: Despite serving a transnational community (the diaspora) local issues and resource limitations mean that most DCOs maintained a local focus. The transnational network for many of these organizations will be limited to a few organizations and personal relationships with individuals in the home country. The opportunity of transnational work will be reduced to one or two initiatives a year.

**Proposition 3:** DCOs will set an agenda for the issues of importance to the diaspora community.

Rationale for Proposition 3: In their role as community representatives and organizers, these organizations will determine the issues that not only the community considers important, but also the institutions that affect them, including the home and host country governments, the private sector, and the ethnic media. This agenda will reflect the institutional priorities and issues.

**Proposition 4:** DCOs' public relations efforts will rely greatly on interpersonal relationships.

Rationale for Proposition 4: Due to lack of resources, public relations efforts within these organizations will be limited to reaching out to those people in the media and in the community with whom the people at the organization have a personal relationship. Therefore, much of the communication will be done through interpersonal communication channels such as email, in-person communication, and small group meetings.

**Proposition 5:** DCOs' leadership will play several public relations roles including advocate, educator, crusader, and information provider.

Rationale for Proposition 5: In the absence of a public relations specialist, other organizational members, and perhaps leaders, will take on public relations responsibilities as needed for the implementation of their programs. In doing so they will play one of the roles attributed to public relations functions, as explained in Hutton's (1999) public relations framework.

**Proposition 6:** DCOs will serve as cultural intermediaries/cultural interpreters between the diaspora community members and host country institutions.

Rationale for Proposition 6: DCOs will help diaspora members, but more specifically immigrants and first generation U.S. citizens, navigate the system and become familiarized with their rights and responsibilities as residents and citizens.

**Proposition 7:** DCOs public relations efforts will seek to improve the opinion that U.S. publics have about their home country and their country's people.

Rationale for Proposition 7: Interviewees claimed they saw themselves as representatives of the diaspora before larger communities. This was the case not only for the advocacy organizations included in the study, but also for the cultural and service organizations. As such, the DCOs act as non-state ambassadors for the home country and diaspora in the United States.

Together, the theoretical model and propositions describe how DCOs use public relations and the outcomes that they seek to obtain through these efforts. Upon constructing the theory it necessary to place it in the larger discourse of the field, i.e., to explain how it relates and contributes to existing theory (Charmaz, 2006). This constitutes the theoretical framework. The following chapter discussed the theoretical framework for this proposed theory, drawing from existing public relations and mass communication theory.

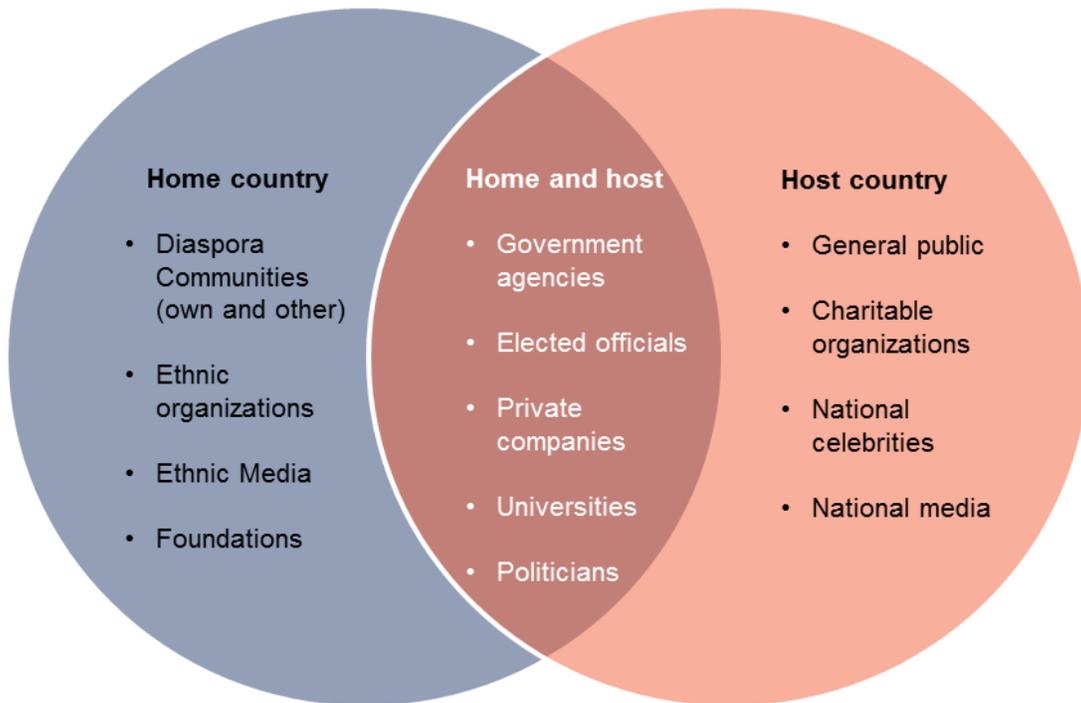


Figure 4-1. Key publics for Diaspora Community Organizations (DCOs)

