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Journalists and public relations specialists: A coorientational analysis

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ABSTRACT

Journalists and public relations professionals have had a difficult, interdependent and always complicated relationship. In spite of their differences, the growing dependence of both professions on each other once again raises the question of how journalists and public relations professionals perceive and evaluate each other. Here, we examine various elements of this complex relationship. Our research was aimed towards answering two main questions. First, we conducted a correlation analysis between the level of (dis)satisfaction with working conditions of each group and their perceptions about the other profession. We expected these correlations to be negative and significant, but this did not prove to be true. In spite of the conventional wisdom that there is a love-hate relationship between the two professions, this study shows that maybe it is time to reevaluate this assumption. Second, we used the coorientational model to analyze the perceptions and cross-perceptions of journalists and public relations experts on their role in organizational reputation building. Both professional groups showed pluralistic ignorance of the other side. It also seems public relations specialists underestimate journalists' opinion of the communication profession. They seem to perceive the relationship as more adversarial than it really is. Our results fall in line with some of the more recent studies on the journalist–public relations relationship and actually suggest that there are fewer differences between the two groups than assumed.

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1. Introduction

In a rapidly changing media landscape, the question is—how are technological, economic and political developments affecting journalism and public relations? Some scholars predict that such changes of position present a threat to the communications field in general (Mellado & Hanusch, 2012). Here we try to explore this issue further.

Journalists and public relations professionals have had a difficult, interdependent and always complicated relationship. The old, often mentioned statement that journalists treat public relations with contempt still seems relatively common. While public relations as a profession shows growth in many areas, journalists are having a hard time with increased work hours, decreased salary, lowered status, job satisfaction and burnout (Yun & Yoon, 2011). Some authors believe that this type of work environment adds to their antagonism towards public relations (DeLorme & Fedler, 2003; Yun & Yoon, 2011). On the other hand, it is possible that these negative opinions have roots in the differing goals, incompatible values and conflicting

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Table 1

Pearson correlations between journalists' statements about their working conditions and their opinion of the public relations profession.

	How would you rate the public relations profession (on a scale from 1 to 5)?
How satisfied are you with your job?	0.03 (p = 0.769)
Do you believe public relations specialists, on average, have a higher salary than journalists?	0.091 (p = 0.402)
Do you believe that public relations experts are usually under less stress at work than journalists are?	0.042 (p = 0.678)
Do you believe that public relations experts have better working conditions?	0.04 (p = 0.698)

ethics of the two professions (Mellado & Hanusch, 2012). While there is some evidence of similarities in professional values (Curtin, 1999; Nejiens & Smit, 2006), other studies have shown that public relations practitioners are less negative about journalists (Nejiens & Smit, 2006).

However, in spite of their differences, the growing dependence of both professions on each other once again raises the question of how journalists and public relations professionals perceive and evaluate each other (Nejiens & Smit, 2006). Are journalist's views of public relations professionals really as negative as previous research shows? Are public relations practitioners more positive in their perceptions of journalists? It seems that lasting issues of both professions feeling misjudged could be reduced by a higher level of understanding and knowing each other better. There have been a few studies which applied coorientational theory to test public relations practitioners' and journalists' views toward each other (Shaw & White, 2004; Stegall & Sanders, 1986; Yun & Yoon, 2011). Here, we propose to build on some of these studies and examine various elements of this complex relationship. How do public relations professionals perceive journalists and vice versa? Is their view of the other profession connected to their own job satisfaction? How do both professions perceive their influence on the reputation of various organizations and how do they estimate the influence the other profession has?

2. Literature review

2.1. Journalists and public relations practitioners—friends or foes?

The value of media relations as a part of modern public relations is largely overestimated. From the public relations perspective, media relations as a tactical function is only a small part of the strategic communication profession. Even though relating with the media is often the most high profile part of public relations, it would be unfair to reduce it only to that. For journalists however, it is often one and the same—they don't seem to perceive that there is anything else public relations specialists do other than relate with the media, often badly (Shaw & White, 2004). This perception shapes the way journalists view the public relations profession. According to Davis (2003) the growth of public relations will make it even harder to differentiate between journalism and public relations, while journalists are becoming more dependent on information subsidies (Jo, 2003).

