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Does (Linking with) Practice Make Perfect? A Survey of Public Relations Scholars' Perspectives

I-Huei Cheng [a] & Federico de Gregorio [b]

[a] Department of Advertising, National Chengchi University

[b] Department of Marketing, University of Akron
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I-Huei Cheng
Department of Advertising, National Chengchi University

Federico de Gregorio
Department of Marketing, University of Akron

Although it has been commented that public relations academics should link their work to the needs of the industry, the general views of public relations scholars on various aspects of the academic-industry interface are unknown. To address this, we conducted a survey of 966 public relations academics. Findings showed that the respondents, overall, were in favor of building closer ties with the industry to advance the field, but certain opinions varied by education level and extent of professional experience. In addition, major conceptual dimensions in this academia-industry relationship were identified. Implications, recommendations, and directions for future research are discussed.

In his review of the history of the U.S. public relations academy, Cutlip (1961) noted that the impetus for academia-industry collaboration on both teaching and research originated with a long-time practitioner, Edward L. Bernays. He offered the first course specifically in public relations at New York University in 1923, amidst a backdrop of heightened scholarly interest fostered by America's propaganda efforts during World War I. Since then, formal majors/sequences, departments, and research streams in public relations have flourished, with 50 universities reporting a dedicated public relations major, more than 119 institutions offering a sequence,

Correspondence should be addressed to I-Huei Cheng, Department of Advertising, College of Communication, National Chengchi University, 64, Chih-Nan Rd. Sec. 2, Taipei, 11605, Taiwan. E-mail: ihueicheng@gmail.com

specialization, or track in the area, and three public relations-specific academic journals in publication (Ross & Johnson, 2005). Eighty-four years after Bernays taught that first course, in a recent special issue of the *Journal of Public Relations Research* on "Challenges for the Next Generation," James Grunig (2006) declared that one of the key goals for public relations scholars is to improve public relations practice. In the same issue, Gower (2006) noted that there is an apparent disconnect between the academic literature and practice in public relations and suggested that scholars should ensure that their research is useful to practitioners, and Broom (2006) stressed the importance of selecting research concepts/topics "derived from the practice and viewed by practitioners as important" (p. 142). Such statements indicate a growing sense among academics that the theory-oriented and applied branches of public relations, although not mutually exclusive, are branching too far afield from each other (Botan, 1993; van Ruler, 2005; Toth, 2006).

However, in contrast to related fields such as marketing, advertising, and management, the intervening years have seen few analyses of the relationship between public relations academia and practitioners beyond the issue of student training (e.g., Anderson, 1999). Furthermore, when the issue has appeared in the literature, it has most commonly taken the form of opinion pieces or conceptual discussions (e.g., Broom, Cox, Kreuger, & Liebler, 1989; Cornelissen, 2000; Lindenmann, 1979; Tirone, 1979). Thus, there is a dearth of empirical assessments regarding both practitioner and academic attitudes toward academic-practitioner links in the public relations field. The goal of this study is to take a first step in filling in this knowledge gap by assessing public relations scholars' views on key aspects of the academia-industry relationship, including research orientation, cross-collaborations and interactions, and dissemination of knowledge. Ascertaining these opinions will provide enhanced understanding of the collective lens through which public relations scholars view this relationship and offer insights for the ways to shorten, lengthen, or maintain the distance between the two groups. Concrete recommendations based on the findings are provided to close out the study.

BACKGROUND

Conceptual Underpinnings of Academia–industry Relations

A conceptual foundation shared by much of the literature on academia-industry relationships, whether explicitly or implicitly, is the fundamental notion that the academy and the industry are distinct entities that, although having the same object as their focus (public relations), are of distinct

philosophical positions in their orientation to that object (Brinberg & Hirschman, 1986; Cornelissen, 2000; Ottesen & Grønhaug, 2004). The orientation of academia is to examine and provide abstract knowledge and relations among constructs at a broad-based level, but the practitioner's orientation is more limited and particular in scope, devoted to finding immediately applicable solutions for current problems (Botan, 1993; Moncur, 2006). Thus, the reason for the gap in the relationship between the two parties is due to a divergence in beliefs as to which orientation or level of knowledge is the most beneficial in improving the central object of public relations.

A separate foundation for the discussion focuses on the issue of knowledge. Specifically, the academia–industry relationship issue is framed as either a knowledge transfer problem or a knowledge separation issue (e.g., Van de Ven & Johnson, 2006). Framed as knowledge transfer, such discussions have as their underlying principle the notion that the practical knowledge of the industry (how to do things or solve day-to-day client problems) should be derived from conceptual knowledge (why things happen and relationships between constructs) developed from theory, and therefore academics must transmit and translate their work to practitioners for the betterment of the field (e.g., McKenzie, Wright, Ball, & Baron, 2002; Toth, 2006). This conceptualization can be broken down into the instrumental model wherein basic research is capable of providing direct, scientific, instrumental solutions to applied problems, and the conceptual model under which broad-based academic knowledge is considered an intellectual toolbox from which practitioners select various tools and adapt them to their particular problems (Cornlissen, 2000). Although differing in their views of how scholarly knowledge is utilized, both models give primacy to academic research and its attendant findings. Terming this the "trickle down view of the knowledge supply chain," Van de Ven and Johnson (2006, p. 805), pointed out that such conceptualizations downplay the practitioners' role in discovering and disseminating new knowledge to improve understanding of the field over the course of their work.

The knowledge separation view assumes that the domains of practice and academia are distinct to the extent that the knowledge produced, and the worldviews adopted, by each are so different from the other that, although perhaps complementary at some level, they must be kept as separate entities due to their incompatibility of perspectives and to retain the purity of each (e.g., Holbrook, 1985a, 1995; Van de Ven & Johnson, 2006). Although perhaps few public relations scholars would be likely to (openly) espouse such a view, the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake has been proposed as the ideal for the academic endeavor (e.g., Holbrook, 1985b).

