



### Women in Public Relations (1982-2019)

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## Introduction and Rationale

Women in public relations is a topic that has started drawing scholarly attention in 1986 with the Velvet Ghetto study. Amongst other findings, the study argued that women see themselves as technical staff, thus expecting to get paid less than men (Cline et al, 1986, see also Grunig, 1991; 1999; Toth and Grunig, 1993; Aldoory and Toth, 2002; Grunig, 2006; Dozier et al, 2007; Creedon, 2009; Beurer-Zuellig et al, 2009; Pulido Polo, 2012). The research on the position of women in public relations has continued since the Velvet Ghetto study, and some of the issues that are often identified include the glass ceiling, pay gap, lack of mentorship opportunities and stereotyped expectations of leadership style, where leadership is usually seen as a masculine trait (Tench et al, 2017). While the research on women in public relations has originated in the US, this research has also been conducted in other countries. In its annual research on public relations trends, the European Communication Monitor project has also been monitoring the position of women in public relations in Europe<sup>1</sup>. Data show that the position of women has improved since the Velvet Ghetto study; however, the issues with a pay gap, glass ceiling and mentoring persist (see e.g. Dubrowski et al, 2019; CIPR, 2018a; 2017; Place and Vanderman Winter, 2018). Research analysing data collected by the European Communication Monitor established that when one issue gets resolved, new issues tend to emerge (Tench et al, 2017). In other words, an analysis of annual results from European Communication Monitor from 2009 to 2015 disclosed that “while practitioners firstly reported male dominance on higher positions, in subsequent years they reported glass ceiling when it comes to progressing to higher positions, then the lack of influence in departments, then better job security for men and finally, mentoring opportunities that then have a potential impact on leadership” (p. 18). Thus, this analysis has shown a negative trend in the position of women in public relations in Europe over a period of seven years.

Therefore, in this paper, an extensive literature review of works written on women in public relations was conducted to get a comprehensive picture of the situation, to deconstruct the main trends in current research and to identify research gaps. The research question set for the literature analysis was, what are the main trends on women in public relations in the current literature? With this, the paper identified main trends in the literature and the thematic analysis provided an overview of problems women working in public relations face. Since the majority of research is conducted on practitioners, through surveys and interviews, this paper, therefore, provides a good grasp of issues in the industry as documented in the academic research in a period from 1982 until 2019.

## Method

The literature was analysed by searching public relations journals and journals in the field of corporate communications, which have traditionally published public relations work. The journals have been identified using the list provided by the British Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR). The analysed journals were *Public Relations Review*, *Journal of Public Relations Research*, *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, *Journal of*

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<sup>1</sup> All European Communication Monitor's report can be found at this link: <http://www.communicationmonitor.eu/european-communication-monitor-all-reports/>

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3 *Communication Management, Corporate Reputation Review* and *Journal of Brand*  
4 *Management*. The *Public Relations Inquiry* journal was also searched, as this journal provides  
5 a critical view of the public relations industry and some articles tackle the position of women.  
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8 The keyword used for searching articles was 'women public relations'. In addition, Springer's  
9 database was also searched using the same keyword as above. Following the completion of the  
10 initial search, Google Scholar was searched using the same keyword, and after completion of  
11 the initial reading and analysis of the literature, a snowball method of finding articles using  
12 reference lists in reviewed articles was used. The latter provided articles in the *Asia Pacific*  
13 *Public Relations Journal* and *Prism* journals, which were then also searched on its own, using  
14 the same keyword as above.  
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18 After completion of the searches, websites of authors that appeared at least three times in  
19 previous searches were individually searched to identify further articles. These authors were  
20 Kate Fitch, Liz Yeomans, Donnalyin Pompper, Katie Place, Heather Yaxley, Lee Edwards,  
21 Elisabeth Toth, Larissa Grunig and Lynda Aldoory. In addition, works published by the authors  
22 of this paper were added, some of which did not show up in searches. The latter presents a  
23 limitation of this research, as it is possible that some other works also failed to appear in  
24 searches, albeit they have been published. The limitation is also the fact it was only possible to  
25 analyse works published in languages from authors of the paper (besides English, in  
26 Portuguese, Spanish, French, Croatian, Serbian, Slovenian, Dutch, and Georgian using the  
27 same procedure as described above) while the number of works available on women in public  
28 relations is likely higher. However, due to the lack of articles in the majority of countries, the  
29 analysis remains predominantly focused on works published in the English language. In other  
30 words, the analysis and the findings on the position of women in public relations largely present  
31 a Western perspective<sup>2</sup>.  
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37 The total number of analysed articles is 223. The initial search was performed on 15 December  
38 2018 and the last literature search was conducted in June 2019, which also included articles  
39 published in 2019. The analysis of the position of women in public relations intensified in the  
40 period of 1980s, however, the highest number of articles has been published in the period from  
41 2010 to 2019 (figure 1). What is relevant to emphasize is that while the number of articles on  
42 women in public relations has increased, this does not necessarily mean that there is an  
43 increased interest in the field. The number of public relations scholars has increased since the  
44 1980s; however, women and gender in public relations remain a marginal topic in academic  
45 journal articles predominantly focused on crisis and risk communication, digital media, public  
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51 <sup>2</sup> While it was possible to find all literature identified through the above-explained process, there were four works  
52 that were identified through snowballing but it was not possible to find them and use them for the analysis. These  
53 works were published in 1968, 1975, 1983 and 1989. Every effort was made to find these journals in databases  
54 and second-hand book stores, and emails were also sent to professional organisations (e.g. to IABC Research  
55 Foundation), however, to no avail. Therefore, the report remains incomplete in regards to these four publications:  
56 Smith, R. W. (1968). Women in Public Relations. *Public Relations Journal* 24(10), 26-29; Gorney, S. K. (1975).  
57 Status of Women in Public Relations. *Public Relations Journal* 31(5), 10-13; Bates, D. (1983). Will Women  
58 Inherit the Profession? *Public Relations Journal* 39(7), 6; Lance Toth, E. and Cline, C. (1989). Beyond the velvet  
59 ghetto. San Francisco: IABC Research Foundation.  
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relations practice, relationships, strategic communication and strategic management and media relations (Jelen-Sanchez, 2018).

