FROM JOURNALISM TO PUBLIC RELATIONS:
A STUDY OF CAREER TRANSITION AND JOB SATISFACTION

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The journalism industry has a long history in the United States, dating back to the colonial period when Benjamin Harris published the first newsletter, *Publick Occurrences*, in Boston in 1690. Since that time, journalists borne witness to many important stories of our history — wars, presidential assassinations, and various crises, such as the 9/11 attacks and the Watergate scandal, among many other events chronicled in print, broadcast, and online coverage. Journalism has experienced much change and growth as a result of industrialization, urbanization, and literacy (Vivian, 2009). However, in recent years, due to the economic recession, news media consolidation, and technological advances (e.g., social media), the field of journalism profession has undergone some troubling transitions.

This dramatic change is especially true for the newspaper industry, which has suffered from loss of readership and increasing competition from Internet news sources. As a result of the weakening industry, many former journalists have either voluntarily sought careers outside the profession or have been forced to do so due to job losses and career insecurity (Weaver, Beam, Brownlee, Voakes, & Wilhoit, 2007).
Pew Research Center’s State of the Media 2012 reports that newspaper newsrooms are about 30 percent smaller than they were in 2000 (56,400 employees in 2000 versus 41,600 in 2010). The American Society of News Editors reports that total employment at daily newspapers declined by 2.4 percent in 2011 (Karpel and Fleming, 2012). Although the cutbacks are slowly declining, according to a Bureau of Labor Statistics 2012 report, employment in journalism (including both newspapers and broadcasting) is still expected to decline about 6 percent through 2010-2020. The Bureau reports that there are 58,500 news analysts, reporters and correspondents in the U.S., with that number expected to decline to 55,300 by 2020. The median annual income of journalists was $36,000 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012).

As if job uncertainty was not enough, the Centers for Disease Control in 2005 listed journalism seventh among the most stressful jobs. Journalists have said they have experienced stress-related health issues, have said their jobs are "highly stressful," and have admitted they are at risk for burnout, which is the result of deadlines, low pay, media competition, long hours, implementing new technology, and time away from family. Journalists are now required not just to produce material for a daily publication or broadcast, but many newsrooms are now deemed “information centers,” with the intent of providing online materials around the clock, including stories, photographs, photo slideshows, informational graphics, and video. Job cuts and diminishing resources have exasperated the burden for journalists and have created additional stress (Reinardy, 2009). Even before the widespread use of the Internet and the economic decline of the last
several years, journalists were still leaving the profession in significant numbers, mainly
due to low pay, stress and lack of opportunity (Olson, 1989; Danko & Oring, 1995).

While the journalism industry has suffered in the last several years, public
relations is experiencing significant growth. The Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational
Outlook Handbook projects that public relations specialist jobs will increase 21 percent
from 2010 to 2020, from 320,000 to 388,300 — faster than the average for all professions.
The 2010 median income of a public relations professional is $57,550, according to the
report. In addition, public relations was rated as one of the best jobs of 2012, according to

Research by Weaver, et al. (2007) has found that many journalists enter the
journalism profession because of their proficiency in tactical skills such as writing and
media relations. Research concerning the various roles that public relations practitioners
hold has found that tactical and technical skills — such as those practiced in journalism
— are important in public relations and are highly correlated with manager role expertise,
operations research expertise, and overall excellence (Dozier & Broom, 2006; Grunig,
Grunig, & Dozier, 2002). Pointing to the importance of those involved in creative work,
Dozier and Broom (2006) found that public relations departments with the right kind of
expertise to enact the manager role and conduct operations research also tend to attract
the best creative artistic teams (Grunig, et al., 2002).

This study examined why former journalists leave their original profession and
select careers in public relations. It included comments from former journalists, as well as
the opinions of public relations managers on the effectiveness of former journalists
working in public relations positions. The research found that journalists left the profession because of poor working conditions, including long hours, stress, and lack of job security. Former journalists participating in this study demonstrated high satisfaction in their public relations careers. The public relations managers participating in the study stated that former journalists were overall effective in their “new” careers.
Chapter 2
Review of Related Literature

The state of the journalism industry

Research has found that journalists tend to be attracted to the profession for a variety of reasons, including an intrinsic appeal of the tasks (writing, interviewing, asking questions, telling a story); a desire to be in a profession that has an important social or political role; and the belief that the work will be varied and exciting (Weaver, et al., 2007). However, due to the changing media landscape that includes increased Internet competition and additional work responsibilities, the job of a journalist has become more difficult in recent years.

Weaver, et al. (2007) reported that more than half of newsroom managers say that the mood in the newsroom has suffered due to budget constraints and layoffs in the industry. DeLorme and Fedler (2003) found that journalists have long complained about their stress, poor pay, and long hours, and the current trends in the news industry are driving many to seek other professions. Those trends include stagnant and declining readership and viewership; growing domination of large, publicly-traded companies that
own news organizations; and efforts to cut costs and staffs. A study by Pease (1992) found that 46 percent of the nation’s journalists would not want their children to pursue careers in the newspaper industry. Similar research found that only 46 percent of the nation’s reporters and editors planned to remain in the industry (American Society of Newspaper Editors, 2000).

Although journalists who do leave the profession go into a variety of fields, many choose public relations. In a study dating back to 1977, Nayman, McKee, and Lattimore found that nearly two-thirds of the public relations practitioners in the Denver area were former journalists and that half the area’s current journalists said they might someday enter the field of public relations. Similarly, Fedler, Buhr, and Taylor (1988) found that 45 percent of former journalists in central Florida transitioned to community or public relations.

Scholarship is inconclusive as to whether journalists who pursue public relations enjoy their new jobs because of the job itself or if public relations is simply a better alternative (or the only viable alternative) to journalism. DeLorme and Fedler (2003) found that journalists who transition into public relations preferred their new jobs on 19 of 20 variables, including freedom, variety, security, challenge, autonomy, and personal satisfaction. The primary advantages were better working conditions and salaries. Former journalists reported less pressure in their new jobs and enjoyed more opportunities to help people, be creative, advance in their careers, experience feelings of achievement, and influence important decisions. In a study of journalists who transitioned into public
relations, Olson (1989) found that the majority of journalists are happier in their public relations jobs.

In their study of women who leave journalism, Everbach and Flournoy (2007) found that many who pursue public relations do so for better hours and pay, but it is often not something they are passionate about. Some in their study were considering returning to journalism because they enjoyed the variety, excitement, and creativity in the journalist role. DeLorme and Fedler (2003) contend that the move from newsrooms to public relations seems likely to continue and possibly even accelerate in coming years.

Grunig and Hunt (1984) wrote that many journalists consider public relations practitioners as “flacks” who are annoying and do not understand news value, and many PR practitioners feel that journalists are “sloppy” in their reporting of the facts and are often biased. As DeLorme and Fedler (2003) found, hostility between journalists and PR practitioners began at the end of World War I when journalists feared that publicists’ efforts to obtain free publicity for their clients would reduce the advertising revenue of newspapers and has persisted in some degree ever since.

Roles research

Roles research in public relations dates back to the 1970s with the work of Glen Broom, whose goal was to categorize the distinct roles that public relations practitioners hold (Dozier & Broom, 2006). Roles research is closely meshed with the excellence theory, which emphasizes the organizational roles of practitioners.
Broom’s initial work produced five roles, but that was later narrowed down to four (Dozier & Broom, 2006). The first role, that of expert prescriber, is defined as an organization’s acknowledged expert on all matters of public relations. He or she is trusted on public relations decisions, often advising the members of the dominant coalition. The second role is that of a communications facilitator, or one who serves as a go-between between the upper management and those involved in the tactics. This person is deeply involved in process, keeping the quality and amount of information flowing and keeping the dominant coalition and key publics satisfied. A third role is that of a problem-solving process facilitator who helps those in the dominant coalition solve public relations problems. The fourth role is that of a communication technician who provides the necessary tasks (such as writing and editing news releases) needed to implement public relations programs developed by management (Broom, 1982; Grunig, et al., 2002). Many of these positions are held by former journalists who have extensive experience in media relations and production (Dozier & Broom, 2006).

Dozier (1983, 1984) developed two additional labels — that of communication manager and communication technician. The technician role utilizes the same definition as that created by Broom (tactical duties such as writing, editing, producing publications, and placing press releases), and the communication manager role involves aspects of the expert prescriber, problem-solving process facilitator, and communication facilitator roles. The managerial role involves being involved in organizational planning, decision-making, strategy, and problem-solving, as well as working with the dominant coalition in a systematic planning process to facilitate communication between the dominant coalition
and publics. Wright (1995) offers a third major role for public relations, that of a communication executive, made up mainly of corporate senior vice presidents who report directly to CEOs.

As part of the excellence theory, Grunig, Grunig, and Dozier (2002) developed new role measures for public relations practitioners. The research found that in less-than-excellent organizations, all of the communication practitioners, including the managers, were classified as technicians, but in excellent organizations there were four distinct roles: manager, senior adviser or communication liaison, technician, and media relations roles. Of the four, the manager and technician roles are the most common.

Hon (2007) found that while journalists in the public relations arena are usually very competent when it comes to technical roles such as writing, editing, and media relations, journalists often lack strategic planning and management knowledge, so they have less to contribute to an excellent public relations practice. As a result, the public relations function is diminished. Dozier and Broom (2006) write that many in public relations are perfectly satisfied with what is termed a creative-artistic practitioner role, most often held by technicians, such as writers and editors. What makes this particularly significant for public relations practitioners is the fact that those holding a managerial role tend to earn higher salaries than those holding a technician role, so staying with what one is comfortable with may not pay off for former journalists in the end (Broom & Dozier, 1986; Dozier & Broom, 1995).

Dozier (1981, 1982) found that many who occupy technician roles have a literary or artistic bent and tend to believe that public relations cannot be scientifically managed
or measured. He found that many in public relations do not aspire to be managers and are perfectly satisfied with the creative-artistic practitioner role. Grunig and Hunt (1984) contend that many public relations departments choose to fill technical positions with journalists who prefer to stay in that role throughout their careers, but fill management jobs with people trained in social science and management. Grunig and Hunt (1984) acknowledge that many public relations professionals were trained as journalists, and that communication technician skills will always be important. However, those who choose to stay in a technical role should “be ready to accept low pay and prestige. And be prepared to accept the fact that your organization some day may no longer need your technical skills” (Grunig & Hunt, 1984, p. 92).

In terms of who is best-suited to hold a managerial role, Dozier & Broom (1995) found that those with professional experience are more likely to succeed, but formal education in public relations contributed very little to the enactment of managerial roles. The researchers point out that the measures of formal education in public relations are not sufficiently focused, with much of the formal education in public relations focusing on technical competencies common to entry-level work in the industry. Those who earn degrees in related areas such as journalism or communication likely have even fewer opportunities to acquire the needed knowledge for strategic and administrative manager role expertise. Berkowitz and Hristodoulakis (1999) found that formal public relations education made practitioners more likely to pursue managerial roles, but professional association in the workplace made practitioners less likely to pursue managerial roles.
Even though there is much importance placed on holding a managerial or strategic role in the organization, Grunig, Grunig, and Dozier (2002) found that excellent organizations highly value the creative types as well as the managers. McGoon (1993) found that not all practitioners desire to be managers. Many derive intrinsic job satisfaction from the creative and artistic aspects of the job, even though they are not often recognized in the same way that managers are praised for their work.