An interesting conceptualization of the academic-practitioner disconnect as an issue of professionalization was recently proposed by van Ruler

(2005). Essentially, practitioners as a whole, regardless of culture or geographic location, do not consider having an underlying body of theoretical knowledge as a requirement for public relations to be a profession, nor as useful in succeeding in a public relations career (see also Moncur, 2006). Thus, the rift between scholars and industry is understandable, given the perceived nonusefulness of academic output in the development of public relations as a profession in general and individual success in a career more specifically (Pavlik & Salmon, 1984; van Ruler, 2005).

Opinions and Empirical Evaluations

We move now from the discussion of the theoretical frameworks guiding the ongoing debate on academia-practitioner relationships to an overview of the opinions and findings within the published literature.[1] During our review, we found that the extant work on academia–practitioner relationships focused specifically on public relations was rather limited in number. Thus, in the spirit of Broom's (2006) open-system approach, and gaining a broad and comprehensive understanding of the concept, we also reviewed a diverse variety of relevant perspectives and investigations across several fields, including psychology, marketing, management, medicine, and organizational science. Our wide-ranging review showed that two main ''sides'' in the discussion can be synthesized as follows:

1. The academy should be closer to its industry roots—its research is largely irrelevant, esoteric, excessively abstract in subject matter, and unusable by practitioners. Moreover, the communication of that research has become overly complicated and highly unreadable, although academic members are not cognizant of, and/or not concerned with, the needs and challenges of practice.
2. The academy should remain distant from the industry—increased devotion to pleasing the practitioner will result in research that is limited in its scope and bankrupt of its joy. Academic members should not give up their academic freedom and sell their intellectual souls to cater to the industry.

The vast majority of published work in this arena has fallen into the first category, with numerous opinion pieces, theoretical discussions, and editors'

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[1]A reviewer noted that several of the cited examples of the literature are rather dated. Where possible and relevant, we have cited a mix of both older and newer works to reinforce the notion that these issues are not only a recent concern.

notes calling for more relevant research and greater academia–practitioner collaboration and interaction (e.g., Botan, 1993; J. E. Grunig, 1979; Lindenmann, 1979; Moncur, 2006; Toth, 2006). Although no similar studies have been conducted of public relations academicians, such calls are in line with a series of surveys showing that a significant proportion of business academics in the United Kingdom (Baker & Erdogan, 2000), France (Hetzel, 2000), Australia and New Zealand (Mankelow & Polonsky, 2002), and the United States (Polonsky & Mankelow, 2000) see a pressing need to better integrate academia with practice. In fact, Morris Holbrook (e.g., 1985a, 1985b, 1995) has been one of the few willing to speak out strongly in favor of the second position summarized. It should be noted, however, that in the aforementioned set of surveys, only in Baker and Erdogan and Polonsky and Mankelow was relevance to practitioners ranked as (slightly) more important than improvement of theory. Thus, although few have been willing to be as open as Holbrook in advocating the second position listed, it seems that there are many who privately agree that relevance to industry is a secondary or minimal concern.

Subsequent to our review of this broad literature, the published discussions and investigations of academia–industry issues were synthesized into three broad, interrelated domains to serve as foundational guidelines for our study—the content of academic research, dissemination of academic work, and characteristics of academics and the academic system.

Content of Academic Research

One of the most commonly discussed issues pertains to the relevance of academic research to the industry, emphasizing the "what"—namely the topics investigated, and the knowledge and advancements resulting from these investigations. Critiques of academic research content have originated from both inside and outside the academy. Surveys of and interviews with both public relations and marketing practitioners (e.g., Gonzalez & Adams, 1995; Kelly, 1987: Nataraajan, Henthorne, & LaTour, 1998; Rotfeld, Tinkham, & Reid, 1983) have revealed predominant perceptions that academic research is generally inapplicable to the industry, seldom communicates anything useful, is unhelpful in helping them make decisions, and does not produce definitive results. Academics themselves, have also been critical of the content of and knowledge resulting from the academy's research. Piercy (2002) declared that academics broadly are obsessed with obsolete, unimportant, and/or trivial topics, while Lindenmann (1979), Toth (2006), and Broom (2006) have more diplomatically recommended that academicians better align their research with industry priorities. Others have critiqued the lack of impact in general that theory-focused research has had on practice

(e.g., Tapp, 2004; Tirone, 1979), with O'Driscoll and Murray (1998) concluding that theory has been rapidly outpaced by industry developments.

On the other hand, Holbrook (1985b; 1995) has been one of the most prominent critics of the idea of selecting research topics based on what is of interest to practitioners. He has forcefully argued that such an orientation sullies the purity of the academic endeavor, limits the intellectual contributions and curiosity of academics, and leads to a selling out of the values that comprise the very heart of being scholars. Furthermore, an orientation toward managerial relevance is considered by Holbrook (1985a) to be an intellectual form of self-corruption, likening applied researchers to prostitutes who sell their intellect for pedestrian returns.

Dissemination of Academic Research

A second key facet of academia–industry issues is that of dissemination, namely how scholarly output is communicated beyond the academy. A critical component of knowledge dissemination is the channel by which the process occurs (Rogers, 1995). That is, if the channel is not accessible or regularly accessed by the intended recipient, there is minimal likelihood of knowledge transfer. In its review of knowledge development in the academy, the American Marketing Association (AMA) Task Force (1988) acknowledged the limited effectiveness of the common academic outlets of dissemination and recommended that the organization and its journals implement a public relations function highlighting/summarizing academic research for the general media. Although no public-relations-specific work has looked at the issue, empirical assessments in other fields have supported the previously discussed arguments. Investigations of marketing/advertising practitioner habits reveal that the vast majority: either have never heard of, or have heard of but never read, academic journals (Gagnard & Swartz, 1988; McKenzie, et al., 2002); receive research news/findings via trade publications, the Internet, and seminars (Gray, Ottesen, & Matear, 2005; McKenzie et al., 2002); and consider academic journals and conferences as the least preferred ways to learn about research results (Gray et al., 2005).