### FIGURE 1 HERE

The main research question for the literature review analysis was,

- What are the main trends on women in public relations in the current literature?

All literature has been analysed by reading every unit of the analysis and writing notes, then reading again and summarising themes that were constantly compared within each decade (the 1980s, 1990s, 2000-2009, 2010-2019) and amongst decades to identify recurring themes and topics of articles that were subject to the analysis. In analysing data, Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach to thematic analysis was adopted, as well as Strauss and Corbin's (1990) approach to coding strategy, both of which was deemed as particularly suitable given the purpose of research and a large number of articles analysed.

Thematic analysis can be defined as "a systematic approach to the analysis of qualitative data that involves identifying themes or patterns of cultural meaning; coding and classifying data (...) according to themes; and interpreting the resulting thematic structures by seeking commonalities, relationships, overarching patterns, theoretical constructs, or explanatory principles" (Lapadat 2010, p. 926). In other words, thematic analysis is mostly centred on identifying where further research is necessary rather than building a new theory, which was particularly relevant for this paper.

In the thematic analysis, coding is a basic tool that helps in identifying recurrent themes. A method from Strauss and Corbin (1990) was deployed, which outlines a constant comparison of analysed data, and the focus is on coding the data throughout (Morse and Richards, 2002). The coding process consisted of,

- Open coding that identified themes emerging from each decade, to compare, conceptualise and categorise the data.
- Axial coding that interrogated the interaction/comparison of themes in each decade and throughout decades.
- Selective coding that identified the most important themes and related them across decades in order to validate findings and provide the general thematic analysis of all decades of research.

## Findings

### The 1980s

The 1980s are the period when scholars increasingly started to research women in public relations. Majority of studies from that period come from American scholars researching the position of women in the US public relations industry, and the concerns expressed in articles centre on the two main themes, **work discrimination** (with subthemes of glass ceiling, pay gap, technician positions for women and educational differences) and **bias against women**

(with subthemes of covert discrimination in promotions, chauvinism, stereotypes against women, and feminization) (table 1).

TABLE 1 HERE

What emerged during this period is that women seem to be locked up in the so-called pink ghetto (Cline et al, 1986) with no real power even when organisations do hire them. Women were reported to face numerous issues such as being paid substantially less than men (VanSlyke, 1983; Cline et al, 1986; Miller, 1988; Lance Toth, 1988; Dozier, 1988; Singh and Smyth, 1988) and facing a glass ceiling (Broom, 1982; VanSlyke, 1983; Scrimger, 1985; Cline et al, 1986; Pratt, 1986; Dozier, 1988). Some practitioners boldly linked their professional status with their private life. For example, one female practitioner said, “why should my husband earn double my salary with roughly comparable education/experience/talent?” (Scrimger, 1985, p. 45).