The excellence theory

The excellence theory stemmed from the excellence study, conducted by James A. Grunig, a researcher from the University of Maryland, who led the study beginning in the mid-1980s. The study sought to answer the following questions: “How does public relations make an organization more effective?,” “How much is that contribution worth economically?,” and “What are the characteristics of a public relations function that are most likely to make an organization effective?” (Grunig, et al., 2002). The theory lays out 14 characteristics of excellent public relations programs in four levels: the program level, the department level, and the organizational level. Grunig’s work contends that CEOs generally favor public relations highly and report a high return on investment from their public relations units. The theory also states the CEOs believe the public relations departments should carry out strategic management and symmetrical, two-way communication (as opposed to a one-way, press agentry model). Although CEOs tend to value public relations, many do not have excellent departments due to a shortage of strategic managers and an oversupply of technicians (Grunig, 1992).
The study distinguished between “average” and “excellent” public relations departments, finding that average departments tended to have more knowledge of the press agentry and public information models of public relations, have extensive knowledge of technical communication functions, but have little knowledge of strategic management functions (Grunig, 1992).

The excellence theory examined two propositions related to public relations roles that are relevant to this study. The first proposition is that the public relations unit should be headed by a manager rather than a technician. Second, the senior public relations executive and others in the unit need to have managerial role experience (Grunig, et al., 2006). According to the theory, a high level of technical expertise is needed for excellent public relations, but technical expertise has value only when it is accompanied by managerial expertise (Grunig, 1992; Grunig, et al., 2006).

The excellence theory maintains that involvement in strategic decision-making and management is the critical characteristic of excellent public relations, and public relations executives play both a strategic managerial role as well as an administrative manager role. In excellent organizations, public relations needs to be empowered by having access to key decision-makers in the organization, known as the dominant coalition. Grunig (1992) notes that public relations professionals often remain outside this inner circle or do not hold a seat at the table of the decision-makers, which severely hampers the ability for public relations to affect strategic decisions of the organization. Grunig (1992, 2002) writes that a lack of empowerment of the profession is detrimental not just to the public relations function, but also to the organization, its stakeholders, and
society as a whole. However, the payoff for following the tenets of the excellence theory is that public relations units will meet their communications objectives, there will be a reduction in the costs of lawsuits and regulation, and the job satisfaction of employees will be high (Grunig, 2002).
Chapter 3
Methodology

This study seeks to answer the following questions:

Research Question 1: What are the main reasons that journalists choose public relations careers?

Research Question 2: How would journalists now working in public relations evaluate their job satisfaction?

Research Question 3: How do journalists-turned-public relations practitioners characterize their role in public relations?

Research Question 4: How do public relations managers view journalists' effectiveness on the job?

The methodologies used for the study included in-depth interviews, content analysis, and surveys. In-depth interviews were chosen to investigate the first three research questions that are directed toward public relations practitioners who are former journalists, with content analysis being used to analyze the transcripts of the interviews.
The fourth research question, directed toward public relations managers, utilized survey research.

Stacks (2011) defines an in-depth interview as an informal research methodology in which an individual interviews another in a one-on-one situation. In-depth interviews are usually conducted when the researcher has identified one or more people whose knowledge or participation on the subject will shed significant light on the study (Stacks, 2011). In-depth interviews provide rich detail and the ability to understand what the individual being interviewed truly thinks about a subject, which is important to the nature of this study. In-depth interviews are best used when answering questions of definition, value, and policy. Since there are few known published studies on this research topic, a more exploratory methodology like in-depth interviews is appropriate for answering the first three research questions in this study (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006).

For the in-depth interviews, 12 journalists-turned-public relations practitioners were selected via purposive, nonprobability sampling. According to Stacks (2011), nonprobability sampling is a sample drawn from a population whereby respondents do not have an equal chance of being selected for the study. Although nonprobability sampling cannot be generalized to the larger population, it is appropriate for when you do not have access to every unit in a population of people (Stacks, 2011), which is the case with this study. Purposive sampling is defined by Stacks (2011) as a nonprobability sample in which participants are deliberately selected for the study based on their special knowledge, characteristics, or position. In this study, former journalists who are now
working in public relations will participate in in-depth interviews because their knowledge and perspective is needed for the study.

Although there is no set standard for the optimal number of in-depth interviews that a researcher should conduct for a study, Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) found that when the population interviewed is selected from a purposive sample (chosen for their special knowledge or experience with a problem, as in this study), data saturation occurs with about 12 interviews. Beyond 12 interviews, the researchers found that little new information is learned. Because in-depth interviews tend to be time-intensive, this study was conducted with the fewest number of interviewees as possible to yield the maximum results.

All of the participants resided within a 100-mile radius of the researcher (who lives in West Lafayette, Indiana), which made in-person interview access easier. Stacks (2011) writes that in-person interviews are ideal because the interviewer can pick up on important nonverbal elements that can provide extra meaning and context, so the researcher chose the participants based on the ability to interview them in person. The particular participants for this study were also chosen because of their backgrounds in journalism and current positions in public relations. All 12 earned college degrees in journalism and currently working in public relations jobs. The participants ranged in age from their early 30s to early 60s. Four of the participants are female. Ten of the 12 were former newspaper journalists, and two were former television journalists. Their time in the journalism industry ranged from a few years to more than 20 years. Seven of the 12 worked in various public relations roles at public universities; three worked in public
relations for for-profit companies; one worked in governmental public relations; and one worked in a public relations agency. The participants have worked in public relations from about two years to nearly 30 years.

The interviews were conducted from June 10, 2012, to July 5, 2012. When possible, the interviews were conducted either at the person’s place of employment or home, but a few of the participants preferred to be interviewed at public locations such as restaurants or coffee shops due to convenience. Each interview lasted about an hour.

Because in-depth interviews involve human subject participation, it was first necessary to gain approval for the study through Ball State’s Institutional Review Board (IRB). Permission was granted by the IRB for the study on May 30, 2012, via an email notification and a letter of permission posted on the IRBnet.org website.

Before the start of the interview, the researcher had the interviewees sign the appropriate consent form as required by the IRB process and reminded them that their complete anonymity was assured. They were reminded that the conversation would be audio recorded for the purpose of transcription and that no names would be associated with the analysis or final report.

After each interview was conducted, the researcher transcribed each interview from the audio recording. Using the transcripts, content analysis was used to analyze the material. Stacks (2011) defines content analysis as a systematic, objective, and quantitative method for researching messages, writing that it is an effective way of analyzing interviews. Two levels of content analysis are identified by Stacks (2011):
manifest, which deals with what you actually see and count, and latent, which deals with underlying messages, deeper meanings or themes of a message.

Wimmer and Dominick (2006) outline several steps for content analysis. The first step is to select a sample to determine what content will be analyzed. For this study, the sample was the 12 former journalists. The second step is to select a unit of analysis, or what exactly the content analysis will analyze, which in this study involved the complete transcripts from the interviews. The next step, according to Wimmer and Dominick, is to develop a category system to classify content. The categories for this research were created through emergent coding, in which the researcher developed the categories after an initial examination of the data.

To increase reliability, each interview transcript was coded once by the researcher and a second time by an independent coder. Because the data set from the 12 interview transcripts was fairly small (compared to some studies, where hundreds of articles are analyzed) the second coder coded the all of the transcripts, not a sample. This was done to help increase reliability.

To categorize the data in each transcript, a coding sheet was developed, which asked coders to evaluate the transcripts for data, such as how happy they were in journalism, what they liked most and least about journalism, what they like most and least about public relations, why they left journalism, why they chose public relations, what were their expectations of a job in public relations in terms of the roles they would serve, what roles they serve in their public relations job, if public relations has met their expectations, how tactical their current job in public relations is, what types of tasks they
perform in public relations, what their current job satisfaction is in public relations, and what their favorite and least favorite parts of their public relations job are, and if they would go back to journalism (and if so, under what circumstances).

Some items on the coding sheet were less subjective than others, and on those questions, there tended to be higher agreement between coders. For instance, on the question of “Would you go back into journalism if given the chance?” the coders agreed 100 percent on their responses. This was due primarily to the fact that respondents tended to answer a straight “yes” or “no” to this question, so there was little room for differing interpretation. However, for instance, on the question that asked what the favorite part of public relations, there was more disagreement between coders. This was due to the interviewees often mentioning factors that require a bit of interpretation, such as determining what they mean by “telling a story” or “accomplishing tactical goals.”

In order to collect responses for the last research question, directed toward public relations managers, a quantitative survey was used. A survey is defined by Stacks (2011) as a formal research methodology that seeks to gather data and analyze a population’s or sample’s attitudes, beliefs, and opinions. A survey can provide significant amounts of data to a researcher in a short period of time, gathering relatively in-depth information about respondents’ attitudes and beliefs (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006). Also, surveys are not constrained by geographical boundaries, so they are ideal for collecting information from the target population for the managerial part of the study: public relations managers who currently or have supervised former journalists in a public relations job.
To measure the views of this population, an online survey, created through Survey Monkey, was distributed to the approximately 300 members of the Indianapolis-based Hoosier Public Relations Society of America via the organization’s online newsletter in August 2012. This organization was chosen because it is the largest central public relations organization in the area, with many public relations professionals (and managers) among its members.

In addition to sending the survey to Hoosier PRSA members, the survey was also sent to about 100 public relations managers at the following organizations or institutions: Ball State University, Indiana University, Notre Dame, Butler, Ivy Tech, Eli Lilly, Purdue University, Ohio University, the University of Illinois, Michigan State, Indiana University Health, Franciscan Health, Rush University, the University of Indianapolis, Northwestern Memorial Hospital, University of Chicago Hospitals, Northwestern University, the University of Michigan, University of Wisconsin, Penn State, Ohio State, University of Iowa, University of Chicago, the Indiana Department of Revenue, the Indiana Bureau of Motor Vehicles, the Indiana Secretary of State and the Indiana Attorney General in June, July and August 2012. The researcher recognized that it was possible that for some respondents to be sent the survey twice (once through their Hoosier PRSA membership and once through the additional contacts made by the researcher), the survey is set up so that it allows an individual respondent to take the survey only once so duplicate surveys can be avoided.

To gain additional respondents, the survey was also shared via Facebook and LinkedIn sites of various PRSA chapters in Indiana, Michigan, Illinois and Ohio.
Due to the nature of the distribution of the survey, it is not possible to know many practitioners received the survey. Therefore, it is impossible to calculate a response rate for this survey. However, because the purpose of the study was descriptive, the small number who completed the survey provides insightful feedback concerning opinions of public relations managers on former journalists.
Chapter 4
Findings

The first three research questions of the study were targeted toward former journalists now working in the public relations industry. Because this population is a specialized one (no readily-available e-mail lists or organizations exist for this particular population), the researcher determined that in-depth interviews would be the most effective way of investigating the research questions in the study. As Stacks (2011) points out, in-depth interviews provide the researchers with rich detail and the ability to discover and understand exactly what the interviewee thinks and feels about a subject. In-depth interviews allow the researcher to learn more about not just the problem, but the individuals being interviewed, which helps in understanding of the problems or research questions to be answered.

