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# Public Relations for Prosocial Change: A Case Study of a Nonprofit Organization's Efforts to Gain Visibility and Support for its Cause

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ABSTRACT

Public Relations for Prosocial Change: A Case Study of a

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This study explores the theory of prosocial public relations as proposed by Wakefield, Burnett, and van Dusen (2011). The propositions put forth by the theory are that in gaining visibility and support for prosocial causes, an organization will engage in non-confrontational (prosocial) public relations by building up internal resources, reaching out to target publics, and making connections with those publics related to the cause. This single-case study explored the public relations and communication tactics of a nonprofit organization whose mission is to provide aid and service to the poor. A Council of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul located in the Western United States served as the case. Observations from this study were made through analysis of documentation and archival records and were supported through interviews with key staff members of the Society and field observations. The findings support the theory of prosocial public relations in that communication and public relations are vital aspects in the work of the nonprofit as it strives to gain visibility and support for the cause. Observations from the case study support that the Society builds up, reaches out, and connects with key publics. In addition, based on data, a fourth element of prosocial public relations, nurturing relationships, is proposed. This study begins to establish some of the public relations methods of how a successful prosocial nonprofit organization can build up, reach out, make connections, and nurture relationships through communication.

Keywords: Public relations, activism, prosocial, nonprofit, prosocial public relations, case study, The Society of St. Vincent de Paul

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**Introduction**

Radicals, revolutionaries, visionaries, philanthropists, idealists, insurgents—history has

placed many different labels on the people who challenge the status quo and call for change.

Regardless of the moniker, these are the groups and individuals who strive to align the way

things are in communities, countries, or on a larger scale, the world, with the way they believe

things ought to be, usually with the intent to improve society. For better or worse, these

proponents of change are all involved in activism. Activism can be defined as purposive action to

bring about social, political, economic, or environmental change. When activists materialize in

society as legitimate organizations, society gives them more defined names such as special

interest groups, nonprofits, or nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). The physical emergence

of NGOs, nonprofits, and special interest groups is ever growing. According to the National

Center for Charitable Statistics (NCCS, 2011), there are currently more than 1.5 million

nonprofit organizations in the United States alone. Of those 1.5 million, approximately 5,600

nonprofit organizations operate internationally (Reid & Kerlin, 2006). So far, the research on

these different entities has been disjointed, having no specific terminology or theoretical

structure to pull it together. But interest groups, nonprofits, and NGOs are all involved in the

pursuit of change as they campaign for various causes; therefore, for purposes here, these groups

will all be drawn together under the blanket term of activists.

Despite their essential role in society as advocates of change (Holtzhausen, 2007; Smith

& Ferguson, 2010), in public relations literature activism is not usually portrayed in positive

prose. All too often activists receive the most attention when they resort to means of civil

disturbance, such as protests, riots, high profile lawsuits, etc., in order to gain visibility. In fact, often activists receive mixed reviews both in the media and in scholarly literature. Broadcast, print, and online publications are filled with either applause or condemnation for the latest activist movements; whether it is disaster relief efforts in Japan or protestors in Egypt. Scholars too tend to shift between positive and negative portrayals of activism and activists, sometimes with praise and censure in the same breath. Many concede that activism is a necessary voice for democracy (Heath, 1997; Holtzhausen, 2000), yet it is with a negative emphasis on opposition that activists have been studied. The dominant perspective has viewed activism as a force which opposes governments, corporations, and other powerful institutions in a context of "the activist" versus "the organization." The situation is generally presented with the activist using pressure and confrontation to elicit change from an organization that is unwilling to adjust according to demands (Smith & Ferguson, 2010).

According to Wakefield, Burnett, and van Dusen (2011), portrayals of activism as oppositional and disruptive may make sense when activist are truly confrontational; however, the negative portrayal of activism is ultimately detrimental because, "this narrow framing excludes the broader spectrum of activist groups seeking to generate change in society in positive ways" (p. 5) and through positive means. These groups do not intend to cause disruption through confrontational methods of communication or to oppose establishments. Instead they seek to create awareness for their cause and gain support in promoting prosocial change. There are hundreds of thousands of activist special interest groups, nonprofits, and NGOs, which seek to generate change in positive ways but which lack important theoretical research to aid them in their goals.

**Public Relations for Prosocial Change: A Missing Theory in Activist Activities**

In their paper *Public Relations for Prosocial Activism,* Wakefield et al. (2011) suggested a framework in which to discuss activism that includes these heretofore understudied groups that engage in "prosocial" causes and communication. The authors introduced the term p*rosocial activism* which encompasses the type of activism that "stems from theoretically defined *prosocial motives—*altruistic behaviors whose singular goal is to improve the welfare of others" (Wakefield et al., 2011, p. 3). Rather than confrontation, these prosocial activists engage in more cooperative means of achieving their altruistic goals. Wakefield et al. explained:

> Prosocial activism is not devised to create conflict; such negative action would seem in direct opposition with their cause. Rather prosocial activists focus on the betterment of society by helping those who are not in a position to help themselves. Prosocial activists work to communicate and cooperate, advocating and assisting a cause through their own means or with the voluntary help of other entities. (p. 11)

The difference between confrontational activism and prosocial activism exists in their underlying motives, and also in the organizational methods and activities used to gain public visibility and reach out to target publics. Public relations as used by activists, and theory to guide their unique endeavors, are areas that are understudied, to say the least. Heath and Waymer (2009) stated, "If we think that public relations is limited to business promotion, we can ignore the promotional efforts by activists to call attention to, frame, and advocate one or many issue positions" (p. 195).

The study of activist public relations, when it is explored, has been limited mostly to confrontational methods and organizational defense procedures. Wakefield et al. (2011) proposed that while confrontational activists and prosocial activists will inevitably have some

similar methods of public relations, "there is a significant, theoretical difference in the way these groups try to foster influence, and these differences are critical to realistic discussions of activism and the public relations efforts that support activist causes" (p. 7). The gap that exists in the literature regarding groups engaged in prosocial causes leaves their methods of public relations unnoticed and underutilized. Furthermore, the lack of theory and research surrounding non-confrontational methods of gaining visibility and support leaves practitioners working in the field with adaptations of business or government public relations at best, or guess work and trial and error at worst.

According to scholars, formalized public relations are making a significant difference in the survival and effectiveness of activist movements (Holtzhausen, 2007). For these prosocial groups focused on doing good through positive methods, public relations is their lifeblood; without it they would not be able to accumulate the support, funds, and attention they need to carry out their operations. In addition, these groups need to target specific publics and build strong, mutually beneficial relationships; or else these entities would presumably cease to exist. On this subject Wakefield et al. (2011) posited:

> Prosocial causes can be enhanced through stronger organizations and better public
> relations programs which target and reach out to their stakeholders for optimal results;
> they can lift their voice above the crowd, across the globe, and help to achieve at least
> some of the changes the world and the people in it so drastically need. (p. 26)

Understanding and classifying the differing techniques and strategies these groups use will add depth of understanding to public relations research, especially in the areas of prosocial nonprofit and activist research.

The following review of literature will consider the spectrum of activist communication from confrontational to prosocial as well as the relevant motivations behind and tactics used by activists to gain visibility and support. Some of the compositions that have been penned on the topic of activism and public relations will be reviewed, taking into consideration how existing public relations theory relates to the actual practice of activist public relations. These previous foundations will be used to begin to answer some of the questions relating to activist public relations. The proposed elements of prosocial public relations as posed by Wakefield et al. (2011), methods of building up, making connections, and reaching out, will be addressed using past research to develop a blueprint to guide the exploration of public relations practices in prosocial activist organizations.

This exploratory study asks the questions: (1) does public relations and communication play an important role in prosocial activist organizations as they seek to gain visibility and support for their cause, and (2) can the proposed elements of prosocial public relations be identified in a prosocial organization? Using a single-case study design the researcher used the four models of public relations (Grunig & Hunt, 1984) and ten strategies of negotiation (Plowman, 2007) to gauge the nature of the case study's organization's relationship with key publics though various communication tools and interpersonal interactions. The methods and evidence for building up, making connections, and reaching out were identified as well as other practices important to creating and maintaining positive relationships with key publics. The purpose of this study is to begin to fill a hole in public relations literature for non-confrontational methods of activist communication or prosocial public relations. Closer examination of this sector is necessary to advance the practice of public relations, especially for nonprofit, NGOs, and special interest organizations. The results and observations of this case aim to commence a

conversation and further examination of the methods and tactics used by prosocial activist organizations in public relations as they communicate and engage with key publics.

## Review of Literature

Within the realm of business communication the everyday functions of the organization are not always seen as important components of public relations. Public relations practitioners often do not serve management functions, and relationships with the publics are often taken for granted until a crisis emerges. One speculative reason this may be is that business operations are largely self-serving, without thought for affected publics beyond their own stockholders. On the other hand, within the realm of nonprofits, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and special interest groups, public relations and communication take on a much more managerial role (Holtzhausen, 2007; Smith & Ferguson, 2010). This may be because activist organizations exist to serve specific publics and the success or failure of their cause rests on the relationships between the organization and its publics. Without visibility, volunteers, and funds, activists have little hope of gaining support for their causes. To gain support activist groups must employ public relations. Some organizations do it strategically, supported by professionals and theory; others use it without realizing it, as a visceral sort of public relations. In either sense, public relations can be considered as playing a key role within activist organizations (Boyer, 1997; Heath & Waymer, 2009), in addition to promoting awareness for a cause. In fact, Boyer (1997) stated that "by adopting the perspective that communications and public relations are critical to carrying out the mission of a nonprofit and a powerful tool in fund raising, it becomes too important to ignore" (p. 484).

Much of the prior research on activist public relations is disjointed, lacking theory and terminology to tie it together. At times the claims are conflicting, portraying activists either as

enemies of corporate and government public relations or as kindred enterprises with similar objectives. Much of the literature discusses confrontational communication methods used by activists against corporate or political establishments and the public relations methods used by organizations to defend against activism (Kim & Sriramesh, 2009). For the most part, these discourses present a homogeneous version of activist organizations when, in fact, activist organizations may take diverse forms.

The following paragraphs will discuss the change agent spectrum recommended by Wakefield et al. (2011) to distinguish between varying types of activist groups based on their motives and objectives; the authors termed these categories confrontational activists, advocacy activists, and prosocial activists. Wakefield et al. proposed in their spectrum that activists use different methods of public relations based on their position within the spectrum and that the nature of the communication ranges between confrontational and non-confrontational, or prosocial. The nature of the activist group's communication within the spectrum will be discussed, as well as strategies of negotiation and Grunig and Hunt's (1984) models of public relations and how these areas relate to activist communication and relationships with key publics. Wakefield et al.'s change-agent spectrum constitutes the groundwork toward a specific brand of public relations practice used primarily by activists engaged in prosocial causes, called prosocial public relations. Prosocial public relations includes strategies to build up internally, make connections, and reach out to publics. The conclusion of this review of literature will begin an investigation into these aspects of prosocial public relations.

**The Change Agent Spectrum: From Confrontational to Prosocial**

Agents of change, activists, nonprofits, NGOs – regardless of the label, activists often play the villain in public relations literature. The dominant perspective in much of public

relations literature seems to be that activist organizations exist mainly to pressure, harass, or otherwise interfere with corporations and governments. This perspective has confined the study of public relations tactics within the activist sphere largely to one of two areas: (1) the confrontational methods used by activists who target governments and businesses to elicit change and/or (2) the public relations methods governments and businesses use to defend against activism (Heath, 1997; Kim & Sriramesh, 2009). Within both of these areas the good which activists are capable of is overshadowed by the methods they use and the negative framing of the situation. Because of confrontational methods, like boycotts, strikes, or protests, activists are often portrayed as disturbers of the peace, aggressors who vigorously pursue their objectives at any cost. Although these methods create the attention activists desire, the old adage does not hold true that "any press is good press," especially in cases of extreme disruptive communication. To illustrate this point, a group of Chechen activists were relatively unheard of internationally until they seized a crowded Moscow theater and held 850 people hostage in October 2002. The activists wanted Russian troops to withdraw from Chechnya and called for an end to the Second Chechen war. Because of their overly aggressive methods not only did they fail to win international sympathy for their plight, but they also cast other, more peaceful groups striving to end conflict in Chechnya into the same shadow of negativity. This example illustrates two problems with the overexposure of confrontational methods of communication: (1) attack methods often result in opposition to the change desired and (2) overexposure creates a stereotype that *all* activist communication must be confrontational.

The stereotype persists even when the pursuits and tactics of activists are not confrontational. Negativity arises because the-activist-versus-the-organization perspective frames activism as a hindrance to "business as usual." In other words, activism is seen as a

limiting factor which inhibits the effectiveness of businesses, governments, and other organizations (L. Grunig, 1992; Kim & Sriramesh, 2009). This is why many of the public relations treatises on the subject focus on how organizations can develop effective defenses against activist movements. Holtzhausen (2000) reproached this approach of framing activism as the inherent enemy of organizations by saying, "*Revolutionary* and *radical* …should not be interpreted in the sense of violence and the overthrow of government but rather should be read as bringing about fundamental change in society and addressing societal problems at the very event or core" (p. 99).

Viewing activism as a problem organizations need to defend against becomes a hindrance to other forms of activism which seek positive change without interfering in organizational operations. In fact, the two predominant areas of activist study ignore the preponderance of activist organizations that do not engage in conflict or confrontation.

Heath (1997) stated that "how we view special interest advocacy and agitation depends on who we believe activists are and how we define their political role" (p. 155); many scholars agree that activism is an essential part of society because it is a driving force for positive change in the world (Holtzhausen, 2007; Smith and Ferguson, 2010; Wakefield et al., 2011). Smith and Ferguson (2010), for one, claimed that an activist's social role is to "elevate a society's value standards" (p. 396). Holtzhausen (2007) wrote that healthy activism operates independent of governments and businesses, giving voice to citizens or societies which would otherwise be voiceless. Activist groups, according to Heath (1997), "help people exert power collectively that they lack individually" and "speak to reveal problems and inject values into dialogues by which issues are judged and solutions are weighed" (p. 153). Obviously, there is more than one way to

view special interest groups, and, like Heath says, this view can change depending on the role they play in society—whether it be disruptive or cooperative.

Gladwell (2010) said, "Where activists were once defined by their causes, they are now defined by their tools" (p. 2). An activist's most powerful tool is, arguably, communications and public relations (Wakefield et al., 2011). Communications is the means by which activists call for attention. Through various forms of communication, such as brochures, petitions, strikes, the Internet, advocacy, negotiation, etc., activists bring visibility and support to their causes; in short, communication is invaluable to creating awareness, raising funds, organizing events, motivating and rallying volunteers, and otherwise working to bring about societal change. Public relations is a vital element for activists, going hand in hand with communication, because the relationships between an activist organization and its key publics can make or break a cause. Without funds from donors, or volunteers, or the support of other key publics intimately connected with the cause, activists cease to exist.

Drawing out the idea of defining activists by their tools, in their paper *Carving a Theoretical Niche for Nonprofit Communication,* Wakefield and Burnett (2011) begin by classifying a range of three types of activism: confrontational activism, advocacy activism, and prosocial activism. These groups are differentiated firstly by their motivations, and secondly by their behaviors or actions. Wakefield and Burnett stated that there is a significant, theoretical difference in the motivations between confrontational and prosocial groups and "understanding these differences is critical to realistic discussions of activism and the public relations efforts that support activist causes" (p. 5).

The motivations of activists relate to the activities and methods they use to advance their causes. J. E. Grunig (1992) said that activist groups seek "to influence and change a condition

through means that range from education to violence" (p. 504). Other scholars also agree that there is a range within activist methods that spans from the extremely violent to the highly civil (Bob, 2005; L. Grunig, 1992; Tkalac & Pavicic, 2009). Berger (2005) classified activist tools in a similar light; he termed activist methods as either unsanctioned resistance (whistle-blowing, leaks to the press about corporate actions, etc.) or sanctioned resistance (gaining more education, becoming more knowledgeable about internal political maneuvering, etc.) (as cited in Bourland-Davis, Thompson, & Brooks, 2010). Wakefield et al. (2011) labeled the activist activity as a range between disruptive and cooperative.

Wakefield et al.'s (2011) spectrum distinguished between the social environment in which activism is framed, the methods employed to reach their goal, and societal views of those actions. This theoretical framework and terminology is necessary to help structuralize the amorphous nature of activism and begin to frame the discussion of public relations used by prosocial activist groups. The following paragraphs will discuss confrontational, prosocial, and advocacy activism, and the underlying motivations and objectives of each type that lead to the methods they employ.

**Confrontational activism.** Confrontational activism considers the purposeful creation of conflict as the most effective way to gain power and establish legitimacy over the dominant institutions of society (Wakefield & Burnett, 2011). The fact that these groups see the "dominant institutions" as obstacles to their goals creates an inherent confrontational environment, similar to the activist-versus-organization paradigm which implies that activists are the natural enemy to organizations. This view relates to Kim and Sriramesh's (2009) analysis that activism attaches an intrinsic element of targeting an established entity such as a government or business. The authors defined activism as:

The coordinated effort of a group that organizes voluntarily in an effort to solve problems

that threaten the common interest of members of the group. In the process of problem

solving, core members of the group attract other social constituents or publics, create and

maintain a shared collective identity among members for the time being, and mobilize

resources and power to influence the problem-causing entity's decision or action through

communicative action such as education, negotiation, persuasion, pressure tactics, or

force. (Kim & Sriramesh, 2009, p. 82)

While education, negotiation, and persuasion are not inherently confrontational practices,

because the activity is framed as directed at a "problem-causing entity" it fits the definition of

confrontational. A problem-causing entity may include institutions that are seen as obstacles, or

it can be seen as the source of the social ill which the activist wishes to remedy. Examples of this

might include anti-sweatshop or child labor activists. While the goal to end child labor is

certainly positive, the activist group would be considered confrontational because its activities

are targeted toward business organizations and would most likely be viewed as disruptive to their

perceived social order. Tkalac & Pavicic (2009) related the case of an activist group working

against Nike to eradicate child labor in Pakistan. The activist's actions resulted in a 20 percent

decline in the average Pakistani household income. This is a case where the decreased income of

families may be viewed culturally as a worse societal option when compared with child labor.

Heath (1997), in his book *Strategic Issues Management*, framed activism, or

confrontational activism, in five stages: strain (problem recognition), mobilization,

confrontation, negotiation, and resolution. Explaining strain in the words of Smelser (1963)

Heath quoted that strain is the result "from a comparison of what is versus what should be"

(Smelser, 1963, as cited in Heath, 1997, p. 165), and "is most persuasive when established social,

economic, or political norms are violated and expectations go unmet" (Heath, 1997, p. 166). Once an activist public recognizes strain, they mobilize against the problem-causing entity. Effective mobilization, as defined by Oberschall (1973), is a mass show of widespread support. Support is often difficult to demonstrate which is why activists "frequently resort to mass rallies, demonstrations, petitions, and other forms of visible aggression of the discontented groups and their sympathizers" (Oberschall, 1973, p. 308). The provocative displays of support are confrontational in nature, but the real confrontation that results, according to Heath, is when activist petitions go unheard and unheeded by the organization. Activists then attempt to force the organization to recognize their demands. In the author's words, "They use confrontation to polarize society to choose between their position and that of their corporate or governmental adversaries" (Heath, 1997, p. 172-73).

