The Portrayal of Public Relations Practitioners in *The West Wing*

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Paper presented to the Public Relations Division at the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication annual conference

San Francisco, 2006

Abstract

An investigation of the portrayal of public relations practitioners was performed using content analysis of the 22 episodes in the debut season of *The West Wing*. The practitioners were coded based on demonstrated traits and work performed or discussed. Significant differences were found between male and female practitioners being included or disciplined, appearing as major characters, dealing with government officials and the media, discussing speech writing, and appearing silly.

Portrayal of Public Relations Practitioners in *The West Wing*

Television has been shown to have an effect on our perceptions of reality (Gerbner & Gross, 1976; Shrum, Wyer & O'Guinn, 1998). Television is considered a "socialization agent" that informs society what is acceptable and what is not and gives meaning to our social roles (Signorielli, 1999). Without direct exposure to a situation, we, the public, often assume a portrayal on television is accurate or at least based in fact. The presentation of occupations on television is believed to affect how people view those fields (DeFleur, 1964; Stone & Lee, 1990; Pfau & Mullen, 1995; Miller, 1999; Pfau, Moy, & Szabo, 2001; Jo, 2003). If an occupation is portrayed in a positive light and in a realistic manner, it could draw the appropriate next generation of employees and could encourage good working relationships with others. If, however, an occupation is portrayed negatively or out of step with reality, top quality candidates may be lost to another field, the wrong sort of candidates may be attracted, and/or other professionals may not respect those in that field. For these reasons, it is worth studying how public relations practitioners are portrayed on television, particularly on prime-time when more people are watching. The way practitioners are presented could affect how agencies, businesses, and institutions recruit future employees and how journalists and the public interact with them.

This study examines how public relations practitioners are portrayed in the debut season of NBC's prime-time political series, *The West Wing*. Content analysis was used to study the 22 episodes in the first season, which began airing in 1999. There are four main characters from the debut season that fit the role of public relations practitioner: Toby Ziegler, communications director; Sam Seaborn, deputy communications director; C.J. Cregg, press secretary; and Mandy Hampton, a media/political consultant. The first two are men, and the second two are women.

The West Wing was chosen for analysis because of these central figures who work in a public relations capacity. They make up four of the nine main characters. Also, this series has earned high marks from both critics and fans, winning nine Emmys in the first season alone – the most ever won by a series in its debut season. The drama earned the Peabody Award for excellence in television in 1999 and 2000, as well. Even after major changes in writing, acting, and producing staff over the years, the series has continued to garner millions of viewers and is in its seventh season. Besides the original broadcasts on NBC, the series also runs repeat broadcasts in syndication and has the first five seasons currently available on DVD. This high visibility could be influencing many young people as they decide on a career and many journalists and the public in their opinions of the public relations practitioners they encounter. With its top-rated cast and award-winning production, this series deserves further study.

Literature Review

The West Wing

Academicians have written about many aspects of *The West Wing.* Rollins and O'Connor (2003) assembled 15 articles that discussed varied aspects of the NBC series, from its similarity to reality (Levine, 2003) to its use as a teaching tool (Beavers, 2003), from its coverage of race and gender (Lane, 2003) to its scriptwriter/creator (Ezell, 2003; Hayton, 2003; Vest, 2003). Authors focused on the politics of the show (Chambers, 2003; Finn, 2003; Smith, 2003) and on the revelations of White House life behind the camera (Pompper, 2003). The series has been a topic of praise (Waxman, 2003) and scorn (Lehmann, 2003; Podhoretz, 2003). No one, however, has examined the portrayal of public relations practitioners on the program.

A quantitative analysis of *The West Wing* was performed by Holbert, Pillion, Tschida, Armfield, Kinder, Cherry, and Daulton. Holbert et al. (2003) used an experiment to test priming

effects of the series. Most priming tests have studied issues presented in network news, but these authors proposed that entertainment television primes people as well. They used a pre- and post-test questionnaire, which found that respondents felt more positively toward both current and past presidents after watching one episode of *The West Wing*.

Other studies have taken a qualitative approach to the series. Jones and Dionisopoulos (2004) performed a case study of the special 9/11 episode of *The West Wing* called "Isaac and Ishmael." The authors discussed narrative forms on television and compared this particular episode to a parable. They also commented on how other programming shied away from September 11, while *The West Wing* confronted the issue and tried to help its viewers cope with the tragedy. Jones and Dionisopoulos analyzed how the production elements, like the set and lighting, were used "to impart meaning to the text" (p. 23). The authors stated that the parable has not been commonly used on television, and because of that, this episode was ground-breaking.