The first questions asked in the in-depth interview were demographic in nature so as to obtain background information on the interviewees. These questions included age, gender, education, major in college, how long they were in public relations, how long they were in journalism and what kind of jobs they held in journalism. These results were not included in the intercoder reliability test since such factual data is not subject to bias or interviewer interpretation.
The majority of the 12 (five) were in the 41-to-50 age range, with three in the 31-to-40 age range and three in the 51-to-65 bracket. Only one was in the 24-to-30 age category. Eight females and four males were interviewed. All 12 of the subjects held bachelor’s degrees (the majority of them being journalism degrees, with one telecommunication degree, one communication degree and one a double major in English and journalism). Four of the 12 also held master’s degrees: three of them had graduate degrees in journalism and one in public relations. The respondents’ time in the journalism industry ranged from 1 to 5 years (2 respondents) to more than 20 years (four respondents). Most (9 of the 12) came from a primarily newspaper journalism background, two had come from the television industry, and one had spent the majority of his career with a wire service. Two of the former journalists left their last journalism due to a layoff, with the rest leaving the field voluntarily.

Seventy-five percent of those interviewed have been in public relations a relatively short period of time — one to five years. One has been in public relations six to 10 years, one 11 to 15 years, and one for more than 20 years. Seven of the 12 currently work as writers or editors in a university public relations office. Three work in public relations for-profit companies, one works in governmental public relations, and one works in a public relations/advertising agency. Ten of the 12 went straight from journalism into public relations, but two held brief jobs in between journalism and public relations, with one working as an office assistant and one as a college instructor.

Using Holsti’s reliability coefficient, which states that reliability equals the number of coding decisions agreed upon by the coders and divides it by the number of
coding decisions each coder made, the reliability in this study is 0.89. According to Stacks (2011), good coder reliability is obtained when coders agree on their decisions 90 percent of the time (0.90 reliability coefficient). Reliability of 80 to 90 percent is acceptable in most cases, but it is preferred that it be above 90. As mentioned previously, the coders tended to disagree on items where interviewees did not provide concrete, easily-interpreted answers like “Yes” or “No.” For instance, on the question of “What is your favorite part of public relations?,,” an answer of “I like the feeling of getting things done” might register as a “tactical goal” for one coder, but for the other coder, the fact that the words “tactical goal” were not mentioned may mean that this interviewee’s response would not fit that category. Wimmer and Dominick (2006) point out that one way to improve intercoder reliability is with a strong data classification system and lengthy training sessions with coders to clarify category boundaries. While better training may have helped bring the number up in this study, due to the nature of the research method chosen to collect the answers, there still likely would be a good amount of disagreement between coders due natural variability in interpretation of the interviewees’ comments.

Although the findings of the in-depth interviews are not generalizable to a larger population due to the small size of the population (12 former journalists), there are notable trends apparent from the findings. Before examining the primary research questions that relate to why the former journalists chose public relations and how satisfied they are in their careers, it is significant to evaluate current job satisfaction compared with their former positions.
Eight of the 12 indicated that they were very happy or mostly happy in journalism, which is somewhat surprising, given that all of them ended up leaving journalism for public relations. Four indicated that they were equally happy and unhappy in the journalism profession, but none indicated that they were mostly or very unhappy in the profession. This question required a bit of interpretation by the coder, but some respondents answered the question with answers such as “I was very happy” or “I was pretty happy,” which made coding the response on a five-point scale easier. Some respondents self-coded, saying that “On a scale of 1 to 10, I’d say I was an 8,” for instance, which could be interpreted by the coder as a “very happy” response.

A former wire service editor and manager now working in university public relations felt that journalism was a profession that was somehow set apart from others:

I was very happy. I felt as though I was doing something good for society, keeping the public informed of the news. I think that’s a noble calling, if you will. I think when people become journalists, it’s not because they will make a lot of money. Some do, but it’s rare. So I pretty much think of it as a calling, where you sacrifice the glory — the fame and the riches — for being involved in a noble cause. I was very happy. I mean, it has its ups and downs, but for the most part there were more ups than downs.

This “noble calling” theme was a common sentiment throughout the interviews. Nine of the 12 former journalists liked their profession because it gave them the opportunity to inform the public and do something for the greater good, performing a watchdog function for society. A former newspaper writer and editor, now working in public relations for a small for-profit company, was proud to call himself a journalist for 17 years:
I always took a lot of pride in being in newspapers, and I was just very fascinated with the history and the atmosphere of newsrooms and very proud of the history of the First Amendment and the watchdog role. Even when I wasn’t doing much of that early in my career, I very much wanted to be a reporter and wanted to be at bigger newspapers … I very much enjoyed the job.

More than half mentioned that one of their favorite tasks in journalism was writing, and half said they enjoyed the process of “telling a story.”

The fact that journalism offers an exciting profession was cited by nine of the 12 in the interviews. Although this “excitement” often meant long and unpredictable work hours (which will be addressed later in this report), the fact that journalism was “something new every day” was seen as a major attraction of the profession by many of those interviewed. Closely related to this is that journalism gives its practitioners the chance to meet new people (cited by eight of the 12) and learn new things (mentioned by five of the 12). A former journalist for a small daily newspaper, now working in for-profit public relations at a large health-care organization, found journalism thrilling as a young adult just out of college:

I got to meet different people, try all kinds of different things. I mean, how many of my friends could have said they rolled down a mountain in an inflatable ball and got a free pole-dancing class and rode a hot-air balloon over Michigan? All kinds of weird things I got to do. I was just a really fun experience.

A former television journalist cited a variety of reasons that she enjoyed her time both in front of the camera as a reporter and anchor and behind the scenes:
I liked the craft, putting together a story using pictures and words and sound, music, and making it fit in a way that the end product told the story in a way that you wanted it to tell. I thought that was very satisfying. Every day basically you left completing a very tangible task. And so I very much enjoyed that. I think journalism gives you a behind-the-scenes look at the world. … You had an opportunity to see and do and speak to people that the average person simply doesn’t get. And so that combination makes journalism very exciting.

Interestingly enough, the two in the study who were laid off from their journalism jobs expressed general happiness with the profession. A former television journalist who now works in corporate public relations said that journalism was a mixed bag, but that she generally got a lot of satisfaction out of the profession:

> When I look back on my journalism career, sometimes you were extremely happy, and sometimes you are extremely frustrated. The happy times came when you were able to do stories that made a difference. How exciting to pinpoint a problem in the community and work with leaders to help make a change. How rewarding is that?

Although most of the former journalists cited several positives from their journalism career, there were a variety of negative aspects expressed, which was expected because all of the 12 have left the profession for public relations. Most cited by the former journalists (10 of 12 mentioned this) was the long or bad hours, which often means very early mornings, very late nights, unpredictable and long hours, and weekend and holiday work. A former television journalist, now working as a public information officer for a governmental agency, made frequent and pointed mention of hours in her interview:

> I think the hours are horrible, and I think they are horrible in many respects, regardless of which shift you work … the last shift I had was a morning shift. And I got up every day essentially at 2:22 in the morning. So that’s just not a normal life in any way, shape or form. So it’s very
exciting, and the positives are still all there, such as putting together a great story, but essentially I’d be in bed most nights by 7 o’clock, if not earlier. … So it’s a really hard way to live …And the holidays, you really don’t get off. You’re working. Maybe you get lucky and you don’t have to work one of them, but you’re definitely not getting all of your holidays off, and so that’s something that is really, really tough.

A common frustration mentioned by the interviewees as something they liked least about being in journalism was the motivation and decisions by management, generally referring to a corporation that owned the newspaper. One former newspaper writer and editor, now working in university public relations, mentioned that during his more than 20 years in newspapers, his job satisfaction declined steadily, mainly due to corporate policies focused on the bottom line:

I was happy, for what journalism I thought was. What it became is another story, over the years. It was more business. It was clearly a business. I worked for a publicly-traded company. They seemed to be more interested in quarterly earnings than quality journalism. And that was a shame. Maybe not all newspapers are like that. But at least the one I worked for for 18 years seemed to be mostly focused on making money. I saw so many editors who were mentors of mine, once they got to that corner office as top editor, everything changed. It’s like they became a different person. They cared about news — you can’t work for a newspaper for more than a year and not care about news — but there never seemed to be anybody saying no to cutting here or cutting there.

The focus on the media company they worked for making money was also evident with younger former journalists. One 32-year-old former newspaper writer, now working at an advertising and public relations agency, mentioned that when he started in newspapers a decade ago, he was very happy, but after the family-owned newspaper he was working for was bought by a corporation, things began to go downhill, making it easier to leave the profession:
It was very clear from the get go, you know, they came in and let people go who had been there 30 years with no warning. On the one hand, I realize that business is business, but on the other hand, a newspaper isn’t a traditional business. … Toward the end, I would say I still liked what I was doing, but I didn’t like who I was doing it for at a corporate level. And that’s really what made it easier for me to leave, even though I was leaving without going to something full-time.

The correlation between journalists’ lack of job satisfaction and a focus on earnings is cited in literature. Weaver, et al. (2007) found in a study of journalists that the more journalists thought that their news organization was more focused on profits than news, the lower their job satisfaction tended to be. The study also found that the more journalists felt that their organization valued good journalism above all else, the higher their job satisfaction.

Five former journalists mentioned that the uncertain future of the journalism industry is one of the things they liked least about journalism, and two cited low pay. One cited specific tasks, such as having to cover certain stories they didn’t prefer writing about, as one of the least favorite aspects. However, most said they generally enjoyed most of what they did in journalism.

Much of the same was repeated when it came to the factors that contributed to the journalists wanting to leave the profession. Seven mentioned that they wanted to leave journalism because they were fearful of what the future of the journalism industry held, four mentioned that there was a general lack of opportunity in the profession, and four cited the bad hours. Two mentioned that they left because of the heavy workload and stress. Two of the interviewees left the profession because they were forced out by a
layoff, and two left due to spousal or significant other career moves. Three of the interviewees mentioned that key reason for leaving journalism was because they wanted to try something new, and four said that they left because they found an opportunity that was better than their journalism job.

When examining the literature on why journalists leave the profession, the interview findings line up well with research by Weaver, et al. (2007), which found that journalists most frequently leave the profession because of poor hours and working conditions, stress and workload, a worry about the stability of the industry, and wanting something new. One notable difference in these findings compared to the Weaver findings was that none of the 12 cited low pay as a reason for leaving (even though it was mentioned by several elsewhere in the interview), but in the Weaver research, low pay was one of the most frequently-mentioned reasons that journalists leave the profession. Olson (1989) also found that most former journalists cite low pay as a prime reason for leaving the profession and pursuing public relations.

**Answering the research questions**

A considerable amount of data and insights were obtained by the interviews concerning the interviewees’ thoughts about their time spent in journalism and their reasons for leaving, but perhaps most important of these questions and answers were the ones that directly answered the three research questions posed by the study. The answers follow, broken down by the research question.
RQ1: What are the main reasons that journalists choose public relations careers?

The reasons most frequently cited as to why journalists tend to gravitate toward public relations tended to have more to do with the unappealing aspects of journalism rather than the appealing aspects of public relations. For instance, all 12 mentioned that they thought that public relations was a natural career choice because many of the skills used in journalism were also used in public relations. This point was made by a former newspaper reporter and editor who had spent more than 20 years in journalism but for a variety of reasons, was looking for a new career and found one in university public relations:

I could use basically the same skills that I had learned or developed working for newspapers in a different setting. ... I knew that part of it was quite different but I knew I could utilize the basic skills I had developed — writing, editing, that type of thing — and still be able to use those skills. ... It was mostly not having to be retrained and come up with a whole new skill set and still be able to use basically what I knew.