Polarizing confrontational tactics include, but are not limited to, boycotts, protests, riots, petitions, legal action, etc. Because the activist's goal is eventual change, the disruptive methods are used for more than just attention. The communicational intent of these tactics is to pressure, embarrass, shame, or belittle target publics like government or business. C. Condit and D. Condit (1992) addressed a strategy termed "incremental erosion" in which an activist group challenges the legitimacy of its target by eroding its means of revenue. Smith and Ferguson (2010) asserted that activists use communication tactics as they seek to undermine the authority of other organizations in order to establish their own legitimacy. Researchers have also investigated tactics which involve raising their own credibility by attacking the credibility of their opponents (Bostdorff, 1992).

Driven by their motive to "redress power imbalances or unequal access to resources" (Bourland-Davis et al., 2010, p. 409), some groups organize rapidly and intensely, engaging in

defiant, even violent, means to gain people's attention. Other groups are not so hasty, and use these provocative methods strategically to draw the spotlight. The overall assumption in both cases is that confrontation attracts the media, the media produce national and international attention, and attention supposedly translates into support. Even if the tactics do not earn support for the cause, however, the high visibility of the events at least creates awareness for the cause.

There is no doubt that confrontational methods do produce results. Disruption can, in fact, create support; such was the case with self-immolation of monks in Tibet. Heath (1997) stated that conflict "can legitimize activists and help them obtain or maintain momentum and enhance their fund-raising and membership drives" (Heath, 1997, p. 173). Conflict can also call attention to a cause even if support is not won, as was the case with the Moscow Theater hostage crisis mentioned earlier. Although it is difficult to gauge exactly what the outcome will be, Bourland-Davis at al. (2010) offered some explanation for why disruption plays such a dominating role in the mindset of corporate-targeting activists. They stated:

> …activist organizations are often more successful in graphically highlighting differences with the organizations with which they are competing for power resources. By developing situations in which perceptions of conflict are heightened (often though press-agentry tactics), activist organizations may gain more attention than if they had tried to collaborate in the face of evident power disparities. (Bourland-Davis et al., 2010, p. 418)

For many activist groups confrontation is just an overall means to an anticipated positive outcome. However, "while the end may be justified, the means is too often seen by society at large as a largely negative, disruptive, or even antisocial activity—at least at the time it is occurring" (Wakefield et al., 2011, p. 8). The civil rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s serves as an illustration of such an occurrence. In retrospect society views the changes brought

about by the civil rights movement as positive and necessary; yet, while it was occurring it was seen as confrontational and antisocial by much of society. For this reason, it is also important to consider the context in which activism is framed as well as society's perception of it. For example, abortion is a widely contested and heated debate among its advocates, with both sides normatively positioning themselves on the pro side of the issue – whether it is pro-choice or pro-life. Nevertheless, with this kind of issue each side fosters an inherent element of conflict within the argument itself: for one side to win, the other side must lose. Both sides serve as agents of change, but in the process they are advocating for their cause as much as they oppose the other; so, by nature, it is contradictory (Hung, 2007).

This review of attack activism and confrontational activities presents only a part of the complete picture of activism and activist-employed public relations. As Wakefield et al. (2011) explained, there are numerous activists who have no intention of engaging in confrontational communication methods. Yet within the wide spectrum of activist methods only the disruptive seem to be covered in the literature while the tactics of the conciliatory and cooperative groups are virtually ignored.

**Prosocial activism.** On the opposite end of the spectrum is prosocial activism. Rather than attacking institutions or creating confrontation, prosocial activist activities are predicated on providing assistance to others. Cottle and Nolan (2007) also felt the need to differentiate groups who "collectively instantiate an ethic of global compassion and promote the normative discourse of universal human rights" (p. 862) from their more adversarial counterparts. They used the label *humanitarian* or *aid NGOs*. The humanitarian and aid NGOs which Cottle and Nolan focused on are certainly included in the definition of prosocial activism, but the term prosocial activism is

preferred in this case because it not only includes groups who seek to do good but specifically focuses on groups that engage in non-confrontational methods to gain support and visibility.

Prosocial motives are defined as the altruistic motivations behind the endeavors of groups whose singular goal is to improve the welfare of others (Wakefield & Burnett, 2011). Prosocial motives stem from humane, universal values and include things like overcoming poverty, helping people to obtain a basic education, eradicating disease, protecting children from abuse, or simply trying to help people survive. The inherent nature of these groups is to create change for the betterment of society through positive means such as constructive communication, cooperation, and assistance.

Prosocial causes that are founded in universal humanitarian values can be said to benefit society as a whole, even if their target is just one specific group of people. Issues would include such things as feeding the hungry, aiding the sick, providing or improving education, or giving disaster relief. Groups who seek positive social change do not possess motivations incompatible with functions of other entities, and therefore do not seek to confront those institutions. Instead, Wakefield et al. (2011) stated that prosocial activism is "specifically distinguished from confrontational activism because of its inherent nature and its goals to change society through positive means, instead of through confrontational means" (p. 10). Thus, prosocial activists use communication to build cooperative relationships with other institutions, working together voluntarily rather than coercing them to change.

Building cooperative relationships is not the only tool available to prosocial groups. Wakefield et al. (2011) name other constructive, two-way communication and outreach tactics of prosocial groups, "*prosocial public relations.*" While the literature has not examined the techniques and processes of activist groups while taking into consideration the motives and goals

of the organizations, there have been a few studies that have looked at public relations in what can be regarded as organizations engaged in prosocial public relations. From these studies scholars can begin to piece together the methods or tactics used by prosocial activists.

One study by Cottle and Nolan (2007), for example, looked at how aid NGOs, as they term prosocial organizations, focus on the media relations side of public relations to raise awareness, funds and support in non-confrontational ways. Examining six prosocial organizations based in Australia, they found that three tactics are generally used to target and promote media relations and coverage. The first is to package stories "in conformity to the known dispositions of target media outlets" (p. 874) as well as to pitch stories around events such as holidays and anniversaries (referred to as "event days"). Second, the NGOs interviewed by Cottle and Nolan appeal to the media's perceived fondness for celebrities by using "stars" or "talent" as delegate representatives for the organizations. According to Cottle and Nolan, "event days and celebrity, then, are used tactically to try and prise (*sic*) open the stubborn gates of media attention" (p. 869). The third tactic is regionalizing global humanitarianism, which refers to a NGO's efforts to link an event getting global media attention to the NGO's specific region or issue. This can be done through geographic proximity, domestic angles or ties, or economic interests or impacts.

In addition to media relations, the Internet is a useful public relations tool for activists in disseminating information and raising awareness. It is particularly relevant for prosocial causes which might otherwise have a hard time making their presence known and voices heard. Seo, Kim, and Yang (2009) conducted a survey of 75 transnational NGOs in order to gauge their use of new media, particularly websites, blogs, podcasts, and wikis. The authors assert that while new media is a growing trend in public relations, it is particularly relevant for transnational

organizations because activists are able to mobilize citizens across the globe efficiently and effectively via the Internet. The results of the study also indicated that rather than stirring up controversy or building tension and pressure, new media public relations for NGOs are generally "geared toward enhancing the organization's image and tapping into current and potential sources of funding" (Seo, Kim, &Yang, 2009, p. 124), disseminating information to journalists, interacting with the public, and networking with other NGOs.

These studies demonstrated the importance of media relations and Internet presence for altruistic causes. However, because the literature has not yet covered this area of prosocial public relations specifically, all that can be done further is to consider what other public relations processes may be applicable. According to Wakefield and Burnett (2011), prosocial activists recognize that accomplishing their goals comes through cooperation with other interest groups, governments, and corporations. The authors continued, saying:

> To gain such cooperation, they first must build up their own resources to gain credibility as an organization, then they connect with other similar entities to increase their ability to assist, and then they reach out to governments, media, and other entities to gain broader societal visibility and support. (Wakefield & Burnett, 2011, p. 14)

Those three things—building up, connecting and reaching out—form the basis of prosocial public relations and will be examined in more detail later in this literature review.

**Advocacy activism.** The differentiation between confrontational and prosocial is not a moral judgment of activist's overall objectives. That is to say, the point is not to imply that some groups have purely altruistic goals while the others do not. Wakefield and Burnett (2011) stated, "*all types of activism* are fundamental to an open society, and *all activist groups* have a right to see themselves and their causes as altruistic in that they are pointing out ills in society that must

be addressed" (p. 11). Furthermore, Curtin and Gaither (2007) explained that "binary oppositions" such as confrontational and prosocial activism can "become ultimately reductionist, ignoring the many degrees of relationship that exist between the poles" (p. 169). That being said, Wakefield et al. (2011) proposed one more classification of activism that exists for activist groups that may either attack or assist, or both, in order to obtain their objectives.

The goal for advocacy activists is mainly "to render assistance but… on occasion [to] try to influence the powerful institutions to make social or regulatory changes to support their goals" (Wakefield & Burnett, 2011, p. 12). In other words, these groups use a combination of methods in order to prime an environment for the change they seek, whether it be applying pressure to knock down barriers on one hand, or working constructively with other organizations to remove them on the other.

Advocacy activists, depending on the circumstance, use communication to sometimes create pressure and other times to build relationships. Curtin and Gaither (2007) described activists as having "fluid, conflicting identities" (p. 173). The purpose of the change agent spectrum is not to try and assign activist groups into neatly labeled boxes, but rather to present the terminology within a sphere where activist tactics are able to change and evolve.

The preceding paragraphs have provided a specific set of terminology for activist groups, identifying them according to their motivations, activities and communication tactics. While the role of public relations has been mentioned briefly, the following paragraphs will look more closely at the role of public relations in all activist organizations – confrontational, advocacy, and prosocial – and will explore how existing public relations theory fits into the change agent spectrum.

**Activism and Public Relations**

Activists materialize in society in the form of special interest groups, nonprofits, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). With more than 1.5 million nonprofit organizations (NCCS, 2011), and an estimated 45,000 new ones established each year (Boyer, 1997), to say the marketplace for activists is crowded may be putting it mildly. These groups are constantly vying to have their voices heard above the expanding throng. "Not only do [activist groups] jostle for attention among dozens of equally worthy competitors, but they also confront the pervasive indifference of international audiences" (Bob, 2005, p. 36). These groups have difficulty not only in winning international attention, but they also face challenges raising awareness and support locally.

Heath and Waymer (2009) suggested that "we would be remiss if we ignore the promotional aspects of activism by only addressing their issue engagement" (p. 195). By just addressing activist "issue engagement" as Heath and Waymer asserted, scholarship misses the fact that activists are themselves organizations of variable philosophy, size, and power (Curtin & Gaither, 2007) which also use public relations. According to Wakefield et al. (2011) activists use varying public relations tactics in their endeavors to achieve different purposes: whether to create pressure, to advocate, or to assist. Some scholars have claimed that activism and public relations have a "natural connection" (Wakefield et al, 2011; Holtzhausen, 2000; Bourland-Davis et al., 2010). On the one side, a public relations practitioner works to provide a voice and promotion for their client or employer; on the other side, the activist's task is not dissimilar, they too provide visibility and support for the cause they represent.

For activist organizations, using public relations as a means to gain visibility and rally followers/volunteers not only seems like a natural connection, but it also seems absolutely

essential to their success and survival. Starck and Kruckeberg (2001) specifically addressed the need for public relations to assist nongovernmental organizations in their work, and Holtzhausen (2007) conceded "little doubt that true grassroots activist organizations can use formal public relations help" (p. 369-370). Smith and Ferguson (2010) argued that "activist organizations rely on traditional public relations tactics to attract the attention and support necessary to achieve" their goals (p. 402).

Activist goals, as outlined by Smith and Ferguson (2010), surround three concepts: issue, legitimacy, and power. Issue refers to an activist's cause; "The attractiveness of an issue, as well as an organization's approach to resolving that issue, helps attract followers and other resources and provides a framework for advocacy activities" (Smith and Ferguson, 2010, p. 401). Public relations is a tool to help draw attention to a cause. However, issues are sometimes fluid. As an issue changes public relations can also be used to maintain the salience of the cause. Legitimacy refers to an activist organization's authority and expertise in the area of the cause they support. An activist's relationship with the media is becoming progressively more important. Bronstein (2006) asserted that journalists are becoming increasingly distrustful of traditional corporate sources, which enables nonprofit groups to establish legitimacy and make more contributions to public conversation. Finally, power is the extent to which activists can assemble, organize, and position resources, especially people and money. From a confrontational activist perspective, Smith and Ferguson discussed how activists accomplish mobilization by disrupting resources on which a corporation depends and impacting the public perception of the organization. Other scholars have looked at the Internet as a vital tool for activists to connect with the publics, organize, and mobilize (Seo, Kim, & Yang, 2009).

Heath (1997) referred to issues, legitimacy, and power, as an activist's *rhetoric*. In order to establish a rhetorical stance, the activist group needs to show that the general public accepts them as an authoritative source on an issue. "The power of the activists' rhetorical stance is the likelihood that their claims will become new ways of thinking by influential members of society, leading to new actions and solutions to problems" (Heath, 1997, p. 169). Public relations is one of the primary tools used by activists to establish a rhetoric. In their case study of Frederick Douglass' "Fourth of July Address," Heath and Waymer (2009) acknowledged "the promotional aspects of activism" (p. 196), stating that they "frame issues in important ways forcing responses" by other organizations, entities, and society (p. 196). As activists seek to change social norms, Heath stated that activist's rhetoric is "like a morality play; it symbolizes good whereas the adversary epitomizes evil" (p. 169). Public relations literature generally paints business or government as the customary adversary of activists. An adversary, however, for an activist movement can range from something tangible like a nuclear power company disposing of toxic waste, to more abstract targets like poverty. Regardless of whether activists are classified as confrontational, advocacy, or prosocial, all engage in public relations activities, if perhaps on a smaller scale from that of businesses or governments (Bronstein, 2006).

Public relations literature has yet to expand beyond organizational and governmental public relations into this sphere of activist activities. Several scholars, in fact, have raised the call for public relations theory and best practices to branch out beyond for-profit organizations (Heath and Waymer, 2009; Holtzhausen, 2007; Smith and Ferguson, 2010; Wakefield et al. 20100). While there are bound to be similarities between for-profit public relations and those methods used by activists, there are also undoubtedly some significant differences.

To begin, the publics of activist organizations need to be identified. In a general sense, according to New and Bates (1977):

> Every nonprofit organization, just by existing, has relationships with different publics or groups of people. The publics include the people it serves, the people it should be serving, volunteers and staff, community groups and agencies whose cooperation it needs, the press and people who support or should support its efforts financially and otherwise. (p. 4)

A look at elements of public relations theory including negotiation and the existing models of public relations will serve as a starting point from which to move on to activist-specific public relations.

**Strategies of Negotiation in Activist Communication**

One area of theory that has been gaining attention in public relations recently is that of negotiation. Both Heath (1997) and Kim and Sriramesh (2009) mentioned negotiation as an element in the relationship between activists and other entities. The need to negotiate inherently arises in public relations because part of navigating relationships between entities is balancing self-interests. Plowman (2007) observed that, "Self-interests, from the public relations literature, are not necessarily selfish interests but rather those interests that have intrinsic value for the survival of an entity" (p. 85-86). Therefore, negotiation is a tool which "practitioners can use to develop relationships with both internal and external strategic publics or stakeholders" (Plowman, 2007, p. 95).

The way in which an activist organization engages in negotiation with key publics can be a determinant of whether or not the group is confrontational, advocacy, or prosocial. In dealing with publics, conflict inherently arises, even within prosocial organizations. According to

Plowman (2008), "conflict and disagreements are inevitable because of the physical separation of organizations" (p. 406). However, conflict does not necessarily directly translate to confrontation; conflict refers to variance in opinion or self-interest whereas confrontation implies hostility. Fisher, Ury, and Patton (2011) wrote that in negotiations it is important to "jointly generate options that are mutually advantageous and seek agreement on objective standards for resolving opposed interests" (p.14). Pressure and confrontation arise in relationships when a particular group feels like they are not being heard, there is an imbalance of power between parties, or communication focuses on the disagreement between parties rather than on common ground (Plowman, 2008). In the midst of managing relationships a prosocial organization seeks to minimize conflict and promote mutual understanding.

There are basically three different outcomes when it comes to negotiation: lose-lose, win-lose, or win-win. To achieve these outcomes there are ten strategies, according to Plowman (2007), that are most commonly mentioned in the negotiation literature: *avoiding, contending, win/win or no deal, cooperating, compromising, mediated, unconditionally constructive, principled, perseverance,* and *accommodating*.

A lose-lose outcome generally results when using the avoidance approach wherein one or more sides refuse to address differences by either withdrawing from the discussion or postponing negotiation. A win-lose outcome is often the product of confrontation between groups because of the conflicting model wherein one side's self-interests are pursued at the other party's expense. According to Heath (1997), "adversarial, or win-lose, posture occurs when the sides presume to have an exclusive grasp of the truth" (p. 157). This mode of negotiating relationships with publics is competitive and hostile. In a 2008 study experimenting with the different models of negotiation, Plowman found that contention was the least effective strategy because while

participants found that they were able to identify issues of divergence between publics, no progress was made in reaching a solution. This model does not encourage understanding dialogue between conflicting parties and the resulting relationship is confrontational.

On the other hand, the win/win or no deal strategy proposes an approach in which both parties collaborate to arrive at a mutually beneficial agreement wherein both parties are satisfied. The "no deal" option arises if one party's only solution is untenable by the other. As Plowman (2007) stated, "The *no-deal* addition to the term *win/win* means that if the parties cannot find a solution that would benefit both, then they would agree to disagree – no deal" (p. 94). This stance is less hostile because it allows both sides to enter the relationship knowing that there will be dialogue. As long as the parties are discussing the terms, negotiation can continue, either cooperating, compromising, or with the help of a moderator. The cooperating tactic of negotiation entails collaboration where both sides are willing to explore the disagreement, generate alternatives, and find a solution which mutually satisfies both parties. Compromising is similar where both parties seek a middle ground by finding a solution each side is willing to accept, including, however, an element of give and take. Sometimes negotiation requires a moderator, or disinterested third-party; this is mediation. A moderator does not offer solutions, instead he/she facilitates the negotiation process by assisting the dialogue between parties to avoid a stalemate. Plowman (2007) explained mediation by stating, "If any resolution of the problem between the groups occurs, it is because they have a common knowledge of how to negotiate with one another" (p. 90). At times these strategies may turn argumentative, but the goal is to reach a decision that is best for the relationship and hence these strategies ultimately produce win-win results.

Even if a public is unwilling to negotiate there is still a strategy that leads to a win-win solution. Unconditionally constructive negotiation is an approach where "even if the other party in the conflict does not reciprocate, the organization acts in reconciling the strategic interests of both the organization and its strategic public" (Plowman, 2007, p. 93). According to Plowman, this is an altruistic strategy because both parties benefit as a result. It seems to fit that a prosocial activist group would want to maintain good relationships with key publics avoiding confrontation when possible and would therefore aim to negotiate to mutual understanding or win-win solutions should conflict arise with any public.

There are also strategies of negotiation that seem to fit within the realm of advocacy activism where pressure is sometimes created with publics in order to achieve a goal. Principled negotiation, for example, occurs when one side holds to a standard upon which there can be no compromise. According to Plowman (2007), this strategy "does not do necessarily what is best for the relationship" (p. 94). Perseverance is similar in there being an immovable point or position in the relationship. Plowman described this strategy as an "assertive pacifism" wherein there is a "refusal to fight directly, but also a refusal to let the stakeholder take advantage of the situation" (p. 96). The opposite of the perseverance model is accommodation wherein one party yields to demands at the expense of their own position.