Women also found themselves predominantly in technician rather than managerial positions. For example, in a study by Broom (1982), the number of women in the industry has reported being increased but when practitioners, male and female, were asked to explain their role women identified their work duties as communication technician rather than managerial. Broom (1982) also reported that women tend to stay in a technician role longer than men even though both women and men were initially hired because of their journalistic skills. This finding was echoed in the report ‘The Velvet Ghetto’ released in 1986, which explored this dichotomy of technician versus manager further (Cline et al, 1986).

According to the largely cited the Velvet ghetto report, women have suffered from bias in regards to their intentions to get married and have children as well as move away if husband’s career takes him elsewhere, which were then impeding their career progress, thus enforcing the patriarchal view that all women desire to be mothers and concentrate on their husband’s careers. In addition, women were seen as problematic when they do have children due to childcare, and traditional biases against women were present, such as not suitable to be good managers, too emotional, lacking corporate spirit, not being good team members and simply not part of the gang (Cline et al, 1986). Researchers also reported covert discrimination such as creating new job titles for men and hiring them at a higher level (Cline et al, 1986, p. I-6).

The relevance of the Velvet ghetto report is in identifying that women are confined to ghettos with little impact “on company’s policy, offering little access to top management” (Cline et al, 1986, p. III-2) and with many empty job titles without meaning. In addition, even when women have been promoted these promotions were smaller “and leave them in the lower positions in the corporate hierarchy” (Cline et al, 1986, p. III-7). This notion has also been recognized in a study conducted in Canada, which showed that women feel they have insufficient influence in the department (Scrimger, 1985) and that their predominant work duty is secretarial or clerical whereas only 9.1 per cent reported doing public relations work as their first job (ibid). The question of power is thus inextricably linked with masculine organisational culture, and early studies reported male networking and bias against women. For example, in a study by Scrimger (1985) one interviewee said “there is male chauvinism aplenty in the upper echelons of corporations and especially in the profession itself. In the CPRS, the term “senior practitioner”

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3 is synonymous with the word male” (p. 45). This chauvinism is also visible in lack of access  
4 to networking, mentorship, and exclusion from events. In the Velvet ghetto study, study  
5 participants revealed they are excluded “from after-work drinks, from lunches, from golf  
6 games. Women are not ‘one of the boys’, not eligible for membership in the old-boy network;  
7 men do not take women seriously; women are not tough enough for management; women are  
8 not breadwinners, so will not take work as seriously; women will get pregnant, her kids will  
9 get sick, her husband will be transferred; women have never developed the skills to be a “‘team  
10 player’ in management” (Cline et al, 1986, p. III-12, emphasis in the original). Some studies  
11 also reported that women do not have opportunities to network and access support work, but  
12 instead of forming their own networks they tend to wait to be accepted to existing ones  
13 (Mathews, 1988).  
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18 However, men were not the only ones seen as impeding the progress of women. The Velvet  
19 ghetto study recognized that older women tend to be the problem sometimes, by expressing the  
20 ‘Queen Bee’ syndrome, or “refusing to help other women achieve the same success they  
21 worked so hard to achieve” (Cline et al, 1986, p. III-13). These prejudices were not present just  
22 amongst US practitioners. In a Nigerian study, Pratt (1986) echoed these views by reporting  
23 on findings that indicate that the number of women in the industry has increased but women  
24 were still seen as unfit for good executives. However, some scholars noted that when some did  
25 not hold this derogatory view of women then they often held a view of a superwoman or a  
26 woman who can do it all; have a career, marry and have children and look after a home (Lance  
27 Toth, 1988), thus imposing unrealistic expectations on women.  
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32 The period of the 1980s was also dominated with several studies on education, for example,  
33 educational qualifications of male and female practitioners, skills that public relations  
34 education should promote as well as whether scholars researching women will be promoted in  
35 predominantly male faculties. When debating education, scholars reported that men often come  
36 with journalism degrees whereas women come with public relations degrees to the industry  
37 (Theus, 1985) and the fact the public relations were starting to attract more women, led towards  
38 scholarly debates as to whether feminization of the industry would depress salaries given that  
39 men go where the money is and normally professions with lots of females do not bring high  
40 financial rewards (Theus, 1985; Cline et al, 1986; Lance Toth, 1988). The study by Theus  
41 (1985) also pointed out that women are more likely to hire other women and that women who  
42 graduate with public relations degrees have to compete for jobs with other female public  
43 relations graduates, as well as men with degrees from journalism.  
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49 However, the most interesting aspect of educational debates during the 1980s is centred on  
50 women’s research skills and the educational levels of public relations practitioners. For  
51 example, a comparative study analysing the US and the UK showed that formal education of  
52 practitioners was similar but practical job learning whilst in the position was more present  
53 among British practitioners than the American ones (VanSlyke, 1988). Following this, Dozier  
54 (1988) proposed for all public relations courses to have modules in research and planning  
55 because the research was recognised as a key skill for progressing to managerial roles. This  
56 came in response to studies arguing that women are predominantly in technician roles rather  
57 than managerial. Dozier (1988) argued that organisational politics preserve male dominance  
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3 and male's power and called for female practitioners to incorporate research into their daily  
4 practice to overcome the concentration of power among men. Dozier (1988) also argued that  
5 women are more inclined to use scientific methods and should use this as their advantage to  
6 break the glass ceiling and get out of technician roles (see also DeRosa and Wilcox, 1989).  
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### 9 **The 1990s**