Readability is another important aspect in dissemination. Both academicians and practitioners commonly believe that most academic journal articles are excessively filled with jargon, unnecessarily technical and complex, and written at a level that is too abstract and/or complicated for practitioners to take the time to understand (AMA Task Force, 1988: Rotfeld et al., 1983). Analyses of management articles using the Flesch Reading Ease Test have found that, essentially, the less readable a journal's articles, the more prestigious and scholarly was that journal thought to be (Armstrong,

1980), and that the majority of business-oriented journals are ranked as extremely difficult to read (Crosier, 2004). No similar studies in public relations have been conducted, but Lindenmann (1979) pointed to a need for enhanced clarity and comprehensibility in the academic public relations literature.

A third key aspect of knowledge communication is personal interaction between groups, termed *interpersonal channels* by Rogers (1995). Such channels are the most appropriate when exchanges and cross-adoption of new ideas are sought. Ankers and Brennan (2002) and Nataraajan et al. (1998) see academia–practitioner research collaboration as facilitating two parties with differing perspectives to co-develop knowledge in the same domain, which also leads to development of more practically relevant academic work and theoretically rigorous industry research. In addition to active research collaboration, some have called for industry funding of academic research but with less practitioner involvement in actual research mechanics (e.g., Greyser, 1978; Weilbacher, 1981). However, others have urged caution in such collaborations, noting that only commercially profitable projects may be pursued at the expense of more intellectual/theoretically interesting topics (Holbrook, 1985b), also warning of the potential demand for results favoring the sponsoring practitioner (Beyer & Trice, 1982; Gillespie, 1991; Holbrook, 1995). Still others have proposed increasing faculty and professional internships, so that each can experience and understand more directly the needs and constraints of the other (e.g., Nataraajan et al., 1998).

Characteristics of Academics and the Academic System

A third key domain in the industry–academy interface has to do with characteristics of academicians and the academic system, and the perceptions of these two entwined aspects. Practitioners commonly consider academics as having little industry experience and, thus, minimal understanding of the field (e.g., Rotfeld et al., 1983), which underlies the calls for increased faculty internship programs. Academia has also come under scrutiny for its structure, which has reward and advancement systems different from those in the industry. Academics generally advance from a combination of publishing in academic outlets and teaching evaluations; practitioners advance from solving clients' short and long-term problems and generating revenue. These differences in goals, reward systems, and overall structure often form barriers to useful and sustained interactions (e.g., Lindenmann, 1979; Nataraajan et al., 1998; Weilbacher, 1981). Meanwhile, it should also be noted that, although practitioners often perceive numerous problematic issues with academic research, they also evince some positive attitudes towards academic research in principle (e.g., Ankers & Brennan, 2004; Kelly, 1987;

Lindenmann, 1979) and the notion of active collaboration with academics (e.g., Nataraajan et al., 1998).

Based on the host of relevant issues raised and discussed by our review of the extant literature, this study examines attitudes towards and perceptions of various aspects of the academia-industry relationship among public relations scholars. Although the issue of academia-industry relations has been a constant source of debate, as noted earlier there has been a distinct lack of empirical investigations of the issue. Due to the dearth of empirical work done in this area, we developed three broad guiding research questions (Wimmer & Dominick, 2003) as follows:

RQ1. What are the current opinions of the public relations academy regarding various aspects of the academia-industry interface (e.g., content and dissemination of academic research, collaboration and interaction)?

RQ2. What are the underlying conceptual dimensions among these various aspects that represent major components in the public relations academia-industry relationship?

RQ3. How do public relations academics' opinions on academia–industry relationships differ by their background (e.g., education, professional experience, academic rank)?

METHOD

Sample and Procedure

As there is no single comprehensive directory of public relations educators in the United States, an initial sampling frame of e-mail addresses was constructed from the 2006 membership lists of the Public Relations divisions of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC), the International Communication Association, and the National Communication Association. Because respondents of interests were both current and future public relations scholars, regardless of country affiliation, both student and non-U.S. members of these two groups were retained. Any members whose main affiliation was clearly within the industry (e.g., public relations agency, nonprofit organization) were not included in the sample. Any members for whom affiliation was unclear were included in the sample. The editorial review boards of three public-relations-focused journals (*Journal of Public Relations Research*, *Public Relations Review*, and *PRism*) were then perused, and any academics not on the initial list were added. Last, the membership directory of the Public Relations Society of America's Educators Academy was subsequently consulted for any scholars not on our list. The final sampling

frame consisted of 966 public relations educators, academic researchers, and students. Although the sample did not include all academics who teach and/or conduct research on public relations, it was deemed as being appropriately representative of this group.

Personalized e-mail invitations to participate in the survey were sent with a brief explanation of the study, a clickable link to access the questionnaire, and a second link to decline participation. Each invitation was personalized by last name for each potential participant to enhance response rates (Heerwegh, 2005). An e-mail reminder was sent every 2 weeks for 6 weeks after the initial invitation using the same combination of personalization and individual messages. Questions for the study were spread across six Web pages for ease of presentation.

Measurement Items

Besides demographic information, respondents were asked for their opinions regarding various aspects of the academia–practitioner interface in public relations. The survey covered the three broad domains discussed previously: content of academic research, dissemination of knowledge and academic research results, and characteristics of academics and the academic system. The majority of questionnaire items used five-point Likert scales, where 1 meant *strongly disagree* and 5 meant *strongly agree*, with 3 as a *neutral* midpoint. Items were derived based on themes discussed in the broad literature on academia–industry relationships. An initial version of the questionnaire was pretested on a convenience sample of 15 public relations scholars drawn from our home institution, as well as several universities across the United States. The sample included academics of varying ranks and levels of professional experience.

