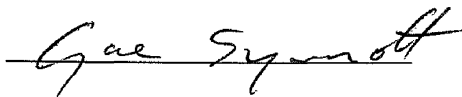


**VALUES AND IDENTITY
IN PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTICE
IN MALAYSIA**

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This thesis is presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of
Murdoch University, 2001

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary educational institution.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Gae Synnott", written over a horizontal line.

Gae Synnott

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many people whose support has been critical to this project. I am immensely grateful to my supervisors: Associate Professor Alex Main, who could see the potential of what I was trying to do and encouraged me along my individual pathway; and Associate Professor Iain Walker, whose focus proved crucial and inspiring during the writing and conclusion stages.

My thanks to my Malaysian respondents who so willingly gave their time to the process, and to all others in Malaysia and elsewhere who were interested in the project. A research grant from Edith Cowan University enabled me to travel twice to Malaysia to undertake the research; and a travel grant provided by Murdoch University allowed me to attend an international conference in San Francisco where I was able to present my initial findings and receive valuable input from many knowledgeable people.

Thanks primarily to my family, friends and colleagues in Australia who have provided moral and physical support and assistance; especially to my husband Ian and my daughters Madelene and Georgia who have lived every step of the journey with me, and have given me the space to pursue this goal.

ABSTRACT

This is a study of values and identity within the public relations profession in Malaysia. Although the study has a national focus, its implications are global, because its context is created by the intersection of three current areas of debate and examination: 1) the renewed focus on Asian values which seeks to articulate Asian values as a way of supporting Asia's pathway to modernisation; 2) the open challenge to assumptions about the transferability of theory between countries around the world, about whether theory can be universal or whether different theories or different versions of theories are needed to help explain practice in different parts of the world; and 3) the re-emerging focus on values underwriting the public relations profession.

Malaysia's growing public relations profession is playing a crucial communication role in support of the country's move towards industrialisation. In Malaysia, issues of culture, modernisation, Westernisation, and globalisation are both real and topical.

Through the values framework, the study aims to contribute in three ways: 1) To develop and test an alternative, but equally useful, framework and method for comparing public relations practice between countries; 2) to investigate the influence of specific cultural and professional variables on public relations practice in Malaysia, to further understand specific variables which might lead public relations practice to differ between countries; and 3) to contribute to the definition of Asian values by defining one component, that is, the personal and professional values of a sample of public relations practitioners in Malaysia.

The research was undertaken in two parts. The first, using a survey and structured interviews, examined the influence of two cultural variables (ethnicity and gender) and two professional variables (years of experience and work environment) on values held. Ethnicity and years of experience led to significant differences in the values held, with each variable influencing different value dimensions. Gender and work environment had some influence but generally in combination with ethnicity and years of experience respectively. The study found a distinctive U-shaped curve related to years of experience, which means that practitioners' value priorities change as they gain more experience in the profession. All four of the variables studied could be significant in accounting for difference in professional practice in other countries.

The second part, using repertory grid methodology, examined values and identity. It identified core values central to public relations practice in Malaysia, and interpreted these core values as statements of self-identity. The nature of identity as a public relations practitioner may also account for differences in public relations practice between countries.

Combining both parts, the study has revealed values that underwrite public relations practice in Malaysia, the aspects of self-identity important to the profession, and the way in which those values and identity have been influenced by cultural and professional factors. It therefore leads towards the development of a theoretical foundation for "culture-specific" public relations in Malaysia.