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11 While scholars in the 1980s established women in public relations as a legitimate point of  
12 enquiry and expressed concerns over unequal position of women in the industry, as well as of  
13 women in public relations higher education departments, during the 1990s scholars engaged in  
14 more complex scholarly enquiries, particularly in terms of engaging with theory development  
15 and establishing women's studies in public relations as a sub-discipline of public relations  
16 scholarship. Research during the 1990s was thus linked with organisational theory and feminist  
17 theory and debated how women's position in public relations should be analysed. Thus, two  
18 main themes in this period are a) **development of feminist theory of public relations** (with  
19 subthemes of radical feminist perspective, women as symmetrical communicators, and  
20 criticism of liberal feminism); b) **organisational theory in public relations** (with subthemes  
21 of glass ceiling and the pay gap, work experiences and satisfaction, and power) (table 2).  
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26 TABLE 2 HERE

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28 In regards to the first theme, feminist theory of public relations, some studies theorised that  
29 women are more inclined to use symmetrical communication than men and that women would  
30 practice a "more cooperative, negotiation style of public relations than would men if women  
31 saw themselves in a managerial-rather than technical-role" (Grunig, 1991, p. 85-86; Grunig,  
32 1999). This is a clear link with radical feminist theory, which traditionally argues that men and  
33 women are different and that women's distinctiveness has to be praised rather than used to  
34 undermine women's prospects (Daly, 1973; Rakow and Nastasia, 2009). Grunig (1991) argued  
35 that women and feminized men are more likely to use two-way, balanced communication, and  
36 thus praised female distinctiveness, which has always been an argument inherent to radical  
37 feminism. This view has also been popularised in the work of Tannen (1990) who argued that  
38 men speak the language of competitiveness, independence and status while women speak the  
39 language that creates intimacy and builds relationships. In the same way, Aldoory (1998)  
40 looked at the leadership skills of female public relations practitioners. While leadership in the  
41 industry can be seen as part of liberal feminist inquiry this research also has elements of radical  
42 feminist inquiry because it assessed women's distinctiveness. Aldoory (1998) thus found that  
43 women tend to use "participative management, attempts to energize staff, and empathy" (p.  
44 97).  
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51 Some scholars also engaged with theory criticism. For example, Creedon (1993) criticised  
52 systems theory of public relations from a radical and socialist feminist point of view (albeit  
53 different forms of feminism are not openly mentioned in her work). In other words, she stated  
54 that systems theory perpetuates class differences and creates a view according to which women  
55 need to seek to be like men to succeed, which is thus undermining desired recognition of  
56 diversity and femininity as an asset, the latter being a point frequently argued by radical  
57 feminists. Liberal and socialist feminism is however discussed in the work by Weaver-Lariscy,  
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3 Cameron and Sweep (1994) who argued that majority of works on women in public relations  
4 come from a liberal feminist perspective and thus concentrate on equal pay and employment  
5 rights, particularly visible in an argument on technical versus managerial roles. The authors  
6 critique liberal feminist research on women in public relations for its over-focus on individual  
7 progress rather than collective, feminine progress and call for socialist feminism in public  
8 relations scholarship, which has a greater potential to address the oppression of women.  
9 Socialist feminism, for example, still addresses pay inequality but from a more collective  
10 perspective of looking into oppression by race, class and sex. The authors conclude that “for  
11 the liberal feminists, the route to change is through the individual, with issues like equal pay  
12 and job status. For socialist feminists, it is more important to change the structure and its  
13 underlying assumptions for all women” (ibid, p. 135-136).  
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19 Some scholars also engaged with organisational theory and public relations industry, with a  
20 focus on how organisational culture affects the position of women (Grunig, 1995) and their  
21 work satisfaction (Serini et al., 1997) while the others also engaged with debating feminist  
22 methodology and advocated for a qualitative interviewing method, which would explore  
23 experiences of women in-depth and provide good recommendations on how to improve their  
24 position (Childers Hon, 1995). On top of that, a field of women’s public relations history started  
25 to develop with some studies analysing work of female public relations practitioners such as,  
26 for example, Jane Stewart (Miller, 1997) and Doris Fleischman (Henry, 1998) or career routes  
27 for women in post-WWII Britain (L’Etang, 2015).  
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31 In addition, some studies engaged in analysing the notion of power and which gender holds  
32 power in organisations. In a study by Grunig (1990), a view that women mostly hold technician  
33 roles is re-enforced, and thus women still reported they did traditional journalistic jobs such as  
34 writing press releases, speeches, newsletters and continued to remain “outside the door” (p.  
35 115) when it comes to decision-making process within organisation. The notion of power was  
36 also found in studies on higher education where women have reported ‘old boys networks’ as  
37 the main reason for not succeeding as much as they could have otherwise (Zoch and Russell,  
38 1991). For example, female faculty had less power and visibility in mentorship positions.  
39 Instead, female staff members were assigned large introductory modules instead of more  
40 prestigious, specialist classes. This brought to the situation that women “spend more time in  
41 preparation as well as in the classroom; to be overloaded with committee assignments; and to  
42 more likely teach in practitioner-oriented disciplines, than in purely academic ones” (Zoch and  
43 Russell, 1991, p. 30-31; see also Yin Tam et al, 1995).  
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### 49 **2000-2009**