Managerial thinking about the relationships of an organization with its publics leads to its philosophy on public relations (Plowman, 2008). For this reason this study will look at which approaches(s) to negotiation a prosocial activist organization might use in managing its relationships. When the goal of an organization is to arrive at mutual understanding, negotiation and dialogue are inherent elements in the communicative relationship; therefore excellent public relations would become a natural result.

**Models of Public Relations in Activist Communication**

Understanding how an organization views communication in its relationships with key publics is the foundation of public relations theory. In most commentaries on business or government public relations, Grunig and Hunt's (1984) four models of public relations are used to explain the communication relationship between an entity and its audiences. Grunig and Hunt's models also apply to activist organizations along the spectrum, from confrontational to prosocial. The following paragraphs will describe Grunig and Hunt's four models of public relations and review what scholars have written about how these models apply to the relationship between activists and their publics.

The press agentry model is the first of Grunig and Hunt's (1984) four models of public relations. This model developed from the early stages of public relations and incorporates an "anything goes" position, as long as it presents a positive corporate image. Press agentry includes slanting the truth, presenting only selected facts, even sometimes direct lies (Moffitt, 2004). According to Moffitt (2004), practitioners that use a press agentry model "typically present only news that favors their clients" (p. 318). The second model is the public information model wherein the organization relates only true information about itself. This model and the press agentry model are "distinctive because they do not utilize any research on targeted audiences before sending out messages" (p. 319). Furthermore, these models do not focus on receiving any feedback from audiences after messages are sent. In other words, once the communication is delivered there is no effort to discover or interest in whether or not the message was received or how it was received. Government public information programs are a typical example of the information model.

The next two models of public relations practice rely on research prior to the dissemination of a message. The first research-based model is the asymmetrical model, sometimes called the two-way asymmetrical model. This model incorporates tailoring a message to a target audience. The reason it is considered asymmetrical is because the communication is imbalanced, leaving the organization as is, and working to change the publics (J. E. Grunig & L. A. Grunig, 1992). The last model is the symmetrical or two-way symmetrical model, and it is considered the "ideal and optimum model for excellent public relations" (Moffitt, 2004, p. 319). The two-way symmetrical model implies "equal communication between the organization and the audiences," wherein the organization "makes a conscious effort to listen to and respect the audiences enough to adjust their business practices to benefit the audiences as well as the organization" (Moffitt, 2004, p. 319). In practice of the two-way symmetrical model, organizations usually do research to target their messages to the stakeholders and gather feedback to adjust any new communication efforts. In short, the two-way model is more of an open dialogue between an organization and its publics.

Communication between activists and their publics is better covered in the literature from the perspective of businesses which may be a targeted public of activists. As discussed, however, the discussion usually relates to confrontational activist communication and thus corporations view activism as a force to oppose or deflect rather than seeing the potential for cooperative communication. This seems at odds with the two-way symmetrical communication model advocated as the best practice in public relations by L. Grunig (1992). Defending against activism implies the press agentry model approach at worst, or the asymmetrical model approach at best. Either way, the result seems to be that when an organization is unwilling to engage in

dialogue with activists, conflict usually erupts. Heath (1997) explained why corporations should be willing to keep an open line of communication with activists:

> If strain is the foundation of activism, then change is aimed at achieving harmony. Corporations may be smart to accede to the demands of activists without waging open battle. Outcomes can be dire if corporations fight to defend unpopular policies and premises or to adhere to operating procedures that are no longer popular. (p. 176)

Smith and Ferguson (2010) stated, "One line of scholarship suggests that activists are co-creators of the relationships between organizations and their publics, contributing to the development and resolution of issues and, ultimately, to social good" (p. 396). In fact, there are many scholars who suggest that businesses work with activist groups in a two-way symmetrical relationship in order to avoid confrontation (Heath, 1997; Heath &Waymer, 2009; Holtzhausen 2000, 2007).

Although the two-way model suggests that information is equally exchanged, in reality it does not necessarily equate to an equal 50-50, give-and-take in conversation and cooperation. In fact, many times this model is practiced through a 60-40 or 80-20 exchange model, especially in relationships with activists. Smith and Ferguson (2010) made an argument that corporations will form alliances with activist groups in an effort to appear concerned, supportive, and socially responsible, when in reality the corporation's interests are being protected by limiting the activist group's interference. Holtzhausen (2000) explained this differently, stating:

> Although the two-way symmetrical model of public relations focuses on mutual understanding and collaboration, scholars have increasingly come to understand symmetry as consensus. … Seeking consensus implies seeking an unjust settlement in which the most powerful, usually organizations, get their way. Stauber and Rampton

(1995) offered valuable examples of how consensus actually represents an unequal

relationship between activists and corporations. …Consensus aims to co-opt and maintain

the status quo. (p. 106)

In other words, not only do organizations work with activists out of necessity to control and

manipulate the situation to their best advantage, but they are also actively trying to maintain the

way things are, restricting the change activists seek.

A few treatises in the literature stray from this business perspective to view activists as

their own entities. Yet these scholars, writing specifically for NGOs, insurgents, nonprofits, or

other activist groups, generally recommend at least one of two main approaches to public

relations: (1) branding and (2) publicity.

**Branding.** Bob (2005), in his book, advocates a marketing approach. He postulated that

activist groups are at a disadvantage because the system in which they exist is not biased in their

favor economically, politically, or organizationally. According to Bob, "The choices of

insurgents—how they market themselves—matter" (p. 5). Much of the philosophy around the

idea of marketing activist groups is tied to the idea of a "brand" as though the cause is only as

good as the marketability of the name or product.

The problem, however, with supporting varying causes through marketing perspectives is

that "these philosophies almost always attach the social issues to some element of revenue

generation" (Wakefield et al., 2011, p. 19). Ehling, White, and Grunig (1992), defined marketing

communication as "programs to create and sustain demand for the products and services" (p.

357) of the organization. Activists are not looking to sustain a demand for their existence but

rather work to create a change where their presence as an organized body is no longer necessary.

Ehling et al. explained that public relations supervises programs for communications directed at

publics that have organized because an organization affects them or they affect it. The authors proposed that, "Marketing and public relations serve different functions and … public relations cannot be excellent if it is subjugated to the marketing function" (Ehling, et al., 1992, p. 357).

Branding, while it is associated with marketing, does have some principles important to activist groups, which is why it is discussed in the literature so often. Cottle and Nolan (2007) stated that "the crowded field of NGOs inevitably produces a sense of competition and the felt need to raise, whenever possible, organizational profile in the media" (p. 865). According to the authors, activists use strategic communication tactics *similar* to those employed by corporate marketing to "brand" their agency and compete for media space. In the case of Cottle and Nolan's study of six different NGOs in Australia, branding was attached to media attention. The authors found that, "In pursuit of brand recognition and competitive edge, aid agencies in Australia and around the world increasingly seek to encode into their organization public image exactly what they think the media will be attracted to" (Cottle & Nolan, 2007, p. 866). This includes elements such as celebrity endorsements and "media events" that incorporate an entertainment or shock factor. The problem with this specific approach, as Cottle and Nolan discovered, is that these communication strategies detract from the activist's original message and purposes.

To illustrate how celebrity endorsements can detract from a message, controversial actor Charlie Sheen recently arranged a walk to raise funds to support the Organization for Bipolar Affective Disorders, a nonprofit based in Calgary. However, the actor did not consult with the organization or include them in his plans for the fundraiser event. The result was that the message of the nonprofit which runs support groups for people affected by bipolar disorder was lost in media blitz covering Charlie Sheen's bizarre behavior (Marikar, 2011).

The emphasis with branding is on strained, one-way communication. Still, aid NGOs attempt to "market" or "brand" their organization in or to the media in order to gain publicity. The authors conclude that branding is one "fatal flaw" in communicating with the media which detracts from prosocial messages originally intended and "imperils both the practice and the idea of global humanitarianism" (Cottle & Nolan, 2007, p. 864). Therefore, perhaps instead of branding or marketing an activist organization, the concept would be better thought of as creating awareness for the cause and establishing the organization's legitimacy as an authoritative source in behalf of the cause.

**Publicity.** Along the same lines of one-way communication models and raising an organizational profile, other treatises on activist public relations are geared mainly toward generating publicity. In 1977, Koestler edited a six-volume series of brochures titled *Managing Your Public Relations: Guidelines for Nonprofit Organizations*. In volume five, New and Bates (1977) explained that the purpose of public relations in nonprofit organizations is largely the same as it is in business or government: "to win and maintain favorable public support" for the organization (p. 5). In volume two of the series, Schmidt (1977) stated how a nonprofit organization might use publicity to their best advantage. Schmidt gave four reasons for a nonprofit organization to use publicity: (1) to secure public understanding and financial support the organization needs to survive; (2) to "propagate" a concept or principle; (3) to create a community climate conducive to the growth of the nonprofit agency; and (4) to secure public recognition for volunteers.

The main focus in these brochures for how to generate publicity is through media relations. The authors emphasized maintaining good, working relationships with media, never "stonewalling," being proactive and not always operating on the defensive. The brochures

explained, however, that there *is* a difference between public relations and publicity; in volume three of this series Ducas (1977) offered this definition to separate the two: "Public relations embraces everything an organization and its personnel do that affects the public's attitude toward it, while publicity is limited to techniques for informing the public about the organization's policies, programs and services" (p. 4). A more recent look at public relations for nonprofits, written by Feinglass (2005), the founder of a New York-based public relations firm with more than twenty years of experience in the nonprofit field, focused on the publicity-building function of public relations. The chapters of the book expounded on the technical skills, techniques, and tools at the practitioner's disposal to generate publicity and communicate with targeted stakeholders.

As related in the preceding paragraphs, public relations in general is talked about as publicity or marketing, the focus of which is on one-way communication and organizational awareness, with little to no research or emphasis on dialogue and forming relationships with key publics outside the media. According to Cottle and Nolan (2007), the current strategies employed by activist organizations, even by those with prosocial motives, "detract from their principle remit of humanitarian provision and symbolically fragment the historically founded ethic of universal humanitarianism" (p. 863-864). In other words, the messages of the organizations are being lost in communication that is wholly focused on brand recognition or concerned with media publicity.

Judging by the literature, gaining visibility and support seems to be the dominant purpose of public relations in activist organizations. But surly activist organizations are not able to obtain their objectives by only branding their image and publicizing through the media. Little research has been done in this area, however, which is why Wakefield et al. (2011) developed the change-

agent spectrum as a framework with which to begin a discussion of varying activist activity and their differing public relations approaches. The imbalance in research toward confrontational activism from a business perspective and one-way communication from activists restricts the study of possible two-way symmetrical practices within the activist arena. The two-way symmetrical model assumes the exchange of information essential to maintaining cooperative relationships between organizations and stakeholders (L. Grunig, 1992). According to Wakefield et al. (2011) a push toward two-way relationships between activists and their publics shows promise in helping to assist groups, especially prosocial activists, in their efforts to build awareness and garner support. The authors suggested a model of public relations that incorporates the objectives and activities that are specific to activist groups that seek prosocial change, called *Prosocial Public Relations*.

**Investigating Prosocial Public Relations**

According to Wakefield et al. (2011), in the cluttered arena of activist activity, "it becomes paramount for these prosocial groups to understand and incorporate the most targeted and effective communication strategies to be able to cut through the clutter. This is where public relations can be of greatest assistance" (p. 17).

Heath and Waymer (2009) endeavored to give a name to activist public relations, calling it "constructive public relations" (p. 195). In defining constructive public relations, however, Heath and Waymer included strain and confrontation in the concept:

> Non-profit public relations features governmental relations, community relations, crisis communication, risk communication, and issues management. It entails the tactics of publicizing some matter of public interest, such as public health, to create strain. It calls

for people to join together and fund the mobilization efforts that can force confrontation and may lead to negotiation and resolution. (p. 197-198)

But what if confrontation to force resolution is not the desired path of the activist? What are the communication strategies used by prosocial activists, when they seek simply to do good, and how do those strategies aid them in achieving their goals? Prosocial public relations, according to Wakefield et al. (2011), refer only to those public relations features that apply to cooperation, building relationships, and assisting others. Prosocial public relations are those tactics and methods in "the realm of public relations that specifically support the altruistic movements whose singular focus is to assist those who are not in a position to help themselves out of dire circumstances" (Wakefield & Burnett, 2011, p. 2).

Despite the myriad of altruistic interest group activity, "there is virtually nothing in the public relations body of knowledge to describe or examine their communication efforts and outcomes" (Wakefield & Burnett, 2011, p. 2; also see Edwards, 2011; Heath & Waymer, 2009). Just as the tactics and methods of public relations practitioners working in the business or government sectors differ, then surely scholars can assume that the public relations tactics must also differ between activist organizations with varying objectives. Without any structure, practitioners are left to guide the efforts of these organizations without needed theories and foundations to fully understand the processes and implications of public relations practice within their fields. This study aims to begin the discussion of public relations practices used by organizations engaged in prosocial causes.

Wakefield et al. (2011) began the discussion for a model of prosocial public relations by determining three areas where public relations activities seem to be practiced in nonprofit and NGO organizations. The authors determined that in order to be successful prosocial groups need

to: (1) build up, (2) make connections, and (3) reach out. "These three categories suggest that prosocial organizations must strengthen their resources, make and utilize connections especially with similar activist groups, and reach out to powerful organizations, the media, and other constituents to achieve cooperation and support" (Wakefield et al., 2011, p. 20). These categories were patterned after Bob (2005), who was the first to vaguely identify the possible activities of activist groups. In his book *The Marketing of Rebellion*, he discussed that insurgent groups need to (1) internally organize with quality leadership and staffing, (2) form alliances with other similar establishments, and (3)"publicize their plight" (p. 4) in order to succeed.

Public relations scholars have also suggested these three elements are present in the process of activist activities. This point is illustrated returning to a quote used earlier by Kim and Sriramesh (2009): "In the process of problem solving, core members of the group attract other social constituents or publics, create and maintain a shared collective identity among members for the time being, and mobilize resources and power…" (p. 82). Here the three main elements of prosocial public relations are mentioned again: (1) making connections to "other constituents or publics," presumably with like interests; (2) building up their internal resources by forming a shared collective identity; and (3) reaching out by mobilizing. While the authors originally framed activism as inherently targeting an organization, they also presented advocacy and prosocial activist strategies such as education, negotiation, and persuasion. This quote was first used in this paper with confrontational activism to show how it is framed targeting corporations and other entities; however, without that anti-organization element, Kim and Sriramesh's quote is significant to understanding the essentials of how activist organizations, including prosocial ones, operate.

Other scholars have also touched briefly on these three areas. Bourland-Davis et al. (2009) discussed how activist organizations in the past have had strong leaders, with good public relations know-how. Bob (2005) talked about how smaller insurgent groups need to form alliances with large, already established organizations. Holtzhausen (2000) stated, "Activists have become experts in making their voices heard through the use of small, niche micromedia" (p. 103). But how specifically are these methods used and what communication tools do prosocial groups apply in these areas to reach their goals? While these areas have not been studied in detail within the framework or using the terminology of "prosocial public relations," there have been some studies which can provide a blueprint for this study. The following paragraphs will clarify and explain the terms building up, making connections, and reaching out, and include what each strategy entails concerning public relations along with a sampling of applicable research.

**Building up.** Building up mainly refers to the internal operations of activist organizations. Elements of building up include leadership, organizational mission statement and distinction of purpose, and staffing. The leadership in any movement is one of the fundamentals from which other elements are built up. According to Wakefield et al. (2011), "Charismatic leaders, such as Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Dalai Lama, personify a movement, and most supporters identify more with a single person than with a faceless organization" (p. 20). A good leader is often a good speaker, relatable, and "transnational," meaning they are able to communicate both on a local scale and on a global one. Bourland-Davis et al. (2010) found that leaders in successful activist movements had "a strategic vision and organizational knowledge" (p. 418) as well as communication competency. Bob (2005) stated that leadership should be knowledgeable, versed in language, able to write and budget, and be culturally aware. All of

these skills contribute to the functionality and success of an activist organization because leadership stimulates a movement's pursuit for external aid. Bob wrote, "Scholars often downplay the role of individuals, instead highlighting historical or economic trends as key sources of change. But the world's best-known 'local' movements are instantly associated with personalities" (p. 46)

Leadership in activist causes, however, needs to be more than a talking head; Bourland-Davis et al. (2010) pointed out that successful activist organizations have "central decision making figures" who are "intimately involved in the organization's communication strategies" (p. 418). In fact, according to their study of activism in the 20th and 21st Centuries, Bourland-Davis et al. concluded that "it becomes difficult to separate the work of the organizations from the leaders and from public relations practitioners" (p. 418). This difficultly to differentiate the work of the organizations, leadership, and public relations is perhaps one reason there is little public relations theory at present to support activist causes, specifically prosocial ones.

While not all leaders will achieve the same notoriety and visibility as other leaders, it is still vital for organizations to appoint an articulate spokesperson, a personable face, and a strong leader for the cause. Leadership, as well as staff members, can be frontrunners for the cause and set the tone of the organization. Tone comes in the form of mission statements and clearly communicated goals and purposes. No matter what the cause, Tkalac and Pavicic (2009) advocated management by objectives, claiming that it is becoming increasingly important in communication strategies. They state that one important function of managers within nonprofits is the ability to clearly communicate organizational goals and objectives as clear organizational goals can be translated into functional objectives. Tkalac and Pavicic wrote that "improving the management of communications, as well as management in general, is seen as a way of raising

operational effectiveness" (p. 815). Boyer (1997) also suggested that nonprofit organizations move smoothest when managed by objectives. In this approach to leadership and management Boyer explained that nonprofits need to consider each of the audiences for the information and services, what the organization wants those audiences to understand, and strategies for delivering messages. This is crucial to building up because, as Boyer explained, "the key to gaining acceptance of a communications and public relations strategy, both within an organization and by external funders, is to be clear on the ways in which the work will be done and the ways in which communications supports other priorities of the organization" ( p. 487).

Bourland-Davis et al. (2010) mentioned that activists were more successful in graphically highlighting differences. While the authors referred to differences in power among competing organizations, the same principle can apply to building up; activist organizations can be successful by stressing their differences and placing prominence on their individualities. According to Wakefield et al. (2011), "In the highly cluttered global communication arena, prosocial organizations must find a way to set themselves apart from others. Most prosocial causes can take advantage of a unique angle or can shed new light on a cause" (p. 21). As an example of a successful group highlighting differences Bob (2005) cited Free Tibet, one of the world's most well-known campaigns. The Free Tibet campaign used Tibetan culture and Eastern spirituality to set themselves apart from other Asian groups that were protesting Chinese occupation. A unique angle, like culture, makes an organization more interesting and appealing, and, therefore, attracts more attention.

In addition to excellent leadership and highlighting differences, Bob (2005) stated that in order for an activist organization to run smoothly it is imperative to have first-rate staffing. Staff members should not only be dedicated to the cause, but should also be able to fill pivotal roles

such as budgeting, writing, and communicating. Bob advocated for a competent staff with at least a second-language proficiency. Wakefield et al. (2011) wrote that for an organization to succeed and to communicate well with its target publics, "the entity must have capabilities in strategic public relations and fundraising (either in-house or contracted)" (p. 21). Boyer (1997) supported the argument that staff members and volunteers should be enthusiastic and personable, stating, "staff members answering simple questions over the phone are delivering a message about the organization just as surely as the executive director in a formal speech" (p.481).