Respondents were first asked about their general thoughts on the academia–industry relationship and opinions on research collaboration with practitioners. For example, respondents rated the current versus ideal "distance" between academia and practice (five-point scale, where $1 = very$ *distant* and $5 = very$ *close*), and reported their perceptions about the potential impact of practitioner funding of academic research, as well as the impact of actual research collaboration on public relations studies (e.g., quality of studies, effect on amount of basic vs. applied research, potential bias of findings toward practitioner needs).

The second section dealt with the debates about whether academic research should be industry-oriented and how well academic knowledge is shared with the industry. Respondents were asked about their selection of research topics in relation to industry issues, as well as

about how they would assess the readability of academic journal articles in general (e.g., complexity, abstractness, use of jargon). Related to academic publications, respondents were also asked for their opinions about whether journals should provide executive summaries for practitioners, whether more practitioners should be invited to serve as reviewers or editors, and whether departments and academic associations should more actively publicize academic research findings and accomplishments.

The final unit of the survey dealt with various aspects regarding academics' contact with, and attitudes toward, practitioners. Respondents were asked about their own experiences with, and opinions about, interacting with practitioners in faculty internship programs and in consulting work. Other potential interaction venues were also included, such as attendance of professional meetings and practitioner participation in academic conferences. To assess academics' perceptions of practitioners, respondents were asked about issues such as practitioners' competency in conducting research and practitioners' understanding of the academic world; in turn, respondents were also asked about how they feel practitioners perceive them, e.g., academics' research competence, how well practitioners think academics understand the industry. Questions in this latter section were based on a combination of items adapted from Rotfeld et al. (1983) and Kelly (1987).[2]

RESULTS

A total of 273 respondents completed surveys, for a response rate of 29%, which is line with prior surveys of public relations scholars (e.g., Shaw & White, 2004). The majority of respondents were tenured or tenure-track academics—assistant professors (30.8%), associate professors (25.1%), and full professors (20.5%)—with the rest of the sample comprised of graduate students (7.2%), emeritus/retired faculty (5.7%), and full-time-/part-time adjunct professors (10.6%), with a mean of 14 years and a median of 11 years in academia. The majority of the sample held a doctorate (64.3%) or Master's (30.5%) as their highest degree, which were mostly earned in the United States (82.7%), but with a wide range of other countries represented (e.g., Australia, Canada, Germany, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Sweden). Similarly, most respondents were currently

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[2]The survey instrument with specific measurements is available upon request from the authors.

employed in the United States (79.6%), with the rest reporting employment in 25 other countries across Asia, Africa, Australia/New Zealand, Europe, the Middle East, and North America. More than a third considered their institutions of employment as equal parts teaching and research (37.9%) or mostly teaching-focused (40.2%), and the rest as mostly research-focused (about 22%). There was about an equal number of male (51.7%) and female respondents in the sample, with an average age of 56 and a median of 50.

Opinions on Research Collaboration

A large number of respondents reported that they believed the relationship between academics and practitioners should be "somewhat close" (50.5%; another 35.2% answered "very close," and only 3.3% answered "somewhat distant" or "very distant"), but the current relationship was rated as "somewhat distant" (50.0%; another 9% answered "very distant;" 17.5% considered the relationship "somewhat close," and 4.1% said "very close"). On the five-point scales that evaluated the academic-industry relationship, where 1 meant *very distant* and 5 meant *very close*, the gap between the ideal and current situations was significant ($M = 4.17$ vs. 2.58, $p < .05$).

Meanwhile, respondents generally held a positive perception about the impact of greater research funding from the industry, but with certain reservations. It was widely believed that practitioner funding would likely result in higher quality studies ($M = 3.62$; about 63% agreed/strongly agreed), but opinions about other positive and negative impacts of such funding and collaboration on research projects were somewhat divided. Respondents were slightly concerned or neutral about whether industry funding or active research collaboration with practitioners would result in findings biased toward practitioner opinions ($M = 2.82$ and 2.78, respectively; 25–40% disagreed, and 26–28% agreed). Similarly, opinions were rather split on whether industry funding or collaboration with practitioners would lead to less basic research that advances public relations theories ($M = 2.69$ and 2.57, respectively; 44–46% disagreed, and 22–24% agreed).

ORIENTATION AND READABILITY OF ACADEMIC RESEARCH

In response to the item about which should be the main focus for public relations academics, more than half of the respondents answered teaching, about 20% said conducting applied research, about 15% said conducting basic research, and about 10% chose not to answer. The majority of respondents further agreed that academic research should study topics relevant to

practitioner needs ($M = 3.58$; about 62% agreed/strongly agreed), with only a small group of respondents opposed to such an orientation (about 16%). Overall, respondents generally disagreed that current academic research topics were irrelevant to practitioner needs ($M = 2.64$; about 58% disagreed/strongly disagreed). However, a distinct proportion, about 26%, felt that academic research topics did not address practitioner needs, and almost 65% reported that they personally selected research topics based on ongoing industry issues.

Regarding the general readability of academic journal articles, most respondents agreed that it was low ($M = 3.91$; 76.5% agreed/strongly agreed) and were in favor of executive summaries written for practitioners in academic journals (almost 70% agreed/strongly agreed). About 40% of the respondents further agreed that more practitioners should serve as journal reviewers or on editorial boards; about 35% disagreed. Overall, the opinions about whether academic journals should serve both academic and practitioner communities were equally split: Almost 40% of the sample believed that academic journals should be written mainly for academics, not for practitioners; another 46% disagreed, and the rest held neutral opinions. Compared to academic journals, books were perceived to be more influential to practitioners ($M = 3.67$). Finally, the majority of the respondents supported departments and academic associations taking more initiative in publicizing academic research and accomplishments (about 85% agreed or strongly agreed).

Interactions with and Perceptions of Practitioners

On the subject of the academia–practitioner interactions, about 14% of respondents had participated in a faculty internship program. The majority of respondents (about 86%) considered practitioner–academic work exchange programs as being able to help build strong ties between academics and practitioners. In fact, about 75% of respondents said that they were personally interested in participating in faculty internship programs.