Eleven of the 12 interviewed mentioned that public relations jobs were what were available when they were looking for a new job or career. The four respondents that were either forced out of their journalism job due to a layoff or a spousal move mentioned that they looked for journalism jobs, but there either weren't any available or what was available was not attractive to them. One such former journalist, who now works as an editor in a university public relations office, said that she was out of a job for about eight months after moving with her husband because he found a new job across the state. She
mentioned that she looked for jobs — both in and out of the journalism industry — but had little luck finding a good fit until the position she is holding now came open:

I looked at the description, and thought, ‘Yeah, I can do this. I think it’s something I’d enjoy.’ … Communications is a field I know. Honestly, this is the job I wanted. I did apply for some I didn’t want but I thought I could kind of do. This really was the job I wanted. I think it was because I knew there would be a lot of similarities to it, to what I knew. …This just seemed to be a natural step.

Another former journalist decided that when his girlfriend moved to another state to pursue graduate school, he would pursue public relations as a profession, but first seek additional training in the profession by earning a master’s degree in public relations. Even though he did have an interest in public relations, he also indicated that he landed in public relations because it would fit his skill set and the fact that at the time, there were few jobs available:

If I could have found a job in journalism in Indianapolis I would have stayed in the profession … The job market’s been bad for awhile now and it was bad back then. I came down here, and said, ‘What is feasible? What do I feel comfortable doing? What do I have the ability to do? Or what can I learn somewhat easily to do?’ And I said I could probably take a crack at public relations. … The short answer is, I didn’t really want to have to start all over again. I didn’t want to go become a nurse or whatever. It’s just kind of like, I already had some idea what I was doing. It wouldn’t be completely overwhelming … So I went back to grad school and I went to the PR program because it looked like something that would fit me, and a natural extension of what I was doing.

More than half of the respondents said a factor in choosing public relations was because they knew a former journalist in public relations. Only three of the 12 mentioned that they had an innate interest or curiosity in public relations. One of three said that
making the transition was something she had thought about before, but didn’t make the change until the right opportunity came along: “I think I’ve always been interested in public relations but was never quite brave enough to make the jump. I remember I would see positions come up and debating whether or not to apply, or applying and not getting the job.”

**RQ2: How would journalists now working in public relations evaluate their job satisfaction?**

All 12 of the former journalists in survey indicated that public relations has met their expectations of what they thought it would be. In terms of exactly what they expected in public relations, “similar tasks as journalism” was cited the most frequently, by 10 of the 12. “Better hours” were mentioned by four interviewees. Despite journalism’s reputation for being a low-paid profession, only one mentioned making more money as an expectation they had of public relations. Four mentioned that they expected to have better hours, and two expected that they would have more stability in public relations.

Most of the former journalists interviewed answered that they were “very happy” (eight of the 12) or “mostly happy” (three of 12) in public relations. One former journalist indicated that he was an equal mix of happy and unhappy. No one answered that they were predominantly unhappy in public relations.

What the interviewees tended to like most about public relations mirrored a lot of what they liked in journalism. Ten mentioned that they liked the ability to tell a story in
public relations, and eight said that they liked the ability to inform the public. Meeting new and interesting people was mentioned by seven of the former journalists, and accomplishing tactical goals, such as writing news releases, was mentioned by three. By contrast, one of the aspects that many did not like about journalism — the bad hours and days off — was seen as a positive of a job in public relations, although one could argue that many professions, such as working in a bank or an insurance agency, would provide such benefits. Nonetheless, the better hours were mentioned by five of the 12, and a couple of them were quite passionate about that benefit, such as a former wire service editor:

My God, I actually have a life now. For good or bad, the life I’m making outside of my work is mine. I don’t get calls like I did at AP at 10 o’clock at night saying, ‘A tornado just went through Evansville. What are you doing about it?’ ‘OK, I’ll drop everything and go into the bureau.’ Vacation plans? Oh, forget it, you’re not going on vacation. You’ve got this coming up, you’ve got this going on. In some sense, I miss that, being in the breaking news — that really gets the adrenaline going. But I don’t miss it all that much because now I have a life.

The least-attractive parts of public relations involve excess bureaucracy, as in the multiple layers that it can take to approve a news release or even an idea (cited by eight), feeling that management or other employees don’t value the contributions of public relations in the organization (cited by half the respondents), too much work (mentioned by three), too many meetings (mentioned by two), and pushing an unworthy story on a journalist (mentioned by one).

Public relations’ over-emphasis on the bottom line was mentioned by one interviewee, who feels that her public relations work for a for-profit life sciences
company suffers because she cannot tell a story in the way that she feels would be most effective:

I think in the business world, sales and revenue are so much more important than the personal satisfaction of making a difference in people’s lives or helping others. I always try to stay focused, so that I talk about what we do: we are helping develop drugs that will help improve the lives of people and save lives. … I’m so much closer to the business end now whereas before we were only interested in ratings. Now everything is focused on sales, and your value is attached to those dollars. I guess maybe that’s my personality. My satisfaction comes from helping people, and instead I’m helping the bottom line.

Though mentioned by only two of the 12, public relations being “boring” was brought up as one of the least-attractive aspects of the profession. This was a somewhat surprising — and perhaps not generalizable — finding, but notable nonetheless because it was mentioned by two in a relatively small sample size. One of the two who said that public relations was boring was referring to the first job he held in the industry, which he has since left for another public relations job. He mentioned his first job in public relations was not as challenging and exciting as he had hoped, coming from a job at a metropolitan newspaper:

It was the first time in my life I didn’t like going to work. I described it as kind of stifling. It’s just kind of cubical world, that bluish-gray cubical carpet, and you’re just sitting there. I really thought it was boring. … Sometimes the highlight of my day was riding the people mover. I decided that I didn’t want to spend the rest of my life there.

The other former journalist who cited “boring” was somewhat unsatisfied with his current position and is considering seeking other opportunities. He also was the least satisfied of the 12 with his job in public relations:
I feel like I’ve lost a little bit of my steam. I don’t know if it’s the job, or public relations in general, or if it’s just the field I’m in. I’ve thought a couple of times, why don’t I just leave and start a business that’s not even related to PR? And there’s other times when maybe I think I just need to go to a different place. I get antsy easily. I get bored very easily. If a job is not stimulating enough to me or interesting, I have no problem leaving it after a couple years. … There are times when it’s fun and interesting, but then it seems like lately at least, the not-fun times are starting to maybe outweigh the fun times, and maybe when you get to that point, it’s time for a change.

The former journalist quoted above was the only member of the so-called millennial generation — or those born in 1982 or after — in the study. This is significant because his comments were consistent with what researchers have found to be true with this younger demographic — that they are difficult to motivate, restless, tough to retain, and often not committed to the job. “They wipe out on life as they wipe out on work itself,” one study found (Gallicano, Curtin, & Matthews, 2012). Although not the focus of this study, this is an interesting issue that all public relations managers — and managers in all industries — need to keep in mind as millennials move up and around in their careers.

**RQ3: How do journalists-turned-public relations practitioners characterize their role in public relations?**

This research question was addressed in a few of the questions posed to the former journalists. One question asked them if they thought that journalists on the whole (themselves included) tended to be more focused on tactical duties rather than strategic duties. On this question, all 12 indicated that they felt that journalists tended to be more tactical (meaning that they prefer tasks like writing, editing, or working with the media)
than strategic (involved in longer-term planning, strategic decisions, or more managerial roles). Interviewees also tended to consider their public relations job as either all or mostly tactical, with little to no strategic tasks. Ten of the 12 did little to no strategic work in their jobs, instead focusing on more writing or editing. Two indicated that their job was somewhat of a mix of strategic and tactical, with tactical overtaking strategic some days, and then vice versa. No respondent indicated that they did primarily all strategic work, but this may be due to the fact that the interviewees in the study tended to be more of the lower- to mid-level public relations practitioners instead of managers or high-level executives that are more likely to spend a larger proportion of their time on strategic work.

When asked what types of tasks they completed on their jobs, all of the interviewees said that they were involved in writing and editing, and eight of the 12 were involved in media relations. Half were involved in strategic planning, which was defined as longer-term, broader-view planning and managerial decisions. The former journalists mentioned a variety of other tasks, such as website content (four of the 12), social media (three of the 12), publication design (three of the 12), video production (two of the 12) and event planning (two of the 12). What is most significant from the answers is that while strategic planning was mentioned by a few of the interviewees, the vast majority of the tasks that the former journalists were responsible for are tactical in nature.

Many mentioned that they enjoyed tasks such as writing or creating something, because it felt like they were doing something tangible, which is similar to the roles they performed in journalism. For some, like this former journalist working at a small for-
profit company after a brief time spent in PR at a larger for-profit, those tangible tasks are proof to themselves that they are accomplishing something they can be proud of:

I definitely like having the busy-ness of tasks and to write. … A think a lot of modern office jobs, a lot of your work is kind of process. Like sending emails or setting up meetings. And that was a lot of the case at [his former public relations employer]. I remember I used to, this sounds kind of strange, but I’d go back to my sent basket, and I’d basically view my day in terms of how many emails I’d sent. ‘Wow, that was a busy day.’ I never did that at the newspaper. I kind of viewed my busy-ness or productivity by how many stories I wrote. When you write something, you’re making something, like if someone builds a cabinet, then you have a cabinet.

This sentiment was consistent with research by Dozier (1992) that suggests that public relations practitioners who fall into the “creative-artistic” typology tend to gravitate more toward technician roles rather than managerial or strategic positions. Dozier also found that while managers in public relations (those usually involved in making strategy decisions) generally exhibit more job satisfaction than tacticians, those who are considered creative-artistics tend to be happier in tactical roles. Dozier found that these types of practitioners tend to self-select the technician role and are worried that by taking a more strategic role in the organization that they will relinquish their chances to exhibit their creativity and enjoy the more humanistic aspects of public relations.

Although the interviewees were quick to mention the various tactical roles they hold in their jobs, most of them acknowledge that strategy is important, even if strategic roles are not something they feel as comfortable with. This runs counter to Dozier’s work that has found that most who are considered “technicians” in an organization don’t think that public relations can be measured. The fact that more public relations practitioners are
finding value in research — despite the fact that they were not trained in it in college — can be seen as a positive development for the industry since the work of Dozier in the early 1980s.

One former journalist, who transitioned later in his career to university public relations, indicated that he is often called upon to provide strategic insight because of his age and experience in the media, even though it’s not a role he feels particularly comfortable in:

It seems like I’m involved at least peripherally in things like strategic stuff. But that’s an area where I don’t feel like I really know that much about it … That’s one of those roles I don’t feel comfortable in. I’d just as soon stick to the writing and editing, because it’s what I know.