Parry-Giles and Parry-Giles (2002) also used qualitative methods by conducting a broad examination of character portrayals in the debut season of *The West Wing* including examples of dialogue and descriptions of scenes. They argued that *The West Wing* is a postmodern romance. The authors specifically discussed the portrayal of race, gender, and military strength. Parry-Giles and Parry-Giles suggested that the inclusion of women and racial minorities on the series may prompt viewers to have different perceptions of government employees, "which must inspirit, at least unconsciously, a more progressive attitude toward a more multicultural executive" (p. 224). The authors praised the diversity on the White House staff but criticized other portrayals of race as stereotypically associated with violence on the show. They also argued that though the female characters are praised, the praise comes "in gendered ways" and

the women are kept "at the margins" and portrayed as "objects[s] of gaze and comment" (p. 221). In regards to military strength demonstrated on the first season, the authors pointed to the frequent appearance of military personnel as opposed to the nonexistence of diplomats; this was particularly evident with no Secretary of State.

The number of studies focused on *The West Wing* lends credence to its importance as a topic of review. Quantitative and qualitative studies about the series have added to academic literature, but there has been a lack of investigation in the area of the portrayal of public relations practitioners. This study seeks to fill that gap.

Portrayals of Public Relations

Research has been performed on the portrayal of occupations in the media. Prime-time television has been a popular analysis area in the area of occupation portrayals. The televised presentation methods during these peak viewing hours have been scrutinized by social scientists for decades. Experts have conducted studies looking at the presentation of communications professionals on television, as well as in print journalism, films, and novels.

Several studies have focused on the presentation of public relations and its practitioners on news programs. Keenan (1996), who made use of Spicer's (1993) categories, performed a census of the term "public relations" mentioned in network news broadcasts from 1980 to 1995. Stories mentioning public relations tended to be related to politicians or foreign governments, and story topics often included war or disaster. The presentation of these practitioners was generally in the role of press agent. Keenan found an increase in the mention of the term public relations over that 15-year period.

Jo (2003) also examined the use of the term public relations by the news media, but he examined both print and broadcast. Using content analysis, Jo studied stories in the *New York*

Times, *Wall Street Journal*, and the evening news of ABC, CBS, and NBC from October 1998 to October 2001. Jo coded the type of organization mentioned in the story (business, government, non-profit, citizen group, or politician/celebrity), the news story type (straight, feature, opinion column, or editorial), the purpose of PR portrayed in the story (persuasion, advocacy, public information, cause-related, image-reputation, or relationship management), and the treatment of public relations within the story (positive, negative, or neutral). Jo found that public relations had a negative connotation when used in business stories or those dealing with the government, as opposed to the positive portrayal public relations received in stories about non-profit organizations. Additionally, Jo found that stories mentioning public relations generally referred to publicity campaigns, image-making efforts, persuasion, or marketing.

Spicer (1993) used convenience sampling of print media to collect stories, cartoons, and editorials that used the terms "public relations" or "PR." Spicer analyzed 84 items, 88.9% of which were from newspapers. He performed inductive thematic analysis allowing themes to make themselves apparent as his study progressed. Spicer's ultimate categories of how "*public relations* and *PR* are given subjective meaning in the print media" were titled: distraction, disaster, challenge, hype, merely, war, and schmooze (p. 53). Spicer determined that "clearly there is not simply one meaning, either positive or negative, attributable to the terms" (p. 58). In his analysis, 83% of the samples used the terms in a negative or unfavorable way. According to Spicer, "Reporters, editors, headline writers, and cartoonists subjectively embed and reinforce negative connotations about public relations through their use of the terms *public relations* and *PR*" (p. 58).

Some studies have focused on fictional portrayals of the public relations industry and its practitioners. Miller (1999) completed a textual analysis of the portrayal of public relations

practitioners in films and novels from 1930 to 1995. Like Spicer (1993), she used a convenience sample and allowed the themes to become evident as her work continued. Seven of the eight categories that emerged from her study represented negative portrayals (ditzy, obsequious, cynical, manipulative, money-minded, isolated, or unfulfilled). Only one was positive (accomplished). She found the representations to be constant over time. Miller suggested that perhaps these presentations have cultivated negative feelings toward the practice of public relations. She also found that glamorous public relations positions were overrepresented. According to Miller, "It is safe to say that a reader or viewer could learn very little about the actual practice of PR from film and fiction" (p. 23).