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51 The period between 2000 and 2009 presents a continuation with theory development. Several  
52 studies interlinked the position of women with the position of the public relations industry and  
53 its recognition, as well as feminist theory and thus questioned whether liberal feminism helped  
54 women. Therefore, two main themes in this period are **professionalism** (with subthemes of the  
55 position of women and the position of public relations and technical versus managerial  
56 positions) and **feminist theory** (with subthemes of criticism of liberal feminism, feminist  
57 values and PR excellence, power, women more inclined to conduct research and radical  
58 feminist perspective) (table 3).  
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## TABLE 3 HERE

In a study by Grunig, Toth and Childers Hon (2000), authors invited for further research on feminism and feminist values, arguing that feminist values can contribute to excellent public relations practice. Authors additionally argued that we would need to look at issues such as gender, but also race, class and sexuality and see how these elements influence the position of women. With this, public relations scholarship started with research on intersectionality in women's treatment (albeit this is not always explicitly mentioned), which originally started with the work of Black feminist and Law Professor Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw (1989). These were then complemented with studies on diversity in public relations where authors argued that public relations industry must diversify its workforce (Childers Hon and Brunner, 2000; Pompper, 2004). Aldoory (2005) also argued that all data showing feminization of public relations has opened up a question on the effectiveness of feminist theory in addressing "gender and power and the impact of classism and racism on the discipline" (p. 668). While feminist research has helped in establishing the position of women in public relations and while awareness has been raised, Aldoory (2005) argued that future research needs to look at notions of power and difference. Many studies in this period indeed looked at these issues and analysed the notion of power. In that, the authors argued that power comes from several factors, such as managerial role enactment, inclusion in the dominant coalition, reporting relationship, employee support and department structure (O'Neill, 2003a). Some authors also directly questioned liberal feminism by arguing it did not work because once the number of women in public relations increased it did not help women obtaining power and higher rated positions (Aldoory and Toth, 2002).

This criticism is linked with women still occupying predominantly technical roles, which was the cornerstone of research in previous decades and from the early days of public relations research on women. The fact that women are in technical position then naturally leads to the situation that they earn less than men (Aldoory and Toth, 2002; Grunig, 2006; Dozier et al, 2007; Creedon, 2009; Beurer-Zuellig et al, 2009) and generally have less power (Grunig, 2006; Fröhlich and Peters, 2007; Aldoory et al, 2008; Edwards, 2009). Nevertheless, even when women are put in a higher position, they have less power than male managers. For example, in a study by O'Neill (2003a) women reported exclusion from power structures, particularly from formal and relationship power and this put them in a situation to have less influence in the organisation. The latter particularly applies to structural power, due to women's traditional exclusion from old networks. However, research also reported that when women work in a women-only environment they still embrace masculine methods of competition and there does not seem to be harmony but power struggle again (Fröhlich and Peters, 2007).