This exploratory study has generated findings which challenge the expectations of Schwartz and Bilsky's values theory, on which the values analysis was based.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | Page |
|---|-----------|
| CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| 1.1 Purpose of the research | 1 |
| 1.2 Broad context and justification for the study | 4 |
| 1.2.1 The current focus on Asian values | 5 |
| 1.2.2 The current interest in understanding differences in public relations practice in different countries | 8 |
| 1.2.3 The current focus on values in public relations | 13 |
| 1.3 Study design and direction | 17 |
| 1.3.1 The springboard for this study | 17 |
| 1.3.2 The contribution of other studies in setting the direction for this research | 18 |
| 1.3.3 Framing this as a grounded, transdisciplinary study | 20 |
| 1.3.4 Researching one country from another | 23 |
| 1.3.5 Limits of the study | 24 |
| 1.4 Background to Malaysia and the development of public relations | 25 |
| 1.4.1 Ethnic profile of Malaysia | 26 |
| 1.4.2 Religious diversity | 29 |
| 1.4.3 A short history of public relations in Malaysia | 30 |
| 1.4.3.1 <i>Nation building phase</i> | 30 |
| 1.4.3.2 <i>Market development phase</i> | 32 |
| 1.4.3.3 <i>The present</i> | 33 |
| 1.5 The structure of this thesis | 36 |
| 1.6 Conclusion | 38 |
| | |
| CHAPTER 2: HOW THIS STUDY IS CONCEPTUALISED | 40 |
| 2.1 The first level: Self, values and self-identity | 42 |
| 2.1.1 The concept of self and self-identity | 42 |
| 2.1.2 Values | 45 |
| 2.1.2.1 <i>Schwartz and Bilsky's values theory</i> | 48 |
| 2.1.3 Personal construct psychology | 51 |
| 2.1.3.1 <i>Personal construct psychology in cross-cultural studies</i> | 56 |
| 2.1.4 Linking self, values and self-identity to PCP | 58 |
| 2.2 The second level: Culture and cultural dimensions | 60 |
| 2.2.1 Hofstede's cultural dimensions | 62 |
| 2.2.1.1 <i>National vs. Organisational culture</i> | 66 |
| 2.2.2 Ethnicity | 68 |
| 2.2.3 Gender | 70 |
| 2.2.3.1 <i>Theories on gender difference</i> | 72 |
| 2.3 The third level: Public relations and professional variables | 73 |
| 2.3.1 Public relations frameworks and worldviews | 73 |
| 2.3.1.1 <i>Asymmetrical vs. symmetrical public relations</i> | 75 |
| 2.3.2 Public relations: what role in developing countries? | 76 |
| 2.3.2.1 <i>The personal influence model</i> | 77 |
| 2.3.3 Gender issues in public relations | 78 |
| 2.3.4 Occupational/professional culture | 79 |
| 2.3.5 Years of experience | 81 |

| | | |
|-------|---|----|
| 2.3.6 | Work environment | 83 |
| | 2.3.6.1 <i>The corporate work environment</i> | 84 |
| | 2.3.6.2 <i>The consulting environment</i> | 85 |
| 2.4 | Conclusion | 86 |

**CHAPTER 3:
RESEARCH QUESTION AND RESEARCH METHOD** **87**

| | | |
|-----|--|-----|
| 3.1 | Framing the research question as a grounded theory study | 87 |
| 3.2 | Introducing the research design and method | 90 |
| | 3.2.1 Research design | 91 |
| | 3.2.2 Focus groups | 92 |
| | 3.2.3 Survey | 95 |
| | 3.2.4 Rep grid technique | 96 |
| | 3.2.4.1 <i>Elicitation of elements and constructs</i> | 99 |
| | 3.2.4.2 <i>Rating of constructs</i> | 100 |
| | 3.2.5 Structured interviews | 101 |
| 3.3 | Procedures used for this study | 101 |
| | 3.3.1 Selection of respondents | 101 |
| | 3.3.2 Selection of variables | 102 |
| | 3.3.2.1 <i>Ethnicity</i> | 102 |
| | 3.3.2.2 <i>Gender</i> | 102 |
| | 3.3.2.3 <i>Work environment</i> | 103 |
| | 3.3.2.4 <i>Years of experience in public relations</i> | 103 |
| 3.4 | Ethical and practical considerations | 103 |
| 3.5 | Criteria for evaluating qualitative methodology | 104 |
| 3.6 | What the backgrounding stage found | 107 |
| 3.7 | Conclusion | 108 |