The term "information subsidy", created by Gandy (1982), labels the type of access to information that does not involve high cost of effort for the receiver. It is the role of public relations specialists to provide information subsidies to journalists and the media (Curtin, 1999). This allows public relations practitioners to affect public opinion and participate in agenda building. There are many studies that give an assessment of the proportion of news that come from press releases (Maat & de Jong, 2012; Tkalac Verčič & Mueller, 2007; Sallot & Johnson, 2006; Cameron, Sallot, & Curtin, 1997) and these estimates reach more than 75% (Macamara, 2002).

Under the right circumstances communicators can become trusted sources and have the role of "journalists in residence" (Curtin, 1999). Conversely, Jeffers (1977) found that journalists view public relations professionals as an obstruction to their quest for truth. They also believe that their status, ethics and skills are greater than those of public relations practitioners. The reason for this negative perception of communicators can be connected to their role as advocates with hidden agendas, who withhold information and compromise on ethics (Turk, 1986). Additionally important for our study, hostility could be traced to journalist's perception that practitioners tend to have higher salaries and higher job satisfaction (Nayman, McKee, & Lattimore, 1977; Yun & Yoon, 2011). As Yun and Yoon state (2010, p. 307):

"There must be something irrational and emotional in journalist's attitude beyond a rational assessment of the quality of media relations: something similar to the feeling of a legitimate child for its younger bastard sibling. In this sense, journalists may clearly 'hate and envy up close' public relations practitioners as their occupation has been on the decline, plagued by job-related problems, while public relations have been on the rise. This unique occupational psyche, resulting from frustration and envy, is seen as the cause of media negativity."

As DeLorme and Fedler (2003) noted, the origin of journalists own problems goes back to late 19th century. They described journalists as: "chronic complainers, forever griping about their long hours, low pay, stress, insecurity, and unpleasant assignments" (2003, p. 114). Various authors underlined the possibility that jealousy fuels journalists' negative perceptions (Nayman et al., 1977; Tilley & Hollings, 2008) because they "resent the higher salaries and better working conditions they perceive practitioners to enjoy" (Sallot & Johnson, 2006, p. 157).

From the perspective of public relations research, the dominant view seems to be that public relations are negatively perceived, underestimated and trivialized, by journalists (Davis, 2009). According to Macamara (2002) there is a whole century of research that shows a very tense and adversarial relationship between the two professions. Wright (2005, p. 103) claims that “. . . the stark reality (is) that many journalists don't like public relations people.” White and Russel (2004, according to Wright, 2005) showed that journalists hold stereotypes about public relations that include lying, hype and cover-ups. However, it seems there are some contradictory conclusions in this respect. Some recent studies show that public relations practitioners tend to be less negative towards journalists (Nejiens & Smit, 2006). (Curtin, 1999; Nejiens & Smit, 2006; Shaw & White, 2004); all found that two groups of professionals have similar values and that their mutual differences are not fundamental (Mellado & Hanusch, 2012).

As Charron (1989) sums it up, the relationship between public relations professionals and journalists is complex and ambiguous, as well as characterized by both conflict and cooperation. One possible approach to investigating this relationship further is the application of the coorientation model.

2.2. Exploring the relationship through the coorientation model

The coorientation model was originally developed to explain why groups of people change attitudes when in relationships with other groups of people (Heider, 1958). The key assumption of the coorientational approach (according to McLeod and Chaffee, 1973) is that the behavior of a person is not based merely on his or her personal construction of the world, but also on the perception of the orientations that others around him or her hold, as well as his or her orientation toward them. The original model was then extended by Newcomb (1953) into numerous studies in interpersonal communication. In public relations, coorientation was elaborated by Broom (1977) to explain relations between various groups in organizations. Coorientation in public relations has been applied in a variety of settings that includes different types of relationships, from international relations (Verčič & Tkalac Verčič, 2007; Verčič, Verčič, & Laco, 2005) to relationships between journalists and public relations professionals (Avery & Lariscy, 2007; Shin & Cameron, 2004; Shaw & White, 2004).