Although Dozier (1992) has found that some in public relations are largely comfortable staying in a more technical role, this tendency to shy away from strategic work is troublesome from the perspective of the excellent theory (Grunig, et al, 2002), which states that in order to be relevant, public relations make contributions to high-level strategy in the organization, which would be influential to management. And while there is some room for the technical role in most public relations organizations, most, if not all, of those technicians should be able and willing to step up to the plate if needed when it comes to offering strategic contributions to the organizations. The term “journalist-in-residence” is cited frequently in literature by Grunig, Dozier and others to refer to a former journalist holding a job in a public relations organization whose main contributions are tactical (writing, editing, media relations). Although the basics are certainly important for all in the organization to know, the excellence theory states that
equally important is a knowledge and interest in strategy and decisions that affect
management of the organization. While the journalists in this study did have some
knowledge and awareness of strategy, most seemed to feel more comfortable with a
“journalist-in-residence” type of role, which is not consistent with excellence in a public
relations organization.

While some former journalists said they had mixed emotions about being
involved in strategy, others embrace it, such as the former journalist who pursued a
master’s degree in public relations after his stint at a newspaper. Although he enjoys
strategic work in his current job in health care public relations, he says that he likely
wouldn’t have been as interested or comfortable in strategy had he not received graduate
training in public relations:

I think I tend to be a little more strategic, only because I went through grad
school and I learned all that stuff. I understand the importance and value
of research. … I think without that, I would have come in here, like, OK,
tell me what I need to write and just write it. And don’t get me wrong.
Sometimes I still do that. I think coming straight from journalism, I really
would have not have had an inkling into the strategy and research and
planning.

When asked the types of roles they perform in their public relations jobs, most of
the interviewees emphasized tactical roles such as writing or updating a website. Some
mentioned working on communications or strategic plans as part of their jobs, but there
were less frequent mentions. Some said that they do have an interest in getting more
involved in developing strategy in their organization, but their current job keeps them
busy with day-to-day tactical roles. When looking at these findings through the lens of
Broom’s roles research, most in the study would be categorized as communication technicians, which is most often held by “journalists-in-residence.” The communication technician’s job is to perform the tasks needed to communicate and disseminate strategic decisions developed by the dominant coalition, which are generally made up by expert prescribers or management (Dozier, 1992). Not all in this study would be considered technicians, as many held dual functions as having some hand in strategy, so they could at times be deemed communication facilitators (those who facilitate communication between management and the public), as well as problem-solving process facilitators, who help management things through problems to develop solutions. According to Dozier (1992), expert prescribers, communication facilitators, and process-solving process facilitators are all crucial to maintaining a two-way symmetrical style of public relations that is optimal in an excellent organization.

Major themes

Although the methodology of in-depth interviews has the major limitation of not being generalizable to other populations, there were still several findings that emerged that could be considered themes, as they were mentioned by several of the interviewees.

Theme 1: Most would consider returning to journalism (with conditions)

The majority of interviewees expressed a deep passion for the profession at least at some point during their careers, dating back to college when choosing a major, and in many cases, years before that. Some had spent a generation working in the field of journalism and recounted fond memories of exciting or memorable events they covered,
people they met or places they traveled. The passion they had once felt — and still felt — was evident. Perhaps, then, it is not surprising that when asked if they had the opportunity to return to journalism, 10 of the 12 said they would — if the conditions were right.

Just what those conditions were mainly had to do with having the choice to do the types of tasks that they preferred, such as covering the type of stories they wanted to cover. This was mentioned by nine of the former journalists. Choice of hours that they would work was mentioned by four, and for some (four mentioned it), money would be a key factor, one even citing a particular number and rationale for that salary:

I think it would take a $150,000 contract to get me back into TV. I could and would do it for that for a few years, very limited time. And I have that number in my head, figuring what I would get is a maid because I think you have to have some perks with that. I wouldn’t want to clean my own house anymore. I’d get my groceries delivered. What the money would offer you would be an increase in your lifestyle to get to do a few more fun vacations, travel, enjoy that element again for a few years. And it would have to be enough where it would make up for the down side of how awful the timing is because you know going into it, it’s going to be a terrible schedule and you’re not going to have time to do these other things. And so you might as well get the perk of it. And so it would take a lot.

Two mentioned that they would need to be granted promises of job security before returning to journalism, and one said that he would return to journalism only if he had to because he couldn’t find another job. Two of those interviewed said they would not return to journalism, regardless of the circumstances, and many of the interviewees said that although if they were offered a lucrative and interesting job in the journalism industry they would consider it, but the likelihood of them returning is low. As one former journalist put it, “There’s probably a 10 percent or less chance that I would go
back into journalism. It’s not to say I don’t love it. I think if I would go back, I’d have a blast. But I think once you’ve turned that page, it’s hard to turn back.”

Another former journalist — one who lost his journalism job involuntarily — said he has been approached about a journalism job since leaving the profession. Although he considered taking it, for him, the public relations vs. journalism debate comes down to job security:

[The university] hired me when I was down, so I have a sense of loyalty. [The university] took a chance on me. And they wanted me, they really wanted me for this job, so I see a sense of worth here. Because, you know, I could be there for six months, and they say, well, you know, we’re downsizing so you’ll be out of a job. They’re still doing furloughs, and there’s no indication that that’s going to end. Why put myself at risk? I have a job here where they want me, they like me, I have a sense of worth, so I’m staying put.

As Weaver et al. (2007) found, journalists tend to be attracted to the field because they enjoy the tasks involved (writing, editing, meeting people), they feel that journalism holds an important place in society as a function of the Fourth Estate, it is exciting, and offers “something new every day,” as news is always changing and impossible to predict. It also gives its practitioners an inside view, and first look, at whatever the news event may be, whether it is the Indianapolis 500, a county fair or a life-changing event like the Sept. 11 attacks.

Many who were interviewed, especially those who had been journalists for many years, spoke with great fondness and pride about their years in journalism, indicating that they very much enjoyed the tasks, but ultimately had to come to the tough conclusion that the benefits of the profession no longer outweighed the negatives. The reactions of almost
all of the interviewees who the researcher asked the question, “Would you ever consider returning to journalism?” were notable, as many smiled, paused, and often said, “I have thought a lot about that” or “I was just thinking about that the other day.” Clearly, the journalism profession “gets in one’s blood,” and is may be tougher than other types of jobs to walk away from. As veteran newsman Dan Rather is quoted as saying in an Oct. 22, 2000, article in the *Boston Herald*, “Be careful. Journalism is more addictive than crack cocaine. Your life can get out of balance.” This addictive nature of journalism — the fact that a journalist’s life can easily get out of balance, ultimately leading to unhappiness — was clearly evident in the interviews.

However, whether it was working odd hours and never seeing family or fearful that they would be laid off, all 12 came to the often-tough decision of embarking on a new profession — public relations. Several spoke of a period of mourning or regret after having made the decision to leave journalism. “I cried when I left newspapers,” said one interviewee. “I really didn’t want to go. But I didn’t really have a choice. It was just a leap of faith.” But in the end, as evidenced by the high job satisfaction that the 12 have in public relations, they seemed to adjust to a new career.

DeLorme and Fedler (2003) conclude that when journalists become disillusioned and “burned out” with journalism and especially the newspaper industry, “they turned to related fields and found that public relations offered a multitude of good jobs for which they were well-qualified.”
Theme 2: PR is basically an extension of journalism

None of the former journalists interviewed said they would return to work in journalism unconditionally. This may imply reasons why they left the profession, but what does it say about why they chose public relations as a second career? The information gained from the interviews suggests that at least this set of former journalists chose public relations mainly because jobs were available, the hours and pay tend to be better than in journalism, and the tasks that journalists perform — such as writing, editing and working with the media — are ones that journalists are skilled at and feel comfortable doing. In essence, these former journalists tend to view their public relations jobs very similarly to their journalism jobs in terms of tasks performed.

Many indicated that little training would be needed for them to transition into public relations. One former newspaper journalist even referred to their jobs in university public relations as so similar to newspapers that the areas that he would be serving in a public relations capacity in his new position were referred to as “beats” — just like a reporter would hold.

Another former journalist said that when she left newspapers to work at a university news bureau, she didn’t really feel as if she was leaving journalism for public relations. In her mind, she equated a newspaper “newsroom” with a university “news bureau,” where she would be performing the same types of tasks of writing and editing as she enjoyed in newspapers. Although she soon found out that her public relations job consisted of other duties (such as promoting news items to journalists and writing quotes for university officials), she soon grew comfortable with her new role:
When it came to marketing, I was basically finding good stuff and sharing with the right people. To me, that meant you understood what they were covering, you understood what they needed, and you made the matches. So you might have something that wanted to share, and you’d present it in a different way with different people because they had different needs and different audiences. But you were selecting things that were helpful to the university.

Although most of the journalists in this study seem to have found career satisfaction in their public relations roles, most are finding that what they like most about public relations is what they enjoyed about journalism — writing, creating, meeting people, learning new things. However, the additional advantages of working in public relations includes regular work hours and a traditional workweek. Most would agree that having high-energy, highly productive employees, such as former journalists, in an organization is positive, but it does bring up a concern with some that many former journalists are turning to public relations mainly because a lot of these trained journalists lack a background in public relations, so while they can produce a great news release, their skills in strategy may be severely lacking, which can ultimately weaken the organization (Grunig, 2002).

Journalists who enter into public relations may discover that their opportunities — and likelihood of gaining power in the organization — are limited. Grunig and Grunig (1992) found that the more education practitioners have in public relations, the more likely they are to practice two-way, symmetrical models and public relations, and the more likely they are to be in the dominant coalition. Ehling (1992) writes that having a firm educational background in public relations — both in the university undergraduate level and at the graduate level — has been a focus of the public relations industry for
decades, dating back to 1973 when the first Commission on Public Relations Education was established by the Association of Education in Journalism and Mass Communication. Although the communication basics that journalists learn — writing, editing and a knowledge of communications — are essential to any public relations student, areas that were emphasized by the commission included research and theory, public relations management, and organizational theory. It is unlikely that without specific training in public relations that journalists would have knowledge in these areas, which makes it difficult for an organization to practice two-way communication that goes far beyond the one-way “publicity” model that most journalists are more acquainted with (Ehling, 1992).

A review of a variety of public relations books or articles about the discipline revealed a key reason why former journalists might have trouble understanding exactly what public relations is: there is no one commonly agreed-upon definition of the practice. Grunig and Hunt (1984) define it as the “management of communication between an organization and its publics.” Cutlip, Center, and Broom’s definition is “the management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the publics on whom its success or failure depends” (Bowen, 2003). Even the Public Relations Society of America has difficulty defining the field, having established a definition in 1982 that held until 2012. The current definition is “a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics” (PRSA website). A study of college public relations majors found that even students who have chosen to major in the discipline do not always understand exactly what public relations is, often being surprised that it involved research,
management and environmental scanning (Bowen, 2003). With those well-versed in the industry struggling to define it, it should not be a surprise that those who lack training or experience in the field, such as former journalists, tend to come up with their own definitions that justify their career-switch decision.

**Theme 3: PR is not always ‘the dark side’**

Many of the former journalists described their transition into public relations as “going to the dark side,” which speaks to the historical adversarial roles that journalists and public relations practitioners have held over the years. Even with this long-standing rivalry between the two industries, for many, the public relations transition was not a difficult one to make due to the types of positions in the industry they were going into. Most of the former journalists in this study now work in educational public relations, which was characterized by the interviewees as working for the common good, much like a journalist would. “I am working for an organization I believe in,” said one former journalist working in university public relations. “I believe in what [the university] is doing and most higher education in general and I can get behind that, so it doesn’t feel quite so dark.”