**CHAPTER 4:
RESULTS FROM THE FIRST DATA COLLECTION TRIP IN
MALAYSIA** **109**

| | | |
|-----|---|-----|
| 4.1 | Method | 109 |
| | 4.1.1 The sample | 109 |
| | 4.1.2 Phase one methods | 111 |
| | 4.1.3 Conduct | 112 |
| 4.2 | Analysis of the repertory grid data | 112 |
| | 4.2.1 The FOCUS algorithm | 113 |
| | 4.2.2 The PRINCOM analysis | 115 |
| | 4.2.3 The SOCIOGRID analysis | 116 |
| 4.3 | Rep grid results – the aggregated data | 117 |
| | 4.3.1 Self-concept and extent of similarity between self and others | 117 |
| | 4.3.2 Similarity of constructs of effectiveness in public relations | 121 |
| 4.4 | Rep grid results -- the individual data | 124 |
| | 4.4.1 Self-concept | 125 |
| | 4.4.2 Professional values | 125 |
| | 4.4.3 Relationship between elements and constructs | 127 |
| 4.5 | Analysis of the survey data | 129 |
| | 4.5.1 The independent variables | 129 |
| | 4.5.2 Overview of analyses | 130 |
| 4.6 | The values results | 130 |
| | 4.6.1 Effects due to ethnicity and gender | 132 |

| | | |
|---------------------------|--|------------|
| 4.6.1.1 | <i>Value dimensions</i> | 132 |
| 4.6.1.2 | <i>Value domains</i> | 134 |
| 4.6.2 | Effects due to years of experience and work environment | 136 |
| 4.6.2.1 | <i>Value dimensions</i> | 136 |
| 4.6.2.2 | <i>Value domains</i> | 136 |
| 4.6.3 | Correlations | 137 |
| 4.6.3.1 | <i>Value dimensions</i> | 137 |
| 4.6.3.2 | <i>Value domains</i> | 138 |
| 4.7 | Summary of the results and implications for the next phase of research | 141 |
| 4.7.1 | Values and variables that appear crucial to the research | 142 |
| 4.7.2 | Values and variables that appear to be less important to the research | 143 |
| 4.7.3 | Planning the next research phase | 146 |
| 4.8 | Conclusion | 148 |
| CHAPTER 5: | | |
| OPENNESS TO CHANGE | | 150 |
| 5.1 | Methodological detail | 150 |
| 5.1.1 | Changes to the sample | 150 |
| 5.1.2 | Conduct | 151 |
| 5.1.3 | Analysis of the structured interviews | 152 |
| 5.2 | The findings on Openness to Change | 154 |
| 5.2.1 | Openness to change and ethnic group | 155 |
| 5.2.1.1 | <i>Chinese practitioners</i> | 155 |
| 5.2.1.2 | <i>Malay practitioners</i> | 162 |
| 5.2.1.3 | <i>Indian practitioners</i> | 166 |
| 5.2.2 | Openness to change and gender | 172 |
| 5.2.2.1 | <i>Female practitioners</i> | 172 |
| 5.2.2.2 | <i>Male practitioners</i> | 180 |
| - | <i>Newer male practitioners</i> | 183 |
| - | <i>Mid-level male practitioners</i> | 184 |
| - | <i>Senior male practitioners</i> | 185 |
| 5.3 | Interpretations on Openness to Change | 188 |
| 5.3.1 | The impact of ethnicity on openness to change | 189 |
| 5.3.1.1 | <i>The Chinese and openness to change</i> | 189 |
| 5.3.1.2 | <i>The Malays and openness to change</i> | 191 |
| 5.3.1.3 | <i>The Indians and openness to change</i> | 192 |
| 5.3.2 | The impact of gender on openness to change | 193 |
| 5.3.2.1 | <i>Females and openness to change</i> | 194 |
| 5.3.2.2 | <i>Males and openness to change</i> | 195 |
| 5.3.2.3 | <i>The impact of gender and ethnicity on openness to change</i> | 196 |
| 5.4 | Summary of emerging issues | 197 |
| 5.5 | Conclusion | 197 |
| CHAPTER 6: | | |
| SELF-ENHANCEMENT | | 199 |
| 6.1 | The findings on Self-enhancement | 199 |
| 6.2 | Self-enhancement and years of experience | 200 |
| 6.2.1 | Newer practitioners | 200 |
| 6.2.2 | Mid-level practitioners | 204 |