Lee (2001) also analyzed cinematic productions, but he focused on the portrayal of government public relations practitioners in film. He found 20 films he referred to as "flack flicks," including *Pork Chop Hill*, *Americanization of Emily*, *Broadcast News*, *JFK*, *Apollo 13*, *Up Close and Personal*, and *Contact*. Lee discovered common traits among the films, including the overwhelming presence of male practitioners. Hence, as Lee argued, "This imbalance [of males versus females] not only suggests a lingering image of a male-dominated career but also of a glass ceiling for women in the profession" (p. 309).

Lee (2001) also criticized Hollywood's treatment of public relations as synonymous to media relations. These practitioners, who tended to work for the federal government as opposed to state or local agencies, were almost always shown performing media relations. According to Lee, "the image of the PR professional as a mere press agent appears to be a lingering and powerful stereotype" (p. 309). The practitioners were given varied titles, which are consistent with the real world, but the one presented most often in these films was "spokesman."

As far as the genre of film that includes a public relations practitioner, 12 of those evaluated by Lee (2001) were dramas and eight were comedies. Half of the films portrayed the public relations practitioners as comic characters, and the other half were serious. According to Lee, five films portrayed the practitioners in a positive light; seven portrayed them in a negative way; two depicted the practitioners as both positive and negative.

The study of the portrayal of the field of public relations and its practitioners in the media has spanned more than a decade, yet so much is left to uncover. The studies of Spicer (1993), Keenan (1996), Miller (1999), Jo (2003), and Lee (2001) offer baseline examinations of the field of public relations and its practitioners in news, film, novels, and television programs.

The Journalist in Fiction

The most common communications practitioner studied by academicians has been the journalist. Stone and Lee (1990) performed a content analysis to discover how journalists are depicted on television. The researchers sampled prime-time shows from ABC, CBS, and NBC in the spring and fall of 1987. They pointed to both cultivation theory and occupational role socialization theory to indicate the importance of the study. The authors offered some possible effects of negative portrayals of journalists on television: "Might a pervasive adverse portrayal of journalists affect jury verdicts in libel cases, reduce the public's trust of the mass media and later impinge on freedoms granted the press by the First Amendment?" (p. 697). The authors also pointed to the effects on recruitment, saying that young people would likely not want to choose a career that is "depicted on television as demeaning or unethical" (Stone & Lee, 1990, p. 697-698).

As Stone and Lee (1990) analyzed the results, they discovered that "depictions of journalists abounded on prime-time television" (p. 703). Journalists were depicted only second to

police officers, as far as frequency (covering 36.5 hours of the 100.5 hours coded). On their coding sheet, analysis points included sex, age, job status, overall rating (positive, negative, or neutral), and a list of bipolar adjectives (articulate-inarticulate; brave-cowardly; competent-incompetent; ethical-unethical; neat-sloppy; sober-alcoholic/drugs; sensitive-insensitive; wise-foolish). They found the majority were White, male, and between ages 30 and 50. Most journalist characters were rated as articulate, brave, competent, and sober; however, the overall portrayal of journalists was found to be negative. Because of the suggestions from cultivation theory, Stone and Lee state that "this study's implications for audience perceptions about journalism as a profession and as a career are worrisome at best" (p. 707).

Other research has examined the portrayal of journalists in film. Steinle (2000) studied 23 films from the 1990s with major characters or themes related to journalism. He found a "balanced picture" of print journalists, who were generally presented as "useful and ethical contributors to society" (p. 2). However, the depiction of television journalists was negative. They were shown as "indifferent to society, primarily seeking to enhance their reputations with spectacular or sensational reporting" (Steinle, p. 2). According to Steinle, only three of the 23 films he studied from the 1990s showed television journalists in a positive light.

Spaulding and Beasley (2003) also studied journalists in fiction, but focused on the portrayal of females in the field. They examined the depiction of Washington female journalists in 13 novels written since 1990. In each of the novels the authors examined, the main characters had plans to maintain their careers in journalism "regardless of whether they have found a satisfying relationship with a man" (Spaulding & Beasley, 2003, p. 21). As with the films about newswomen, these novels also showed women "having a more difficult time proving themselves than men in the male-dominated field of journalism" (p. 22). The women in these novels also

tended to make progress up the ladder of success because of their looks in addition to their journalistic skills.