With regards to individual professional experience, respondents reported an average of about 11 years and a median of 9 years being employed as a practitioner. Many respondents had consulting experience: 43% reported some experience, about 26% reported a lot of experience, and about 20% a little experience. Among those who had consulting experience, about 37% have consulted for public relations agencies and about 14% for marketing research firms. Other clients that have been served included business clients (other than PR agencies and marketing research firms, about 53%), nonprofit organizations (about 62%), government agencies (about 45%),

and several educational institutions. Overall, respondents widely agreed that consulting helps to build strong ties between academics and practitioners (about 86% answered agree or strongly agree), and personally, they were interested in consulting opportunities (More than 75% disagreed/strongly disagreed with the reversed item, ''No interest in consulting opportunity''). Almost unanimously, respondents agreed that academics should actively try to interact with practitioners (almost 95% agreed/strongly agreed), such that more academics should attend professional conferences (about 92% agreed/strongly agreed), and more practitioners should be invited to attend academic conferences (about 85% agreed/strongly agreed). As for interest in collaboration, only about one-third of respondents agreed that most academics were interested in working with practitioners on research, but when asked personally, about 84% of respondents said they were interested.

However, despite apparent desire to interact with practitioners, respondents were lukewarm in their opinion of whether practitioners are well-trained and competent researchers ($M = 2.12$). Additionally, most respondents hold relatively negative or pessimistic perceptions of practitioners. Respondents agreed or strongly agreed that practitioners do not understand the academic system (about 83%); are not interested in developing theories (77%); do not read academic public relations journals (about 80%); consider trade publications (including books) as more useful than academic research (about 90%); consider academic research topics as unrelated to practitioner needs (about 65%); consider gut feelings as more useful than academic research (about 64%); do not participate in academic organizations (about 62%); and, overall, have little/no incentive to build relationships with academics (about 60%). It was notable, however, that respondents felt that practitioners considered academics as well-trained researchers (almost 50%) who did not have a good understanding of the industry (54%) and were not very interested in collaborating on research (about 44%).

Dimensions in Academia–industry Relations

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted to identify the potential underlying dimensions among the various aspects of the academia-industry relationship. EFA is commonly used to summarize data with numerous variables by grouping sets of correlated variables into independent factors that reflect underlying processes or components, especially when previous literature does not offer confirmed scales of measurements (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). In our factor analysis, we used varimax rotation, the most commonly used extraction technique to maximize the variance of the

loadings within factors, across variables.[3] The results indicated that there were 10 factors with eigenvalues greater than 1 and able to be considered as important; this number of factors is also adequate to summarize and describe the wide range of questions asked in our survey, given the total number of variables (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). As shown in Table 1, the 10 factors can be interpreted as dimensions of the academia-industry relationship as follows:

- Factor 1 concerns the orientation and reviewing process of academic public relations journals.
- Factor 2 concerns the readability and usefulness of academic journals/ research.
- Factor 3 represents the concerns over industry's funding/influence on academic research.
- Factor 4 represents general perceptions about academics interacting with the industry.
- Factor 5 concerns the image of academics among the practitioners.
- Factor 6 deals with the role of academic units in publicizing research/accomplishments.
- Factor 7 represents the perceptions of practitioners' interest in theory.
- Factor 8 pertains to building ties between academics and practitioners.
- Factor 9 represents belief in the value of academic research for practitioners/students.
- Factor 10 deals with issues relevant to the academic system as a whole.

Comparison of Perceptions across Respondent Groups

Further analyses were conducted using cross-tabs and ANOVA to examine possible differences by personal characteristics. Respondents with a doctorate degree also largely shared similar opinions with those who did not have such degrees, but with significant differences in degrees of agreement and in some cases, indeed different opinions. Table 1 reports that those with doctoral degrees were more likely to consider that, compared to research articles in academic journals, those in professional publications should be

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[3]Variables with categorical responses were not included in the factor analysis. A few other questions were also excluded in the final analysis reported because they did not fall under any of the significant factors in the initial analyses and had low face validity to be considered as part of any factor. These questions included: "Practitioners have little/no incentive to build relationships with academics;" "Practitioners participate in academic organizations;" "Practitioners consider 'gut feelings' as more useful than academic research;" and "Most academics are interested in collaborating with practitioners on research."

TABLE 1
Opinions and Statements on Academic-Practitioner Relationships: Comparison by Education and Industry Experience

		Overall (N = 273)	PhD (N = 182)	Non-PhD (N = 84)	Less industry experience (N = 121)	More industry experience (N = 135)
Orientation towards academic research Research collaboration would result in biased findings.	M	2.78	2.75	2.86	2.93*	2.61*
	SD	1.00	1.04	.92	1.01	.97
Academic research should study topics relevant to practitioner needs.	M	3.58	3.58	3.56	3.40*	3.76*
	SD	.94	.91	1.00	.93	.93
Most academic research topics have little relevance to practitioner needs.	M	2.64	2.51*	2.87*	2.52	2.73
	SD	1.13	1.12	1.11	1.09	1.17
There should be executive summaries for practitioners in journals.	M	3.66	3.65	3.70	3.51*	3.88*
	SD	.97	.99	.94	.97	.86
For most practitioners, academic articles have low "readability."	M	3.91	3.87	3.98	3.78*	4.02*
	SD	.95	.94	.98	.90	.97
More practitioners should serve as ad hoc journal reviewers.	M	3.01	2.85*	3.35*	2.81*	3.20*
	SD	1.11	1.10	1.05	1.07	1.11
More practitioners should serve on journal editorial review boards.	M	3.08	2.93*	3.38*	2.80*	3.34*
	SD	1.10	1.12	1.02	1.09	1.06
More practitioners should serve as editors/coeditors of journals.	M	2.68	2.49*	3.11*	2.48*	2.87*
	SD	1.08	1.05	1.06	1.00	1.13
Associations should publicize academics' research and accomplishments.	M	4.20	4.14*	4.33*	4.15	4.27
	SD	.73	.77	.63	.71	.73
Opinions on tenure review & personal statements. Professional experience should be a key consideration for academic hires.	M	3.70	3.55*	3.96*	3.38*	4.05*
	SD	1.04	1.07	.91	1.09	.80