A competent, capable and energetic staff is a step toward making connections and reaching out. Staff can help an organization build up its resources by providing a solid list of contacts (Wakefield et al., 2011). So much of relationship-building relies on networking, and staff members often have valuable contacts from previous education or work experience which can be helpful to a growing cause.

**Making connections.** Networking is becoming an essential tool in public relations, making the old adage true: it's not so much what you know, but who you know. Making connections takes networking one step further – while it is important to know people, an activist organization also needs to connect with them to form alliances to further their cause. Heath (1997) looked briefly at how an activist's allies can help persuade the public of an activist's legitimacy and cause. Allies can include an organization's volunteers, supporters (especially powerful supporters such as donors or celebrities), and members of the media, government, and other nonprofits specifically engaged or interested in the cause. These individuals and groups are the same as those to whom the activists will also wish to reach out; but the difference between making connections and reaching out is the strength of the tie formed and the level of involvement with the activist cause. Gladwell (2010) differentiated between strong-ties and

weak-ties. Strong-ties relate to the depth of personal commitment and connection with publics and can translate into powerful action, whereas publics with weak-ties are less committed and are willing to only take action that requires less effort.

Strong connections are generally made more on individual levels through dialogue and negotiation. A journalist or celebrity who feels passionately about a cause will go to great lengths to bring visibility to the issue, making these connections very valuable to an organization. However, Koestler (1977), Bob (2005), and Wakefield et al. (2011) focused on the importance of connecting to similar entities. Koestler (1977) provided this advice to nonprofits with regards to forming connections with similar activist organizations to support mutual causes:

> The combined efforts of allied organizations can produce a multiplier effect in shaping public attitudes on human service issues. Seeking out the organizations—local, state, regional, national—whose goals coincide with yours will exert leverage that magnifies the impact of whatever message you are trying to get across. (p. 20)

Activists with similar platforms can cooperate in their efforts in order to gain more attention. Cottle and Nolan (2007) identified a trend toward "more proactive NGO collaborations that mobilize collective resources and maximize impact on the media" (p. 875). Furthermore, Cottle and Nolan noted the emergence of humanitarian resources like Reuters' Alertnet (www.alertnet.org) and the United Nation's ReliefWeb (www.reliefweb.int), wherein web-based services collate and dissemble "accessible, up-to-date information and background on forgotten humanitarian crises around the world" (p. 875). These resources help point activists in the right direction for making connections.

Wakefield et al. (2011) stated that organizations or movements within their perspective causes, "could increase their influence by linking together and cooperating in their efforts instead

of competing for limited resources" (p. 22). While some organizations, such as Amnesty International or the Red Cross, gain greater visibility and obtain more support and funding, other smaller groups would have much to gain by forming alliances with the larger, more prominent causes. According to Bob (2005), "There are clear hierarchies among NGOs, with top organizations having the deepest pockets, the best staffs, and the greatest credibility, often in a single package" (p. 22). Bob referred to the larger organizations as *gatekeeper NGOs*, and explained that "Gatekeepers… hold the key to broader support" for the smaller entities (p. 24). Along these same lines, Tkalac and Pavicic (2009) pointed out:

> Large international NGOs could attract large donors who perceive them as the only organizations capable of coping with certain social difficulties. Such donors could also be interested in having a reliable partner institution. Since the number of donors and their funds are limited, smaller national, regional and even international NGOs could be at a handicap in their fund-raising activities. (p. 813)

Therefore, making connections makes sense for smaller organizations who struggle to build their cause. The relationship, however, ought to be mutually beneficial. At times smaller organizations are better able to meet needs on a more personal and local level. This ability to cater to specific niches is why larger organizations should welcome partnerships with smaller groups. Consequently, the connections and relationships formed through the making connections strategy can be highly beneficial in reaching out.

**Reaching out.** Reaching out refers to an activist organization's attempts to extend information to key publics and other institutions that are not naturally connected to the issue, such as the media, local communities, governments, and corporations. The purpose of reaching out is to direct "the exchange of information with these important external stakeholders so that

they can be convinced to assist the cause of building awareness and increasing support" (Wakefield et al., 2011, p. 22). Heath (1997) stated, "Activists work to put key facts, values, and policy preferences into the public dialogue. They believe that as others learn the facts, values, and policy preferences, a new set of expectations will emerge and demand improved corporate and government policy" (p. 165). This is the area where more traditional methods of public relations are put into practice in order to create public awareness, understanding, and involvement; consequently, this is also the area where some research has been done.

*Reaching out to community, government, and corporations.* Reaching out incorporates an activist organization's efforts to gain visibility and support in the community as well as encourage government and corporate participation in the cause. One of Wilcox and Cameron's (2000) objectives for nonprofits is to develop public awareness of an organization's purpose and activities. Once an organization accomplishes this it is important for the nonprofit to reach out to the people at whom their service is directed; in other words, to encourage individuals to use the services provided. To illustrate, the Chicago Community Media Workshop is a nonprofit organization that provides communications training to Chicago's nonprofit community. They provide useful recommendations of ways organizations can reach out – for example, visiting with journalists outside the nonprofit's immediate location, taking advantage of conferences or other gatherings where target audiences will be, offering to provide a workshop, writing for the trade press (special interest publications), and staying in touch with key audiences via newsletters or personalized letters. According to Wakefield et al. (2011), reaching out to the community is essential, because, "if an organization is seen as an outsider it will encounter obstacles in carrying out its mission" (p. 23).

Often, it is important to tailor communication to the cultural climate and situations which arise in the activist realm. Boyer (1997) explained, "Each time borders are crossed, the roles of the game change" (p. 485). Wakefield et al. (2011) offered as an illustration Voice of America, a nonprofit radio broadcast that is aired internationally. The VOA website noted that activist projects and causes cannot be considered "one size fits all" because the "desires of the local people or their cultural, economic and political differences" ought to be taken into consideration (Simms, 2010). "Traditional programs and communication messages fail to reach various needy publics because of cultural and linguistic differences, limited access to information, and low levels of education" (Tkalac & Pavicic, 2009, p. 818). This is why an understanding of local culture is an important element of reaching out. In addition to being culturally savvy, reaching out should be personal and tailored. Wakefield et al. claimed that "putting a face on a cause makes abstract claims concrete, and direct personal contact helps to facilitate the message in the manner desired by the prosocial organization" (p. 23).

*Media relations.* In reaching out to and communicating with external stakeholders, activist causes must seek to capture the attention of the media. In 2007, Cottle and Nolan's study of aid NGOs in Australia concluded that "NGOs have become increasingly dependent on the news media to publicize and pursue their humanitarian objectives" (p. 874). In gaining the attention of the media, according to Cottle and Nolan's study, humanitarian NGOs regionalize and personalize media coverage making it more appealing to local media. Cottle and Nolan also found that humanitarian NGOs generally package stories in ways designed to appeal to known media interests, such as celebrity endorsement and publicity events. Wakefield et al. (2011) also advocated this route of media relations, saying, "Prosocial groups must learn to communicate in

journalistic format, including satisfying professional standards of objectivity and creating an angle to a story that benefits the journalist and his or her outlet" (p. 23).

While these tactics have been used successfully by many nonprofits and NGOs, maneuvering through and negotiating media relationships is becoming increasingly complex. For example, using celebrities as spokespeople can affect the media relationship by reflecting badly on the organization if the celebrity misspeaks or misbehaves, which thereby detracts from the main purpose of the cause. Thus nonprofits are frequently advised to proceed with caution when using celebrity endorsements (Bronstein, 2006; Cottle & Nolan, 2007). Even presenting a story regionally may fracture prosocial messages, according to Cottle and Nolan (2007), because using a regional angle presents the message "through a mediated national prism that splinters the category of global humanity in 'us' and 'them, 'active saviors' and 'passive victims'" (p. 871).

The reason Cottle and Nolan (2007) concluded for the hit-and-miss efforts of humanitarian organizations' media relations is that in building up, making connections, and reaching out, prosocial causes strive to conform to what they call Western media's "media logic." In other words, because news worthiness is calculated according to geographic proximity, economic connectivity, body count, severity of distress, and/or entertainment or shock value, nonprofits risk the integrity of their humanitarian message for coverage which is often shallow and fleeting. The conclusion is therefore that while the three common methods of media relations can be effective, they can also have unanticipated, and sometimes detrimental, repercussions on a prosocial organization's purpose. Cottle and Nolan stated:

> Humanitarian aid organizations are now working *within*, not simply sourcing, today's
> media regime whose priorities and predispositions are not principally founded on the
> historically forged commitment to global humanitarianism. Insofar as these media

propensities win out, the historical project of global humanitarianism is diminished.

(p. 875)

That being said, Cottle and Nolan (2007) proposed other means for more prosocial media relations. These suggestions were not the most commonly used means of media relations, rather they are declared "positive developments or even resistances to the dominant media logic documented above" (Cottle & Nolan, 2007, p. 875). The first method the authors dubbed "beneficent embedding," meaning the ability of nonprofits to strive to facilitate access for journalists allowing them to become emerged in the field and cover stories with greater depth of understanding. While some organizations shy away from this because of distrust of media intentions and the possibility that negative press can result in tarnishing the organization's "brand image," Cottle and Nolan argued that organizational delegates assisting journalists is "the ideal situation for ensuring media understanding of the problems and issues" at hand (p. 867). Beneficent embedding also allows for greater depth and informed reporting.

*Using the Internet.* The second method noted by Cottle and Nolan (2007) is that the humanitarian agencies of their study reported an increased use of the Internet. This was found to be helpful not only in communicating with donors and other publics, but also indispensable in enhancing the ability of the organizations to deliver firsthand, authoritative accounts to promote their cause. Bronstein (2006) stated, "The advent of electronic communication has made the global distribution of information instantaneous and inexpensive, and many nonprofit groups are seizing the opportunity to expand their public relations programs" (p. 72). With the general public and journalists increasingly turning to non-corporate sources for information (Bronstein, 2006), new media, including websites, blogs, and social media, are one way activist groups can reach out to make themselves more visible in a manner that does not conflict with their prosocial

motives. The Internet is an increasingly appealing tool for nonprofit organizations because of its growing accessibility, potential reach, cost-effectiveness, and the ability to publish firsthand content. The Internet not only allows activists to represent their cause from their own point of view but, according to Bronstein, activist presence on the Internet encourages journalists not to discount their point of view.

Seo, Kim, and Yang (2009) studied new media and global activism among 75 transnational NGOs. Their results showed that, regardless of an organization's objective, websites are viewed by NGOs as the most important new media tool available; blogs were the second most important. "This indicates that the website is the major new media tool for NGOs at this time" (Seo, Kim, & Yang, 2009, p. 124). Furthermore, their study asked open-ended questions which revealed that several NGOs are investigating social networking sites such as Twitter and Facebook to see if that is a viable option for reaching targeted publics. Boyer (1997) stated, "Advocacy groups have found that electronic communications among motivated activists can be a powerful tool for organization and action" (p. 493). Gladwell (2010) agreed that social media can be an excellent tool to reach out to publics, not only to those with strong ties to an organization, but also to those with weak ties to a cause. Gladwell cites sociologist Mark Granovetter as stating there is strength in weak ties: "Our acquaintances – not our friends – are our greatest source of new ideas and information. The Internet lets us exploit the power of these kinds of distant connections with marvelous efficiency" (as cited in Gladwell, 2010, p. 3). The key to motivating publics with weak ties, according to Gladwell, is not asking too much; "Social networks are effective at increasing *participation* – by lessening the level of motivation that participation requires" (Gladwell, 2009, p. 5).

Tkalac and Pavicic (2009) wrote that communication skills are being converted over to the Internet so that ideas and tactics can be shared instantly without drawing from tight resources. But just because the Internet is revolutionizing the ways in which nonprofits can reach out does not mean that traditional methods are passé.

Whether with the media, other entities, or internally, the function of communication is to foster an exchange of dialogue between the activists and their publics (Wakefield et al., 2011). These three areas—building up, making connections, and reaching out—are a trend away from the more marketing/integrated communication strategies that are being applied in contemporary corporate settings, because the focus is on the publics involved in the support and functions of the organization and not just "brand name recognition." These suggested methods of prosocial public relations propose a trend toward the roots of public relations: focusing on building and maintaining positive relationships with key publics. Wakefield et al. (2011) stated "it would thus seem the more traditional, grass-roots efforts would be best suited to helping prosocial causes" (p. 19). These areas, especially in the areas of negotiation, making connections, and forming relationships by reaching out, show promise for helping prosocial activists in their communication efforts to build awareness, understanding, and support in the likeness of two-way symmetrical exchanges proposed by J. E. Grunig (1992).

Tkalac and Pavicic (2009) stated, "Even though nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have consistently used public relations as a primary tool to mobilize public opinion in their favor, public relations literature on this subject is rather thin" (p. 807-808). This study aims to enhance the literature by looking at the ways nonprofits seek to build up, make connections, and reach out in non-confrontational, prosocial ways.

**Research Questions**

The previous review of literature has looked at the nexus between activism and public relations and examined the range of activist motivations and activities in the change agent spectrum which classified confrontational, advocacy, and prosocial activism. From this discussion a model of prosocial public relations was identified which takes into consideration the different organizational functions, like building up, making connections, and reaching out, that prosocial activist organizations perform in order to accomplish their goals. Furthermore, the four models of public relations (Grunig and Hunt, 1984) and the ten models of negotiation theories (Plowman, 2007) were related to how activists communicate with their key publics.

From this literature analysis the following research questions were developed upon which this exploratory study was centered. These research questions were created so that rather than trying to approach the main research questions holistically, as one unit of analysis, the investigator is able to look at specific embedded elements within the questions that relate directly to the propositions of the main questions. The study did not just address whether or not public relations plays an important role in a nonprofit organization's endeavors, but the study placed emphasis on which of the models of public relations fit the methods used in the case study and which strategies of negotiation are most effective in relationships with key publics. Furthermore, where the second main research question asks if the elements of building up, making connections, and reaching out can be identified in a general sense, attention is paid to the particular ways in which the organization implemented the proposed elements and looked for any other methods used by the organization to help it reach its goals. Therefore, the research questions are:

RQ 1: Does this particular case support the theory that communication as it relates to

public relations is an important function in a prosocial organization trying to reach

its goals?

1a: Which models of negotiation were observed in the case? Which models of negotiation

does the case seem to suggest should be most effective in relationships with key

publics?

1b: Which of Grunig and Hunt's (1984) models of public relations were observed in the

public relations strategies used by the case? Which models of public relations does

the case seem to suggest should be most effective in relationships with key publics?

RQ 2: Can the three proposed elements of prosocial public relations (building up, making

connections, reaching out) be clearly identified in a prosocial nonprofit

organization's public relations strategies?

2a: In what ways does the organization build up, make connections, and reach out?

2b: Are there other methods of public relations or communication used that are essential

to the organization in reaching its goals?

**Methodology**

Research can be used to verify and validate a theory. On the other hand, depending on the

conclusions drawn from the data, research can also challenge or discredit a theory. The preceding

review of literature has delved into the theoretical concepts of the activist spectrum proposed by

Wakefield et al. (2011) and begun to generalize about the foundations of prosocial public

relations which may exist in a nonprofit organization serving a prosocial cause. Sutton and Staw

(1995) stated that a theoretical basis is necessary to tell "a [hypothetical] story about why acts,

events, structure, and thoughts occur" (as cited by Yin, 2009, p. 36). In other words, a theory can

serve as a starting point of analysis, a frame around which to design a study. The next step is to explore the theory and examine its propositions. According to Yin (2009), "Any new empirical study is likely to assume the characteristic of an 'exploratory' study" (p. 37). This study, therefore, serves as an exploratory study of prosocial public relations as proposed by Wakefield et al. This study explores whether or not public relations/communication plays an important role in helping nonprofits reach their goals, and if the elements of prosocial public relations can be identified.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) wrote that there are some phenomena that cannot be fully understood "without reference to the context in which it is embedded" (p. 302). Holtzhausen (2000) stated that public relations is one of those phenomena which "will be best understood in the way it is practiced in a particular environment and at a particular time. In that way," she continued, "public relations will reflect the diversity of the societies in which it is practiced" (p. 107). Studying public relations in its natural environment not only helps the understanding of the diversity of the profession across cultures, but also clarifies the variety of practice within specialized areas from business public relations to nonprofit public relations. This study utilized qualitative research methods, specifically the case study method, to explore the value and elements of prosocial public relations as it is used in activist communications. In doing so, this study aimed to support or amend the theory of prosocial public relations.

Case studies, as defined by Stacks (2002), are "*in-depth studies of particular people, organizations, events, or even processes.* They provide a richly detailed and complete understanding of the case under study," and are "an obvious extension of secondary research" (p. 71). A case study is generally considered appropriate for the exploratory phase of an investigation and can be used as a preliminary research method (Yin, 2009). It is especially

appropriate in instances that investigate a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context when the "boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (Yin, 2009, p. 18). This is the case with nonprofits, as Bourland-Davis et al. (2010) stated that "it becomes difficult to separate the work of the organizations from the leaders and from public relations practitioners" (p. 418).

A carefully structured and systematically executed case study can result in unique observations and insights that might not be gathered by any other means. Yin (2009) stated "the case study method allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events" such as organizational processes (p. 4). Yin proposed three qualifications by which to judge the appropriateness of a case study methodology. First, the types of research questions being asked should not deal with frequencies or incidence (which would require quantitative methods), but should rather focus on the "how" or "why" aspects of the phenomena. In this case, the investigator wished to explore if communication plays a vital role in helping the organization reach its goals and how nonprofits communicate with their publics, making it a valid candidate for a case study. Secondly, Yin's last two qualifications refer to the extent of control the researcher has over behavioral events and the degree of focus on the present, rather than the historical "dead past." Yin stated, "The case study is preferred in examining contemporary events, but when the relevant behaviors cannot be manipulated" (p. 11). Such is the case with this inquiry; the study is concerned with contemporary practices of public relations over which the researcher has no control.

The following paragraphs will describe the subject of the case study, outline the procedure for data collection and analysis, and elucidate the potential theoretical contributions and delimitations of the study.

**The Case Subject**

The activist sector is filled with millions of voices all vying to gain attention for their many different causes. Given the vastness of choices, the complexity of activism in general, and the certain differences in methods of communication between varying causes, complete research on this particular topic would take a lifetime to generate. For this introductory and exploratory study, the researcher chose a single-case study to examine if public relations does in fact play an important role in a successful nonprofit organization, and if the proposed elements of prosocial public relations can be identified.

According to Yin (2009), a single-case study can be justified if the subject is a "*representative* or *typical* case" where the "objective is to capture the circumstances and conditions of an everyday or commonplace situation" (p. 48). The goal in choosing a nonprofit to serve as the case for this study was to identify a "typical" nonprofit entity that fits the definition of prosocial, an organization that is well established, and which is geographically accessible to the researcher.