An earlier lack of research in the area of fictional portrayals of journalists prompted the Norman Lear Center at USC Annenberg to establish "The Image of the Journalist in Popular Culture" in 2000. The goal of the project is "to investigate and analyze, through research and publication, the conflicting images of the journalist in film, television, radio, commercials, cartoons, and fiction, demonstrating their impact on the American public's perception of newsgatherers" (The project, 2006).

As has been found in the study of public relations portrayals, many of the depictions of journalists are negative. The portrayal of journalists in fiction has been more thoroughly examined than other communications professionals. Other communications researchers should follow this example set by those in the field of journalism research and study portrayals of those in public relations, advertising, electronic media, graphic arts, and photography.

Other People Portrayed in Fiction

Television programming, films, and novels have also been analyzed for their portrayal of various other professions and groups. DeFleur (1964) conducted a content analysis of television programs with regards to the portrayal of occupations. Even in 1964, adults were concerned with the number of hours children were spending in front of the television. DeFleur (1964) stated that "incidental learning from television may contribute to the child's attitude toward his own future occupation, and toward his orientation to others who carry out specific work roles in the occupational structure" (p. 73). DeFleur (1964) analyzed 250 half-hour programs and found that "as a learning source, then, television content that deals with occupational roles can be characterized as selective, unreal, stereotyped, and misleading" (p. 74). Specific examples

include the overrepresentation of law enforcement and the portrayal of some jobs only as "glamorous" and others only as "humble" (DeFleur, 1964, p. 73).

Dominick (1973) also performed a content analysis of prime-time television. He compared the portrayal of law enforcement and crime on television to real-world data. He analyzed content from comedies and dramas on prime-time television in 1972. Eighty-eight percent of crimes were solved on television compared to the FBI's record of 23 percent. The criminals portrayed on television were older and more likely to be White than the real-world data showed, and minorities were underrepresented as victims of murder.

Along with law enforcement, the medical profession is a popular topic for fiction. Kalisch and Kalisch (1986) studied the portrayal of medical professionals in novels, films, and prime-time television from 1920 to 1980. The researchers discovered negative treatment of nurses versus positive treatment of physicians. The portrayal of doctors improved over time compared to the treatment of nurses, which declined. The results showed that fictional doctors were portrayed as more central to stories than nurses and were depicted as more intelligent, rational, and nurturing.

Besides the portrayal of the occupations themselves, researchers have also investigated the treatment of gender in relation to jobs held on television. Vande Berg and Streckfuss (1992) focused on the presentation of gender and the occupations males and females held on prime-time television. The researchers performed a content analysis of prime-time programming on ABC, CBS, and NBC for one week in 1986 and another week in 1987. They found that, though there had been improvement, women continued to be underrepresented in prime-time television. The findings showed a significant difference between the genre of program males tended to appear on (action-adventure) versus the genre most likely to include females (comedies). In addition,

women executed more of the action in comedies, while men executed more of the action in dramas and action-adventures.

Elasmar, Hasegawa, and Brain (1999) also examined television's depiction of gender. They analyzed the portrayals of women on ABC, CBS, NBC, and FOX prime-time shows during 1992-1993, and compared them to the roles of real women in America. The researchers found that a character's marital status was related to her occupation. The results showed that double the number of single females held white-collar positions compared to married females. Additionally, half as many married women were in entertainment-related jobs compared to single women. Women were in more minor roles, unmarried, and under age 50.

Another study involving the portrayal of women on television was performed by Signorielli (1999), who proposed and found that women were not being equally recognized on television. Through content analysis of prime-time television from 1967 to 1998, she examined the genres in which women were found most often (comedy) and the tendencies for portrayal of women's ages (young) and occupations (gender neutral). There were more male than female characters in each decade. The trend for occupations shown on television for both men and women was toward gender-neutral jobs (unemployed, artists, authors, students).

To summarize, the portrayals of people on television are generally inaccurate. Some occupations and people groups are overrepresented. Occupations are often shown as more glamorous than in reality. Crime is shown more frequently and is solved more often that in the real world. Television portrayals reinforce stereotypes. Many of these stereotypes involve women. Women are more commonly active in comedies and are more likely to be young, unmarried, minor characters.

Possible Effects of Television Portrayals

Some researchers have taken the analysis a step further to demonstrate possible effects of these television portrayals on the viewers. Pfau and Mullen (1995) studied the portrayal of medical personnel on prime-time television and how these images affect the public's thoughts of physicians. The researchers used a three-phase study: a content analysis of prime-time television, a mail survey to doctors, and a random telephone survey of the public. They examined the relationship between the number of medical programs seen and the public perception of doctors. The results showed a positive correlation between the amount of programming watched and the likelihood of believing doctors' attributes to be like those portrayed on television.