(*Continued*)

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TABLE 1
Continued

		Overall (N = 273)	PhD (N = 182)	Non-PhD (N = 84)	Less industry experience (N = 121)	More industry experience (N = 135)
Professional publications should be given credit during tenure/promotion.	M	4.12	4.04*	4.26*	4.07	4.16
	SD	.75	.83	.54	.74	.76
Professional publication should be given less credit in tenure/promotion.	M	2.66	2.80*	2.38*	2.79*	2.46*
	SD	1.19	1.23	1.05	1.15	1.17
Academics should actively try to interact with practitioners.	M	4.43	4.38	4.54	4.25*	4.61*
	SD	.71	.70	.72	.76	.60
Practitioners consider trade publications more useful.	M	4.15	4.21	4.05	4.01*	4.28*
	SD	.63	.60	.70	.69	.69
I incorporate academic research findings in my teaching.	M	4.41	4.42	4.37	4.46*	3.97*
	SD	.70	.69	.73	.68	.99
I incorporate current industry issues in my teaching.	M	4.46	4.42	4.55	4.37*	4.58*
	SD	.66	.66	.65	.70	.61
I am interested in collaborating with practitioners on research.	M	4.14	4.12	4.19	3.99*	4.29*
	SD	.85	.89	.77	.95	.74

Note. Higher scores predominantly indicate stronger agreement with the statements.
*Denotes difference significant at .05 level in one-way ANOVA.

given less credit during tenure/promotion review ($M = 2.80$ vs. 2.38, $p < .05$). Respondents with doctoral degrees were also less likely to feel that most academic research had little relevance to the industry ($M = 2.51$ vs. 2.87, $p < .05$); and more practitioners should serve as journal reviewers, on journal editorial boards, or as editors/co-editors of academic journals ($M = 2.85$ vs. 3.35; $M = 2.93$ vs. 3.38; and $M = 2.49$ vs. 3.11, respectively, $p < .05$). Additionally, they were more likely to disagree that academic associations should take initiative in publicizing academics' research and accomplishments ($M = 4.14$ vs. 4.33, $p < .05$) or that more academics should attend professional conferences ($M = 4.15$ vs. 4.33, $p < .05$), and personally, they also expressed less interest in faculty internship programs ($M = 3.83$ vs. 4.23, $p < .05$). In terms of hiring for academic positions in public relations, those with doctorates were likely to disagree that professional experience should be a key consideration ($M = 4.14$ vs. 4.33, $p < .05$).

To compare the differences between those with more professional experience and those with less, respondents were spilt into two groups by median years of experience as a practitioner. That is, respondents with 9 years of professional experience or less were compared with those with more than 9 years of experience. Data showed that those with more years of professional experience were more likely to consider the main focus of academia should be teaching (60.4% vs. 39.6%, $\chi^2 = 11.7$, $df = 2$, $p < .05$), rather than conducting basic research (31.6% vs. 68.4%). Table 1 also reports other significant differences in the perceptions of the two groups. Respondents with more industry experience were more likely to believe that the relationship between academics and practitioners should be very close ($M = 4.26$ vs. 4.07, $p < .05$), academics should actively try to interact with practitioners ($M = 4.61$ vs. 4.25, $p < .05$), and academicians should attend professional conferences ($M = 4.34$ vs. 4.08, $p < .05$). In terms of research, respondents with more professional experience were less concerned that practitioner-academic collaboration on research would result in findings biased towards practitioner needs ($M = 2.61$ vs. 2.93, $p < .05$), and they considered most current academic research topics as having little relevance to practitioner needs ($M = 3.76$ vs. 3.40, $p < .05$). In addition, those with more industry experience tended to suggest that professional publications should be given more credit during the tenure and promotion process ($M = 2.46$ vs. 2.79, on a reversed scale, $p < .05$), and that more practitioners should be involved in academic journals, such as serving as reviewers ($M = 3.20$ vs. 2.81, $p < .05$), serving on editorial boards ($M = 3.34$ vs. 2.80, $p < .05$), and serving as editor/co-editor of journals ($M = 2.87$ vs. 2.48, $p < .05$).

Participants' responses were also compared by their current academic rank: graduate student, (part-time or full-time) adjunct professor, assistant

professor, associate professor, full professor, and professor emeritus/retired. ANOVA and post-hoc analyses did not show a clear pattern of respondents' opinions varying by academic rank. The few significant differences found were: Professors emeritus/retired were less likely to agree that more practitioners should serve as journal editors/coeditors than graduate students and adjunct professors ($M = 2.07$ vs. 3.21 and 3.14, respectively, $p < .05$); associate professors were less likely to agree that practitioners considered academics well-trained and competent researchers than full professors or graduate students were ($M = 2.95$ vs. 3.63 and 3.43, respectively, $p < .05$), and assistant professors generally reported higher personal interest in participating in faculty internship programs ($M = 4.16$ vs. 3.58, $p < .05$).