The sample population of potential nonprofit organizations was taken from a compilation of nonprofits under the 2011-2012 Combined Federal Campaign (CFC). The CFC is a government organization which organizes the fundraising efforts in federal workplaces in the United States. Each state has a committee that selects local, national, and international charities based on eligibility requirements. The CFC catalog used in this study is compiled of 2,866 nonprofit organizations that have ties to the state in which this study was conducted. Although this list is not a complete representation of every nonprofit agency in the state, it does serve as a legitimate archival source from which to select a candidate for this case study because of ease of access to key information regarding the organizations. Information on each organization is

available in a paper or web-based directory which includes a 25-word description of the

organization's purpose, its administrative and fundraising expense rate (AFR), and its Service

Categories (Taxonomy Codes). These three categories were used in narrowing the selection pool

for possible case studies.

| Included Service Categories | Excluded Service Categories |
|---|---|
| K- Food, Agriculture, and Nutrition | A- Arts, Culture, and Humanities |
| L- Housing, Shelter | B- Educational Institutions & Related Services |
| M- Public Safety, Disaster Preparedness & Relief | C- Environmental Quality, Protection & Beatification |
| P- Human Services- Multipurpose and Other | D- Animal Related |
| Q- International, Foreign Affairs, National Security | E- Health- General and Rehabilitative |
| S- Community Improvement, Capacity Building | F- Mental Health, Crisis Intervention |
| T- Philanthropy, Voluntarism & Foundations | G- Disease, Disorders, Medicinal Disciplines |
| W- Public, Social Benefit: Multipurpose and Other | H- Medical Research |
| X- Religion Related, Spiritual Development | I- Crime, Legal Related |
| Y- Mutual/Membership Benefit Orgs., Other | J- Employment, Job Related |
| Z- Other | N- Recreation, Sports, Leisure, Athletics |
| | O- Youth development |
| | R- Civil Rights, Social Action, Advocacy |
| | U- Science & Technology Research Institutes |
| | V- Social Science Research Institutes, Services |

*Figure 1.* Complete list of those Service Categories (Taxonomy Codes) as developed by the National Center for Charitable Statistics that were included and excluded from the sample population for this study.

There are 26 Service Categories (Taxonomy Codes) which represent the types of services

that most charitable organizations offer. The categories were developed by the National Center

for Charitable Statistics and are widely used in the nonprofit community (Combined Federal

Campaign, 2011). Each organization self-chooses up to three identifiers according to what they

feel best represents the work they do. In order to drastically reduce the number of eligible

nonprofits, the researcher selected 11 Service Categories that she felt would result in producing a

selection of organizations that fit the definition of prosocial. The researcher looked for a cause

that was likely driven by altruistic motivations, that was not centered on research, and which

serviced a definable populace (which excluded groups concerned with the environment, animals, and culture), while avoiding populations deemed vulnerable by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB defined vulnerable populations as children, pregnant women, cognitively impaired, prisoners, and institutionalized persons. Figure 1 shows the categories that were included and excluded in the selection process.

Limiting the selections by Service Category brought the eligible number of nonprofits to 326. Next, organizations were considered based on their 25-word descriptions and their Administrative and Fundraising expense Rate (AFR). If in their description an organization served a vulnerable population, particularly children, they were excluded. In addition, organizations were considered ineligible if they had an AFR of more than 25 percent. An AFR represents the percentage of dollars spent on administering the charity, including executive salaries and fundraising expenses. According to the CFC, "The philanthropic community generally considers an AFR in excess of 35 percent to be problematic" (Maricopa Country Federal Campaign, 2011, p. 2). The researcher in this case wanted to select an organization that spent at least 75 percent of all donations on the cause itself rather than administrative expenses.

With these requirements the final sampling of organizations was narrowed to 244. From there the researcher read the 25-word description of the organizations to find one that would fit the purposes of this case study best. Organizations that included Services Categories of both P and W were given preference because of their potentially strong prosocial stance. As a final requirement, Yin (2009) included ease of access for a case study, explaining that the researcher needs to have "sufficient access to the potential data, whether to interview people, review documents or records, or make observations in the 'field'" (p. 26).

Yin (2009) further recommended that the researcher "should choose the case(s) that will most likely illuminate [the] research questions" (p. 26). For this to be possible, the organization selected had to have a mission statement that aligned with the definition of prosocial activism. That is, the organization should seek to improve the welfare of others motivated by humane, universal values. With these qualifications in mind the researcher chose The Society of St. Vincent de Paul. Access to the Society was granted by a contact in the communications department and cooperation with and participation in the case study was granted.

St. Vincent de Paul is associated with the Catholic faith; thus their motives stem from altruistic Christian Gospel values to assist the poor and needy. According to the USA General Council website for the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, "Vincentians," members of the Catholic faith who volunteer significant time and resources to the organization, "are united in an international society of charity by their spirit of poverty, humility and sharing…" (National Council of the United States Society of St. Vincent de Paul, 2011). According to their mission statement, St. Vincent de Paul is dedicated to serving the poor and providing opportunities to serve. The programs it has established in this endeavor include services for the homeless, medical and dental care for the working poor, charity dining rooms, thrift stores, a transitional housing shelter, and general assistance for individuals in need. The main component of the organization, apart from the aforementioned programs and facilities, is locally organized conferences which are operated by member-volunteers (Vincentians). Conferences not only extend the reach of the organization beyond its central locations but local Vincentians are able to offer assistance to those in need on a more personal level.

In addition to examining the purpose and motives of the nonprofit, the researcher also hoped to find a case that had a long-standing history in the community. The Society of St.

Vincent de Paul is a well-established nonprofit organization, not only in the area where this study took place but internationally. The original Council of Society of St. Vincent de Paul was founded in Paris, France, in 1833, and currently headquarters there as the Council General. The Society of St. Vincent de Paul has a presence in 144 countries, and the USA Council General has been in the United States since 1845. The Society has many appendages called Diocesan Councils and those Councils are identified by the main city in which they operate. The subject of this case study is located in the Western United States and is currently the largest Council of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul in the country (Seligman, 2012). The Council has been in the state for 63 years and currently has 89 conferences.

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul was deemed likely to yield the best data considering its prosocial objectives and motives, the multiple facets and programs of the organization that require communication, its long-term and successful foundation, and favorable reputation in the community. Secondarily to the aforementioned reasons, the willingness to participate in the case study and the convenient and accessible location to the researcher also made the Society of St. Vincent de Paul a quality candidate for this research. Daymon & Holloway (2002) affirmed that it is not uncommon to select a case for practical reasons.

**Procedure and Measurement**

Critics of case study research often observe that data is collected based on the subjective judgment of the investigator. Case study advocates, on the other hand, suggest that this shortcoming is overcome by rigorous methodological procedure and clearly defined sources for data collection (Daymon & Holloway, 2002; Yin, 2009). In fact, one of the strengths of case study research is the ability to draw from a wide variety of sources for data (Daymon & Holloway, 2002; Yin, 2009). This allows data to "converge in a triangulating fashion," (Yin,

2009, p. 18). This triangulation of data from multiple sources all supporting the same conclusions helps to support the construct validity of the case study. Construct validity relates to the operational measures for the research question under study (Yin, 2009); construct validity is related to credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) drawing conclusions from multiple sources is one way to establish the credibility of the findings and interpretations of a study. Triangulation can include data that comes from different sources or from multiple items of one source. Yin (2009) listed six major sources from which evidence can be triangulated, four of which are relevant to the procedure of this study: (1) documentation, (2) interviews, (3) archival records, and (4) direct-observation.

Before collecting data the researcher created table shells as suggested by Yin (2009) (see Figure 2). The columns of the table represent the data to be collected and the rows relate to the research questions under consideration. Table shells serve two important purposes in the procedure of a case study; first, they force the researcher to identify what data are sought, and second, they ensure that parallel information will be obtained from multiple sources.

|  | RQ 1a role of comm/PR | RQ 1b models of PR | RQ 1c negotiation | RQ 2a id 3 elements | RQ 2b Other elements |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Documentation** |  |  |  |  |  |
| website | √ | √ |  | √ | √ |
| Vincentian Connection | √ | √ |  | √ | √ |
| news clippings |  | √ |  | √ | √ |
| press releases/media advisories | √ | √ |  | √ | √ |
| event flyers | √ | √ |  | √ | √ |
| brochures | √ | √ |  | √ | √ |
| Newsletter | √ | √ |  | √ | √ |
| Email Newsletter | √ | √ |  | √ | √ |
| **Social Media** |  |  |  |  |  |
| blog | √ | √ |  | √ | √ |
| facebook/twitter | √ | √ |  | √ | √ |
| youtube | √ | √ |  | √ | √ |
| **Interviews** | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ |
| **Archival Records** |  |  |  |  |  |
| Annual Report (statistical records) | √ |  |  | √ | √ |
| Service records | √ |  |  | √ | √ |
| Tax information | √ |  |  | √ | √ |
| Past survey research | √ | √ |  | √ | √ |
| **Observations** | √ |  | √ | √ | √ |

*Figure 2.* Table shell created for this study illustrating where data is sought from multiple sources.

The process of collecting documentation, archival records, and conducting interviews and field visits are what Stacks (2002) referred to as "fact-finding and data-gathering" (p.74). The process of conducting a case study is an unspecific art – that is to say, there is no universal process. However, several authors suggested keeping fastidious track of whatever process the researcher follows in the form of annotated bibliographies, establishing a chain of evidence, and keeping an organized database (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Yin, 2009). This allows other researchers to audit, or follow the logic of the case study, and arrive at the same conclusions. The concept behind all three of these methods was used in this study. First, the researcher created a type of coding sheet and operational definitions with which to record insights and keep track of evidence as records were analyzed. This coding sheet included an area for a summary of the documents and recorded information similar to what would be found in an annotated bibliography. Also on the coding sheet were the research questions where the researcher could record specific observations. Daymon and Holloway (2002) suggested constructing a coding system that "allows for uncategorized ideas and activities to be accounted for" (p. 237). The final research question allowed for any information which did not fit under any category to be recorded.

While analyzing data, a chain of evidence was recorded to keep tack of how data led to conjectures, and conjectures led to concluding observations. This chain of evidence document is stored in the case study database. All documents available in electronic form were saved on the researcher's computer and an inventory was kept of where each record was stored. The inventory file lists a description of each saved record, the source from which it was pulled, and the file name of where it was saved. The database also includes a copy of every coding sheet used during the study. Keeping the database and the chain of evidence contributes to the reliability of the

study because it allows other researchers to see exactly what was done and how conclusions were reached (Yin, 2009).

The first source for data collection was documentation. Documentation can take many forms including press releases, media advisories, flyers, brochures, notes from meetings, news clippings, websites, etc. Documents are not always accurate or impartial; therefore, they cannot be taken as literal recordings. With that in mind, documents are useful in corroborating information from other sources and providing specific details.

For this case study the researcher used documentation as a starting point for data collection. Before making the first field visit the researcher searched the Internet collecting documents from the organization's website, various local news sources, and social media. This search produced many of the documents that were later coded and analyzed. Records used for documentation were the content of St. Vincent de Paul's website, brochures, flyers, the St. Vincent de Paul Society Newsletter (published monthly), the Vincentian Connection (newsletter published 3 times a year), *Helping the Poor* blog, and content from the social media sites (Facebook, twitter, and YouTube). Observations made from documentation were helpful in formulating questions for interviews.

The second source of data in this case study was interviews. Yin (2009) described interviews as one of the most important sources in a case study because they provide data from individuals intimately connected to the subject. An interview was first scheduled with the Manager of Communications. Following Yin's advice, the researcher conducted interviews as guided conversations rather than ridged question-and-answer sessions. While focused interviews are more conversational, the questions asked still follow an outline leading to obtain preconceived, sought-after information. Questions were asked in a friendly, nonthreatening way

and questions were carefully structured to solicit information without biasing the responses. Yin referred to this as allowing the interviewee "to provide a fresh commentary" (p. 107). Interviewees were asked questions to solicit facts, opinions, and insights that could later be used to corroborate data from other sources. Interviewees were also asked to suggest or recommend other people related to the everyday operations of the nonprofit who might be beneficial to interview in conjunction with the case study. Through this process, the researcher was lead to interview the Director of Community Relations and Business Strategies who is also a member of the executive board, a member of Major Giving/Support, a Volunteer Program Coordinator, and the Manager of Vincentian Support Services. These interviews provided opportunities to corroborate facts between interviewees as well as triangulate the conjectures from other sources.

While conducting interviews the researcher asked for any archival records that might be available. Specifically, the researcher collected service volunteer records, organizational statistics, and survey data the organization had from prior research. The researcher also collected statistical data made available by federal and state governments. Although all archival data was kept in the case study database, "the usefulness of these archival records will vary from case study to case study" (Yin, 2009, p. 106); therefore, only those records that relate to the findings of the study are referred to in the later portions of this paper.

The fourth source of data for this case study was direct observation. These observations were made during field visits. The researcher looked for opportunities to corroborate other information with what was visible from office interactions, volunteer interactions, and meetings. Observations were made at St. Vincent de Paul's many venues, including their main campus, the thrift stores, donation sites, events, and conference meetings. These types of observations are important, as Daymon and Holloway (2002) pointed out, because "case studies should also focus

on the routine, the taken for granted, the *everyday goings on* of those involved in sending and

receiving managed communication" (p. 110).

**Data Analysis**

Just like there is no set procedure for conducting a case study, data analysis is also left to

the discretion of the researcher (Yin, 2009). While judgment on the most appropriate analytic

process should be made based on what best fits the needs of the research questions and the

collected data, there are a few common guidelines to data analysis. To begin, the evidence

collected from the study should be reviewed by the researcher quickly (Yin, 2009). This allowed

questions to be asked about why data appears as it does. It also guided the researcher to other

possible sources. With this method, one answer leads to a host of new questions which will

eventually aggregate into a significant inquiry as to how or why something functions as it does

(Yin, 2009).

Evaluating the data while collecting more evidence is another important element in data

analysis; therefore, evaluation of the communication tools, programs, and records in this case

study was an ongoing process. This constant comparative analysis is one of the strengths of

doing a case study because constant comparison means that data analysis can be both inductive

and deductive. First the researcher began with propositions derived from the research questions

that led to categories through which data was analyzed. Daymon and Holloway (2002) explained

that from those categories, themes and patterns emerge which then present other propositions or

ideas that are tested as data collection continues.

Some documents were analyzed qualitatively where the researcher looked at the way

things were presented, the audiences for whom they were meant, how statistics are organized,

key messages, and strategic purposes. Other records, specifically social media (Twitter and

Facebook) were analyzed quantitatively. Posts and comments were coded and categories were

created until saturation was achieved and no new categories were being added. Messages were

coded in all categories to which they applied and the number of instances of each category was

totaled. Social media communication from September 2011 to January 2012 was analyzed. To

assist the process of looking for evidence regarding the research questions, operational

definitions were constructed. Unique to this study are the definitions for building up, making

connections, and reaching out (see Figure 3). Other operational definitions were derived from

typical public relations and communication literature.

| | |
|---|---|
| Building Up: | Messages from or actions of the organization that demonstrate efforts to grow and strengthen internal aspects of the organization including leadership, organizational mission statement and purpose, staff, and services. |
| Making Connections: | Messages from or actions of the organization that demonstrate an effort to connect, form alliance, build strong individual relationships with other organizations, volunteers, and supporters related to the cause of the communicating organization. |
| Reaching Out: | Messages from or actions of the organization that demonstrate an effort to extend the organization's coverage, connections, and policy to those not naturally connected with the organization including media, government, communities, and corporations not specifically related to the cause of the communicating organization. |

*Figure 3.* Operational definitions of the three proposed elements of prosocial
public relations: building up, making connections and reaching out.

As the data collection process continued, relevant notes from coding sheets were

organized into a matrix and saved in the case study database. This matrix arranged the

conjectures and insights derived from each document and archival record according to the

research questions which allowed the researcher to easily compare the data and see similarities,

differences, and emerging patterns. Daymon and Holloway (2002) suggested that once data is

reduced into manageable portions by coding and organizing into categories according to themes,

then interpretation generates the content, concepts, and theories being analyzed by bringing meaning and insight into the case study.

The analytic strategy of this study is based on the theoretical propositions of the research questions. Yin (2009) described relying on theoretical propositions as the "most preferred strategy" because "the original objectives and design of the case study presumably were based on such propositions, which in turn reflected a set of research questions, reviews of the literature, and new … propositions" (p. 130). The propositions helped the researcher to recognize which data were important and which data were superfluous. Furthermore, propositions helped to suggest alternative explanations as observations were made. In looking at the data and creating conjectures, alternative explanations suggested different ways to interpret the findings which lead to the new conjectures. The process of reaching the final observations was documented in a chain of evidence; the record shows documentation of conjectures that were created as data were organized. Conjectures were supported or contradicted by multiple evidences from the study and final observations were concluded.

**Theoretical Contributions and Delimitations**

In every study there are bound to be weaknesses that restrict the theoretical conclusions. It is the responsibility of the researcher to address these limitations and work to ensure they have the minimal possible impact on the potential theoretical contributions. The first delimitation of this study is that it is a single-case study. Single case studies are notoriously criticized because they provide little basis for scientific generalization. The argument is that a single case can not be applied to a universe or population. The goal of this case study is not to be generalizable, however. Yin (2009) posited, *"This analogy to samples and universes is incorrect when dealing with case studies…"* (p.43) because case studies rely on analytical generalization as opposed to

statistical generalization. "In analytical generalization, the investigator is striving to generalize a particular set of results to some broader theory" (Yin, 2009, p. 43). The intended purpose of this case study is to serve as a basis to initiate dialogue regarding activist public relations and communication; in other words, the goal is theory building as opposed to theory testing. According to Daymon and Holloway (2002), the results of a case study should be open-ended in order to "generate a forum for further dialogue" (p. 128).

Another strength of this study wherein lies theoretical contribution is its basis in real-life context. The data of this study comes from an actual nonprofit organization that has built success enough to operate for 63 years in the community. "Case studies," according to Berg (2009), "open the door to the processes created and used by individuals involved in the phenomenon" (p. 319). In other words, this study reveals the communication and public relations practices used by professionals in their every-day environments. To try and generalize a case study is to "tear the case's findings out of the particular real-life context which gives them their meaning" (Daymon & Holloway, 2002, p, 113). Developing communications theory around real, contemporary events in their natural environments helps achieve "… insights into territory that is previously uncharted or not well documented" (Daymon & Holloway, 2002, p. 106).

A second delimitation of this study is that the Society of St. Vincent de Paul exists all over the country, not just in the organization examined here. Unfortunately, including the larger facets of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, the Council General in Paris and the United States Council in St. Louis Missouri, were beyond the reach and resources of the researcher for this particular project. Future study, however, should look to include the larger picture. In this case the investigator recommends that this study be considered a pilot study. Yin (2009) suggested that "there are other situations in which the single-case study may be used as a pilot case" (p.

49). This case study is meant to be "the first step in forming a theoretical position on public relations strategy and planning that can be tested in the field or in the laboratory" (Stacks, 2002, p. 78). Further research will be able to expand on the results of this study to continue to build theory. Therefore, as Yin stated, "the single case study can represent a significant contribution to knowledge and theory building" (p. 47).

The case is also bound by time delimitations. The documentation and archival records gathered and analyzed here covered the communication activities and operations over several months. Observations and media scanning were conducted September 2011 through January 2012. In order to try and balance the delimitations of these data representing only a snapshot in time, interview questions were non-time specific. Even though the case will represent the current practices of the organization, the cause can be seen as representative of "a process of public relations and that the case may provide insight into similar situations" (Stacks, 2002, p.73).