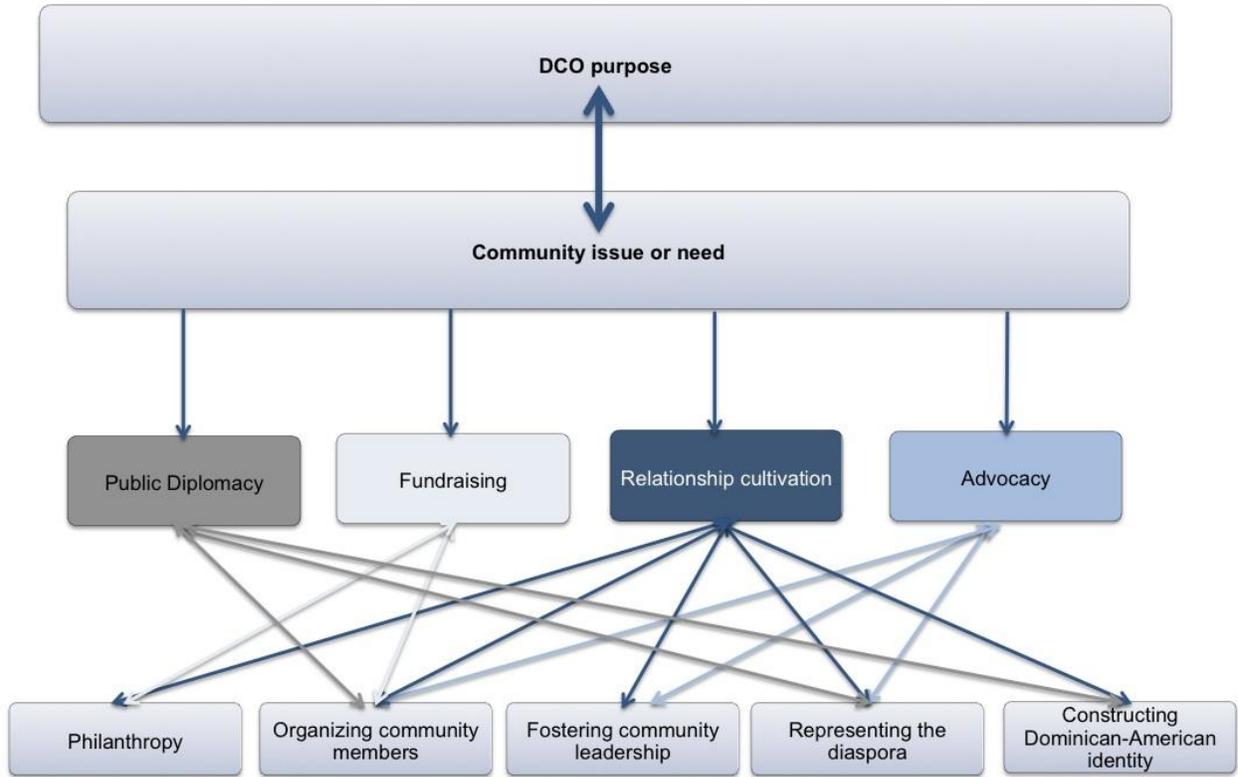


Figure 4-2. Model of DCO Public Relations

## CHAPTER 5 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE PROPOSED THEORY

In contrast to quantitative studies, grounded theory research does not begin from a pre-determined theoretical framework. Instead, the researchers usually will review existing research when related concepts emerge in the data analysis. As explained by Charmaz (2006), the theoretical framework helps place studies such as this one in the relevant discourses of the discipline.

Corbin and Strauss (2008) listed the occasions in which they believe theoretical frameworks would be useful to grounded theorist. These included cases in which the researcher finds that the theory they have developed is closely aligned to a previous framework and cases where existing frameworks can offer alternate explanations of the phenomenon of study. The theoretical framework can serve to engage leading ideas in the field, acknowledge the contributions of prior theoretical works, position the new developed theory in relation to existing ones, and help explain the significance of the developments in the new theory (Charmaz, 2006).

Charmaz (2006) suggested that the theoretical framework be drafted in relation to the grounded theory constructed and used to “claim, locate, evaluate and defend your position” (p. 163). Therefore, this chapter discusses how the proposed grounded theory of DCO public relations relates to existing public relations and mass media theories, as well as how these theories can complement the explanations and propositions offered by the proposed grounded theory. This study draws upon relationship management theory (Hon & J. Grunig, 1999; Ledingham & Bruning, 1998; Ledingham, 2003); the Circuit of Culture model (Curtin & Gaither, 2005, 2007); agenda

setting theory (McCoombs & Shaw, 1972); and framing theory (Goffman, 1974; Entman, 1993) to build the theoretical framework.

The core theoretical category identified in this study, nurturing a sense of community, was closely related to the efforts that the DCOs make to cultivate relationships with their key publics. This desire to bring together the community around a shared identity and the need to address community issues are what make these organizations use public relations strategies to cultivate relationships of vital importance for these community organizations. This is evident when comparing the way in which the DCOs studied pursue their purpose to the relationship cultivation strategies detailed by Hon and J. Grunig (1999).

The interviewees' statements revealed how important having community member's buy-in in the decision making and problem-solving initiatives (access and task-sharing cultivation strategies) was to the organization's ability to achieve their goals. Also, the primacy of interpersonal communication efforts over other forms of communication is evidence of the openness of these organizations. Although the data indicated that service and cultural organizations were more open and provided more access and task-sharing opportunities to their members than advocacy organizations, all three types of organizations included in this study used these relationship cultivation strategies.

Similarly, networking was vital to achieving organizational goals. All of the interviewees provided examples of opportunities in which their organization had collaborated with other diaspora, charitable, public, and/or private organizations. For the DCOs, networking was a way of not only mobilizing resources (e.g., making or receiving

donations), but also making the organization's service, cultural representation, or advocacy efforts possible by allowing them to reach people in their community and beyond. Though less obviously, the DCOs also used positivity efforts, especially in providing friendly and personalized answers to the community member's concerns and in creating opportunities for the community to celebrate and enjoy their homeland's culture.