The model includes three key variables that describe how distant or close the views of organizations are to those of their public (Broom & Dozier, 1990), or in this case how distant or close the views of two professions are. Congruency is the degree to which each of the sides believes that the idea or evaluation of the other side is similar to theirs. Accuracy represents an interpersonal construct which is measured by comparing both sides' approximations. It shows the degree to which the approximations of one side match the real attitudes of the other side. Agreement is the degree to which two sides share similar evaluations of a particular issue of common interest. In order to quantify the agreement, it is necessary to calculate the difference between the cognitions on both sides. A greater difference signifies a lower level of agreement (Verčič et al., 2005).

The history of using coorientation theory for investigating journalists and their relationships is quite long, with Aronoff (1975) discovering that journalists have relatively negative attitudes towards communicators primarily because of their news values. Later, similar explorations such as Kopenhaver, Martinson, and Ryan (1984) showed the same tendency, but with lesser levels of intensity. Turk (1986) established that journalists judge practitioners as self-serving and thus less credible. Shaw and White (2004) conducted a study in which they used coorientation theory to analyze the differences between journalism and public relations educators. Their results showed that there was a higher level of agreement with positive statements than the literature would suggest. Journalism educators did not have as negative opinions of public relations as the latter may believe. Shin and Cameron (2004) conducted a web survey of 641 practitioners and journalists and discovered a conflictual relationship between reporters and their sources. Their application of coorientational analysis showed mixed views of the two professions. Journalists and public relations practitioners disagreed and inaccurately predicted each other's responses, which resulted in false dissensus (since inaccurate projections about the views of the other side were more common than their actual disagreement).

Avery and Lariscy (2007) used a coorientation model to compare the uses of social media between public relations practitioners and journalists. Their survey showed a similar overall picture comparing their uses and perceived importance of the tools. The levels of agreement, accuracy and congruency in social media use were high. So, even though there were certain differences, the two professions seem to have shared orientations in their understanding of the other side.

More than 30 years ago Grunig and Hunt (1984) concluded: “Public relations practitioners and the media frequently fail in their dealings with one another.” (1984, p. 225). The main motivation behind this study was to explore what each side thinks of the other and again what they both think each other is thinking about their own profession.

Table 2

Pearson correlation between public relations specialists' statements about their working conditions and their opinion of the journalism profession.

	How would you rate the journalism profession (on a scale from 1 to 5)?
How satisfied are you with your job?	0.055 (p = 0.583)

Table 3

Agreement-average level of agreement between journalists and public relations professionals.

	Journalists	PR professionals	t test			D-result
	M	M	t	df	p	
How would you rate the journalism profession (on a scale from 1 to 5)?	2.4	2.2	1.656	206	0.099	0.2
How would you rate the public relations profession (on a scale from 1 to 5)?	2.7	2.6	1.009	201	0.314	0.1
How strong is the journalists influence on the reputation of the organization they report on?	4.0	3.9	1.435	204	0.153	0.1
How strong is the influence public relations specialists on the reputation of the organization they work for?	3.8	4.0	−1.850	203	0.066	−0.2

3. Research questions

In order to investigate the relationship between journalists and public relations professionals, we formulated two research questions and accompanying hypotheses. The first research question was aimed at exploring the possible connection of journalists' own problems with their attitudes toward the public relation profession. Building on previous studies (Yun & Yoon, 2011), we assumed that there is a significant connection between the level of journalists' (dis)satisfaction with their own working conditions and their perception about public relations. The second research question was focused on discovering the level of mutual congruency, accuracy and agreement between the two professions. In order to test the coorientation of the two groups, we asked them to judge the influence that both professions have on organizational reputation building.

RQ1: To what extent do practitioners and journalists differ in their perceptions of each other, and their views of their profession?