Other criticisms of the case study method include a perceived lack of rigor and an over-descriptive nature. According to Yin (2009) this is a problem when the case study investigator has not followed systematic procedures, and it can be overcome if the investigator follows specific, systematic measures in the collection and analysis of data. Systematic procedures contribute to the repeatability of a study and, because a case study does not strive to be generalizable, it must strive to be repeatable. Steps taken to ensure that other researchers can follow the data collection procedures and arrive at the same conclusions not only increase the rigor of the study, but also contribute to the reliability of the results. The efforts taken to document the data collection and record the chain of evidence in this study contribute to reliability and repeatability. Regarding an over descriptive nature, Daymon and Holloway (2002) said:

Case studies are sometimes accused of being too descriptive. However, in some instances, description is your intent, say, if you wish to develop understanding of how a theory works in practice in a particular setting, or if you are attempting to illustrate a case that is unique. (p. 116)

Furthermore, apart from description being the intent of the study to develop the understanding of the process of prosocial public relations in a nonprofit organization, if the researcher relies on the theoretical propositions to guide the analysis of data collections, as discussed previously, then, as Yin stated, "the proposition helps to focus attention on certain data and to ignore other data" (p. 130) thus cutting down on unnecessary descriptions.

Case study research can also be limited by researcher bias. The purpose of this study is not to substantiate a preconceived position, but rather to explore the means and methods by which the pubic relations and communication functions in a nonprofit entity seeking prosocial change within a specified theoretical framework of prosocial public relations. The theory provides the researcher with a blueprint or outline of possible explanations for events, but the researcher needed to be careful not to be blinded by *a priori* assumptions. Bias can be mitigated in the extent to which the investigator is open to contrary findings or alternative explanations. "Marshall and Rossman (1995) contend that if you are not able to find strong supporting evidence for alternative explanations, then you can feel confident that the explanation you offer is the most plausible of them all" (as cited in Daymon & Holloway, 2002, p. 241).

Despite the limitations of this study, the research is significant because this study has the potential to contribute to the efforts of those public relations practitioners working in prosocial nonprofits and NGOs who otherwise have little theoretical foundation specific to the work they do. Daymon and Holloway (2002) pointed out that "a good case study, therefore, highlights the

numerous factors governing managed communication in a particular setting, portraying something of its uniqueness while also – but not always – attempting to offer insights that have wider relevance" (p. 106). This study then also contributes to the academic community where documentation on the practices of public relations in a nonprofit organization are scarce and research regarding the procedures of activists with prosocial motivations is practically nonexistent. "The scientific benefit of the case study method," as Berg (2009) stated, "lies in its ability to open the way for discoveries" (p. 329). Therefore, the results and observations of this study reflect the uniqueness of methods studied while also offering insights that have wider relevance as well.

## Results

Through the analysis of documentation and archival records the following data were collected. Results were then supported though interviews and observations. Regarding the case study of the Council of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, public relations does play a vital role in the operations of the nonprofit entity. Communications is an essential function as it relates to helping the organization gain visibility and support in the community, and as it relates to establishing and maintaining relationships with key publics.

It can likely be argued that any number of communication theories can be used to attain visibility and support for a nonprofit entity engaged in a prosocial cause; however, according to the Director of Community Relations, Business Strategies, and member of the Executive Board, "Public relations is actually extremely important for a nonprofit. There is no cost involved, if you will; not like putting ads in the papers" (personal communication, January 27, 2012). Findings support this claim that, in nonprofit organizations where promotional funds are either scarce or nonexistent, public relations is truly the method that best helps a prosocial nonprofit to be

successful. In addition to its cost effectiveness, the role of public relations as examined in the Council of St. Vincent de Paul goes beyond general management of communication between the organization and its intended publics, although that is important; public relations as it is used in gaining visibility and support entails the practice of establishing relationships between the organization and its individual publics through building up, reaching out, and making connections.

The following sections will review the findings and results of this case study, relating the ways in which building up, reaching out, and making connections were identified in the everyday functions of St. Vincent de Paul, and illustrating the importance of communication and public relations to the nonprofit. In addition to the three elements proposed by Wakefield et al. (2011), the results of this case study found evidence that supports the addition of another factor in prosocial public relations relating to the nurturing and preserving of relationships. The results will show that this public relations formula, along with the addition of nurturing and preserving relationships, is necessary in helping St. Vincent de Paul gain visibility and support. The discussion will reference the models of public relations that were identified in the various processes. Finally, the strategies of negotiation that were identified will be discussed in addition to a note on the role of advocacy communication in a prosocial nonprofit organization.

**Situational Theory of Publics: A Brief Detour**

As the elements of prosocial public relations began to manifest throughout this case study, it became apparent that the basis of this study was missing a rudimentary public relations theory that assists the discussion of publics as they relate to an organization, or in this case as they relate to a cause. Grunig and Hunt (1984) established the situational theory of publics wherewith to categorize publics. The theory also establishes five factors describing how an

individual or group relates to the organization or cause. This terminology will be helpful in the discussion of St. Vincent de Paul's public relations activities and the elements of prosocial public relations. Therefore, this section of the paper will briefly introduce Grunig and Hunt's situational theory of publics.

According to the theory there are four basic publics: (1) non-publics, (2) latent publics, (3) aware publics, and (4) active publics. As is relevant in this case study, a non-public is one that is completely indifferent to the cause of the organization; a latent public refers to those individuals or groups that, if made aware of the cause, would gain interest; an aware public is interested and informed; and finally, an active public is one that supports the cause by actively supporting the organization. The variables which affect these different classifications are problem recognition, constraint recognition, level of involvement, and information seeking and processing. These variables determine whether a person will become active or not. Problem recognition is the extent to which the cause is recognized as a problem. To illustrate, because St. Vincent de Paul's purpose is caring for and serving the poor, a non-public of the organization would be those who do not consider poverty an issue with which to be concerned. Constraint recognition is the extent to which individuals view limitations that impact their ability to be involved. Level of involvement is a measure of how relevant the cause is to an individual or how involved they may already be. Information seeking publics, usually aware or active publics, are those actively looking for information. Information processing publics are those who will process information that comes to them and most likely fall under the latent or non-public classifications.

Being able to classify publics as latent, aware, and active and use the terminology of problem and constraint recognition, level of involvement, and information seeking and

processing, will greatly aid the discussion of prosocial public relations in reaching out and making connections.

**Building Up: Establishing a Solid Foundation**

In gaining visibility, building up establishes an identity though which an organization can reach out to and make connections with publics through strong leadership and dedicated staff. Building up denotes messages or actions that show efforts to grow and strengthen internal aspects of the organization such as leadership, staff, mission statement, and services. The results of this case study suggest that building up is an element of prosocial public relations used by St. Vincent de Paul.

The review of literature proposed that in building up an organization needed to declare its objectives by having a clear mission statement, considering audiences for information and services, and strategizing how messages are to be delivered. This process is part of establishing an identity for the organization. In this way the organization is clear on its purposes and the ways in which communication supports its goals.

**Identity and reputation.** St. Vincent de Paul has a direct and obvious mission statement which can be found in full on the website. "The Society of St. Vincent de Paul is an international non-profit organization dedicated to serving the poor and providing others with the opportunity to serve" (St. Vincent de Paul, 2010a). In clear and concise language the organization states that its purpose is twofold: (1) to serve the poor and (2) provide others with the opportunity to serve. In order to successfully build up, the researcher concluded that the programs and services provided by the nonprofit need to be directly related to the mission statement. This is important because being able to communicate the programs and services of the nonprofit to target publics contributes to the effectiveness of efforts to reach out for gaining awareness and support.

In the case of St. Vincent de Paul, the mission statement includes a list of programs provided by the nonprofit related to its purpose: "Programs include services for the homeless, medical and dental care for the working poor, charity dining rooms, thrift stores, a transitional housing shelter, and general assistance for individuals in need (St. Vincent de Paul, 2010a). While these programs constitute the bulk of St. Vincent de Paul's activity there are many, many smaller facets embedded in each program that relate to the first tier of the mission. For example, charity dining rooms include programs for entertainment and education, tutoring for children, and other activities or events. In fact, the Manager of Communications explained that what sets St. Vincent de Paul apart from other similar charities is that St. Vincent de Paul offers comprehensive services to the poor and homeless. The Director of Vincentian Support Services explained that "no act of charity is foreign" to the organization (personal communication, January 27, 2012). In other words, any action that relates back to the mission of serving the poor is a part of the organization not only to meet the basic needs of the poor and homeless but to provide aid to those in dire circumstances to keep them on their feet. In reviewing some of the smaller components that relate to the main programs of the organization, the Manager of Communications explained that the organization's services are designed to "…work together to help people stay out of poverty, stay out of homelessness, and prevent homelessness. …We meet basic needs, as well as prevent people who are on the verge of poverty from becoming homeless" (personal communication, January 20, 2012). This angle illustrates a unique quality of the Society that sets it apart from other nonprofits working to meet basic human needs.

In addition to comprehensive services to the poor, St. Vincent de Paul also differs from other nonprofits by providing others with opportunities to serve. While data collected during the case study did not provide evidence that this purpose was overtly communicated through any of

the organization's media, there is reason to believe that the message is received by publics nonetheless. The explanation for this phenomenon given in interviews was that people "just know" that St. Vincent de Paul is a good place to find opportunities to serve (Manager of Communications, Volunteer Program Coordinator, personal communications, January 20 & 27, 2012). This is further evidenced by the fact that St. Vincent de Paul is a staple in the community where businesses, schools, youth programs, church organizations, and others turn when searching for opportunities to serve. This message is likely communicated through direct contact and experience with the organization, in other words, by making connections. These publics that have connected to the organization in turn help to establish its reputation in the community as a good place to serve.

Reputation is tied to the identity of St. Vincent de Paul. In the communication efforts of the organization it was consistently important that publics knew that St. Vincent de Paul was a legitimate, trustworthy, and effective nonprofit. This message is communicated in efforts of the organization to reach out; however, establishing that reputation as part of the identity begins in building up through its programs and services.

**Leadership.** Once the purpose and programs of the organization have been established; the literature review suggested that strong leadership and excellent staffing would be important in carrying out the works of the cause. Evidence led the researcher to conclude that leadership does play a crucial role in building up the identity of a nonprofit. Based on observations and interviews, the Executive Director of St. Vincent de Paul possesses qualities and skills relating to communication, business, and relationship building. The qualities mentioned regarding the Executive Director were the following: a good business man willing and able to use his professional skills for the good of the organization; wise with resources and good at fundraising;

good with people and talented at networking and connecting with individuals; well respected in the community. Most importantly, however, was that the Executive Director is passionate about and committed to the cause. This is perhaps the most important quality because it translates to both communication and relationship building skills. The Manager of Communications said, "[The Executive Director] is genuine when he talks about St. Vincent de Paul; he really believes in what we do. I think people know that when they meet him" (personal communication, January 20, 2012).

Observations and documentation confirmed these qualities of the Executive Director and led the researcher to suppose that because the leader plays a role in building up the organization, the leader must also be involved in the public relations functions to reach out and make connections. This supposition was supported by the visible actions of the Executive Director. For example, the Executive Director was profiled by the local paper regarding his involvement in St. Vincent de Paul. This article was unsolicited, but welcomed, by the organization, suggesting that the Executive Director is a respected figure in the community to be solicited by the paper for an article. In addition, the Executive Director is often quoted or featured in news stories relating not only to St. Vincent de Paul, but also to general coverage of charity work. These efforts contribute to the organization's efforts to reach out.

Furthermore, the Executive Director spoke at the annual fundraising breakfast for St. Vincent de Paul and provided a "vision" of what the organization does in and for the community. This serves as an example of his passion for the cause and his ability to make connections with individuals. The Executive Director also undertakes efforts to make connections with other organizations to extend the awareness, support, and services of St. Vincent de Paul in the community.

**Staff.** Competent, capable staff is necessary to back up the leadership and contribute to building up the identity and reputation of the organization. From observations of the staff at St. Vincent de Paul, qualities of staff members include dedication to and passion for the cause, a willingness to do multiple jobs, and filling pivotal roles using their professional skills. For example, the Director of Community Relations is also a member of the executive board and the Director of Business Strategies with particular stewardship over the thrift stores. Prior to her work at St. Vincent de Paul, the Director of Community Relations worked for 10 years at a New York advertising agency. The Manager of Communications and Volunteer Program Coordinator had higher-education degrees in their field (one majored in mass communication; the other had a graduate degree in nonprofit studies). Throughout the organization staff members knew the mission statement and referred to it in describing the fulfillment of their job functions. The researcher observed that staff members were also personable and demonstrated respect and affability toward colleagues, volunteers, and clients. These observed qualities were confirmed when interviewees were asked to describe from their experience what qualities the staff of a successful nonprofit needed. The most common responses were of dedication to the mission statement and being able to be flexible in their job description. The Director of Community Relations added to the prior list commitment that goes beyond a pay check; a generous heart and true desire to help create positive change in the lives of others. Building up an organization with staff possessed of these qualities lends assistance to the task of establishing a positive organizational reputation.  These qualities are also valuable in the efforts of the organization to make connections.

**Strategic communications.** Before an organization can look to extend its coverage and connections to its publics, it must first strategize how messages will be delivered and identify the

intended targets for communication. Because of the nature of the case study where the researcher is an outside observer, understanding how messages were strategized was difficult to ascertain. Therefore, the actual messages themselves must be left to speak for themselves. The dominant messages of the organization relate to the programs and services offered by St. Vincent de Paul and encourage various ways to support those facets. The Manager of Communications, to the other point, was able to clarify the intended publics of the organization's communication efforts, saying:

> We have people that are already supporters that we want to continue to cultivate; we have people that are already volunteering with us that we continue to engage with; and there's the general public that may be looking for a cause to support or a place to volunteer; and then there's a group of people who just donate a can of food during a food drive or something. They aren't looking for something long term; they just see a drive and want to do something to help on a whim. (personal communication, January 20, 2012)

**Reaching Out: Targeting Latent and Aware Publics**

Reaching out entails the messages or actions of the organization that demonstrate an effort to extend the organization's coverage, connections, and policy to those not naturally connected to the cause. Not naturally being connected with the cause implies latent and aware publics because these are groups that should or may be interested in the cause but for whatever reasons are not actively engaged in supporting its efforts. The case study supports the existence of reaching out in the public relations and communication activities of St. Vincent de Paul, especially in efforts to reach latent and aware publics.

**Target publics of reaching out.** From the description of target publics provided by the Manager of Communications, latent groups can include the general public looking for a cause to

support or a place to volunteer and those who are not looking for something long-term but who can be motivated to act if the occasion arises. The Director of Community Relations added to latent publics, "potential donors which would be people that have the ability and desire to really support the work we do which is hunger, homelessness, and health care. …Those that are really in tune with human needs, basic human needs" (personal communication, January 27, 2012).

Aware publics, on the other hand, include Catholics in the community who know about St. Vincent de Paul because of its Catholic foundation, and members of the community who are aware of the organization and its cause but who do not actively or consistently support it. Consistency is a key concept here because an aware public may shop at the thrift store or donate several cans of food during a drive but not be truly connected to the cause. The level of involvement is a key indicator between aware and active publics. If a public only donates once or twice a year and is not otherwise connected, they may perceive constraints against becoming more involved, or they may not see a need for more involvement.

It seems pertinent to note that the messages and methods of reaching out are not generally targeted to clients of the cause. The "clients" are those people served by the programs of St. Vincent de Paul. That is, where the researcher thought that reaching out might entail efforts to direct people to use the nonprofit's programs and services, this was not the case for the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. Both the Director of Community Relations and the Manager of Communications stated that their job does not entail finding more clients, but rather focuses on improving the recognition and reputation of the nonprofit in the community. While there were some messages for clients on the website and in brochures, evidence supported the position of the interviewees that outreach efforts were not directed at clients.

**Methods of reaching out.** St. Vincent de Paul does not tailor its messaging to differentiate between publics that are familiar with their organization and those that are unfamiliar. Yet communication by the organization suggests that there are separate goals regarding latent and aware publics. In the case of St. Vincent de Paul, reaching out is a multifaceted process that uses similar messages and media to reach different publics. For example, a message may be targeted to reach information-processing, latent publics in order to help them become aware; that same message also may contain communication to aware publics to encourage them to support the organization through action.

Frequently the term "branding" is employed in discussions of the degree of awareness and reputation of a nonprofit. The American Marketing Association (2012) defines a brand as a "name, term, design, symbol, or any other feature that identifies one seller's good or service as distinct from those of other sellers." The review of literature suggested that this marketing term might not be appropriate when referring to a nonprofit organization, and at the end of this case study, the researcher maintains this perspective. When the interviewees in this case study used the word "branding," instead of referring to goods and services, they really seemed to refer to the awareness and reputation of the organization. In other words, communication is not focused on differentiating goods or services, but, in fact, related to building up an identity and reputation and the process to reach out and raise awareness for the organization. Reaching out is the communication of the mission statement and services that work to establish the organization as legitimate, trustworthy, and effective.

Community awareness is high in the case of St. Vincent de Paul. In the past, phone survey research has been done throughout the state and the results were that people generally knew that St. Vincent de Paul was an organization that served the poor, but did not generally

know the extent of its programs and services. As a result, better communication of the programs and services St. Vincent de Paul offers became a major theme in its messaging.

> A lot of times people only know us as a food bank or, for example, people that are involved with our medical clinic they really only know about that. …It is something that we are trying to get across to people: that we provide comprehensive services. (Manager of Communications, personal communication, January 20, 2012)

In reaching out to the community to establish St. Vincent de Paul's image, the majority of communication is one-way in the form of publicity or information. Informational communication helps to create problem recognition regarding the various causes of the entity. Facts about the programs and services of the nonprofit are available through its website, brochures, and published reports. According to the Manager of Communications, the website is "like an online brochure" (personal communication, January 20, 2012) where information-seeking publics can go for the history of the organization, its programs, and locations, and access material on ways to be involved through volunteering and donations. The website is a useful tool for reaching out to increase awareness and can be useful in motivating aware publics by raising their level of problem recognition. The website offers ways to get involved by providing a sign up for the e-newsletter, linking interested publics to the blog and social media sites, and announcing events and drives.

St. Vincent de Paul holds several events throughout the year to build positive awareness and understanding in the community. These events offer the perfect venue for aware publics to put forth minimal effort with low levels of involvement in support of the cause. Not only do events reach out to the community for raising awareness, but they also provide the organization with the goods it needs to support programs. Some examples of the larger events are the *Peanut*

*Butter & Jelly Drive* held every summer, *Turkey Tuesday* held in November, and the *Annual Community Fundraising Breakfast*. Smaller events include thrift store sales or specials like the "Southwestern Sale" where the store is filled with items of a Southwestern nature; community charity events like school children in the area purchasing holiday gifts at the thrift store for $1 or 50 cents; or a free omelet drive by a local restaurant where donations were collected for St. Vincent de Paul. Events are invitations for publics to become involved in small ways or at low levels. This helps to overcome perceived constraints if a public is not looking for something long term but still is interested in contributing to the cause. Of these fundraisers and drives the Director of Community Relations says, "We have special events and we try to publicize those. …We're trying to integrate social media into more things that we do" (personal communication, January 27, 2012).