Even though the relationship-building paradigm offers useful insights as to the contributions that public relations make in these diaspora organizations, it alone does not explain the role or contribution that public relations makes in diaspora communities and their organizations. In addition to the relationship cultivation efforts, this proposed theory of DCO public relations also includes public diplomacy and advocacy efforts employed in the pursuit of representing the diaspora and constructing its group identity, which involved other public relations efforts.

The advocacy efforts by the DCOs did indeed require the cultivation of relationships with media and government organizations and individuals. However, it just as importantly required the construction of a community agenda in service of which the DCO would advocate, and around which the community could organize. Agenda setting theory can provide further insights into how this agenda is constructed and forwarded.

Agenda setting theory was proposed by McCombs and Shaw (1972) in their study of the 1968 U.S. elections. In this research, the scholars asked undecided voters about the issues they considered more important and combined their answers to collect what they called the public agenda. Further, they compared the public agenda with those salient in the media and found the relationship between the two. As a result,

agenda setting theory proposed that the media influences the salience of topics on the public agenda.

Just as the media select from the many events happening around us those that they believe the community should be attentive to, so do community organizations select those issues that they believe need to be addressed by the community. This is evident not only in the commonality of the issues that the organizations studied considered most in need of attention, but also in the differences among these issues by the organizations. For example, while one organization was most concerned with the lack of political representation of Dominican-Americans at the state level, another considered the loss of identification with Dominican culture one of the main problems affecting the diaspora community. In selecting these issues and communicating with the diaspora community about them, the DCOs influence the issues on the community's agenda.

Agenda setting theory was expanded to include not only the issues, but also the attributes attached to those issues, in what is called second-level agenda setting (McCombs, 1997). Kim, Dietram, Scheufele and Shanahan (2002) explained:

Just as the public agenda consists of a set of public issues, an issue consists of a set of attributes that can be employed to evaluate or think about the issue. Whereas agenda setting deals with the salience of issues, attribute agenda setting, an extended version of agenda setting, is concerned with the salience of issue attributes (p. 11).

DCOs also play a role in determining the attributes associated with an issue. For example, they communicate with their members that the rising housing costs (the issue) is an effort to displace them and gentrify the neighborhood (the attributes). They also encourage them to see home-country political partisanship as a divisionary force in their diaspora community. In other words, the DCOs attempt to influence not only the issues

in the community agenda's, but also how the community members think about these issues.

The attributes associated with an issue can also be seen as frames, i.e., schemata's of interpretation that seek to communicate some aspects of an issue of phenomenon (Goffman, 1974). Agenda-setting theorists have equated frames and issue attributes (McCoombs, 1997), yet some framing theorists argue that in viewing frames as attributes, we are studying only one aspect of the process, forgoing the exploration of how frames are built, communicated and consumed by the public (Reese, 1997; Scheufele, 2000). For example, Entman (1993) discusses the intention behind framing when describes framing as the selection of "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" (p.52). From this perspective, framing theory would allow for a more in-depth analysis of how DCOs affect the way the community thinks about the issues affecting them because it would allow for the exploration of how culture, shared history, language, and interpersonal relationships come into play in the frame-building and frame-setting process.

Agenda-setting and framing theories also serve to building understanding of how the DCOs attempt to influence the way the community is seen by people outside of it. In their communication of issues and attributes (or frames) the DCOs engage in agenda-building efforts, i.e., efforts to influence the media agenda and, through it, the public agenda (Lang & Lang, 1981). Therefore, agenda-building provides another perspective under which to study DCO public relations, since their use of news releases, news

conferences and online communication suggest these organizations do in fact attempt to build the community agenda.

Agenda setting and framing help understand a significant part of the public relations efforts by these diaspora communities, but fail to incorporate the central role of culture in these efforts. The place for culture in the proposed public relations theory is discussed in the following section.

### **Culture in DCO Public Relations**

In their efforts to nurture a sense of community, most of the organizations studied appealed to the shared history and culture of the diaspora. They identified the lack of knowledge about, and connectedness to, the home-country history and culture as a problem affecting the community. As a result, many of their efforts put forth give immigrants and Dominican Americans opportunities to learn about Dominican culture. In fact, seven of the eighteen organizations included in this study had the promotion of Dominican culture as their main purpose.

Relationship cultivation strategies, agenda-setting, and framing theory alone cannot explain the centrality of culture in the relationship that organizations have with the diaspora members, nor in the ways in which they try to reach and mobilize the members. These theories do not provide ways for understanding the process of producing and consuming culture or how it affects the community. However, the Circuit of Culture model introduced by Curtin and Gaither (2005) does provide some valuable insights about to this process. This model identifies and explains five moments in which meaning is created: representation, production, consumption, identity, and regulation. The first refers to how a social problem is manifested and communicated; the second to

the way it is communicated (i.e., form, format, medium); and the third to how it is interpreted by the recipients of the message.

The moment of regulation refers to the context and explicit and implicit norms and legal system in which the communication takes place as well as to how it affects the representation, production, and consumption of the message. This moment comprises both the formal controls and informal controls of cultural politics. Therefore in the case of the diaspora studied here, it would include the rules and regulations of U.S. society, such as the need to include other ethnic groups in their service offerings in order to retain their non-profit status, as well as those rules imposed by Dominican culture, such as the need to develop personal relationships with key publics.