The influence prime-time television has on the public's perceptions of government was the focus of a study by Pfau, Moy, and Szabo (2001). Through telephone surveys, the researchers discovered that certain genres of programming affect the public more than others. Results showed that attention paid to science-fiction programs was related to a decrease in confidence in the federal government, while watching reality programs like *Cops*, was associated with better feelings toward the executive branch of government.

Some research focused on the effects of television portrayals on children. Wright et al. (1995) examined children's understanding of occupations portrayed on television and their ability to distinguish between what is accurate and what is not. According to Wright et al. (1995), "content analyses over many years have repeatedly indicated that television portrayals of many occupations show the glamorous, dramatic aspects of jobs, while the hard work, boredom, and routine elements are deemphasized" (p. 1707). Through interviews with second and fifth graders, the researchers discovered that television does play a role in children's thoughts about occupations, even when they recognize television as less accurate than real life.

Portrayals of occupations can be found in every television program. Studies have shown that what viewers watch on television affects their perceptions, and these perceptions begin forming in early childhood. Researchers have found stereotypes portrayed on television including age, race, gender roles, and occupation that reinforce what many viewers have in their schemas already. Often the more exciting aspects of an occupation are shown on television offering viewers a skewed image of a real job. The examination of these depictions is important because of their effect on viewers' perceptions, which affect their attitudes, beliefs, and behavior.

Research question/Hypotheses

Based on previous studies performed in related areas and the lack of published research about the portrayal of public relations practitioners, the current investigation seeks to answer the following questions and find support for the following hypotheses.

If, as Pfau and Mullen (1995) found, the portrayals on television affect viewers' attitudes, it is important to study how practitioners are portrayed:

R1: How are public relations practitioners characterized on *The West Wing*?

This study examines the treatment of the PR practitioners on television and how these characters treat others, for example are they calm or enthusiastic, rational or emotional, sarcastic or respectful, silly or serious, argumentative or agreeable, dominant or submissive? Is each character's overall portrayal positive, negative, or neutral? Where would they fit in Miller's (1999) categories: ditzy, obsequious, cynical, manipulative, money-minded, isolated, accomplished, or unfulfilled? Do these four characters appear effective at their jobs? Brody (2003) suggested that effectiveness can be determined by "track[ing] results rather than messages" (p. 38). Brody gave a list of items to track, including complaints and compliments.

Based on that definition, what type of results are *The West Wing* practitioners receiving? In other words, how often are they praised or criticized for their work? How often are they shown being disciplined for inappropriate actions? Is their advice heeded or ignored?

This study also examines the traits displayed by each of the public relations practitioners using nine sets of opposite descriptors based on the research of Stone and Lee (1990), who coded the portrayal of journalists in prime time as: articulate-inarticulate, brave-cowardly, competent-incompetent, ethical-unethical, neat-sloppy, sober-alcoholic, sensitive-insensitive, wise-foolish, and overall positive, negative, or neutral. These individual questions will help answer R1.

Based on DeFleur's (1964) findings of the inaccuracy of occupational portrayals and Keenan's (1996) findings of the overrepresentation of public relations practitioners as press agents on the news, the hypothesis is made that *The West Wing* will also misrepresent the job of a public relations practitioner.

H1: An accurate picture of the responsibilities of a public relations practitioner will not be shown on *The West Wing*.

Based on research by DeFleur (1964) and Wright et al. (1995), this researcher expects that glamorous aspects of public relations will be emphasized more than practitioners' typical daily activities. Specific questions include: What do the practitioners' job descriptions appear to be? What responsibilities do they appear to have? What work are they actually shown doing? What work do they merely discuss? What common public relations work is never even mentioned? Based on what viewers saw during the first season, would they come away with an accurate picture of the field of public relations?

Based on studies involving gender portrayal on television (Kalisch & Kalisch, 1986; Vande Berg & Streckfuss, 1992; Elasmar, Hasegawa, & Brain, 1999; Signorielli, 1999), this

study expects to discover differences between the portrayal of male and female practitioners on this prime-time program.

H2: The portrayal of the male and female public relations practitioners on *The West Wing* will be different.