Social media, the e-newsletter, and the blog of St. Vincent de Paul all act as publicity tools aimed at stimulating public interest and organizing opportunities for low-level involvement such as is provided though events. These three media all communicate the same information via different formats; these media, however, only reach information-seeking publics. The main low-level tactics are event information, drives, fundraisers, and thrift store sales or "good finds" to encourage shoppers. Aside from publicity, the e-newsletter is also an avenue for storytelling, a common theme among all the communications for St. Vincent de Paul.

Storytelling is one of St. Vincent de Paul's strategies for communicating its objectives and programs. The goal in sharing narratives from people who have been helped by the organization is to establish a good reputation. To support the cause at a low level of involvement or to become an active public, a person does not need to know every single program St. Vincent

de Paul has to serve the poor because it is the end result that is really important. The purpose of a story is to illuminate that end result.

> People want to be a part of organizations that are making a difference. If they give us a dollar, they want to help us feed a hungry person; they don't want to give us a dollar just to give us a dollar. So my job is to communicate that to people, to show that this is how your dollar is going to be stretched and this is how your dollar is making a difference in the community. I'm showing them the end goal of their donation in what we do. That's really important to people, to know that they're doing something that's positive and that's going to make a difference. I think that storytelling is key. (Manager of Communications, personal communication, January 20, 2012)

Storytelling plays a role in reaching out because it establishes the mission of the nonprofit on a more personal level, reaching both latent and aware publics. A story can motivate an aware public to overcome perceived constraints and act. For example, "Sometimes a story is about how little it took to get someone back on track. I think people think sometimes, 'well, it's so big and my $25 isn't going to make a difference' and that's not true" (Director of Community Relations, personal communication, January 27, 2012).

The previously discussed avenues of information and publicity communication work if a public is seeking information. If a public is only information-processing, however, then the organization needs another way to reach out. One way St. Vincent de Paul will use in the future to reach out will be to mail the Annual Report, which summarizes programs and finances over the past year, to all the Pastors in the Diocese to promote the awareness of the organization. But this public is naturally connected to St. Vincent de Paul through Catholicism and the

organization needs another way to reach out to those with no ties to the cause. Media relations, therefore, becomes essential to reaching out.

**Media relations.** One of the main and most important ways St. Vincent de Paul reaches out to both latent and aware publics is through the traditional media. Communication through the media is essential not only in creating awareness and understanding for the cause (the needs of the poor and homeless), but also in raising the visibility and credibility of the organization (the Society of St. Vincent de Paul). Raising the visibility and credibility of St. Vincent de Paul establishes the organization as a legitimate, trustworthy, effective intermediary to aid the poor and homeless. Without that reputation, the nonprofit would face challenges in gaining financial support and volunteers for its programs.

Many of the news clippings analyzed in this case study promoted the organization by raising awareness of its cause and services, providing information on ways to get involved, and helping to perpetuate the organization's strategy of storytelling. Understanding that the media cannot run heartfelt stories all the time, the Manager of Communications is grateful to have two to three "success" stories a year covered by the media.

Media coverage can translate into making latent publics aware and aware publics active. One example took place during the course of this case study. The local paper ran a story about a university professor who brought his students to St. Vincent de Paul's main dining room one night a month to make pizza for the family evening meal. The professor's students created a plan for St. Vincent de Paul to create its own pizza kitchen to be able to continue to run the pizza night independently. The article quoted the Executive Director who expressed his desire to install the pizza kitchen but stated that they currently did not have the funds. The Manager of Communications related that St. Vincent de Paul received a phone call from someone who had

read the article and wanted to help fund the program. "And so they said, 'we're going to donate to help build this pizza oven so that you can continue to do this.' I don't remember how much it was, but it was quite a bit of money" (Manager of Communications, personal communication, January 20, 2012). That is a special example of how reaching out through the media that directly translates into support. The Manager of Communications explained:

It obviously doesn't always come out that way. Sometimes a good story in the newspaper is just a good story and people see it and in the back of their mind they remember St. Vincent de Paul as a good organization that's successful and takes your dollar and really spends it well. So sometimes media relations is just building good will and good name recognition and branding and sometimes it's directly dollars that come in because people see a good thing that we're doing. (personal communication, January 20, 2012)

In reaching out to media, the Manager of Communications takes a couple of different approaches. The first is tailoring a story to fit the needs of the media. For example a press release will include a good time for the outlet to come to obtain good visual shots, or a different angle on the story will be added for the local Catholic paper. The second method is to regionalize a story to help it gain coverage. The Manager of Communications will scan the environment looking for ways the Society of St. Vincent de Paul fits into current events or current hot topics. One example is when health care was being widely discussed, and the State had legislation in process that would cut health care benefits. The Manager of Communications approached the media with a St. Vincent de Paul-twist on the debate:

A while ago when health care was really big, we started contacting some reporters about our health care clinics that provide services to the uninsured and what an impact that is making in the community. With the budget cuts that were coming to [health care] access,

it would affect the uninsured by essentially increasing the number of people who are

uninsured and then who would be coming here for services, because people need basic

health care. (personal communication, January 20, 2012)

The suggestion was picked up by the local paper and an article was written including St.

Vincent de Paul in the discussion. Beyond the free publicity that media coverage provides,

stories like the one on health care establish St. Vincent de Paul as a legitimate, trustworthy

organization and give them a public voice.

To summarize, St. Vincent de Paul reaches out to both latent and aware publics but not in

an effort to inform clients of services. The Director of Community Relations explained:

We really want to build the awareness and reputation of this organization in the

community. Our goal is not to promote our services so that more people will come,

because the people in need already know about St. Vincent de Paul... [Communication

efforts are] really to position ourselves as a leading nonprofit organization in the

community. (personal communication, January 27, 2012)

Messages are sent to information-seeking publics though brochures, the website, social media,

blogs, and the e-newsletter, and directed at information-processing publics through media

relations. Events like fundraisers, drives, and thrift store sales contribute to a latent public's

awareness of the organization and are tools for reaching out to those publics who are willing to

have a low level of involvement if the effort required is not too high. The overarching purpose of

this communication is establishing the nonprofit as legitimate, trustworthy, and effective.

I think people in the community really love what we do and they know that we're a good

organization to do that with. I think they trust us. They know that if they donate food to

us that it will go to a family in need or if they donate cash they know that it's going to be

spent with our clients in mind. (Manager of Communications, personal communication, January 20, 2012)

The final key in reaching out is that all communication contains an invitation for involvement whether on a small or large level. St. Vincent de Paul's messaging to its publics is two-fold: The first is messages about what St. Vincent de Paul does (mission statement) and how they do it (programs and services); the second message is "come and help us, come and volunteer" (Director of Community Relations, personal communication, January 27, 2012). Invitations to participate, whether it is to donate a turkey at a drive, shop at the thrift store, fill out a volunteer application on the website, donate money, or contact a staff member to start a dialogue of ways to be involved, lead to making connections. The deciding factor between inactivity and becoming an active public depends on the nature of the communication and the inherent self-interests of the receiver. However, once a public has made the decision to act it is up to the organization to establish a relationship, and that is where making connections contributes.

**Making Connections: Establishing Relationships of Involvement**

Making connections is the element of prosocial public relations that applies to active publics and involves the process of converting aware publics to active participants in the organization. For St. Vincent de Paul, making connections goes one step further than simply convincing an individual or group to contribute to the cause; it relates, as the label proposes, to establishing a connection or a relationship with the individuals or groups that are already participating in the cause in some way. A person who donates a turkey once a year on Thanksgiving has a low-level of involvement, but is not connected to the organization unless something has happened that leaves that individual seeking to stay connected to the organization

in other ways (like receiving the e-newsletter, donating to or shopping at thrift stores, volunteering, etc.). Connection entails a positive relationship that can be prevailed on for more action in the future. Reaching out can lead to making connections when interested publics respond to invitations to act.

The activities and messages of St. Vincent de Paul support the existence of making connections as an element of its public relations processes. St. Vincent de Paul makes connections with four main publics: volunteers, donors, other organizations, and clients. These groups, with the exception of clients, are considered active when they support the cause through time and/or in-kind or monetary donations. The case study suggests that establishing connections takes two-way communication, asymmetrical and symmetrical. As mentioned, the process of activating an aware public begins with an invitation to act. St. Vincent de Paul makes connections with donors, volunteers, organizations, and clients differently so each one will be examined separately.

**Connecting with volunteers.** Most invitations to volunteer are issued through the process of reaching out. Once a public is aware and interested in donating their time they contact the organization though volunteer services by filling out a volunteer application on the website or in person. There are other ways to begin the process, but all volunteers have to fill out the application before they can serve. Volunteers are then invited to tour St. Vincent de Paul's main campus to see all the programs of the organization; this begins the process of making a connection. The case study finds that offering firsthand experience with St. Vincent de Paul is something many of the departments do, not just volunteer services, to make connections with publics. A tour of the facilities offers the public a scope of the work the organization does beyond where the volunteers may want to spend their time. "I want [even the one-time

volunteers] to understand they're part of a bigger picture. They're a part of a huge organization and no matter what they're doing, they're making a difference" (Volunteer Coordinator, personal communication, January 27, 2012). Offering this view of the bigger picture is helpful in making connections because it lets the volunteer know that what they do is important, "valuable," and worthwhile (Director of Community Relations, personal communication, January 27, 2012).

At St. Vincent de Paul making the opportunity to participate satisfying and rewarding is part of making that connection. "People want to feel like they are needed. They want to feel like they are making a difference. That is probably the main reason that people keep coming back if they're looking for long term opportunity" (Volunteer Coordinator, personal communication, January 27, 2012). In making sure volunteer opportunities are positive at St. Vincent de Paul, the volunteer system is organized and scheduled so that every volunteer has a place to be with a task to complete.

Another element in making volunteer opportunities satisfying and rewarding is offering experiences for service in capacities where volunteers feel like they are needed or are able to use their skills. Therefore, St. Vincent de Paul has a wide range of projects or programs where volunteers can dedicate their time: the transient aid center, one of the seven dining rooms throughout the area, the medical or dental clinic, Ozanam Manor (transitional shelter), the thrift stores, the food reclamation center, etc. The organization also has specialized opportunities to serve for different groups or in different projects. For example, young children who come with their school can be put to work decorating the family evening meal hall for the holidays; or an Eagle Scout candidate will help contrive a project for the organization like helping to harvest oranges from St. Vincent de Paul's orchard. "We aim as an organization to make sure people have a good experience with us. …Providing opportunities for people to serve is part of our

mission so we just strive to have good opportunities" (Manager of Communications, personal communication, January 20, 2012).

The case study showed that part of making the volunteer experience satisfying and rewarding is showing gratitude and appreciation for the time volunteers donate. Sometimes volunteers will serve in places where they are thanked by clients. According to the Volunteer Coordinator those volunteers walk away from that experience with satisfaction, feeling good about the service they have done. On the other hand volunteers that help sort food donations are not getting that immediate validation for the work they do, which is why the staff at St. Vincent de Paul are the ones to make sure they say "thank you" to those volunteers. In creating a good relationship with publics the Director of Community Relations said, "Saying thank you and being appreciative, I think, is often an overlooked step" (personal communication, January 27, 2012).

**Connecting with donors.** Making connections with donors is also important to St. Vincent de Paul's public relations. Donors, according to Major Giving/Donor Support, believe in St. Vincent de Paul's mission statement and that motivates them to give. Making a connection with donors is about encouraging them to be a part of the mission.

> Donors have varying degrees of familiarity with St. Vincent de Paul. This can range from donating funds to help feed the poor, to having read or heard about us on the news; perhaps they attended our annual fundraising breakfast or took a tour of the facilities; or their knowledge base may be through their church or a friend. St. Vincent de Paul offers so many programs and services, most donors perhaps have but a general overview of the organization. (Major Giving/Donor Support, personal communication, January 29, 2012)

To understand the bigger picture, donors and potential donors are also invited to take a tour of the main campus. "The saying 'seeing is believing' really applies at St. Vincent de Paul. Once people see our work and its results, their enthusiasm for being a part of it increases" (Major Giving/Donor Support, personal communication, January 29, 2012). Enthusiasm sometimes translates into both money and time donations. When donors or potential donors ask to volunteer, Volunteer Services accommodates their wishes because it is important to establishing and building the relationship.

Part of the connection between St. Vincent de Paul and its donors sometimes entails allowing donors to have a say in where their donation is spent. One illustration is of the donor who called about the pizza kitchen; he wanted that donation to go directly to starting the pizza kitchen. Another example is a donor who wanted to give his wife a unique gift by donating to St. Vincent de Paul. His family had served in the dining hall for family evening meals and he wanted to create a center for client's children to work on homework, be tutored, read, play, etc. Working with St. Vincent de Paul they created the *Dream Center* which includes a tutoring station, reading library, and computers with learning software.

**Supporting connections with volunteers and donors.** The key to volunteer and donor relationships is communicating that their contribution is needed, appreciated, and will be used to accomplish good. "Focus is placed on building relationships with our benefactors. …St. Vincent de Paul knows the value and importance of its donors and volunteers and strives to show appreciation for all manner of support" (Major Giving/Donor Support, personal communication, January 29, 2012). Understanding the larger scope of the cause and focusing on the end result contributes to initiating a connection between active publics and St. Vincent de Paul.

The case study suggests that the nonprofit's strategy for communicating narratives to latent and aware publics comes in handy in creating connections as well. The stories communicated about people who have been helped though St. Vincent de Paul become especially pertinent to audiences that have actively participated with the organization. While statistics about the pounds of food sorted or the number of meals served are important to communicate, it seems what really makes a connection are stories that "capture the heart" (Director of Community Relations, personal communication, January 27, 2012) and drive the cause home. In addition to telling success stories about clients or projects, stories for making connections include projects undertaken by volunteers and how they affected the organization or the community, volunteer experiences, or specific information on how a donation was spent. These stories relating to active publics are also used in reaching out to invite more volunteers and donors. In the Society of St. Vincent de Paul the combination of participant, plus organization, plus the community, creates a platform for strong connections.

> We are short staffed by design. …Part of our mission is to give people that opportunity to be of service. I often think of St. Vincent de Paul as a place where the community can come to help the community; which is really, I think, a very nice way of thinking about it. It's not us doing – it's you doing though us. (Director of Community Relations, personal communication, January 27, 2012)

**Connecting with clients.** Worth noting in the process of making connections, whereas in reaching out those served by St. Vincent de Paul's programs were not included in the targeted publics, in making connections clients are considered a public with whom connections are important. One way that the organization connects is by treating clients with dignity and respect and caring for them beyond their basic needs. Some of the ways St. Vincent de Paul goes beyond

basic needs is by helping with job referrals and transportation, offering budgeting classes, and sponsoring a series of motivational speakers who share encouraging and inspirational messages to clients.

Connections with clients is important because of the altruistic nature of the cause in caring for basic human needs and also because it often translates back in to support for the cause, and not just through the narratives that help in reaching out and making connections. "Many people have themselves been in the position of needing help and find St. Vincent de Paul an avenue though which they can give back in thanksgiving for what they have received" (Major Giving/Donor Support, personal communication, January 29, 2012). Former clients who may not be able to give back financially sometimes come back to volunteer: "A lot of [volunteers] want to help out where they've received help from. …It might not have been [in this State]. They'll say, 'When I was in Wisconsin back in the day I used to get food boxes.' They remember that; so we get a decent amount of people that come back" (Volunteer Coordinator, personal communication, January 27, 2012).

**Connecting with other organizations.** Connecting with organizations begins with a personal contact that is aimed at making a connection. Personal contact is a specialized invitation in the process of reaching out. This is the element of reaching out that involves going to government, businesses, or other organizations that are not specifically related to the cause and forming partnerships. The Director of Corporate Relations at St. Vincent de Paul is very successful at doing this. St. Vincent de Paul has partnerships with nearly 400 corporations. The Manager of Communications said, "[The Director of Corporate Relations] builds really great relationships that last for years and years." Part of her process is the *Corporate Ambassadors' Program* which sends representatives from corporate partners to "share our story with other

corporations as well as our need for new partners and the benefits of volunteering on employee culture and moral" (St. Vincent de Paul, 2011a, p. 13). Some partner corporations provide financial support, others provide manpower. Some organizations commit to sending groups of employees to volunteer monthly, others plan special holiday events, and still others hold food drives or help to fund specific programs.

While these partnerships are essential to running St. Vincent de Paul's programs, they also create more opportunities to gain visibility and support through reaching out. Before focusing on St. Vincent de Paul's benefits, the researcher noted that the case study suggests that these kinds of connections are mutually beneficial even if the benefit to the other party is not obvious at first. To illustrate with an obvious example first, the State Fair ran a food and clothing collection drive for St. Vincent de Paul; in return St. Vincent de Paul lent the fair furniture and other décor to use in its stage shows. A beneficial relationship that is less obvious is with the local university. In this relationship medical and dental students donate their time in St. Vincent de Paul's clinics; the benefit for the students is that they are completing necessary hours relating to their practice. Other benefits include a demonstration of corporate social responsibility and a concern for and involvement with the community. In addition, according to one of the Corporate Partnerships Developers, companies that send their employees on service days see an increase in employee morale (personal communication, December 15, 2011).

St. Vincent de Paul also partners with similar nonprofit organizations in the work. In these partnerships both organizations assist one another in accomplishing their respective goals. For example, St. Vincent de Paul works a lot with St. Mary's Food Bank. The organizations run food drives together and share the products. To illustrate, the Director of Community Relations explained, "We're all in this together. We have this big Turkey Tuesday drive and we share those

turkeys with St. Mary's Food Bank. If St. Mary's doesn't have enough we ship them turkeys. …We're all about the end result, not about who collected the most turkeys" (personal communication, January 27, 2012). Bob (2005) talked about connections with gatekeeper organizations. In the case of St. Vincent de Paul's partnerships with other similar organizations in the State, it seems that St. Vincent de Paul has established itself as a gatekeeper in the community. On the other hand, St. Vincent de Paul is also listed on community information referral services, which is a list of the nonprofits in the area and their services. This helps to gain visibility for St. Vincent de Paul when someone calls the service looking for an organization that serves the poor. The use of this list also suggests that it benefits even large, established organizations to connect with other organizations that act as gatekeepers, like the community referral service.

**The vital role of connected publics.** The case study found that connected publics help in the administration of St. Vincent de Paul's programs and services. Whether through donation of time or money, or through a partnership of programs, these publics are vital to helping St. Vincent de Paul execute its mission. In 2010, donors contributed about 25 million dollars in monetary and in-kind donations; volunteers dedicated approximately 748,000 hours, and that's the equivalent of 360 full-time employees (St. Vincent de Paul, 2011a, 2011); corporate connections contributed to both of those numbers.

Dedicated volunteers help to reach out to others. A regular volunteer may arrange a youth or church group to come and volunteer also. Major Giving/Donor Support offered another example where volunteers help to reach out and connect to donors through phone calls and personal notes. The added assistance throughout the year is more than St. Vincent de Paul would

be able to do with its small staff (Major Giving/Donor Support, personal communication, January 29, 2012).

Partnerships with other nonprofit organizations help St. Vincent de Paul achieve its purpose by extending its coverage and services beyond St. Vincent de Paul's own resources. For example, when asked how much St. Vincent de Paul works with other charities, the Executive Director responded, "The best example is St. Vincent's involvement with the Human Services Campus in [city], a collaboration of nonprofits, the public sector and the business community. More than a thousand people every day receive a myriad of services there" (Zabilski, 2012). Nonprofit partnerships also help in the operating of some of St. Vincent de Paul's programs by contributing experiences related to their own cause to St. Vincent de Paul's clients. For example, [City] Theater's *Partners that Heal* program provides entertainment and education during family evening meals through puppetry, skits, and interactive activities (St. Vincent de Paul, 2011a). The Nick Lowery Youth Foundation organizes *Champions of the Homeless,* an event at St. Vincent de Paul's dining rooms during holidays where athletes come and sign autographs and talk with guests.