There was a rather clear pattern, however, based on the respondents' current academic institution (i.e., whether they considered their university/school as mostly research-focused, mostly teaching-focused, or equal parts teaching and research). ANOVA and post-hoc analyses were performed to identify potential impact of institution type. Table 2 shows significant

TABLE 2
Opinions and Statements on Academic-Practitioner Relationships: Comparison by Institution

		Research focused (N = 58)	Teaching focused (N = 106)	Equal parts (N = 100)
Most academic research topics have little	M	2.81*	2.78*	2.32*
relevance to practitioner needs.	SD	1.21	1.10	1.04
There should be executive summaries for	M	3.72	3.72	3.57
practitioners in academic journals.	SD	.91	.92	1.06
Books are more influential to practitioners	M	3.21*	3.79*	3.79*
than academic journal articles.	SD	.99	1.01	.82
Professional experience should be a key	M	3.71	3.83	3.52
consideration for academic hires.	SD	1.03	1.02	1.06
Professional publications should be given	M	2.83	2.69*	2.32*
less credit in tenure/promotion.	SD	1.22	1.06	1.27
Practitioners are interested in using	M	2.50	2.69*	2.32*
theories to guide their work.	SD	1.01	.98	.94
I do not select research topics based on	M	2.53	2.37	2.47
ongoing industry issues.	SD	1.12	.99	1.11
I incorporate academic research findings	M	4.40	4.28*	4.53*
in my teaching.	SD	.68	.79	.58
I am interested in participating in faculty	M	3.71*	4.19*	3.85*
internship programs.	SD	1.04	.85	1.01

Note. Higher scores predominantly indicate stronger agreement with the statements.
  *Denotes difference significant at .05 level in one-way ANOVA.

differences largely found between teaching-oriented institutions and the other two types of institutions. Compared to those who considered their institutions equally oriented on teaching and research, the respondents who reported their institutions as mostly teaching-focused were more likely to disagree that professional publications should be given less credit during tenure/promotion review ($M = 2.41$ vs. 2.82, $p < .05$), agree that public relations practitioners generally are interested in using theories to guide their work ($M = 2.69$ vs. 2.32, $p < .05$), and disagree that they personally incorporated academic research findings in teaching ($M = 4.28$ vs. 4.53, $p < .05$). Additionally, those in mostly teaching-focused institutions were the most interested in faculty internship programs than the other two groups. In terms of academic research, the patterns were similar: Those in equal parts teaching and research institutions disagreed the most that topics had little relevance to practitioner needs, and those in research-focused institutions disagreed the most that books are more influential than academic journal articles.

DISCUSSION

Implications of Findings

Standing on the conceptual discussions of academia–industry relations in the literature, this study adds new insights based on empirical data from public relations scholars. In particular, the dimensions of academia–industry relations identified through the factor analysis help to advance this conceptual discussion by specifying several essential components, including academic journals' contents and readability, interactions with practitioners, perceptions of and attitudes toward practitioners, concerns about research collaboration with or support from the industry, the academic tenure/promotion system, and the role of academic units. The results provide more detailed shades to the fundamental debate regarding the separation between the academy and the practitioners. Our measurement items can be used in future studies, and the factors identified should be further validated as reliable scales to monitor the state of this ever-current issue.

The key conclusion from the survey findings is that the public relations academy is, overall, industry-oriented, perceives a clear gap between the two parties, and believes that forging closer relationships to close that gap will better the academic endeavor. Public relations scholars widely believe that their selected research topics should and do address issues relevant to the industry, and they personally select topics with such industry orientation when conducting research on their own, as well. Basically, public relations

academics welcome the opportunities to collaborate and interact with prac-
titioners on research projects. There was a positive view about the impacts
of industry funding or academia–practitioner collaboration on research
(e.g., higher quality of studies), although some have concerns about poten-
tial bias in findings as a result of such financial support or collaboration.

Academics' research orientation toward industry issues and desire to
collaborate is in an interesting contrast to their perceptions of their counter-
parts in the industry. Practitioners were considered to be indifferent to
academia: not interested in applying theories, not reading academic jour-
nals, not understanding the academic system, and being not well-trained
researchers with little incentive or desires to work with academics. These
perceptions go a long way in explaining why, particularly in terms of aca-
demic outreach, the connection between scholars and practitioners remains
somewhat distant today, despite academics' high interest in collaboration
and interaction. After all, if one wishes to partner with another but perceives
that other as being not as well-trained and uninterested in reciprocating that
wish, the effort to reach out across the gap will, quite likely and understand-
ably, be muted. Whether practitioners actually have such attitudes towards
academics and interaction with them is another matter—no systematic
assessment of industry perceptions in this regard has been reported as of
yet. Such an investigation may reveal that practitioners also feel that aca-
demics have little incentive/desire to collaborate with them or solve prac-
tical problems, thereby leading to a situation of two parties leery of
interacting to any great extent when there is actually a strong underlying
desire to do so by each.

Our study also shows that there is a smaller contingent of respondents
who are resistant towards having a direct, closely collaborative relationship
with practitioners or a research focus that is overtly industry-driven (e.g.,
about 16% of respondents opposed academics studying topics relevant to
practitioners' needs). Even among this minority, however, none were as
vociferous as Holbrook (1985a, 1995), either via the quantitative items or
the more than 100 open-ended comments, in advocating a need to keep
away from practice to the betterment and purity of scholarship or
education. However, lest it seem that the majority of public relations scho-
lars are willing to form relationships with industry no matter the cost, our
results also indicate a concomitant, prevalent concern that the pursuit of
basic public relations research to advance theories must continue, and that
potential pressures to distort results in support of particular practitioner
perspectives or problems is a potential risk that must be guarded against.

Although most of the survey results were found to be similar
across research-oriented and teaching-oriented institutions, the differences
found between respondents with different educational and professional

backgrounds are particularly noteworthy. The results suggest that the respondents with a Ph.D. degree generally considered academic research as already relevant to industry needs, and thus find it not as necessary for academics to involve practitioners in academic journals or reward professional publications in the promotion review. The opinions of those with more years of industry experience are largely in a converse direction: They see a greater need to more actively interact with the industry, such as involving practitioners in academic journals and raising the relevance of academic research to the industry. Scholars who have had longer years in the industry seem to carry over those experiences with them into the academy, akin to a lens through which they view academia's research endeavors. Basically, this pair of findings suggests that there exist different degrees of agreement in public relations academics' opinions regarding the academia-industry interface, and that one's thinking may be limited to one's personal experiences and biased toward one's own worldview.