Lastly, the moment of identity entails the encoding of meanings that practitioners want to convey to the recipients of the messages. This moment is where the proposed theory of DCO public relations and the Circuit of Culture model have most in common. Curtin and Gaither (2007) recognize that publics are composed of individuals who may have multiple identities. They explain that as a result, “public relations practitioners create and put into circulation identities designed to create a favorable environment for consumption of campaign messages” (p.102). This is similar to the work done by the DCOs in their public relations efforts as described before, except that in the case of the DCO they are most concerned about the communication of the hybrid home/host country identity (i.e. the Dominican American identity) and how their publics’ attachment to it will lead to a sense of community, than with the consumption or interpretation of messages. While the Circuit of Culture model accepts that practitioners construct new

identities at given times, the proposed theory of DCO public relations sustains that the practitioners will attempt to shape and form public attachment to the diaspora identity.

In sum, Curtin and Gaither (2007) argued that viewing public relations from the perspective of this circuit redefines it as a practice “that produces meaning within a cultural economy, privileging identity, difference, and power because of the central role these constructs play in discursive practice” (p. 110). Therefore, this view of public relations concerned with communicating an identity and reproducing culture supplements, or is supplemented by, the understanding of the practice of DCO public relations as it takes into account not only the central role of culture, but also of identity.

Dominican identity is at the core of the communication efforts done by the DCOs and, therefore, of their efforts to nurture a sense of community. This was especially true in efforts to represent the community, since these required defining and describing the community. Of course, this was at the core of the efforts to construct the Dominican-American identity.

Because community identity is socially constructed, it is conditioned by the characteristics of the people in the community (Weisenfeld, 1996). Therefore, both the mediated (mass) and interpersonal efforts by the DCOs contribute to shaping the collective identity. As communities get cues from these and other organizations, from their experiences, and their ideas of the community’s delimitations, distinctiveness, and their own identification with the community, these perceptions are incorporated in the community identity (Puddifoot, 1995).

In contemporary public relations research, only the Circuit of Culture model considers the part that public relations efforts play in constructing identity. This might be

due to the fact when scholars have studied the outcomes of public relations efforts, they have been more concerned with the outcomes for organizations, rather than for the publics with which they cultivate relationships.

In this manner the proposed theory of DCO public relations makes an important contribution by focusing on the impact of the efforts in the community. Additionally, as detailed in the preceding discussion, it ties to existing public relations theory, providing complementary insight, as well as a description of public relations in a type of organization that had not previously been explored in public relations scholarship. The following section further discusses the theoretical contributions of this study.

### **Theoretical Contributions**

As detailed above, existing public relations and mass communications theories could be employed to understand how and why DCOs use public relations. Individually, they would explain the process of selecting and forwarding community issues. They could be used to study the process of meaning creation or to measure the relationships types and outcomes of the DCOs and its main publics. Collectively, these theories could be adopted as a framework to study diaspora public relations, but none of them could, alone, provide a comprehensive understanding of DCO public relations because they do not focus on how the use of public relations serves to construct a sense of community. This is the main theoretical contribution of the proposed theory of DCO public relations. It explains the central role that culture plays in the public relations efforts by this type of community organizations and how their work contributes to constructing the diaspora identity and to representing the diaspora in the larger U.S. society.

DCO's public relations efforts are driven by the organization's purpose. Because these organizations exist to address a need they have identified in the community, their efforts will also be driven by the purpose to have some effect on the community. Therefore, the study of their public relations efforts needs to include the desired and obtained outcomes in the community. In essence, it includes the study of how public relations efforts contribute to society, given that "the value of public relations to an organization and society exists in the relationships developed with strategic publics" (J. Grunig, 2002, p. 5). Therefore, in cultivating relationships with the DCO's key publics it contributes to the community, as do the efforts to build identity and nurture a sense of community.

From this perspective, the proposed theory of DCO's public relations informs the societal and communitarian perspective of public relations (RQ6). The data and findings suggest that one way in which studying DCOs' public relations practices contributes is by providing an understanding of why and how these organizations engage in public relations efforts. Additionally, it ties their public relations practice to the mission of the organization, so that if this organization is working to provide social services or help groups in need, their public relations efforts are also geared towards those ends. Therefore, this study provides some answers to the question at the core of the societal perspective of public relations: how public relations could contribute to society?

Despite the centrality of culture to DCO public relations, the findings detailed above could be used as a starting point to study other diaspora and ethnic organizations and ethnic groups. This would serve to further refine the proposed theory and to provide

more breadth of knowledge as to the role and contributions of public relations in diaspora and ethnic organizations.

## CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSIONS

Curtin and Gaither (2007) asserted that regardless of the plurality of definitions of public relation it is certain that it is a process that “involves some form of communication, whether it be written, verbal or neither, as a purposeful choice” (p. 6). This focus on the communication process, as well as the definition of public relations as managing strategic relationships between an organization and its publics, allows us to view a variety of organizational communication efforts from the perspective of public relations. Therefore, this study, which focused on the community organizations serving one of the largest diasporas in the United States (the Dominican diaspora), provided insights as to how public relations can help this understudied type of organization achieve its goals and help the community members they serve and represent.

Over two decades ago, Kruckeberg and Starck (1988) argued that “public relations practitioners can take an active part in helping community members become aware of and interested in common ends” (p. 65). However, most of the research addressing this public relations role had focused on serving organizations, rather than community ends. Although the present study does not completely address this issue, it does take an important step towards investigating the role of public relations in community based organizations that serve and represent immigrants, who are traditionally disenfranchised, or vulnerable, groups.