Another university writer and editor felt, in fact, that what he does in his position in actually more public affairs than public relations, which he feels good about:

The thing about the work here at [the university], it’s not really public relations per se, although it’s part of the job. It’s more public affairs. … In public relations, you’re really working for the best interest of a company, where spin is more the daily life, whereas in public affairs, it’s more of educating the public. We’re educating the public about what we do at [the university].
Grunig and Hunt (1984) stated that the term “public affairs” was popular in the 1970s as a euphemism for public relations, which often didn’t have a good reputation with the public. They define public affairs as “the management function responsible for interpreting the corporation’s non-commercial environment and managing the company’s response to those factors.” Public affairs generally encompasses more than public relations because it tends to involve all of the organization’s contacts with its publics and environment. Grunig and Hunt prefer to reserve the term public affairs for a specialized public policy and government relations program that is managed by the organization’s public relations function.

The former journalist quoted works in a university agricultural communication and Extension office, which is tasked with communicating and educating the public, and his job title is “public affairs director,” so that distinction from public relations could be valid. But it is notable that this former journalist, who had been a writer an editor for more than 25 years, quickly pointed out that he was in “public affairs” more than “public relations,” although he admitted that many other functions or his position are considered public relations.

Several interviewees talked disparagingly about some in public relations who were involved in “spin,” and many mentioned that “spin” is not something they would be interested in doing in the industry. Although the notion of spin is somewhat antiquated, dating back to the days of Ivy Lee and Edward Bernays, many former journalists drew a distinction between industries that would have their practitioners “spinning” and ones
who are focused on the common good. All in the survey felt that they were in industries that support the common good, much like journalism does. As one former journalist working in health care said, “I couldn’t like work for some large company like Comcast or AT&T. It would have to be a nonprofit or a health system or an educational institution. Those are really the three areas I was interested in.”

The fact that some of the former journalists drew a distinction between “good PR” and “bad PR” is well-supported by research. DeLorme and Fedler (2003) write that the relationship between journalists and public relations practitioners has been negative but complicated throughout history, due to a variety of factors. On the one hand, journalists tended to distrust the publicity “stunts” held by those in PR dating back to the 1800s, such as P.T. Barnum and other “circus press agents,” but they recognized the need for public relations as well. Agents would provide reporters with needed information, plus publicity agents would frequently provide underpaid journalists with free tickets, bribes or gifts, often persuading journalists to join the profession. Even though journalists do recognize the need for public relations practitioners, “journalists’ hostility toward public relations developed quickly, appears to stem from a myriad of interrelated factors, and persists,” writes DeLorme and Fedler.

Theme 4: Strategy can be learned

All of the interviewees in the study were trained as journalists, either print or television, and just one had any formal educational background in public relations, having earned a master’s degree in the subject. Looking at the research on the subject, it would seems as though this group of former journalists would not be likely to embrace
strategic tasks on the job, but the contrary seems to be true. Half of those interviewed said that they perform at least some strategic function in their public relations jobs.

Although some interviewed expressed obvious dislike of strategy, much preferring tactical roles, others say that they have gradually learned about the importance of strategy and research in public relations and are advocates for it in their organization:

Even though I like to be the tactical person, it’s nice to have goals that are backed up by research so that we’re not just stabbing in the dark. When I first started in public relations, I didn’t care. Just get it out there, talk to the media, who cares? But now I know there is more behind it than just doing the work. It has to be strategic work that actually is based on needs and assessments.

Others, although perhaps not involved in strategy at this point in their jobs, expressed that it is important, both to the organization and to an individual’s success in the public relations field, even if it’s something that may not immediately seem interesting:

That’s the only way you can move up the ladder. …It affords you an opportunity to guide the tactics. You’re sort of putting your imprints on the products that are coming out, in a way. If you think about it that way, it’s not as dull as it sounds on the face of it.

For those who are currently performing some strategic duties in their job, they indicated that they learned about research and planning by experience. One indicated that he attended a seminar that stimulated his thinking in that area, and others indicated that they began seeing the importance of strategy when questioning the “whys” behind a lot of what they were being asked to do. “They come up with a different slate of stuff every
year, and it’s very opportunistic as opposed to strategic,” said one former journalist about the way her workplace used to work before it got involved in strategic planning.

Research by Grunig (1992) supports the need for all public relations organizations to be managed strategically, with the need for strategy being first in a list of 14 characteristics of an excellence public relations program. The former journalist quoted above, as well as a few others in the study, backed up Grunig’s findings that say in order to be strategic, top management must recognize the need for strategy and give the public relations area of an organization the autonomy and power to conduct research and develop a strategic plan. As a result, not only is an organization considered “excellent,” but a strategic organization will run more efficiently and have higher job satisfaction among employees.

In short, the tenets of the excellence theory indicate that either through formal training or “self-study,” most or all public relations practitioners in an organization need to have the “potential” to become managers and be equipped to make strategic decisions. Although communications technicians are needed in every organization, Grunig clearly states that excellent public relations organizations should be predominantly filled with people who can fill both tactical and strategic roles (Grunig, 2002). Although this sample size of 12 public relations practitioners is far from representative, using this population, it would seem that while some former journalists do see the need for strategy and are embracing it, much needs to be done in the way of educating practitioners about research, strategy and planning.
Results of the manager survey

The fourth research question in the study, “How do public relations managers view journalists’ effectiveness on the job?,” is addressed through a survey of public relations managers who have supervised journalists in a public relations job. Partially due to the very specialized target audience for the survey, the number of responses was not as high as the researcher had hoped. However, the data that did come out of the survey is definitely worth reporting and exploring.

The online survey was distributed to public relations professionals via email, an electronic newsletter and social media outlets such as Facebook and Linked In. Due to the nature of the distribution of the survey, it is impossible to know how many people received the survey, so a response rate cannot be calculated.

The first two questions in the survey were designed to weed out any public relations professionals who didn’t fit into the target for the survey: “Are you a supervisor or manager in public relations?” and “Have you ever supervised an employee who has worked as a journalist?” A total of 48 people began the survey and 47 finished. On the first question, eight answered no, so they were directed to exit the survey. On the second question, six were directed to exit. That left 32 respondents who completed all the questions of the survey.

In terms of education, 50 percent of the respondents held bachelor’s degrees as the highest degree completed, two completed some graduate school, 14 people held master’s degrees, and one earned a doctorate. About 53 percent of the respondents were
journalism majors in college, 19 percent majored in communications or telecommunications, and one person majored in marketing and one majored in public relations. Seven majored in other areas, such as political science, history, rhetoric, professional writing and philosophy.

The majority of the respondents worked for an educational institution (75 percent). Three respondents worked in government, three respondents worked in corporate public relations, one worked in the nonprofit sector, and one for a public relations agency.

Because this survey was limited to those who are in a managerial role, the job titles of the respondents reflected that. Most were directors or managers of public relations/external communications, one was a principal at a public relations firm, and five were assistant or associate vice presidents of the public relations or communication part of their organization.

One interesting finding is that 75 percent of the respondents had worked as a journalist at some point in their careers, and that half of the respondents held undergraduate degrees in journalism. This may explain why such a high percentage of respondents held the abilities of the former journalists in high regard.

In terms of how these managers viewed the former journalists’ skills, the majority (75 percent) indicated that former journalists’ ability to write well was “very good” or “good” (22 percent), and their skill with media relations was “very good” (41 percent) or “good” (53 percent). In terms of former journalists’ knowledge of the public relations industry, the results were mixed. Forty-two percent of the managers said that former
journalists had a “good” general knowledge of the public relations industry, 13 percent said it was “very good,” 29 percent said that had neither a good nor poor knowledge and 16 percent said it was poor. When asked to rate the effectiveness of former journalists on knowledge of strategic thinking or planning, 19 percent felt former journalists were “very good” at this skill, and 44 percent said they were “good.” A sizable proportion (34 percent) rated them as neither good nor poor and just one responded rated them as “poor” in this area.

The fact that so many managers felt that former journalists grasped the notion of strategic planning was notable, considering the literature on the topic that suggests that former journalists are much more skilled (and interested in) tactical duties such as writing. While clearly the managers ranked journalists’ tactical skills higher than their strategic skills, the fact that so most managers consider journalists to have value in strategic planning is a positive finding for the individual employee’s personal development, the public relations organization they work for, and the state of public relations itself.

The majority of the respondents thought that in comparison to public relations employees who have not been journalists, former journalists are either more effective (45 percent) or about the same (42 percent) as employees who were not journalists. Just four respondents indicated that journalists were less effective on the job. When examining the answers of only those managers who used to be former journalists themselves, the number who felt that former journalists were more effective was 50 percent, with 38 percent indicating that they are about the same, and three former journalist manager indicating that former journalists are less effective on the job.
When it comes to the strengths that former journalists bring to the job, their tactical skills ranked at the top. Ninety-three percent said their top strength was the ability to write well, and 91 percent said their knowledge of the media and their ability to meet deadlines were former journalists’ main assets. Far fewer (31 percent) thought that strategic thinking was a top skill, and even fewer felt that managerial skills (9 percent) and knowledge of the public relations industry (6 percent) were strong skills.

The results of the final question, “Having more former journalists in my organization makes it more effective” yielded most positive results for former journalists. A quarter strongly agreed with that statement, and 47 percent agreed with it. Twenty-eight percent neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement, and none disagreed or strongly disagreed. Among managers who used to be journalists, slightly more (33 percent) strongly agreed with the statement, with about the same number as the general population — 46 percent — agreeing with the statement, and 21 percent neither agreeing or disagreeing. This seems to indicate that public relations managers are pleased with the job performance of former journalists and would be open to hiring more in the future because they, at best, make the organization more effective or, at worst, either don’t have an impact on the effectiveness of the organization or do not hurt its effectiveness.
Chapter 5
Summary and conclusions

At the outset of this study, the researcher initially theorized that former journalists left the profession primarily due to low pay, bad hours, stress and workload, lack of opportunity in the profession, and a fear of what the future of the industry holds. The researcher — herself a former journalist who made the transition into public relations after working in newspapers for about a dozen years — made the switch for all of those reasons, as did many of the colleagues she worked with. When one experiences a situation themselves, it is easy to believe that he or she knows all that there is to know about that subject, and what he or she feels is what everyone feels in that situation. While many of the predicted reasons for leaving journalism were found to be solid, there were a variety of findings that were someone surprising.

It was notable that so many of the former journalists still expressed such an affinity for the profession. Many said they still loved journalism and even miss it sometimes. Clearly, the passion for the profession is still there, even though these same people also expressed a great deal of frustration of the profession, which ultimately resulted in them leaving to go into public relations. The 12 interviewed, with a couple of exceptions, were still passionate about journalism and wished that the profession could
meet their needs, but since it cannot, they needed to find work elsewhere. And since all in the study had obtained degrees in a journalistic field and had spent years (ranging from a few to a generation of experience) in journalism, they needed something where they could make a quick jump and that did not require years of additional school and training. For the 12 former journalists in the study, public relations fit this qualification.