| | | |
|-------|--|-----|
| 6.2.3 | Senior practitioners | 209 |
| 6.3 | Interpretations on Self-enhancement | 215 |
| 6.3.1 | Newer practitioners and self-enhancement | 215 |
| 6.3.2 | Mid-level practitioners and self-enhancement | 216 |
| 6.3.3 | Senior practitioners and self-enhancement | 218 |
| 6.4 | Summary of emerging issues | 219 |
| 6.5 | Conclusion | 220 |

CHAPTER 7: SELF-TRANSCENDENCE **221**

| | | |
|-------|---|-----|
| 7.1 | The findings on Self-transcendence | 221 |
| 7.2 | Self-transcendence and years of experience | 222 |
| 7.2.1 | Newer practitioners | 222 |
| 7.2.2 | Mid-level practitioners | 227 |
| 7.2.3 | Senior practitioners | 233 |
| 7.3 | Self-transcendence and ethnicity | 238 |
| 7.3.1 | Chinese practitioners | 239 |
| 7.3.2 | Malay practitioners | 243 |
| 7.3.3 | Indian practitioners | 247 |
| 7.4 | Self-transcendence, gender and ethnicity | 251 |
| 7.4.1 | Female practitioners | 251 |
| 7.4.2 | Male practitioners | 253 |
| 7.4.3 | Chinese females and males | 254 |
| 7.5 | Interpretations on Self-transcendence | 256 |
| 7.5.1 | The impact of years of experience on self-transcendence | 257 |
| | 7.5.1.1 <i>Newer practitioners</i> | 257 |
| | 7.5.1.2 <i>Mid-level practitioners</i> | 258 |
| | 7.5.1.3 <i>Senior practitioners</i> | 259 |
| 7.5.2 | The impact of gender on self-transcendence | 261 |
| | 7.5.2.1 <i>Female practitioners</i> | 261 |
| | 7.5.2.2 <i>Male practitioners</i> | 262 |
| 7.5.3 | The impact of ethnicity on self-transcendence | 263 |
| | 7.5.3.1 <i>Chinese practitioners</i> | 263 |
| | 7.5.3.2 <i>Malay practitioners</i> | 264 |
| | 7.5.3.3 <i>Indian practitioners</i> | 265 |
| 7.6 | Summary of emerging issues | 266 |
| 7.7 | Conclusion | 267 |

CHAPTER 8: ETHNICITY AND GENDER **269**

| | | |
|-------|---|-----|
| 8.1 | Summary of findings | 269 |
| 8.2 | Theoretical context for ethnicity analysis | 273 |
| 8.2.1 | Social Identity Theory as a framework for understanding ethnic identity | 273 |
| | 8.2.1.1 <i>Studies on Social Identity Theory in the workplace</i> | 280 |
| | 8.2.1.2 <i>Polarised appraisal of outgroup members</i> | 283 |
| 8.2.2 | Influence of cultural dimensions on ethnic identity | 285 |
| | 8.2.2.1 <i>Challenges to the individualism/collectivism dichotomy</i> | 290 |
| | 8.2.2.2 <i>Studies on cultural dimensions and the impact of context</i> | 293 |
| 8.3 | Theoretical context for gender analysis | 296 |