According to VandeBerg and Streckfuss (1992) and Signorielli (1999), women were more likely to be in comedies than in dramas; also, according to Vande Berg and Streckfuss (1992), more of the actions performed in dramas were done by males. Because *The West Wing* is a drama, the researcher expects to find that male public relations practitioners on *The West Wing* will appear more often than the female practitioners.

Methodology

All 22 episodes of the debut season of *The West Wing* were coded by the author. Two pretests were performed: one using 30 minutes from a more recent season and one using an hour from the debut season. Ten percent of the debut season's chapters were randomly selected and coded by another researcher. Intercoder reliability was found to be 91%.

Study units were based on the DVDs break-up into chapters. There were five chapters to each episode, making 110 total chapters. For each chapter in which a practitioner appeared, a new code sheet was completed. The four main practitioners were known beforehand, but a co-worker of the character Mandy was added named Daisy. Her title was never made clear and her appearances were brief.

Characters were coded for the tasks they were shown performing and the tasks they discussed. These 42 items included giving advice, writing, editing, working with the media, researching, typing, and responding to crises. Characters were also coded based on the traits they demonstrated. These characteristics could be divided into how the practitioners were treated

(heeded, ignored, praised, disciplined, included, treated with respect) and how they treated others (professional, respectful, silly, serious, argumentative, agreeable, dominant, submissive). This list of traits should help show the effectiveness and overall image of these White House communicators.

Two other sets of coding categories were implemented, which were found in previous research, including Miller's (1999) nine "archetypal characteristics": ditzy, obsequious, cynical, manipulative, money-minded, isolated, accomplished, and unfulfilled. This researcher attempted to follow Miller's work by classifying the public relations practitioners in *The West Wing* according to her categories after each chapter in which they appeared. The other set of descriptors came from the work of Stone and Lee (1990), who analyzed the portrayal of journalists on prime-time television as: articulate-inarticulate; brave-cowardly; competent-incompetent; ethical-unethical; neat-sloppy; sober-alcoholic/drugs; sensitive-insensitive; wise-foolish, as well as a rating of overall positive, negative, or neutral.

Findings

The characters studied in this research endeavor appeared in a total of 343 chapters. (If each of the four major characters had appeared in every chapter on the DVD, the total would have reached 440). Only two chapters had no public relations practitioner present (episode 8, chapter 1; episode 11, chapter 1).

RQ1 sought to discover how the public relations practitioners were characterized on the debut season of *The West Wing*. The most commonly coded traits included: serious (322), enthusiastic (306), rational (293), treated with respect (282), effective in job (267), respectful (264), included (248), professional (233), and heeded (213). Table 1 shows the frequencies of each trait coded.

To further answer RQ1, public relations practitioners on *The West Wing* were also overwhelmingly articulate (335), brave (326), competent (305), and sober (322), as well as ethical (305), neat (337), sensitive (242), and wise (275) following Stone and Lee's (1990) categories. The appearances were positive overall (80.9%). The characters were coded as neutral or "can't tell" 15.6% of the time. The practitioners were considered negative in 3.5% of their codings; negative traits included being insensitive (98), unwise (65), incompetent (35), unethical (35), alcoholic (18 appearances or remarks related to drinking or drugs), cowardly (14), sloppy (5), and inarticulate (4). The practitioners were considered effective 267 times. They were criticized (64) and praised (50), and they were even disciplined (18). They were heeded (213) more than ignored (105).

The most common archetype, according to Miller's (1999) categories, was the "accomplished" practitioner, coded 206 times. Males were coded as accomplished more often than females (53.9% and 46.1%, respectively). The character with the most frequent accomplished coding was Sam (33.5%), with C.J. (30.6%) coming in second. Forty-seven times a practitioner was coded as "unfulfilled" (53.2% of those were Toby). Ten of the 11 ditzy codings were of female characters (90.9%), eight of those were C.J. Eighty percent of the 30 cynical codings were of male characters, with the majority falling to Toby (76.7%). The two manipulative ratings went to one male (Sam) and one female (Mandy). During the coding, there were 44 of the 110 chapters in which the practitioner being coded did not fit Miller's categories. Half of those who did not fit into the categories were male and the other half female. No practitioners were coded as obsequious, isolated, or money-minded.

When Miller's (1999) categories were collapsed into positive, negative, and neutral, the comparison with character was significant using crosstabs analysis ($\chi^2(6, N = 338) = 46.49, p <$

.05). A review of the data suggests that Toby had the most negative ratings within Miller's categories (53.3%), Sam had the most neutral ratings (42.9%), and C.J. and Sam held the largest portions of the positive ratings (30.6% and 33.5%, respectively). Most of C.J.'s, Mandy's, and Sam's ratings were positive (66.3%, 62.7%, and 70.4%, respectively).