H1a. The more dissatisfied journalists feel about their job, the more negatively they feel about public relations.

H1b. The more dissatisfied public relations professionals feel about their job, the more negatively they feel about journalists.

H1c. The better journalists perceive the working conditions of public relations practitioners compared to their own, the more negative they feel about public relations.

RQ2: How do journalists and public relations practitioners perceive their roles in organizational reputation building?

H2a. Journalists underestimate public relations professionals' perception of influence on organizational reputation building.

H2b. Public relations professionals underestimate journalists' perception of influence on organizational reputation building.

4. Method

In order to answer the research questions, we conducted a survey among public relations professionals and journalists using the coorientation approach. Data was collected by a computer assisted web interview system which allowed standardization, so quality control of administration was ensured. All acquired data was automatically recorded and coded.

The online survey was conducted during a 4 week period, in March of 2015. The sample frame for the journalist population included all members of the Croatian Journalists' Association (N = 554) and for the public relations specialist population, all members of the Croatian Public Relations Association (N = 434). Both of those professional associations cover the majority of all the professionals in each of the fields. All of the members of both societies received an e-mail with an explanation of the study's purpose and a link to the questionnaire. After one month, the survey was closed. 106 journalists completed the questionnaire; with a response rate of 19% and 101 public relations professionals completed the questionnaire, with a response rate of 23%.

The majority of the journalists who participated in the survey mainly report on economic issues (51.9%), closely followed by political journalists (41.5%). Their average number of years in journalism was 15, and 52.8% of them stated that they had some experience in public relations. In the public relations sample, 66.3% of the professionals reported that they primarily work in business public relations, followed by 21.8% who work in political public relations. Average length of professional experience in the public relations sample was 10 years. 56.4 of the public relations professionals stated that they had previous experience in journalism.

Two standardized questionnaires were developed based on previous studies of journalists' perceptions of public relations experts (Mellado & Hanusch, 2012; Nejiens & Smit, 2006; Yun & Yoon, 2011), one for journalists and one for public relations professionals. In both cases, the questionnaires started with some basic demographic questions, followed by a series of items aimed at judging the level of satisfaction with their respective professions. The next section of the questionnaire followed up with a series of five-point scales about journalists' working conditions. Finally, the questionnaires ended with eight five-

Table 4

Accuracy–average level of evaluations by journalists, and predictions by public relations professionals about evaluations by journalists (“What PR people think journalists think”).

	Journalists	PR professionals on journalists	t test			D-result
	M	M	t	df	p	
How would you rate the journalism profession (on a scale from 1 to 5)?	2.4	2.8	−3.177	206	0.002*	−0.4
How would you rate the public relations profession (on a scale from 1 to 5)?	2.7	2.3	2.932	202	0.004*	0.4
How strong is the journalists influence on the reputation of the organization they report on?	4.0	3.9	0.748	204	0.455	0.1
How strong is the influence public relations specialists on the reputation of the organization they work for?	3.8	3.3	3.745	203	0.000**	0.5

* p.

** p.

point scales asking both groups their opinion on their own and each other’s influence on organizational reputation building. In all of the five–point scales 1 corresponded to “not at all” and 5 corresponded to “to a great extent”.

After quantitative data was gathered, we conducted five personal, in–depth interviews with selected journalists, in order to acquire more comprehensive data and explore key findings. The respondents were selected as a purposive sample of journalists who represented both electronic and press media, had more than 20 years of experience and substantial familiarity with public relations specialists and their work. Their answers were transcribed, analyzed by two researchers and then used to gather insight into our data in order to get an additional reference frame for interpreting our research.