| | | |
|----------------------------|---|------------|
| 8.3.1 | Different views on differences between genders | 296 |
| 8.3.2 | Hofstede's (1980) cultural dimensions and gender | 300 |
| 8.4 | Bringing the frameworks together | 301 |
| 8.4.1 | The Schwartz and Bilsky values theory, and its application to gender and ethnicity | 301 |
| 8.4.2 | Studies combining the effects of ethnicity and gender on values and/or identity | 303 |
| | 8.4.2.1 <i>Studies on identity</i> | 303 |
| | 8.4.2.2 <i>Studies on gender and values</i> | 304 |
| 8.4.3 | Interaction between ethnicity and gender in Malaysia | 306 |
| | 8.4.3.1 <i>Ethnicity, gender and Islam</i> | 306 |
| | 8.4.3.2 <i>Gender issues for the Chinese</i> | 308 |
| | 8.4.3.3 <i>Gender issues for the Indians</i> | 308 |
| | 8.4.3.4 <i>Asian values and the role of women</i> | 309 |
| | 8.4.3.5 <i>Objectivity in gender research</i> | 310 |
| 8.5 | Themes emerging from the findings | 311 |
| 8.5.1 | That ethnicity is a bigger influence on openness to change and self-transcendence values for male practitioners than female practitioners | 311 |
| | 8.5.1.1 <i>Chinese men and the value dimensions of openness to change and self-transcendence</i> | 314 |
| | 8.5.1.2 <i>Malay, Chinese and Indian women and the value dimensions of openness to change and self-transcendence</i> | 319 |
| | 8.5.1.3 <i>Malay men and women and the value dimensions of openness to change and self-transcendence</i> | 325 |
| | 8.5.1.4 <i>The conservation and self-enhancement value dimensions</i> | 328 |
| | 8.5.1.5 <i>Indian practitioners and the value dimensions of openness to change and self-transcendence</i> | 331 |
| 8.5.2 | That there is a difference between how Malay, Chinese and Indian practitioners view themselves and the job | 334 |
| 8.6 | Conclusion | 337 |
| CHAPTER 9: | | |
| YEARS OF EXPERIENCE | | 339 |
| 9.1 | Summary of findings | 339 |
| 9.2 | Theoretical context for years of experience analysis | 342 |
| 9.2.1 | Progress through life cycle | 343 |
| | 9.2.1.1 <i>Age and aging</i> | 346 |
| | 9.2.1.2 <i>The impact of passage of time</i> | 347 |
| 9.2.2 | Career development models | 349 |
| | 9.2.2.1 <i>Mid-career challenges</i> | 351 |
| 9.2.3 | Personal change in self-concept and values | 353 |
| | 9.2.3.1 <i>Changes in importance of values over time</i> | 357 |
| | 9.2.3.2 <i>Studies on personal change and values</i> | 358 |
| 9.2.4 | Role transitions, person-environment fit and organisational socialisation | 360 |
| | 9.2.4.1 <i>Role transitions</i> | 360 |
| | - <i>Nicholson's (1984) theory of work role transitions</i> | 361 |
| | - <i>The transition process and its impact on self-identity</i> | 367 |