Some scholars also continued with studying women's inclination toward research. For example, Grunig (2006) argued that women express more interest in research than men and generally they do it more. Thus, any real difference in performance between men and women predominantly comes from socialisation in the organisation rather than biology. Similarly, in a study by Mendoza (2007) research was emphasized as a key skill for public relations practitioners. However, the most meaningful finding can be found in a study by Sha and Toth (2005) where authors interviewed young professionals only to realise that male young

professionals express less agreement with discrimination of women in the industry, thus effectively undermining the view that the problem is in old white men. The problem exists at all levels and that many men lack the ability to understand the position of women and how the system is designed to predominantly benefit men.

### 2010-2019

In the last analysed period, the two main themes identified are **work discrimination** (with subthemes of technical versus managerial positions, glass ceiling and the pay gap, masculine work culture, and diversity) and **bias against women** (with subthemes of stereotypes about women's organisational skills, power, stereotypes on communication skills and intersectionality and criticism of liberal feminism) (table 4).

#### TABLE 4 HERE

While it is clear that in the first two analysed periods liberal feminism perspective dominated, with some works coming from radical and socialist feminism, in the last period scholars turned towards analysing work discrimination from both liberal (technical versus managerial positions, glass ceiling and the pay gap) and radical feminist perspectives (masculine work culture and diversity).

According to scholars' observations, between 2010 and 2019 women were still underrepresented in leadership positions (Place and Varderman Winter, 2018; Aleman et al, 2018; CIPR, 2018a; Tench et al, 2017; Soria and Gomez, 2017; Yeomans, 2014; CIPR, 2014b; Fitch and Third, 2010) and some data showed that number to be up to 80 per cent (Dubrowski et al, 2019). In addition, studies showed that pay gap is a persistent problem and that both pay gap and the glass ceiling issues are still linked to the fact women primarily occupy technical roles (Moreno et al, 2018a; Moreno et al, 2017; Moreno et al, 2015; CIPR, 2018a; Tench et al, 2017; Varderman-Winer and Place, 2017; CIPR, 2017; CIPR, 2017a; CIPR, 2016b; CIPR, 2014a; Andrade and Sobreira, 2013; Pulido Polo, 2012).

Stereotypes against women followed the feminization of the public relations professionalism debate. For example, some studies showed that men are still believed to have more organisational power while women are believed to have strong media and communication skills (Lee et al., 2018). Nevertheless, some scholars also recognised that "gender socialization may play a role in women practitioners' power-control and use of alpha and omega practices. It is possible that women use alpha practices most often because they have been socialized to act less aggressively when they employ omega strategies" (Place, 2012, p. 447).

Stereotypes also include seeing women as more inclined to have good communication skills and to be more dedicated to personal communication that builds relationships. However, some studies argued that this is not necessarily the case. For example, in a study by Verhoeven and Aarts (2010) women expressed more appreciation towards social media communication and correctly predicted its relevance, whilst in a study by Tench, Moreno and Topić (2017) women have shown to be more inclined towards emails and social media communication with men expressing more inclination towards the phone and face-to-face communication, thus going against the usual stereotype of women preferring relationship-building form of communication.

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3 However, the biggest issue with stereotypes came from media and popular culture. In a study  
4 by Fitch (2015a), it appeared that practitioners are always portrayed as male, white and  
5 untrustworthy or unhelpful while female practitioners are portrayed as love interest and white,  
6 middle class, young, desirable and single. Public relations scholarship dismisses these  
7 stereotypes as inaccurate and not representative of the industry, however, Fitch (2015a) also  
8 argues that the popular culture representation of public relations is gendered because women  
9 are often portrayed as trivial while men are portrayed as important (see also Johnston, 2010).

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13 In the last decade, more studies tackling diversity appeared arguing that public relations are  
14 still dominated by white men (in leadership positions) and white women (in technical  
15 positions). For example, Varderman-Winter and Place (2017) argued that a lack of diversity  
16 still remains a problem in the public relations industry with most of the research being  
17 anecdotal. They also argued that intersectional identities have a link with the pay gap and this  
18 presents a historical problem because “historically, women and white practitioners have  
19 dominated the public relations field” (p. 326). In other words, women of colour face dual  
20 discrimination and are generally paid less than white women in the same position. In this way,  
21 women of colour are discriminated as women (because women generally get paid less than  
22 men) and then also as women of colour because they are paid less than white women too.

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27 Other scholars also argued that since women already constitute the majority in the field, there  
28 is a need to move away from comparing women with men and actually compare women with  
29 women “and approach practice in context so that its daily logic and dynamic can be observed”  
30 (Edwards, 2009, p. 253, cited in Pompper, 2012, p. 89). In addition, it has been recognised that  
31 we must understand different groups and the value they bring to the society so that the work  
32 produced characterizes the society and its wider social norms (Edwards, 2011).