5. Results

5.1. Descriptive statistics

The mean level of journalists’ job satisfaction was 3.8 (SD=0.88) which shows they state a relatively high level of satisfaction. Their ranking of job satisfaction was quite close to the one given by public relations specialists’ (M=3.9; SD=0.86). However, journalists stated that their job conditions have somewhat deteriorated during the last five years (M=2.7; SD=1.03), unlike public relations specialists who indicated that in their case job conditions have slightly improved in the same period (M=3.2; SD=0.99). When asked about pay, journalists agreed with the statement that public relations professionals on average have a higher salary (M=3.8; SD=0.86). This was closely mirrored by the estimations of public relations experts (M=3.6; SD=1.18). The question about the typical amount of job related stress (“Do you believe that public relations experts are usually under less stress at work than journalists are?”) showed a statistically significant difference in the answers between the two groups (t=−2.850; p=0.001). Journalists were neutral in their judgment of the level of stress public relations professionals usually have (M=3.0; SD=1.09), while communication experts did not agree (M=2.1; SD=1.02). As for working conditions in general (“Do you believe that public relations experts have better working conditions?”), both groups of respondents agreed. Journalists stated their agreement of 3.6 (SD=0.86) while public relations professionals stated a slightly lower level of agreement of 3.4 (SD=0.95).

We wanted to know how both professions felt about each other, so we asked the journalist sample: “Do you believe that public relations experts are mostly professionals with high moral and ethical standards?” Their average response to this was 2.4 (SD=0.72), which means their collective estimation is close to “disagree”. When asked “Do you believe that the main purpose of public relations is manipulating and controlling the public?” they responded close to “neither agree nor disagree” (M=2.9; SD=0.83). Public relations specialists gave similar answers to the question: “Do you believe journalists respect high ethical and professional standards?” (M=2.3; SD=0.83).

When we directly asked both groups what their opinions on each of the professions were, the responses were somewhat surprising. Both journalists and public relations professionals were quite negative in judging both professions. Public relations experts stated that journalism as a profession deserves an average grade of 2.2 (SD=0.72), while journalists gave their own profession a slightly higher grade of 2.4 (SD=0.77). Public relations specialists gave themselves an average grade of 2.6 (SD=0.73), while journalists had a slightly higher average at 2.7 (SD=0.57).

5.2. Correlations between job satisfaction and opinions of the “other” profession

In order to answer the first research question and subsequent hypotheses, we correlated the results between selected answers from the two groups of professionals. Table 1 shows the answer to H1a—the more dissatisfied journalists feel about their job, the more negatively they feel about public relations. Even though the direction of this correlation was expectedly negative, it was not strong enough to confirm the hypothesis. Table 1 also shows the answer to H1c—the better journalists perceive the working conditions of public relations practitioners compared to their own, the more negatively they feel about public relations. Once again, the correlations were negative, which means the stronger the belief in better working conditions

of public relations specialists, the lower the opinion of their profession. However, none of the correlations were statistically significant and therefore this hypothesis was also rejected.

Table 2 shows the answer to H1b—the more dissatisfied public relations professionals feel about their job, the more negatively they feel about journalists. Even though literature reviews did not point toward this type of a relationship we decided to test a possible reverse thesis and see if there was any type of connection between these perceptions in the public relations group. Interestingly, in this case the correlation was positive, meaning that the higher the level of satisfaction among public relations professionals, the higher their opinion of the journalism profession. Still, the correlation coefficient was not significant, which lead to the rejection of hypothesis H1b.

5.3. Coorientation between journalists and public relations specialists

The coorientation model offers three variables in describing relations—agreement, accuracy, and congruency. Agreement (Table 3) refers to the level to which evaluations of issues between journalists and public relations specialist are similar. Generally, agreement refers to the level to which the two sides have similar evaluation situations, i.e. similar attitudes (Verčič et al., 2005). In order to show the differences in agreement, Table 3 also presents the results of a *t*-test for large independent samples, as well as D-results (difference scores). None of the differences were statistically significant.