| | | | |
|-----|---------|---|-----|
| | 9.2.4.2 | <i>Organisational socialisation</i> | 369 |
| | 9.2.4.3 | <i>Occupational socialisation</i> | 373 |
| | 9.2.4.4 | <i>Expectations – surprise and occupational reality shock</i> | 375 |
| | 9.2.4.5 | <i>Studies on organisational socialisation and personal change</i> | 377 |
| | 9.2.4.6 | <i>Summary</i> | 379 |
| 9.3 | | Themes emerging from the findings | 379 |
| | 9.3.1 | That newer practitioners have higher motivation levels on significant value dimensions than do all other practitioners. | 379 |
| | 9.3.1.1 | <i>The findings in relation to Nicholson’s (1984) theory of work role transitions</i> | 383 |
| | | - <i>Self-transcendence</i> | 383 |
| | | - <i>Self-enhancement</i> | 386 |
| | 9.3.1.2 | <i>The findings in relation to Schwartz and Bilsky’s values theory</i> | 387 |
| | 9.3.2 | That mid-level practitioners have lower motivation levels on significant value dimensions than do all other practitioners. | 391 |
| | 9.3.2.1 | <i>The findings in relation to Nicholson’s (1984) theory of work role transitions</i> | 397 |
| | | - <i>Self-transcendence</i> | 397 |
| | | - <i>Self-enhancement</i> | 400 |
| | 9.3.2.2 | <i>The findings in relation to Schwartz and Bilsky’s values theory</i> | 402 |
| | 9.3.2.3 | <i>Respondents’ view of their personal change</i> | 403 |
| | 9.3.3 | That senior practitioners have motivation levels on significant value dimensions that sit between those of the other two practitioner groups. | 404 |
| | 9.3.3.1 | <i>The findings in relation to Nicholson’s (1984) theory of work role transitions</i> | 408 |
| | | - <i>Self-transcendence</i> | 408 |
| | | - <i>Self-enhancement</i> | 411 |
| | 9.3.3.2 | <i>The findings in relation to Schwartz and Bilsky’s values theory</i> | 413 |
| | 9.3.3.3 | <i>Respondents’ view of their personal change</i> | 413 |
| 9.4 | | Conclusion | 414 |

CHAPTER 10:

AN EXTRA DIMENSION -- THE REPERTORY GRID DATA 416

| | | |
|------|---|-----|
| 10.1 | Recap on the foundations of Personal Construct Theory | 417 |
| 10.2 | How this study integrates with the values and self-identity findings | 419 |
| | 10.2.1 Values | 419 |
| | 10.2.2 Self-identity | 420 |
| | 10.2.3 The focus of this analysis | 422 |
| | 10.2.4 Recapping on the elements used and analysis done | 425 |
| | 10.2.5 Limitations | 426 |
| 10.3 | Results – Aggregated data | 427 |
| | 10.3.1 Values and attributes of the role model | 429 |
| 10.4 | Results – Individual data | 433 |
| | 10.4.1 Comparing the values and self-identity of practitioners with different lengths of experience | 435 |

| | | |
|----------|---|-----|
| 10.4.1.1 | <i>The newer practitioner</i> | 436 |
| - | <i>Self-concept</i> | 436 |
| - | <i>Professional values</i> | 439 |
| - | <i>Relationship between elements and constructs</i> | 442 |
| 10.4.1.2 | <i>The mid-level practitioner</i> | 445 |
| - | <i>Self-concept</i> | 445 |
| - | <i>Professional values</i> | 449 |
| - | <i>Relationship between elements and constructs</i> | 451 |
| 10.4.1.3 | <i>The senior consultant practitioner</i> | 453 |
| - | <i>Self-concept</i> | 454 |
| - | <i>Professional values</i> | 458 |
| - | <i>Relationship between elements and constructs</i> | 459 |
| 10.4.1.4 | <i>The senior corporate practitioner</i> | 462 |
| - | <i>Self-concept</i> | 463 |
| - | <i>Professional values</i> | 466 |
| - | <i>Relationship between elements and constructs</i> | 468 |
| 10.5 | Conclusions | 472 |

**CHAPTER 11:
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS** **475**

| | | |
|------|--|-----|
| 11.1 | Intended contributions of this study | 475 |
| 11.2 | What this study has found | 478 |
| 11.3 | The importance of the results in terms of public relations theory and practice | 482 |
| 11.4 | The importance of the results in terms of Schwartz & Bilsky's values theory | 486 |
| 11.5 | Effectiveness and limitations of the study | 489 |
| 11.6 | Recommendations for future research | 492 |
| 11.7 | Conclusion | 494 |

REFERENCES **495**

APPENDICES

| | |
|---|---|
| A | Schwartz Values Survey |
| B | Example of a completed rep grid form with ratings |
| C | Values and how ethnic groups view each other |
| D | Sociogrid examples |
| E | Transcripts of second interviews with respondents |