### 33 34 35 36 **A General Thematic Analysis: Literature Trends in the Period between 1982 and 2019**

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38 When looking at all identified themes, during analysed periods (the 1980s, 1990s, 2000-2009,  
39 2010-2019) it appears that the majority of work would fit into three general themes,

- 40  
41 a) **Liberal feminist perspectives** where scholars have analysed issues such as glass  
42 ceiling and pay gap, work discrimination (such as the fact that women can mostly be  
43 found in technical positions, lack of mentorship opportunities, etc.) and the power that  
44 women simply do not hold due to their low status within organisations.  
45  
46 b) **Radical feminist perspectives** where scholars have started to analyse diversity in  
47 public relations, intersectionality, a lack of opportunities for women, women’s  
48 distinctiveness (e.g. such as women being seen as more inclined to do research and  
49 having different ways of doing things) and criticism of liberal feminism that did not  
50 solve problems for women.  
51  
52 c) **Theory development** where scholars engaged with developing an organisational  
53 theory of public relations and thus analysing the position of women in the organisational  
54 setting. This has a clear link with liberal feminist perspectives as this line of research is  
55 also concerned predominantly with women advancing in their careers. In addition,  
56 scholars engaged with developing feminist public relations theory and  
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3 professionalization of the field, which was in some cases linked to the position of  
4 women (table 5).  
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7 **TABLE 5 HERE**

8 While there are some differences in the framework under which the same issue was sometimes  
9 analysed, the concerns persist through time. The issue of pay gap and glass ceiling, for example,  
10 has been analysed as part of work discrimination studies in the 1980s while this same issue  
11 belongs under the organisational theory of public relations in the 1990s. In a period between  
12 2000 and 2009, this issue has been analysed under professionalism debates, and in the final  
13 period (2010-2019) it returned to work discrimination concerns. Thus, the debate on  
14 discrimination of women has reached a full circle in four decades of research and returned to  
15 the discriminatory work environment. Even though the position of women has significantly  
16 improved since the early days, the reality is that many women still cannot progress in their  
17 careers.  
18

19 While bias against women has been recognised in the 1980s in the form of chauvinism, covert  
20 discrimination and stereotypes and biases against women (e.g. women not being good team  
21 players), in the last analysed period (2010-2019) this issue returned to the agenda with women  
22 being recognised through stereotypical communication skills, which naturally leads them to  
23 technical positions. Recent research, however, recognised the issue of masculinity in  
24 preventing some women from obtaining leadership positions due to lack of recognition of  
25 diversity in leadership styles.  
26

27 In summary, the majority of research conducted on women in public relations comes from a  
28 liberal feminist perspective and thus heavily concentrates on the glass ceiling, pay gap, career  
29 opportunities and career hurdles for women. However, as some scholars critique, these  
30 considerations and activism did not help women significantly and, in a way, it seems feasible  
31 to argue that liberal feminism in itself is somewhat positivist and only identifies a problem  
32 without being able to tackle the root of the issue.  
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41 **Conclusion**

42 The analysis of the literature indicates that if four decades of academic research continually  
43 show prejudices and discrimination towards women, there is something to say about the system  
44 that prevents women from meeting their full potential and, for example, occupy leadership  
45 positions. The findings from this paper are clearly linked with the analysis of European  
46 Communication Monitor surveys conducted on women in public relations in Europe, where  
47 Tench and Topić (2017) reported that new forms of inequality emerge as one issue gets close  
48 to resolving, which then causes negative trends in the equality of women in the public relations  
49 industry. The future research should look at these trends more closely and explore why is there  
50 a constant inequality of women in the public relations industry.  
51

52 In this respect, criticism of liberal feminism seems in place, and calls from authors with radical  
53 feminist perspectives seem appealing. Future research, therefore, needs to look at the position  
54 of women in public relations through radical lenses and investigate the organisational and  
55 social structures. Radical feminism argues that women and men are fundamentally different  
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and these differences then translate to, for example, differences in communication style, leadership style, and also affect interactions in organisations (Rakow and Nastasia, 2009).

The radical feminist framework can, thus, be particularly useful for analysing the position of women in public relations because it enables going forward from mere analysis of the pay gap and glass ceiling (which is usually done from the liberal feminist perspective according to which women and men are to be seen as individuals with the same potential to achievement, see Nes, 1989). This enables us to move forward and analyse issues such as the impact of masculinity and masculine organisational structures on women, power struggle within organisations, the issue of Queen Bee syndrome and women embracing masculine patterns to succeed because organisations still operate under masculine patterns. Similar research, for example, has already been done in journalism studies where some authors argued that the newsroom culture is so masculine that women have to be bloke-ified to succeed, which is not possible for the majority of women. This then also leads to the situation that younger women cannot identify with masculine women and see them as role models (Mills, 2014; Topić, 2018). In the same way, the future research on women in public relations should look at the work culture in the public relations industry and explore whether the work culture is masculine to the point that women cannot succeed unless they embrace masculine ways of working and communicating.