Table 4 shows accuracy, which is the similarity between how public relations specialists perceive journalists' attitudes and their actual attitudes. Table 5 shows the similarity between how journalists perceive public relations specialists' attitudes and their actual attitudes. In other words, accuracy refers to the degree to which a prediction of attitudes of one side about the attitudes of the other side is correct. Once again Tables 4 and 5 present results of *t*-tests for large independent samples, as well as D-results, i.e. the differences between arithmetic means. Here certain significant differences start to appear. It seems that public relations experts are less accurate in their prediction of journalists' attitudes than vice versa. In three out of four questions, public relations professionals significantly misjudged journalists' answers. They overestimated the opinion that journalists have of their own profession and they underestimated the opinion journalists have of the public relations profession. They also significantly underestimated the journalists' opinion on the influence they believe public relations people have on the reputation of the organization they work for.

Unlike public relations professionals, journalists showed better results in estimating public relations professionals' attitudes. In three out of four questions they were almost completely correct. However, in assessing the public relations opinion on their own profession they significantly overestimated the answers. Even though public relations specialists gave their own profession a relatively low grade ($M=2.6$), journalists believed that the estimate would be above average ($M=3.7$).

Finally, congruency among attitudes is shown in Tables 6 and 7. Tables also include *t*-tests for large independent samples and D-results (differences between arithmetic means of own evaluations and predictions of other side's evaluations).

Table 5

Accuracy—average level of evaluations by public relations professionals, and predictions by journalists about evaluations by PR professionals (“What journalists think PR people think”).

	PR professionals	Journalists on PR professionals	t test			D-result
	M	M	t	df	p	
How would you rate the journalism profession (on a scale from 1 to 5)?	2.2	2.2	0.341	200	0.733	0
How would you rate the public relations profession (on a scale from 1 to 5)?	2.6	3.7	-0.946	192	0.000**	-1.1
How strong is the journalists influence on the reputation of the organization they report on?	3.9	3.8	0.991	202	0.323	0.1
How strong is the influence public relations specialists on the reputation of the organization they work for?	4.0	4.2	-1.816	202	0.071	0.2

** p.

Table 6

Congruency—average level of evaluations by public relations specialists, and predictions by public relations specialists about evaluations by journalists.

	PR professionals	PR professionals on journalists	t test			D-result
	M	M	t	df	p	
How would you rate the journalism profession (on a scale from 1 to 5)?	2.2	2.8	-4.355	102	0.000*	-0.6
How would you rate the public relations profession (on a scale from 1 to 5)?	2.6	2.3	2.176	102	0.032*	-0.3
How strong is the journalists influence on the reputation of the organization they report on?	3.9	3.9	-0.495	102	0.622	0
How strong is the influence public relations specialists on the reputation of the organization they work for?	4.0	3.3	5.878	102	0.000**	0.7

* p.

** p.

Table 7
 Congruency-average level of evaluations by journalists, and predictions by journalists about evaluations by public relations specialists.

	Journalists	Journalists on PR professionals	t test			D-result
	M	M	t	df	p	
How would you rate the journalism profession (on a scale from 1 to 5)?	2.4	2.2	2.298	98	0.024 [*]	0.2
How would you rate the public relations profession (on a scale from 1 to 5)?	2.7	3.7	-9.551	89	0.000 ^{**}	-1.0
How strong is the journalists influence on the reputation of the organization they report on?	4.0	3.8	2.968	98	0.004 [*]	0.2
How strong is the influence public relations specialists on the reputation of the organization they work for?	3.8	4.2	-3.817	98	0.000 ^{**}	-0.4

^{*} p.
^{**} p.

The second research question (and subsequent hypotheses) was aimed at analyzing how journalists and public relations practitioners perceive their roles in organizational reputation building. In order to test if journalists underestimate public relations professionals' perception of influence on organizational reputation building, we conducted a *t*-test for large independent samples of their accuracy scores. After conducting a *t*-test on the average level of evaluations by public relations professionals, and predictions by journalists about evaluations by communication professionals, the difference was not statistically significant. Thus, hypothesis H2b was rejected.

In order to test if public relations professionals underestimate journalists' perception of influence on organizational reputation building, we, once again, conducted a *t*-test for large independent samples of their accuracy scores. After conducting a *t*-test on the average level of evaluations by journalists, and predictions by public relations professionals about evaluations by journalists, this difference was found not to be statistically significant either. Thus, hypothesis H2a was also rejected.