This study sought to build theoretical knowledge of how the use of public relations by diaspora community organizations (DCOs) contributes to their ability to achieve their goals and serve their communities. Findings show that public relations efforts and techniques facilitate the organizations in achieving their mission, by contributing to

fundraising efforts, gaining support for the organization, influencing the opinion that people outside the community have about community members, and gaining the involvement and participation of community members. Likewise, through their events and outreach efforts these organizations contribute to building or maintaining a sense of identity tied to the home-country's culture, customs, and traditions.

Further, as reported in the previous section, the DCOs studied provided insight into why they used public relations. The findings can be summarized in one core category: nurturing a sense of community. A close study of these organizations shows that the pursuit of the communication goals and public relations outcomes was instrumental to their ability to achieve organizational goals and fulfill their mission. Also, findings show that because these organizations exist to address a need within the society, their public relations outcomes are in service to the society. In other words, because the mission of the DCOs studied here was to address a social need in benefit to a specific group in the U.S. society (the Dominican diaspora), we can conclude that the use of public relations by these organizations makes a social contribution in the diaspora community.

More specifically, the findings show the contribution that public relations efforts can make in community development, organizing and building. As explained by Rubin and Rubin (2001), community development is a result of the members of the community strengthening their neighborhood bonds, building social networks and forming their own organizations. The present study focused on organizations formed by and for members of the diaspora community. All but two of the 18 organizations included in this study were founded by Dominican immigrants and are still run by Dominican immigrants. The

other two were founded and are run by first generation Dominican Americans. Likewise, the findings show how the organizations have cultivated relationships with other diaspora and ethnic organizations, establishing a support network that helps them reach other groups and aids them in the pursuit of their goals. Similarly, all the DCOs studied had programs designed not only to serve a community need, but also to nurture a sense of community (the core theoretical category identified in this study). Therefore, collectively, these organizations have set a good foundation for community development in the diaspora.

The findings also provided insights into the organizations themselves. Previous studies suggested that the members of diaspora communities, and specially of the Dominican diaspora, lead actively transnational lives (e.g. Itzigsohm, et al., 1999; Portes, 1998; Reynoso, 2003), therefore one could expect their organizations would also have dense transnational networks. However, the organizations included in this study were more focused on their host-country (United States) issues versus the home-country (Dominican Republic) issues. Additionally, their transnational efforts were done mainly through interpersonal relationships, speaking to less formalized and more sporadic opportunities for transnational work.

Similarly, previous research in diaspora communities have pointed to the role that ethnic media plays in constructing the community identity and nurturing a sense of belonging. Existing research points to the value of mass communication for encouraging participation in, and identification with, the community (e.g. Georgiou, 2006, Huesca, 2000; Tsagarousianou, 2004). However, in their own efforts to promote the cohesiveness of the community, the DCOs included in this study use a combination of

interpersonal and mass communication efforts, relying much more on relationships between individuals and between organizations than the existing research in other fields would have suggested.

Additionally, the findings suggest that the DCOs are more similar to other broader-focused community based organizations that was expected. The face similar challenges, such as need for funds, frame the issues for their communities, and attempt to encourage community members to organize and try to achieve common goals (Pyles, 2009; Rubin & Rubin, 2001). Therefore, the insight gained here could be transferred and adapted to understand the use of public relations by other types of community organizations.

The emergent core and sub categories described before suggested a series of propositions that give shape to a theory of diaspora community organization public relations. These propositions describe the directions and outcomes that the use of public relations can have on the DCOs and diaspora members, and provide for specific opportunities for the continued development and refinement of this theory, expanding not only to other diasporas, but also to other types of community based organizations.

As explained in the previous chapter, the proposed theory not only builds on existing public relations knowledge, but allows for looking at public relations efforts in a new way; mainly in being instrumental to nurturing a sense of community in a diaspora (be the members of this diaspora neighbors or geographically dispersed) and in constructing the community identity. Just as importantly, the proposed theory of DCO public relations helps forward theoretical development in what Ihlen and van Ruler

(2009) described a societal, or sociological, approach to public relations; one that focuses of the role of public relations in society.

More specifically, the proposed theory is closely related to the Latin American school of public relations described by Molleda (2001) and the postmodern public relations approach proposed by Holtzhausen (2000). First, by contributing to the understanding of how public relations aids these DCOs in their efforts to address community needs and issues, the public relations philosophy adapted by the organization's employees is similar to that identified by Molleda in Latin American practitioners: working in the interests of the community, contributing to human well-being and equality, concerned with the social environments where organizations operate; and working accordance to the socio-political context of the region. Just as the public relations professionals in the region, the DCO public relations leaders can be viewed as change agents, not only within the organization, but also in the community they operate.

Similarly, Holtzhausen (2000) viewed public relations as a change function. In her postmodern perspective of public relations, practitioners are tasked with becoming community and organizational activists who help develop grassroots democracy. This in essence is a great part of the work done by the DCO workers when they encourage residents to obtain citizenship and participate in the electoral process; when they encourage Dominican Americans to run for office; and when they offer information and orientation so that immigrants and their children can navigate the rules and laws of their host society.

Additionally, Holtzhausen (2000) argued that in order for public relations “to contribute to a vibrant democracy, it needs to be studied and practiced in every possible way and in all its complexity” (p.110). Following this directive, the present study, with its focus on understudied organizations and groups, provides new insight into alternative realms in which public relations is contributing to organizations, to communities, and to society. It also provides valuable insights for the practice and education of public relations. These are discussed in the following section.