The researcher also hypothesized that most of the former journalists chose public relations due to better hours, a better work environment, better pay, and the fact that many of the tasks of journalism are the same as those found in public relations. This was largely found to be true among the 12 in the study. Many mentioned that they were happy to be out of a workplace that was nearly 24/7 and was always demanding more and more of its employees with management offering fewer and fewer benefits and less appreciation for the workers’ efforts. Surprisingly, obtaining higher pay was less of a motivator among this sample to switch careers than was predicted, looking at the median salaries of journalists vs. public relations professionals, and reading the literature on why journalists are unhappy. However, as some noted in the interviews, they had a firm realization that journalism was not a high-paying profession when going into the field so there was never an expectation of high pay in journalism, thus they didn’t seem to be motivated to leave based solely on this. But lower pay, combined with more workload and long hours, did seem to tip the scales, making these journalists look elsewhere.

For many, public relations was a natural transition. Many in the study had worked in newspapers with universities nearby that frequently hired former journalists in various media relations or communications jobs. Some in the interviews expressed the notion that
it felt like they were simply going into another journalism job, not transitioning into public relations. The content analysis revealed that most felt happiest and most comfortable doing tactical tasks like they did in newspapers (writing, editing, etc.) and less comfortable in strategic roles. This finding is consistent with literature on public relations roles. However, in terms of what makes an “excellent” public relations organization, Grunig and others have found that all or nearly all practitioners in an organization should have knowledge and capability not just in tactical work but in strategic work as well. Although some in the study are currently performing strategic functions in their job and understand a need for it, others expressed disdain for the entire area of strategy, which is a troubling finding and indicative of former journalists’ lack of formal training in public relations.

Also of note in the in-depth interviews were the comments that many made about “good” public relations and “bad” public relations, indicating that “spin doctors” are still common (and maybe even the norm) in public relations. The interviewees all expressed that they are practicing “good” public relations, as in serving the greater good — the public’s right to know or helping to educate the public. These comments also reveal a certain lack of knowledge about modern public relations, which is far from the early work of true “spin doctors.” Only one of the 12 interviewed had any formal education in public relations, which is likely why many of those interviewed had lot of misconceptions about public relations. Had they received degrees in public relations, they would know much more about strategy, research, as well as the history and evolution of public relations, which does include some early questionable practices but now has evolved to a
fully-developed profession with a strict code of ethics, as found on the Public Relations Society of America website.

The findings of the manager study were surprising on several fronts. First, it was interesting that even though only public relations managers took the survey, only one person in the survey had a degree in public relations, with about 75 percent holding degrees in either journalism or communications/telecommunications, and the same percentage having worked in journalism before public relations. Although the sample size was small, it does lead one to believe that there are many former journalists holding public relations jobs — and rising to the rank of management. This runs counter to the findings of Grunig and Hunt (1984), which say that public relations departments tend to fill technical positions with former journalists, but fill manager jobs with those trained in management or strategy.

The managers in the survey indicate that, for the most part, former journalists make average or above average public relations professionals. Considering the journalism background of many of the managers, this is not a surprising finding. However, it still holds value because journalism background or not, those in the survey are currently managers in public relations who have the power to hire and fire, so this speaks well of former journalists’ ability to make the transition to a new field.

Despite the findings of this survey, others in the public relations industry have differing views on whether journalists make good public relations professionals. A 2011 article by Rosanna Fiske, chair and CEO of the Public Relations Society of America, on Poynter.com presented both sides of the issue. On the one hand, journalism and public
relations have a lot of similarities: in both, you must communicate clearly with the public, be curious, and know how to tell a story. It cited the views of Debra Caruso, a former radio personality now in media relations, who believes that “the most successful PR people are those who think and act like reporters.” In a Poynter Institute poll, 64 percent agreed with that view.

The Public Relations Society of America held a webinar focused on helping journalists transition into public relations and outlined skills they consider transferrable: meeting deadlines, organization, putting a story together, writing, creating a positive branded appearance, and working with special interest groups. Among those skills that journalists should brush up on are project management, event planning, social media, video, and making websites creative.

However, some public relations practitioners are concerned that journalists — without further training or education in public relations — are not familiar with key tenets of public relations, such as the ability to tailor your story to varying audiences, understand the long- and short-term implications of a decision, a firm knowledge of the public relations code of ethics, and the ability to focus on outcomes instead of outputs. These are all crucial into ensuring that an organization meets follows the standards of the excellence theory (Hubbell, 2010).

According to a Public Relations Society of American article, today’s public relations is less about media relations — something that former journalists usually excel at — and more about communication planning, which many journalists are not as comfortable or skilled in (Hubbell, 2010). The PRSA article cited additional reasons the
industry should be concerned about former journalists being hired in public relations jobs: journalists tend to be more reactive instead of proactive, they have little knowledge in environmental scanning, and they tend to mistake tactics for strategy (Hubbell, 2010).

The findings of this study may contribute to the public relations profession in a variety of ways. Although there is considerable literature on why journalists are unhappy in their profession and why they are considering leaving it, there is little research on why journalists choose to transition specifically into a career in public relations. This study sheds light on the reasons journalists find public relations attractive, perhaps helping them in their career path to determine in public relations is right for them. Secondly, the results can benefit managers in public relations because it will seek to determine what impact hiring former journalists has on the effectiveness of the public relations organization. It also could be of value to those in journalism management, helping them understand the reasons many employees leave. Lastly, the study could be of value to those who teach both journalism and public relations courses at the university level. Educators could consider a greater integration of journalism and public relations programs (which has traditionally been somewhat segregated) because it’s likely that the two groups could be co-workers in the future.

Limitations of the study

This study has a variety of limitations. The first is in the method chose to explore the thoughts of the former journalists. By nature, in-depth interviews are not generalizable, so while the findings here may be interesting and relevant, they cannot with statistical certainty accurately represent the thoughts of this population. The results
provide only a snapshot of what this particular group felt and thought. Wimmer and Dominick (2006) point out several disadvantages of in-depth interviews: they are sensitive to interviewer bias; they are often non-standardized in terms of the exact nature of the question asked, and they are difficult to analyze and extract data from. All three of these disadvantages were evident in the collection and analysis of the data from the interviews in this study. Also, because the researcher personally knew most of the interviewees, some bias is likely in the collection and data analysis. This was evident especially in the intercoder reliability process. The second coder — who did not know the identities of the interviewees — often coded the more subjective units (such as “What is your favorite part of public relations?”) somewhat differently than the researcher. It is nearly inevitable that humans will make a jump in conclusion based on prior knowledge and not necessarily what is said verbatim in the text of an interview. Although the interviewer attempted to keep to the interview schedule as much as possible, many of the interviewees tended to jump around, sometimes not directly answering a question when it was asked, or mentioning the answer earlier or later in the interview. This likely contributed to some variability in the results of the data between the coders.

The other major limitation of the study is with the public relations manager study. Although the researcher was hoping for a much greater response to the survey, the fact that only 32 completed the full survey was disappointing and renders the findings less valid. Although the researcher made various attempts at sending the survey out to groups nationwide via email and social media, the final numbers were not as large as what was expected. Part of the issue is that the population being sought for the survey was very
specific: a public relations manager who supervises former journalists. The design of the survey prevented those who were not managers and who did not supervise former journalists to end the survey. Although the numbers would have been larger had these limitations not been in place, they would not be as valid. Therefore, there is reasonable assurance that those who did answer the survey were in the target population, but there simply were not enough of them to make significant conclusions about the research question.

An additional limitation of this study was that the majority of the participants in both the in-depth interviews and the manager survey are working in educational public relations. The reason why so many from the education sector were included in the study is access: the researcher knew several former journalists working in public relations for the in-depth interviews, and the researcher sent the survey to public relations managers who had publicly-available emails, which is common in education and not as common in agencies and some corporations. If more public relations professionals were included from the corporate or agency sectors, the results may have been different.

**Recommendations for future research**

Because this study of former journalists was limited in scope, a possibility for future research would be expand the population surveyed. Although the in-depth interviews yielded interesting insights, a much more effective way of analyzing the views of this population would be to conduct an accompanying quantitative survey with a few hundred responses, then following up with a dozen or so to gain deeper insights via in-depth interviews. Surveying many more public relations managers who supervise
journalists would likely provide more insightful and valid data that could spark new research avenues.

One topic that could be explored further is the impact of corporate decision-making on the happiness of journalists and their willingness to stay in the field. Many of the interviewees mentioned that when they first got into journalism, they loved their jobs, but once a newspaper was bought out by a large corporation, job satisfaction tended to decline significantly. Some of the frustration of a heavily-corporate environment came from the fact that compared to locally-managed news operations, those managed by large corporations tend to have less job autonomy, with many more news and personnel decisions being handed down from “on high.” This finding is supported by research by Weaver et al. (2007), which found that as perceived autonomy increased, so did job satisfaction.

It would also be worthwhile to pursue the effect that the economy has had on the number of journalists jumping into public relations. At the height of the economic downturn in 2008, CBS News and PR Week both reported on the topic, quoting public relations managers on the subject, one even who was administering a “second life club” to help educate journalists who were considering making the transition (Greer, 2008). With the economy stronger than it was a few years ago, it would be worthwhile to examine this topic now to see if journalists are still seeking to change careers into public relations, or if they are pursuing other career opportunities. A final potential area for further exploration would be the demographic impact of age on the attitudes of journalists regarding the field of public relations (i.e., generational impact).
Works Cited


Tables and charts

The following tables and graphs were generated from the results of the public relations manager survey and the transcripts of the in-depth interviews.

Figure 1. Former journalists’ satisfaction in journalism
Figure 2. Former journalists’ satisfaction in public relations.
Figure 3. Tasks mentioned by former journalists that are part of their PR jobs
Figure 4. How tactical former journalists’ PR jobs are

How tactical is current public relations job?

Number of People

All Tactical

Majority Tactical

Mix

Little Tactical
Figure 5. Undergraduate major of public relations managers
Figure 6. Proportion of former managers who worked as journalists

Have you ever worked as a journalist?

- Yes
- No
Figure 7. How managers rate former journalists by skill

Effectiveness and knowledge of public relations skills

- Very good
- Good
- Neither good nor poor
- Poor
- Very poor

Skills:
- Media relations
- Strategic thinking/planning
- General knowledge of the public relations industry
Figure 8. Job-effectiveness of former journalists in public relations

![Chart showing job effectiveness of former journalists compared to non-journalists. The chart indicates that more than 50% of former journalists are perceived as more effective, about 40% as about the same, and less than 10% as less effective.]
Figure 9. Job strengths of journalists in public relations

[Bar chart showing strengths of former journalists in public relations. The categories include Knowledge of media, Ability to write well, Knowledge of public relations industry, Ability to meet deadlines, Strategic thinking, and Managerial skills.]
Appendix

Letter from Institutional Review Board approving human subjects research for study.

May 30, 2012

Kimberly Delker, Master’s
Ball State University IRB

IRB protocol # 342373-1
Why journalists choose public relations careers and a measurement of their job satisfaction and effectiveness
New Project

DETERMINATION OF EXEMPT STATUS
May 30, 2012

The Institutional Review Board reviewed your protocol on May 30, 2012 and has determined the procedures you have proposed are appropriate for exemption under the federal regulations. As such, there will be no further review of your protocol, and you are cleared to proceed with the procedures outlined in your protocol. As an exempt study, there is no requirement for continuing review. Your protocol will remain on file with the IRB as a matter of record.

Editorial notes:
1. Approved- Exempt
2. Informed Consent Required for Interviews.