H1 proposed that an unrealistic view of practitioners' responsibilities would be portrayed. Frequency distributions revealed that the tasks shown most often were: exchanging views with co-workers (127), reporting facts to superiors (99), fulfilling senior staff duties (98), responding to a crisis (83), researching (76), giving advice (62), and delegating tasks (50). The activities most commonly *discussed* but not shown included dealing with government officials (16) and writing a speech (14). Many of the senior staff duties included attending dinners or other events and meetings that might follow the theories of DeFleur (1964) and Wright et al. (1995) in that occupations are often shown more glamorous than reality. A prime example came in episode 16, "20 Hours in L.A.", when the staff attended a Hollywood fund-raiser, and C.J. is seen chatting comfortably with Jay Leno. Other support was found for H1 in that the practitioners were never shown doing basic public relations tasks such as assembling a media kit, preparing a document for publication, defining a target audience, developing goals/objectives, preparing a crisis plan, appearing or preparing someone else to appear on a talk show, training subordinates, seizing an opportunity for good press, or writing a speech. Some of the actions performed by the practitioners did not fit the defined categories and were, thus, coded as "other"; the most common ones could be grouped under the categories of: socializing (29), criticizing co-workers (11), writing various items (9), and apologizing to co-workers (3). In addition, nine of the "other" items that were coded as tasks *discussed* but not seen involved writing.

H2 proposed that male and female practitioners would not be presented equally. Male practitioners appeared more frequently (56.3%) than female practitioners (43.7%), but according to crosstabs data analysis, the difference between the frequency of appearance of males and females is not significant ($\chi^2(21, N = 343) = 5.87, p > .05$). As far as individual characters, Sam appeared the most, with 28.6%, while C.J. and Toby both appeared in 27.7% of the chapters populated by public relations practitioners. Mandy appeared in 15.5% of the chapters, and Daisy, Mandy's briefly appearing assistant/co-worker, appears in 0.6% of the chapters.

Support for H2 was found via several crosstabulations. According to crosstabs data analysis, women and men were shown performing different tasks on *The West Wing*. Male public relations practitioners appear to be much more likely to deal with government officials than female practitioners ($\chi^2(1, N = 343) = 10.74, p < .05$). Female practitioners were more likely to answer media questions ($\chi^2(1, N = 343) = 24.12, p < .05$), to deal with the media outside of interviews ($\chi^2(1, N = 343) = 24.12, p < .05$), and to lead a news conference ($\chi^2(1, N = 343) = 25.88, p < .05$). These three involving the media came as no surprise because the press secretary was female.

The tasks discussed by practitioners also showed some significant differences between men and women. Again, a review of the data shows that men were more likely to discuss working with government officials ($\chi^2(1, N = 341) = 6.53, p < .05$) than women were. Male characters were the only ones to discuss writing a speech ($\chi^2(1, N = 341) = 11.20, p < .05$).

The traits portrayed by the public relations practitioners on the program also differed between men and women, according to crosstabs analysis (see Table 1 for a list of the overall count and a comparison of male and female percentages). The trait "included" was significant when examined in the light of the gender of the practitioner ($\chi^2(1, N = 342) = 26.43, p < .05$).

Based on a review of the data, practitioners included in decision-making were more likely to be male (64.9%). There was a significant relationship between the gender of the character and whether he or she was considered a major character during a particular chapter of the program ($\chi^2(1, N = 342) = 11.83, p < .05$). A review of the data showed male practitioners as more likely to be considered major characters (64.6%) than female practitioners (35.4%). Crosstabs showed a significant difference between the gender of the character and the number of times he or she was disciplined ($\chi^2(1, N = 342) = 5.59, p < .05$). A review of the data shows male practitioners were disciplined more often on the job than their female counterparts (83.3% and 16.7%, respectively). Crosstabs also showed a significant difference between gender and silly behavior ($\chi^2(1, N = 341) = 5.83, p < .05$). A review of the data showed that female practitioners were shown as silly more often than male practitioners (56.3% and 43.7%, respectively).