### **Implications for Public Relations Practice and Education**

The present study provides knowledge about diaspora communities and diaspora organizations, which had not been the subject of previous public relations research. Thus, it also offers valuable insights for public relations in DCOs and similar community based organizations.

First, the findings show that public relations efforts are tied to many of the day-to-day operations of the DCOs. In cultivating the relationships with community members, business, government agencies and the media that the organization needs to fulfill its mission, the organizational leaders are not only adopting public relations roles, but also performing public relations functions. Therefore, the first implication for the practice of public relations in DCOs, is the need to recognize the value that public relations brings to the organization.

When the interviewees were asked about public relations efforts by they organizations, most focused on the lack of resources to conduct planned public relations or to hire public relations personnel, without realizing that in their own performance as spokespeople, community mobilizers and source of public information,

they were employing public relations. Similarly, many spoke of their relationships with the media as the main (and sometimes only) public relations effort, without considering the breadth of relationship cultivation strategies that they rely on to establish the relationships they need to fulfill their missions.

An acknowledgment of the role of public relations in the DCOs' ability to serve and represent the diaspora should be followed by public relations capacity-building efforts in the organization. Training in public relations would give the DCO staff the ability to improve their public relations efforts. Similarly, recognition of the contributions of public relations should encourage these organizations to be more strategic in their use of public relations efforts. Preparing and implementing public relations plans, including having specific public relations objectives in place, can lead to the evaluation of efforts and their improvement, in order to strive for more efficiency in the use of public relations.

Findings show that despite the DCO's many relationship cultivation efforts, ethnic media relations and ventures into social media, most of their efforts have been centered on the diaspora or, to a lesser extent, on other Hispanic communities. A more strategic approach to public relations should help these organizations reach wider audiences in support of their diaspora representation and identity construction goals.

Similarly, this study provides valuable insights for other organizations attempting to form relationships with diaspora communities and the DCOs. Most notably, these organizations need to be cognizant of the role of culture in communicating with diaspora members and diaspora organizations. Because the home country's culture is one of the main glues that help these immigrants and their children feel part of a community,

appeals to the home-country culture, or the inclusion of cultural activities can help organizations of any type bring the people in the community together. Similarly, attention to the agenda of issues established by the organization can provide insight as to the issues in the mind of the community members.

An understanding of the main DCOs in the area, as well as the issues and needs that the DCO is addressing would also give an organization outside the community some valuable information about the community, and ideas as to how to approach it. For example, most of the organizations included in the study were concerned with facilitating the integration of the immigrants into mainstream U.S. society, at the same time as they nurtured a sense community and the construction of Dominican American identity. Therefore, these organizations should have a welcoming attitude to forming relationships with public, private and non-profit organizations that can support their efforts. On the other hand, although in the minority, some of the advocacy organizations felt that the diaspora community was being discriminated against or mistreated by public and private sector groups. This would, in turn, suggest that the organizations that attempt to form relationships with these DCOs would need to make efforts to overcome the potential skepticism or cynicism with which these DCOs may come to the table. In sum, the issues addressed and programs in place give organizations outside the community an idea of the needs and views that the DCO and, through them, the diaspora members have of their community and the organizations outside the community.

In addition to the implications for public relations practice listed above, this study also points to some implications for public relations education. Although public relations

textbooks include sections about non-profit organizations (e.g. Swan, 2008; Wilcox & Cameron, 2009), these do not discuss the use of public relations in organizations like the ones studied here: small community-based organizations, or organizations working with diaspora groups. In fact, to a great extent public relations education is not concerned with the public relations efforts put forth by other than practitioners, or those that are not part of public relations campaigns. The present study can inform public relations, by providing some evidence of what the practice in these types of organizations may look like, and how it may affect the cultivation of relationships with and within the diaspora community (as discussed above).

Likewise, this study provides empirical evidence of how public relations can work in benefit to community and how it can contribute to community development building and organizing. Even though these questions had been present in public relations literature for a while (Kruckeberg & Starck, 1988; Hallahan, 2004; Ihlen & van Ruler, 2009), they are rarely addressed in empirical studies. Therefore, this study contributes to building evidence of the social contribution of public relations and hopes to enrich the discussion of this topic in public relations classrooms.

However, despite the contributions made by this study, there are some limitations that need to be acknowledged. These are discussed in the following section.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Although significantly contributing to the understanding of public relations in diaspora community organizations, this study has limitations that need to be considered. The first is that this study focused on community organizations serving the Dominican diaspora and therefore are only directly related to the Dominican DCOs' work and

experience. Even though existing research suggest that there could be many similarities between the public relations efforts by Dominican DCOs and DCO of other diasporas, there is no empirical evidence testing this relationship. Similarly, the propositions developed as part of this theory are based on the evidence collected and would need to be tested and refined.

Another potential limitation is that the data was collected from in-depth interviews and organizational texts only. Grounded theory methodology allows for collecting data through many methods and from many sources. Therefore, using other methods such as observation, participatory action, or focus groups could allow for gaining further or more in-depth insight. Along those same lines, the data was collected over a relatively short-time frame (approximately three months). Although the researcher is confident of having reached theoretical saturation before leaving the field, the possibility of contextual situations (such as the celebration of Dominican Independence day) during the data collection period could have influenced the responses given by the interviewees. Therefore, further data collection at a different time, or a longer timeframe in the field might have resulted in additional or different findings.

Similarly, the texts studied were limited to those that were either readily available in the organizational websites, or volunteered to the researcher. Therefore, the texts were not the same for each organization, and might not be a comprehensive representation of the publications or written communication with the public that the organization produces.