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Figure 1. Articles per decade

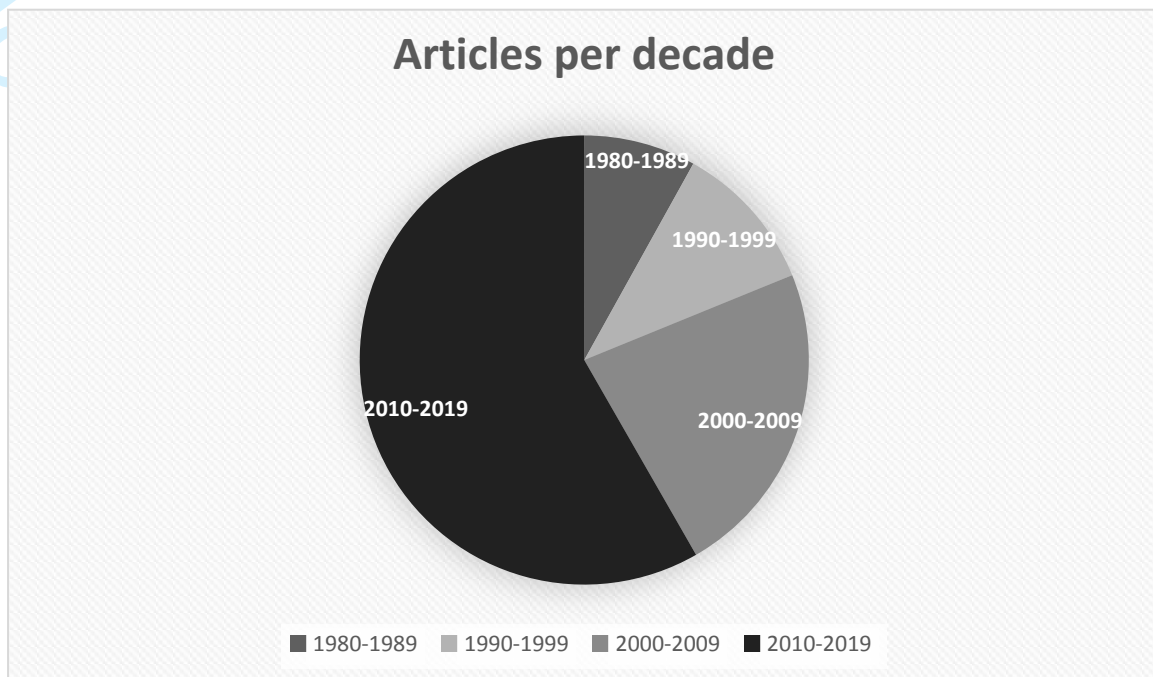


Table 1. Main themes in the 1980s

MAIN THEMES	SUB-THEMES
Work discrimination	Glass ceiling Pay gap Technician positions for women Educational differences
Bias against women	Covert discrimination in promotions Chauvinism Stereotypes against women Feminization

Table 2. Themes in the 1990s

MAIN THEMES	SUB-THEMES
Development of feminist theory of public relations	Radical feminist perspective Women as symmetrical communicators Criticism of liberal feminism
Organisational theory in public relations	Glass ceiling and pay gap Work experiences and satisfaction Power

Table 3. Themes in the period between 2000 and 2009

MAIN THEMES	SUB-THEMES
Professionalism	The position of women and the position of public relations Technical vs managerial positions

Feminist theory	Criticism of liberal feminism Feminist values and PR excellence Power Women more inclined to do research Radical feminist perspective

**Table 4. Themes in the period between 2010 and 2019**

MAIN THEMES	SUB-THEMES
Work discrimination	Technical vs managerial positions Glass ceiling and pay gap Masculine work culture Diversity
Bias against women	Stereotypes about women's organisational skills Power Stereotypes on communication skills Intersectionality and criticism of liberal feminism

**Table 5: Thematic Analysis: Main Literature Themes (1982-2019)**

MAIN THEMES	SUB-THEMES
Liberal feminist perspectives	Glass ceiling and pay gap Work discrimination Power
Radical feminist perspectives	Diversity and women's distinctiveness Intersectionality Criticism of liberal feminism
Theory development	Organisational theory Professionalism Feminist theory of PR