Recommendations

At present, there are several public relations research centers, housed in universities, that were originally initiated or inspired by practitioners. These organizations aim to advance the field and serve as bridges between the public relations academy and the practice, part of which is through funding academic research that carries implications for practitioners (e.g., the Arthur W. Page Center at Pennsylvania State University, the Institute for Public Relations at the University of Florida, the Plank Center at the University of Alabama). There are also several professional organizations that include academics on their committees or grant projects (e.g., the Public Relations Society of America, the International Association of Business Communicators). Inspired by such bridging initiatives, and based on our research findings as well as the academia-industry relationship literature in general, we provide the following recommendations for the future.

Content of Research

- The academic bodies (e.g., Public Relations divisions of the International Communication Association and AEJMC) jointly develop, and annually update, broad research priorities in public relations, with input from public relations agencies and/or industry groups (e.g., the Council of Public Relations Firms). Models include the Marketing Science Institute (MSI), which issues an updated and revised list of research priorities every 2 years, developed jointly between industry and academic members.

- Link the research priorities previously described with incentives for both practitioners and academic researchers, such as potential industry funding of appropriate studies and/or access to industry data. Models include the MSI's Working Papers series of projects that have resulted in both industry white papers and academic publications through collaborative research efforts.
- Scholars keep up-to-date on broad knowledge gaps and research challenges faced by agencies and corporations, and increasingly conceptualize and design their research projects to advance understanding in these areas. Rigor and theory development/application should not be sacrificed at the expense of, but integrated with, these goals.

Dissemination of Knowledge

- The public relations journals maintain their rigorous standards and add content aimed at encouraging practitioner readership and appreciation. Such possible features include: an extended executive summary for each article that synthesizes and explains the relevance for practitioners (models include the *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, which provides an executive summary, written by an outside marketing firm, for each article) and practitioner commentary on specific articles or issue as a whole (e.g., William D. Wells' *Measuring Advertising Effectiveness* featuring commentary from senior practitioners on each scholar-written chapter).
- The public relations journals make specific efforts to invite and persuade senior level practitioners, such as public relations research managers and account planners, to serve as editorial board members, ad hoc reviewers, and (guest) editors or coeditors.
- The public relations journals periodically develop special issues devoted to joint academia–practitioner authored studies. Models include the *Journal of Marketing Research* cosponsoring with the MSI a conference, a competition, and a recent issue (November, 2006) featuring collaborative academia–practitioner research.
- Public relations educators strive to incorporate theories and academic research that bear high relevance and implications for practitioners into their classroom teaching. Students, who are future practitioners, would develop an appreciation of academic research, understand how it can guide their professional work, and be able to distinguish applicable/useful useful findings from inapplicable/nonuseful.
- The university/departments, academic associations, and the public relations journals assign/hire staff member(s) specifically devoted to building relationships with stakeholders beyond academia and disseminating news

of research activities and accomplishments. Models include the *Journal of Consumer Research*, which recently (2005) began a publicity initiative to widely disseminate press releases on recently published articles, and the Association of Consumer Research's development of subsections of its Web site devoted to content relevant for public policy makers, consumers, and marketers.

Work and Social Interactions

- Departments provide opportunities and incentives for faculty to interact with practitioners. Opportunities for interaction include inviting practitioners to visit campus as speakers in classes or as participants in events that are oriented on the public relations profession. Other incentives for interaction can include funds for professional conference attendance.
- The academic bodies make specific efforts to invite and persuade practitioners to be involved in the organizations and attend the annual conferences as presenters, reviewers, and/or guest speakers (e.g., the AMA and the Public Policy and Marketing conferences are regularly attended by senior-level practitioners across a range of industries).
- Academic bodies invite participation of companies to collaboratively create work exchange opportunities and faculty internship programs for public relations academics. Model includes the Advertising Educational Foundation's summer Visiting Professor Program.

Academic System

- During the academic tenure review or promotion process, give some "credit" for involvement with the industry and consultation and/or research that demonstrably contributes to the professional world. Evidence of contribution could include written statements from practitioners and positive references to scholars' work within trade publications or professional books.
- Departments provide incentives for faculty to collaborate with practitioners. Such incentives can include course reduction/semester leave to conduct collaborative research with industry. In those institutions where tenure is granted based on academic research productivity, priority for such incentives would be prioritized for tenured faculty, as junior faculty should be focused on publishing in academic journals and gaining tenure.

Future Research

Future research can extend from this study in several ways. An immediate extension would be a similar study done with public relations

practitioners. A comparison of both sides' views would provide an even greater understanding of how the gaps between the two may, or should, be shortened. Second, one can further expand the understanding of global public relations scholars' opinions on this subject. Although our study yielded some responses from non-U.S. participants (almost 19% of our sample), there were too few to validly generate implications or recommendations that factor in particulars of the academic system and attitudes in these respondents' home countries. Prior literature by non-U.S. academicians has touched on this topic (e.g., van Ruler, 2005), but future research should be conducted of non-U.S. academics and examine socio-cultural factors and historical events that are unique to a country and may result in opinions different from our U.S.-based survey. Potential samples would be the membership of non-U.S. academic bodies such as the European Public Relations Education and Research Association.

A third fruitful area of future research inquiry can center on successful cases where public relations academicians and practitioners collaborated on research projects and coauthored publications in academic journals based on the results. Analyses of authorship patterns in the academic public relations literature (Pasadeos & Renfro, 1992; Pasadeos, Renfro, & Hanily, 1999) reveal a steep decline in academia–practitioner copublications as well as practitioner-only works since the 1970 s. In-depth interviews with these participants can help to understand how these projects were initiated and how the relationships were developed and maintained throughout the process. Publication in academic journals is clearly beneficial to academics, but the motivators for practitioners to engage in such research collaboration still need to be explored. The lessons from these instances of cross-collaboration can offer insights for effective means by which the public relations academy and industry can work together to generate research that is mutually beneficial and advances both theory and practices.

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