Another limitation is that this research did not provide sufficient insight as to what the organizations think they can obtain through the use of public relations. This is due

mostly to the fact that the interviewees' answers did not consider the use of communication in benefit to the organization, but rather in benefit to the community. However, existing public relations knowledge points to the fact that the organization's efforts in cultivating relationships has some impact in how it is regarded by the community and other organizations. This is a missing piece of the puzzle in this study, which should be explored in future research.

Additionally, even though the researcher tried to ensure that personal biases did not affect her theoretical sensitivity, it is possible that the preexisting opinions that she had about the topic of this research, and her proximity and familiarity with the diaspora could have influenced her findings. Therefore, the possibility that this might have affected or limited the findings of this study is acknowledged.

Most of these limitations point to opportunities for future research that would contribute to refining the results or gaining additional insights into DCO public relations. These avenues are detailed below.

### **Avenues for Future Research**

As in all grounded theory research, the development of the theory is only the first step. Future research should focus on refining and testing the theory. Replicating this study with another diaspora would be the first step in further developing the theory of diaspora community organization public relations. Similarly, comparisons would be drawn between the findings of this study and the findings of the study of another diaspora.

Additionally, the theory developed here would be a greater contribution to the public relations body of knowledge if it were expanded to ethnicities. The similarities in

culture in ethnic groups (such as Hispanics or Asian Americans) suggest that if public relations practice is influenced by the identity culture, then the practices of larger ethnic organizations could be similarly explained.

The propositions detailed above could be revised and refined using a Delphi panel with the informants in this study, as well as with additional informants. Also, the effectiveness of their public relations efforts could be evaluated by studying the community members that these and other diaspora organizations work with.

Another significant contribution would be to analyze the agenda building and agenda setting efforts of these DCOs. The data analysis suggested that diaspora organizations attempt to set the issue agenda for the community in which they work, and to incorporate the same agenda into the ethnic media with which they have established relationships. The efforts, through which these agenda building and agenda setting attempts are made, in addition to the factors influencing their success or failure, would be a great contribution to understanding DCO public relations and, in an expansion of the study, public relations by ethnic organizations.

It is important that future research also incorporate the views of the community that is served by these organizations. More specifically, future studies could apply the co-orientation model (Cutlip, Center & Broom, 2000) to explore the roles and expectations that the parties in the relationship (i.e. the organizations and the community) have of each other. This model could also be used to explore the inter-organizational relationships that are so important for the DCOs' ability to fulfill its mission, including businesses, governments, donors and other diaspora and ethnic organizations.

Similarly, these organizations, and their publics, could be better understood if they were studied through a dialogic lens. Future research could employ dialogic theory to examine the extent to which these organizations engage in dialogue with their members or beneficiaries, and the participation given to the community members in the decision making and issue framing processes.

Additionally, in the process of collecting the data about the public relations efforts in these diaspora organizations, good insights were obtained about the organizations themselves. There is an opportunity here to contribute to the community studies and public relations understanding of diaspora and ethnic organizations in future research. The nature and role of the organization's leadership, as well as their internal coordination and communication practices, would provide valuable theoretical and practical knowledge about these organizations.

In sum, this study is but an initial step in a fertile and understudied field of public relations: Public relations in diaspora, ethnic and community organizations. Future research could apply the theory proposed in this study, or use existing mass communication and public relations theory to continue to build knowledge of how their use of communication contributes to the organization and the community they serve.

APPENDIX A  
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

**Transnational Public Relations by Community Organizations**

Please read this consent document carefully before you decide to participate in this study.

**Purpose of the research study:** to explore how community organizations serving diaspora groups communicate with their publics and with other home (Dominican Republic) and host (United States) organizations.

**What you will be asked to do in the study:** The interviewer will ask you to describe the goals of the organization you work or volunteer for, as well as the ways in which you communicate with your publics. Additionally, you will be asked your opinion about the people your organization reaches out to and their ties to Dominican culture.

**Time required:** Approximately 1 hour

**Risks and Benefits:** There are no anticipated risks or benefits involved with this study.

**Compensation:** There is no compensation offered for participating in this study.

**Confidentiality:** Your identity will be kept confidential to the extent provided by law. Your information will be assigned a code number. The list connecting your name to this number will be kept in a password-protected file.

**Voluntary participation:** Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. There is no penalty for not participating.

**Right to withdraw from the study:** You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence.

**Whom to contact if you have questions about the study:** Maria F. De Moya, Ph.D. Candidate University of Florida. (352) [REDACTED]-[REDACTED]; [REDACTED]@ufl.edu

For information regarding your rights as a research participant contact the IRB at 352-392-0433.

**Agreement:**

I have read the procedure described above. I voluntarily agree to participate in the procedure and I have received a copy of this description.

Participant: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Principal Investigator: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX B  
INVITATION EMAIL

Dear Sir or Madam,

My name is Maria De Moya and I am a doctoral candidate in the College of Journalism and Communications at the University of Florida, originally from the Dominican Republic. I am currently working on my dissertation on the communication efforts of organizations serving the Dominican-American community.

I would like to invite your organization to participate in this research study. This research study is for my doctoral dissertation in Public Relations, and has been approved by the University of Florida's Institutional Review Board (IRB).

The purpose of the study is to explore the ways in which organizations like yours, which serve the Dominican-American community, use communication efforts to reach out in the people you serve and achieve organizational and community goals. At your convenience, I would like to conduct a 45 to 60 minute phone interview with a representative, or representatives, of your organization involved in the communication efforts.