Discussion

Portrayals of the public relations practitioners tended to be positive. The practitioners were generally portrayed as effective. These characters were usually included, treated with respect, and heeded. C.J., Mandy, Toby, and Sam were often major characters within a chapter. They were praised, though they were criticized more frequently. The practitioners were often emotional and sarcastic; they were argumentative more than they were agreeable. These four characters were submissive more than they were dominant. They were overwhelmingly professional, enthusiastic, rational, respectful, serious, brave, competent, ethical, neat, sober, sensitive, and wise.

These characters were shown doing many typical public relations activities such as writing, researching, and responding to crises. There were many typical tasks that were not shown, however; most of these fell under planning (creating a crisis plan, developing goals,

assembling a media kit, preparing someone for an interview). These practitioners' jobs did appear somewhat more glamorous than the average public relations position; they were shown attending dinners and formal occasions, which were coded under senior staff duties.

There were differences found between the portrayals of male and female practitioners. Some of those differences were attributable to job title, as was the case with media relations, which would naturally fall to the press secretary (C.J.). Males performed more of the interactions with government officials, were included in a larger number of discussions/decisions, and were more often considered major characters within a chapter than females were. They were also disciplined more than their female counterparts. Females were portrayed as silly more often than males were. Male and female practitioners were both portrayed as emotional.

Limitations/Suggestions for Future Research

Limitations of this study include the difficulty of coding by chapter. Several different interactions often took place between characters during a chapter. With the first co-worker, the practitioner might have been silly, and with the second he or she might have been serious. Yet trying to code each interaction was attempted in the first pilot study and quickly discovered to be too difficult. Also, because the classifications were so specific for writing, several writing tasks were forced into the "other" category (e.g. writing a birthday message, a toast, or an unspecified item). A broader writing category might have been better to use in the study.

A comparison between the portrayals found in the first season should be made to later seasons, particularly after the departure of the show's creator, Aaron Sorkin. Other areas that deserve study include the portrayals of public relations practitioners on other prime-time television shows. It would also be worthwhile to investigate the effects these portrayals have on viewers' perceptions of public relations.

Conclusion

Although a complete picture of public relations was not shown in the first season of *The West Wing*, the portrayals of those characters in the PR field were positive overall. It is a step in the right direction to see public relations practitioners generally included in important decisions, treated with respect, and heeded. The fact that these characters were portrayed as ethical, professional, competent, sensitive, and wise is quite a change from the previous literature's findings. It is also a boon to the field of public relations that these practitioners were shown in an advisory capacity so often. This is the role put forth in literature but not always true to life.

Though there were some basic activities missing, the duties depicted covered many responsibilities of actual practitioners. Writing, editing, researching, and monitoring the media could have easily been left out because of their lack of visual excitement, but the writers managed to include these activities regularly. Again, this is a different discovery than previous studies, which have found the press agent role to be the most common.

The female practitioners on *The West Wing* were not considered major characters as often as the male practitioners. The women were excluded from decisions and discussions more than the men and were often made to look silly. While these inequalities between the portrayals of male and female practitioners are important, there were fewer significant differences than expected. It is worth noting that the female practitioners were treated with respect, portrayed as effective and professional in their jobs, and were heeded and praised as much as the men. They were also portrayed as calm, rational, and serious as their male counterparts. The overall positive portrayal of the female practitioners is good for women and for the public relations field.

Public relations practitioners can only hope for more positive portrayals on prime-time television like those shown in the debut season of *The West Wing*.

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Table 1

Traits Demonstrated by Public Relations Practitioners

on the Debut Season of The West Wing

Trait	*Overall Count*	*Male Percentage*	*Female Percentage*
Included *	248	64.91%	35.08%
Treated with Respect	282	58.15%	41.84%
Effective in Job	267	58.06%	41.94%
Heeded	213	55.86%	44.13%
Ignored	105	48.57%	51.42%
Major Character *	192	64.59%	35.42%
Praised	50	62%	38%
Criticized	64	51.56%	48.44%
Disciplined *	18	83.34%	16.67%
Professional	233	57.09%	42.92%
Calm	71	56.34%	43.67%
Enthusiastic	306	56.86%	43.13%
Emotional	151	56.95%	43.04%
Rational	293	57.34%	42.66%

Sarcastic	159	57.23%	42.77%
Respectful	264	57.20%	42.80%
Silly *	71	43.66%	56.34%
Serious	322	57.45%	42.55%
Argumentative	191	59.16%	40.83%
Agreeable	167	53.29%	46.70%
Dominant	135	55.56%	44.34%
Submissive	178	55.05%	44.94%

* Significant differences were found between male and female portrayals in these areas, $p < .05$