6. Discussion

What are journalists and public relations specialists thinking of each other and what they both think each other is thinking about their own profession? Is the conventional assumption of a tense and problematic relationship really true, or do these two groups of professionals know and respect each other well? Our research was aimed towards answering two main questions. First, we conducted a correlation analysis between the level of (dis)satisfaction with working conditions of each group and their perceptions about the other profession. We expected these correlations to be negative and significant, but this did not prove to be true. In the journalist group, the direction of the connection was negative. This means that journalists who estimated that public relations professionals had higher salaries, less stress and better working conditions, had a lower estimate of the public relations profession in general. However, since none of the three correlations were significant, our overall assumption can be discarded. In the public relations group, the connection between job satisfaction and the perception of journalism as a profession was positive (once again not significant). It seems that "happier" public relations specialists give journalism higher grades. These results seem to be in line with some of the previous studies on the topic (Yun & Yoon, 2011) and are actually quite optimistic. In spite of the conventional wisdom that there is a love-hate relationship between the two professions, this study shows that maybe it is time to reevaluate this assumption.

Second, we used the coorientational model to analyze the perceptions and cross-perceptions of journalists and public relations experts on their role in organizational reputation building. We tested the level of their consensus by determining coorientation variables, agreement, accuracy and congruency. The level of agreement between the two groups was high in all of the issues measured. Interestingly, both groups judge their own respective professions similarly, and both journalists and public relations professionals give each other's group a higher grade. However, it is quite important to note that they both give themselves and each other below average grades, which is indicative and perhaps of some concern.

Both journalists and public relations experts believe they have a significant influence on organizational reputation. Even though agreement between the respondents is high, both professional groups showed pluralistic ignorance of the other side. This was especially true for the public relations group. In three out of four statements, public relations specialists significantly misestimated journalists' opinions. First, their assessment of how journalists judge their own profession was too high. Journalists seem rather dissatisfied with themselves, but public relations specialists do not perceive this. On the other hand, public relations professionals underestimate the view journalists have of the communication profession. They also significantly undervalue journalists' perceptions of communication experts' influence on organizational reputation building.

It seems public relations specialists underestimate journalists' opinion of the communication profession. They seem to perceive the relationship as more adversarial than it really is. Journalists seem to be better judges of public relations professionals' opinions. The only inaccuracy they show is in how communicators judge their own profession. On this item they significantly overestimate public relations own opinion of themselves, and do not seem to understand the level of dissatisfaction communicators feel. Congruency is essentially the extent to which journalists' perception of issues is the same as their perception of communicators' cognitions about those issues. This measure is used to estimate the difference

of self-perception and the perception of how the other group looks at an issue (Janecek, 2006). In our study, the level of incongruence is high and exists for almost all issues in both professions.

It seems that our results fall in line with some of the more recent studies on the journalist–public relations relationship and actually suggest that there are fewer differences between the two groups than assumed (Avery & Lariscy, 2007). Just as Shaw and White (2004) and Nejiens and Smit (2006) we found support for the conclusion that the situation has improved and the amount of animosity has lessened. However, even though there are fewer differences, the level of understanding is far from perfect. Both groups have a relatively low opinion of their own profession which is a problem in itself. And even though our results did not show a high level of professional jealousy, the interviews with the journalists indicated that they still mostly perceive public relations as nothing more than media relations. Such a myopic view of the communication profession reduces the quality of the working relationship that the two professions have. It seems the main goal in developing this complicated relationship would be to educate journalists about the specifics of the public relations profession, try to reach a higher level of understanding among both professions and work separately on raising the level of how each of the professions perceives the value of their own efforts.

7. Limitations and conclusion

This study is limited by certain methodological and sample issues, mostly connected to our country-specific samples. The study was conducted among Croatian public relations specialists and journalists and this limits the possibility of generalizing our results to other cultural surroundings. We also used a relatively short questionnaire with single item indicators and unidentified reliability and validity.

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