Your participation is vital to the success of my study, so I would greatly appreciate if you can find the time to participate. I would love to have the opportunity to further discuss my project and the aim of my study with you via phone or email. I can be reached at: [REDACTED]@ufl.edu or at my cell phone: 352-[REDACTED]-[REDACTED].

Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to speaking with you.

Sincerely,

Maria De Moya  
Ph.D. Candidate  
College of Journalism and Communications  
University of Florida

## APPENDIX C INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. Tell me a little about your organization...
  - a. How does it differ from others serving the community?
2. What would you say is the main purpose of your organization?
3. How would you describe your role within the organization?
4. Tell me a little about the community the organization serves...
  - a. How would you define the members of the community?
5. What are some things the people in this community have in common?
6. How do you communicate with the members of the community?
  - a. What media (newsletters, email, meetings, etc.) do you use?
7. What are some typical cases in which you would reach out to or communicate with the community?
8. Who is responsible for your communication and outreach efforts?
  - a. What is their position or role in the organization?
  - b. How are decisions regarding your outreach efforts made? (For example, who to reach out to? when? what to say?)
  - c. Do you have a communications plan?
9. As a group, what do you think is important to the people your organization serves?
10. Would you consider their Dominican origins as something important to them?
  - a. Why do you think it is/isn't important to them?
11. How have you seen members of the community express their Dominican identity?
12. Could you please describe the efforts you have put forth to achieve these goals?
13. How do you interact with other organizations serving the community?

14. About the organizations in your community, please tell me a little about how you coordinate your work in the community with other organizations?

15. About the organizations in the Dominican Republic, please tell me a little about how you coordinate your work in the community with other organizations?

APPENDIX D  
INTERVIEW GUIDE IN SPANISH

1. Hábleme un poco sobre su organización...
  - a. ¿Cómo es esta organización diferente a las otras que sirven a la comunidad?
2. ¿Cuál diría usted es el propósito principal de su organización?
3. ¿Cómo describiría su papel dentro de la organización?
4. Hábleme un poco sobre la comunidad que su organización sirve...
  - a. ¿Cómo describiría a los miembros de la comunidad?
5. ¿Cuáles son algunas de las cosas que las personas en esta comunidad tienen en común?
6. ¿Cómo se comunican con los miembros de la comunidad?
  - a. ¿Qué medios utilizan? Por ejemplo: boletines, email, etc.
7. ¿Cuáles son algunos de los casos típicos en los que se comunicaría con la comunidad?
8. ¿Quién es la persona responsable por los esfuerzos de comunicación de la organización?
  - a. ¿Cuál es su posición o rol dentro de la organización?
  - b. ¿Cómo se toman las decisiones en relación a sus esfuerzos de comunicación? Por ejemplo: ¿A quién dirigirse? ¿En qué ocasiones? ¿Qué decir?
  - c. ¿Tienen un plan de comunicaciones?
9. Como grupo, ¿qué usted cree es importante para las personas a quien su organización sirve?
10. ¿Considera que sus orígenes dominicanos son algo que ellos consideran importante?

a. ¿Por qué?

11. ¿Cómo ha visto que los miembros de la comunidad expresan su identidad Dominicana?

12. ¿Podría, por favor, describir los esfuerzos que han realizado para lograr las metas de su organización?

13. ¿Cómo interactúan con otras organizaciones que sirven a la comunidad?

14. ¿Me podría hablar un poco sobre como coordinan el trabajo en la comunidad con las otras organizaciones que trabajan allí?

15. ¿Cómo coordinan el trabajo en la comunidad con las organizaciones en la Republica Dominicana que trabajan allí?

APPENDIX E  
DCO PUBLIC RELATIONS FRAMERWORK

DCO Public Relations Roles and Functions (Adapted from Hutton, 1999)

Organization type	Organization number	SITUATIONAL ROLES						PRIMARY FUNCTIONS							
		Persuader	Advocate	Crusader	Information provider	Relationship manager	Image/reputation management	Research	Image making	Counseling	Managing	Early warning	Interpreting	Communicating	Negotiating
Advocacy	NE1	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y
	NE2	N	Y	N	Y	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y
	NE3	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y
	NE6	N	Y	N	N	Y	N	Y	Y	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y
	NE11	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y
	NE12	N	Y	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y
Cultural	NE7	N	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	N	Y	Y	N
	NE8	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	N	Y	Y	N
	NE9	N	N	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	Y	N
	NE13	N	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	Y	N
	S2	N	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	Y	N
	S4	N	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	Y	N
Service	MW1	N	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	Y	N
	S1	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	N	Y	Y	N
	NE10	N	N	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	N	Y	Y	N
	S3	N	N	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	N	Y	Y	N
	N4	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	N	N	N	Y	Y	N
	N5	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	N	Y	Y	N

APPENDIX F  
INVITATION TO INDEPENDENCE DAY CELEBRATION



**Join us in celebrating**  
**DOMINICAN INDEPENDENCE DAY**

**Date: Sunday, February 27th, 2011**

**Time: 4:00 p.m.**

**Place:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Dominicanness, Identity and Migration**

**Guest Speaker:**

**Honorable** \_\_\_\_\_

**State Senator**

**!Free Admission!**

**Reception and Entertainment**

**Information:** \_\_\_\_\_

or write to \_\_\_\_\_

Facebook: \_\_\_\_\_

Twitter: \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX G  
DOMINICAN WEEK WEBSITE BANNER



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