While your project does not require continuing review, it is the responsibility of the P.I. (and, if applicable, faculty supervisor) to inform the IRB if the procedures presented in this protocol are to be modified or if problems related to human research participants arise in connection with this project. Any procedural modifications must be evaluated by the IRB before being implemented, as some modifications may change the review status of this project. Please contact please contact John Mulcahy at (765) 285-5106 or jmulcahy@bsu.edu if you are unsure whether your proposed modification requires review or have any questions. Proposed modifications should be addressed in writing and submitted electronically to the IRB (http://www.bsu.edu/irb) for review. Please reference the above IRB protocol number in any communication to the IRB regarding this project.

Reminder: Even though your study is exempt from the relevant federal regulations of the Common Rule (45 CFR 46, subpart A), you and your research team are not exempt from ethical research practices and should therefore employ all protections for your participants and their data which are appropriate to your project.
Research questions: In-depth interviews of former journalists

Age:

Educational background:

How long have you been in your current job?

How long have you been in public relations?

1). Tell me about the jobs you held in the journalism industry. Where did you work, for how long, and what was the nature of your work?

2). Tell me a little about how happy were you in the journalism industry. What did you like about your job? What did you not like about your job?

3). What made you leave the journalism profession? Was this voluntary or involuntary, as in through a downsizing?

4). After you left journalism, did you go straight to public relations or did you hold other jobs? If so, what were they and why did you choose them?

5). What made you seek out a career in public relations? What about public relations as opposed to other fields seemed attractive to you?

6). Thinking back to when you made the transition into public relations, what were your expectations of the job in terms of the tasks you would perform or roles you would play? Has the profession met your expectations?
7). Scholarly research has found that many journalists enjoy the more tactical parts of their job (writing, editing, working with the media), but are less interested in (or qualified for) the strategic or managerial aspects of public relations — the jobs that tend to yield more power and are higher-paid. Do you agree with this characterization about journalists who go into PR? Why or why not?

8). How would you characterize your current job in public relations? Do you tend to do more tactical work, more strategic work, or a combination?

9). Now consider your job satisfaction with your career in public relations. How happy are you with your job? What are your favorite parts about the job? What are your least favorite parts?

10). If you had an opportunity to return to the journalism industry, would you? Why or why not?
Invitation email letter for in-depth interviews

Dear (name of former journalist):

My name is Kim Delker, and I’m a master’s degree student in public relations at Ball State University. As the final requirement of my master's degree, I am doing a research paper on journalists who transition into public relations (title: "Why journalists choose public relations careers and a measurement of their job satisfaction and effectiveness"). A major part of the research will be a series of in-depth interviews with journalists-turned-public relations practitioners, asking them a series of questions on why they left journalism, what their current job involves and how they would rate their job satisfaction in public relations. I am writing you to ask if you would be willing to participate in this research, as a former journalist now working in public relations.

The research would involve participating in an in-depth interview that will be about an hour to hour-and-a-half in length in which I would ask you questions about your career in journalism and public relations. The interview will be audiorecorded, then transcribed for data analysis. The results of all participants will be compiled into the research paper. Your confidentiality will be protected, as you won't be identified by name in the final report. There are no perceived risks associated with participation.

If you're willing to take part in this research, please confirm by replying to this email. If you are interested, I'll contact you in the next several weeks to set up the interview. If you have any additional questions regarding the study please feel free to contact me.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Kim Delker
FORMER JOURNALIST CODING FORM

Interview ID: ______
Coder: ______

A. Age:
   1. 24-30 _____
   2. 31-40 _____
   3. 41-50 _____
   4. 51-65 _____

B. Gender:
   1. Male _____
   2. Female _____

C. Educational background
   1. Bachelor’s degree _____
   2. Master’s degree _____

D. Undergraduate major
   1. Journalism _____
   2. Communication _____
   3. English _____
   4. Telecommunications _____
   5. Public relations _____
E. Graduate major

1. Journalism ______
2. Public relations ______

F. How long worked in public relations?

1. Less than a year ______
2. 1-5 years ______
3. 6-10 years ______
4. 11-15 years ______
5. 16-20 years ______
6. More than 20 years ______

G. Main job held in journalism industry

1. Newspaper writer/editor ______
2. Editor/writer at wire service ______
3. Television reporter/anchor ______
4. Radio reporter ______

H. How long worked in journalism

1. Less than a year ______
2. 1-5 years ______
3. 6-10 years ______
4. 11-15 years ______
5. 16-20 years ______
6. More than 20 years ______
I. How happy in journalism

1. Very happy _______
2. Mostly happy _______
3. Near equal mix of happy and unhappy _______
4. Mostly unhappy _______
5. Very unhappy _______

J. Like most about journalism job

1. Writing _______
2. Telling a story _______
3. Helping inform society/watchdog _______
4. Meeting new/interesting people _______
5. Learning something new _______
6. Exciting _______

K. Like least about journalism job

1. Low pay _______
2. Long hours/unpredictable schedule _______
3. Didn't care for many tasks of job _______
4. Worried about future of journalism _______
5. Questioning the motivation/ethics of management _______

L. Was leaving journalism voluntary or involuntary?

1. Involuntary _______
2. Voluntary _____

M. Why did you leave journalism?

1. Wanted something new
2. Forced out by downsizing/layoff
3. Spouse moved to new job
4. Bad hours
5. Found a better opportunity elsewhere
6. Workload/stress
7. Lack of opportunity in journalism
8. Fearful of future of journalism

N. Did you hold jobs after journalism and before PR?

1. Yes _____
2. No _____

O. Why did you choose PR?

1. That’s what was available
2. Knew others in the field
3. Closely matches my skills
4. Interested in PR

P. Expectations of PR job
1. Better pay
2. Performing similar tasks as journalism
3. Better hours
4. More stability
5. More power

Q. Has PR met your expectations?
1. Yes ______
2. No ______

R. Agree with characterization that journalists tend to enjoy and gravitate toward tactical tasks?
1. Yes ______
2. No ______

S. Current job in PR
1. Almost all tactical _______
2. Majority tactical _______
3. Mix of tactical and strategic _______
4. Little to no tactical _______

T. Tasks part of your PR job
1. Writing/editing _______
2. Media relations _______
3. Publication design/production _______
4. Website content _______
5. Videos
6. Social media
7. Event planning
8. Strategic planning

**U. Job satisfaction in PR**
1. Very happy
2. Mostly happy
3. Near equal mix of happy and unhappy
4. Mostly unhappy
5. Very unhappy

**V. Favorite part of job in PR**
1. Finding/telling a story
2. Interacting with people
3. Informing public/serving greater good
4. Accomplishing tactical goals
5. Making decisions/developing strategy
6. Hours

**W. Least favorite part of PR**
1. Pushing an unworthy story on a journalist
2. Strategy
3. Too much work
4. Too many meetings
5. Boring/not exciting
6. Too much bureaucracy
7. Emphasis on the bottom line
8. Not feeling valued by management/other employees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>X. Would you go back into journalism?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Yes, definitely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Yes, if the right opportunity came along</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. No</td>
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</tbody>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Y. Factors that would make you return to journalism</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Much more money</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Choice of tasks/stories covered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Limited/choice of hours</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. A short-term commitment</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Promise of job security</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. If I had no other choice</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Online survey questions for public relations managers

1. Are you a supervisor or manager in public relations?
   Yes
   No

2. Have you ever supervised an employee who has worked as a journalist?
   Yes
   No

3. What is the highest educational level you have completed?
   Less than bachelor's degree
   Bachelor's degree
   Some graduate school
   Master's degree
   Doctoral degree
   Other professional degree (please specify)

4. What was your undergraduate major in college?
   Public relations
   Journalism
   Communications/telecommunications
   English
   Marketing
   Other (please specify)

5. What industry do you work in?
Public relations agency
Corporate public relations
Nonprofit sector
Educational institution
Other (please specify)

6. What is the job title of your current position? (fill in the blank)

7. Have you ever worked as a journalist?
   Yes
   No

8. Thinking about former journalists you have hired or supervised, how would you rate their public relations skills and knowledge in each of the following areas?
   (Select from the following responses for each area: very good, good neither good nor poor, poor, very poor)
   Writing
   Media relations
   Strategic thinking/planning
   Management
   General knowledge of the public relations industry

9. Thinking of all the employees you have hired or supervised in the public relations field, how would you rate the job effectiveness of former journalists in comparison to employees who came from other fields?
   More effective
   About the same
10. From your experience working with former journalists in the public relations industry, what strengths do they bring to the job? (Check all that apply)

Knowledge of media
Ability to write well
Knowledge of public relations industry
Ability to meet deadlines
Strategic thinking
Managerial skills

11. Having more former journalists in my organization makes it more effective.

Strongly Agree
Agree
Neither Agree nor Disagree
Disagree
Strongly Disagree

Thank you for your participation in this survey.
Informed consent form

**Study Title:** Why Journalists Choose Public Relations Careers and a Measurement of Their Job Satisfaction and Effectiveness

**Study Purpose and Rationale**

This study will explore the reasons why journalists choose to transition into careers in public relations, as well as the types of roles they hold in the field and how satisfied they are in public relations.

**Participation Procedures and Duration**

The research involves participating in an in-depth interview that will be about an hour to hour-and-a-half in length in which I would ask you questions about your career in journalism and public relations. With your permission, the interview will be audio recorded, then transcribed for data analysis. The results will be compiled into the research paper. Your confidentiality will be protected, as you won't be identified by name in the final report.

**Audiorecording**

For purposes of accuracy, with your permission, the interviews will be audiorecorded. Any names used on the audiorecording will be changed to pseudonyms when the audio files are transcribed. The audio files will be stored on the researcher’s password-protected personal computer for three years and will then be destroyed.

**Data Confidentiality**

Your confidentiality will be protected, as you won't be identified by name in the final report. The records of this study will be kept on a computer accessible only to the researcher. I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. The audiorecording and transcription will be destroyed within three years of the collection of the research.

**Storage of Data**

Any data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher’s home for three years and will then be shredded. The data will also be entered into a software program and stored on the researcher’s password-protected computer for three years and then deleted. Only members of the research team will have access to the data.
Risks or Discomforts

The only anticipated risk from participating in this study is that you may not feel comfortable answering some of the questions. You may choose not to answer any question that makes you uncomfortable and you may quit the study at any time.

Who to Contact Should You Experience Any Negative Effects from Participating in this Study

Should you experience any feelings of anxiety, we recommend you seek counseling services in your community.

Benefits

Potential benefits of this study include a chance for subjects to freely express themselves about why they made the career choices they did, perhaps enriching themselves in the process.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you are free to withdraw your permission at anytime for any reason without penalty or prejudice from the investigator. Please feel free to ask any questions of the investigator before signing this form and at any time during the study.

IRB Contact Information

For one’s rights as a research subject, you may contact the following: For questions about your rights as a research subject, please contact the Director, Office of Research Integrity, Ball State University, Muncie, IN 47306, (765) 285-5070 or at irb@bsu.edu.

**********

Consent

I, ______________, agree to participate in this research project entitled “Why journalists choose public relations careers and a measurement of their job satisfaction and effectiveness.” I have had the study explained to me and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I have read the description of this project and give my consent to participate. I understand that I will receive a copy of this informed consent form to keep for future reference.
To the best of my knowledge, I meet the inclusion/exclusion criteria for participation (described on the previous page) in this study.

________________________  ____________
Participant's Signature    Date

**Researcher Contact Information**

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