There are programs in St. Vincent de Paul that likely would cease to operate if not for the support of connected publics. The medical and dental clinics rely on connections with local hospitals that provide services like x-rays for discounted prices. The program also relies on volunteer professionals from the State university who donate their time. Ozanam Manor, a transitional shelter for a vulnerable population of homeless individuals (those over 50 or those with mental or physical disabilities), receives assistance from the government, businesses, and other nonprofits. The list of partners include[State] Department of Economic Security Community Services Administration, The [City] Emergency Shelter Grants, The Federal

Emergency Management Agency, The United Way, National Church Residences, and other corporate and foundation grants. These connections are important to running and maintaining Ozanam Manor.

As was suggested in the literature review, the case study found that connections help to further the cause of the organization. Just like elements of building up play a role in the process of reaching out so do connections factor in to reaching out. Connections made with volunteers, donors, and organizations not only help implement the programs and services of the organization but connections also help reach out by contributing to the ability of St. Vincent de Paul to gain visibility and support.

For example, St. Vincent de Paul rarely organizes an event on their own; they are consistently partnering with other organizations and/or business. *Turkey Tuesday* and the *Peanut Butter and Jelly Drive* are run in coordination with Channel 12 News, local radios and DJs, local grocery stores, and other businesses and media partners. The connections, especially with the media, create much more awareness for the cause than St. Vincent de Paul would be able to generate on their own. Having the media involved reaches out to information-processing latent publics and aware publics. Along the same lines, because these partnerships also reach aware and latent publics that are not information-seeking, the events are able to generate more monetary and in-kind donations than St. Vincent de Paul would be able to get on its own.

The Manager of Communications told the researcher that a good relationship with the media does not guarantee coverage. The same might be said that having a good relationship with another organization does not guarantee support. Both statements are true. However, the case study shows once an organization has made a connection with St. Vincent de Paul often the individuals in that organization become advocates for the cause. For example, a local restaurant

volunteered to prepare breakfast for dinner at St. Vincent de Paul's dining rooms. Afterwards the restaurant held a "free omelet day" at its own location. Patrons were given a free omelet and encouraged to donate money that would benefit St. Vincent de Paul. The servers who had volunteered the day before shared with patrons their experiences volunteering, thus reaching out to raise awareness and encourage support. The *Corporate Ambassador Program* is another example of reaching out through connected publics as ambassadors speak to other organizations about the benefits of partnering with St. Vincent de Paul.

The connection made with members of the media is important apart from news coverage because they often come back and volunteer on their own time with their families. The relationship with Channel 12 News has led to assistance with other projects. For the *Annual Community Fundraising Breakfast,* Channel 12 often helps with the video presentation and this year the evening news anchor was the master of ceremonies at the event.

St. Vincent de Paul's *Annual Community Fundraising Breakfast* provides an excellent illustration of how making connections, reaching out, and building up all fit together in raising awareness, generating support, and establishing relationships with publics. The Director of Community Relations provided a breakdown of this year's program:

We usually have some well recognized people from the community speak; this year we had the new head of the Mayo Clinic in [the State] and then we had the new head of the [State football bowl] and they both spoke about why they support us. Our executive director spoke and really kind of provided a vision of what we do in the community and who we are. Then we had two clients come and talk about how we helped them. That is so key because that really talks to people's hearts; we want to capture their minds but we really want to capture their hearts and allow the audience to understand the profound

transformations we make in people's lives. This year we had two fabulous speakers…

Then we have the head of our children's dental program and he is a fabulous speaker,

people love him. …And then the program closes by asking people to really support us

financially. (personal communication, January 27, 2012)

To reiterate, the Society includes connected organizations in its event: in this case the

Mayo Clinic, the state football bowl, and Channel 12. Those organizations help in the effort to

reach out by explaining or showing their support for St. Vincent de Paul. The Executive Director

and a member of the staff, in this case the dental program director, reach out by communicating

the purpose and programs of the organization on a more interpersonal level (not just providing

information). Then the clients with whom the organization has a good relationship share their

success stories. The client narratives help to "capture the hearts" of the audience and connect on

a personal level. Finally, an invitation to act is extended. This year the fundraising breakfast had

the largest attendance it has ever had, more than 2,000 attendees (Wiles, 2011), and raised more

money than it ever has (Director of Community Relations, personal communication, January 27,

2012).

The case study also showed that partnerships and active volunteers keep St. Vincent de

Paul operating during the summertime when there is a lull in charity contributions and

supporters. The *Peanut Butter & Jelly Drive* is an example of connected publics making a

difference during summer months. A spokesperson for the grocery store that takes a lead role in

the drive said:

We created this PB&J Drive to help low-income families make it through the summer,

when fewer donations come in to St. Vincent de Paul. Whether it's giving a dollar or

donating a jar of peanut butter and jelly, every contribution will help people in our

community who need it the most. (12 News, 2011)

**Nurturing Relationships: Preserving Connections Made**

As data was collected, actions and communication from the organization did not seem to

fit wholly into the reaching out or making connections categories. Instead, communications

focused on fostering and preserving connections already made with active publics. The case

study suggests that efforts to keep active publics participating constitutes a new, fourth element

to prosocial public relations: nurturing relationships. This comprises the messages and actions of

St. Vincent de Paul in preserving relationships, helping to maintain a level of activity among

active publics, and encouraging more support.

The majority of the previous discussion has centered on active publics with high levels of

involvement with whom connections have been made. These donors and volunteers are high-

level because they contribute substantial amounts of time or donations. But involvement does not

have to be high in order for St. Vincent de Paul to connect with a public. For example, an active

public with low-level involvement can include an individual who volunteers once at St. Vincent

de Paul for a company service day. If a connection is made that inspires the individual to become

more involved in minor ways, like donating at fundraisers and drives throughout the year, or

shopping at or donating to the thrift stores, then this public is also considered active so long as

they are connected to the cause.

With connected publics, whether they are participating at a low-level or high-level of

involvement, St. Vincent de Paul maintains connection though public relations in what this

researcher calls "nurturing relationships." Elements in nurturing relationships as found in the

case study are: communicating with active publics through newsletters and the Internet (social

media and the blog), relating to publics the operations of the nonprofit, extending recognition and appreciation to active publics, and providing tools, training, and opportunities necessary to keep publics active.

**Communicating with active publics.** St. Vincent de Paul has many modes for communication: website, brochures, social media, a blog, and three newsletters. The website and brochures were mainly implements of reaching out to information-seeking latent and aware publics; social media, the blog, and the newsletters mainly serve the purpose of reaching out to active publics to maintain and encourage relationships.

*Social media.* St. Vincent de Paul has two social media sites: Facebook and Twitter. A content analysis of the Twitter account showed that it serves mainly as a conduit to lead people to the Facebook site. The Manager of Communications says that the Facebook site, which connects to 4,277 people, is mostly used by donors and volunteers (active publics). While it is difficult to judge, the content analysis suggests that the majority of the contacts on the social media are low to medium-level active publics. Social media is one way St. Vincent de Paul keeps in contact with these groups, letting them know about events (opportunities for involvement), new projects or programs, and also serves as an avenue to request help with specific needs. For example, one post from the organization stated the need for backpacks and adult men's tennis shoes and socks. The post said, "If your group or organization is able to host one of these important drives, please contact [and provided contact information]." In today's culture, this avenue of communication has become increasingly important. If a connection is made with first-time participants inspiring them to want to contribute more, they will often turn to social media to learn about other ways they can contribute. A one-time volunteer or donor may "like" St. Vincent de Paul's Facebook page and it will nourish the relationship so they are able to stay

involved. Partner organizations also post information for fundraisers and drives and link it to St. Vincent de Paul's Facebook page generating more visibility for events.

Through social media St. Vincent de Paul is able to communicate other messages that seem to be important in nurturing relationships. First, it provides opportunities for publics to act, as mentioned. Second, it serves as an outlet to recognize and thank volunteers. St. Vincent de Paul posts photos of groups and organizations that complete special projects or participate in events. Another purpose these photos serve is to encourage others to participate in similar ways. And third, it provides a medium for St. Vincent de Paul to report back on projects and events. This relates to a common theme of being accountable for the time and money people donate, discussed more in relation to newsletters.

One final observation of social media in nurturing relationships is that it applies regardless of the level of involvement from – low-level active publics who volunteered once, to aware publics who use it as a venue to get more information and start the process of becoming involved, and even to active publics who post information and commentary on events. One individual wrote, "I would like to help out by volunteering," to which St. Vincent de Paul replied with ways to contact volunteer services. That ability to engage two-way communication is important and social media seems to be one avenue in this case study that allows for two-way communication. Social media provides a source for publics to reach out to the organization with their feedback, compliments, and criticisms. Negative comments (of which there were two in the four-month span used for analysis) were left available to view (as opposed to being removed from the wall). The Manager of Communications said, when questioned about this instance, "It's important for us to respond with integrity and honesty. …That makes us do our job better

because we know that we're being held accountable and responsible though these sorts of things"

(personal communication, January 20, 2012).

*The blog.* The Council of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul in the case study keeps a

blog which they use to nurture relationships. Blog posts recognize volunteers and spotlight

projects, provide information on events, and report on the activities of the organization. The

medium of the blog allows St. Vincent de Paul to share narratives in each of these areas. Several

posts told about groups that were involved in the *New Perspectives* project and recounted their

experience restoring and revamping homes for needy families. Many posts gave out information

on events including times, locations, and needed donations, and a few contained stories of

someone for whom the drive would benefit. Lastly, some posts announce new programs and

explained how they will help or why they are needed. These examples suggest that storytelling is

just as important to nurturing relationships as it is to forming them, and the blog helps in that

effort.

A blog is sometimes considered a two-way communication tool. In this case, however,

the blog did not generate dialogue; therefore, for this study it was coded as a publicity tool used

to promote the organization in maintaining and cultivating relationships.

*The e-newsletter.* The e-newsletter is an email sent monthly from St. Vincent de Paul to

its connected publics. Because anyone can sign up for the newsletter through the main website,

this is also a tool to reach out to information-seeking publics, as well as being a way to keep in

contact with active publics. The e-newsletter is also a publicity tool promoting involvement

though narratives, information, and recognition. Most importantly it provides a method, apart

from social media, for publics to be aware of ways to be involved that are not advertised though

the media, the biggest example being the thrift stores. The e-newsletter announces sales and

specials at the thrift stores and sometimes provides a coupon. The newsletter is also a venue to advertise for needed donations. Furthermore the e-newsletter recognizes volunteers, reports on fundraisers, and shares stories of projects and programs that have been successful. Regarding the content, the Director of Community Relations said, "We often spotlight volunteer contributions, donor contributions, we try to publicly recognize people" (personal communication, January 27, 2012). Just like with social media, the e-newsletter communicates at different levels of involvement. For publics that are less active the e-newsletter has lots of low-effort ways for them to be more involved and links to social media to stay connected to the organization through that medium.

The reason social media, the blog, and the e-newsletter spend time highlighting programs and services is to communicate the idea that St. Vincent de Paul offers comprehensive services to the poor as part of its mission. The Director of Community Relations said, "We're like five charities in one" (personal communication, January 27, 2012). Once a public is connected, making them aware of other aspects of the organization is meant to motivate them to contribute more. "The more people see our work and its many facets as well as the benefits to others, the more likely they are to give time AND money, if they are able" (Major Giving/Donor Support, personal communication, January 29, 2012).

***The magazine newsletter: The Vincentian Connection.*** The Vincentian Connection is a magazine newsletter that is mailed out to active publics three times a year. This newsletter seems more tailored to publics that are truly engaged in St. Vincent de Paul and its cause, as opposed to low-level involvement publics. The Vincentian Connection nurtures relationships much the same way e-newsletters, the blog, and social media do, it just provides one more tool to engage active publics. More than the other avenues, the Vincentian Connection reports on the activities and

accomplishments of St. Vincent de Paul's programs and projects, reporting numbers and statistics along with stories. This suggests that to publics with higher levels of involvement there is more of a need for the organization to communicate accountability and stewardship of its funds and resources. In support of this point, St. Vincent de Paul also mails its Annual Report to those who receive the Vincentian Connection.

Being accountable for the funds and time people donate to St. Vincent de Paul is not only important in nurturing relationships but it applies back to building up an accountable, trustworthy organization maintaining its reputation in the community. Major Giving/Donor Support said, "Donors appreciate St. Vincent de Paul's stewardship of its resources, with over 90% of each dollar funding ministries and services; they know their contributions *will* make a difference in the lives of those most in need" (personal communication, January 29, 2012). Through statistics, narratives, and pictures the Vincentian Connections keeps active publics connected to St. Vincent de Paul. The Manager of Communications said, "I think people want to know the quantity of 'we've served 300 meals in our family dining room tonight' but they also want to see faces. The actual families that came" (personal communication, January 20, 2012).

The Vincentian connection is mailed to 50,000 people (5,000 of whom are Vincentians, member-volunteers discussed later). Earlier this year St. Vincent de Paul sent out a survey in connection with the magazine newsletter requesting audience feedback for ways to improve the magazine. This shows that the communication tool is not just informational or promotional, but a tool to really nurture the relationship between active publics and the organization. The results of the survey showed positive feedback; the readership had a high opinion of the publication and most read the majority of the articles. Comments regarding improvements were that readers

wanted more client success stories and more articles that related the cause of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul on a more national or international level.

> People said they wanted more overall information about poverty and hunger statistically because we generally only write about what we are doing. That was really good feedback; that we should be couching what we do into the broader picture. That's one of the changes that we're making. (Director of Community Relations, personal communication, January 27, 2012)

The feedback from the survey and the resulting action from the director suggest that nurturing relationships requires two-way symmetrical communication. In addition to surveys from St. Vincent de Paul, the Manager of Communications says two-way communication takes place though different avenues: "People have all kinds of ways to let us know these sorts of things – people have emailed, called, written letters. They know how to find us" (personal communication, January 20, 2012). The survey also asked if the reader had taken any action in the last year as a result of reading the Vincentian Connection, and only eight-percent of respondents stated that they had not taken any action. This supports that the newsletter is successful in preserving connections.

**Thanking and recognizing donors and volunteers.** In addition to the appreciation and recognition that donors and volunteers receive from social media, the blog, and the newsletters, St. Vincent de Paul strives to show appreciation in other ways as well. Methods include thank you letters and phone calls, personal notes, special luncheons, and publicized recognition. There are other methods of donor recognition listed on the website like commemorative bricks, *Flowers that Feed* (recognition cards), and tributes in honor of someone. The Director of Community Relations mentioned that donors' names are printed in the Annual Report because

"people like to see their name in print" (personal communication, January 27, 2012). She continued:

> We recognize our circle donors by name, we recognize the annual gifts both by foundations and corporations and then by the individuals and the groups. The first year we did this, we got one call from somebody saying, 'where is my name?' So they look. (Director of Community Relations, personal communication, January 27, 2012)

**Providing opportunities, tools, and training.** The social media, blog, and newsletters all communicate opportunities to continue participation in the organization, therefore actually providing these opportunities is important to nurturing the relationship. Informing the publics of opportunities to volunteer, needed donations, and the events and fundraisers as discussed in reaching out, are further examples of avenues for nurturing relationships, especially if it includes further invitation to be involved. For example, at several of the locations where publics could donate a turkey during the *Turkey Tuesday* drive, volunteers distributed fliers for the local thrift shop that had a coupon for 20% off a purchase. While a flier and coupon may not be a big example of making a connection, it may be enough to connect aware publics and make them active with low involvement.

Tools apply mostly to a special group of volunteers associated with the St. Vincent de Paul called Vincentians. These are "member-volunteers" and will be discussed in detail in the following section. However, the donor section on the website is incredibly detailed. The information available there is almost like "training" for how to become a donor. The tool that is available there is an interactive method of choosing the best route to donate based on the desires, abilities, and interests of the donor. In this way the website is also a tool that nurtures relationships, apart from the other methods of communication mentioned.

Training relates to making sure that active publics have the knowledge base they need to fulfill whatever it is they are doing. Again this step applies mostly to Vincentians; training, however, can also apply when a public wants to invest more time volunteering somewhere specific like the thrift store. Proper training provided by the organization to its active volunteers strengthens the relationship.

**Vincentians: The Vocation of a Volunteer**

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul has a unique structure in that the main arm of the organization consists of the services and programs headquartered at the main campus that functions mostly through volunteers and donors from the community as described in the preceding paragraphs. That campus is directed by the Executive Board. However, St. Vincent de Paul also has numerous appendages of dedicated members that carry out the mission of the organization on a local level. These smaller divisions of the organization are called conferences and operate from local Parishes. Conferences are established and run by member-volunteers called Vincentians. There are 89 conferences attached to the Society in the area for this case study. The conferences are arranged into districts, and the president of each district serves on the Board of Directors under the Executive Board. The relationship between the main Council and the member-run conferences is very important, not just because Vincentians raise the awareness of the Society on a local level, but also because Vincentians are essential to carrying out the mission of the organization.

Technically, according to Vincentian Support, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul began with Vincentians and conferences and the main campus and its programs were established in order to aid the Vincentians in their service. Regardless of which came first, Vincentians help to extend the reach of the Society across the State. Including the Vincentians in this case study is

necessary because they are such a vital piece to the nonprofit's operations. The way Vincentians operate is different from the operations at the main campus. In this respect, it is quite helpful to this case study because it provides another level to the case, like a study within the study. Although public relations, in the standard use of the word, is not a deliberate action within Vincentian operations the case study supports that it is still present. Communication and negotiation are also functions in Vincentian service. Furthermore, the elements of prosocial public relations are also present including building up, reaching out, making connections and nurturing relationships.

**Building up at the Vincentian level.** Vincentians believe in St. Vincent de Paul's mission to help the poor, although they are not as concerned with providing opportunities for others to serve at the conference level. Vincentian service is personal, one-to-one contact with the poor and the needy. If an individual contacts St. Vincent de Paul for assistance beyond what the main campus supplies they are referred to conferences. Conferences make home visits to those who contact them for help, provide food boxes, rent or utility assistance, and make an assessment of "deeper needs." A deeper need, for example, may be if the individual has a job interview but nothing appropriate to wear vouchers are given for the thrift store. The Director of Vincentian Support explained that conferences "do the best they can, with the resources they have" and help any way they can with whatever needs may arise (personal communication, January 27, 2012).

Conferences are composed of a president and other elected officials (vice president, treasurer, etc.) and volunteers. The conference included in this case study has about 85 active and full-time members. Meetings are held twice monthly and usually attended by about 30 to 45 members; this is one of the larger conferences, which meets less frequently than other

conferences. They are located in a district with seven other conferences. Although anyone is welcome to become a Vincentian, most Vincentians are Catholic members who go to the local Parish out of which the conference is run. In the conference meeting the researcher attended, three Vincentians were identified as non-Catholic. Vincentians are motivated by spirituality; they "see the face of Christ in those they serve" (Manager of Vincentian Support Services, personal communication, January 27, 2012). Vincentians see their service as a "vocation" rather than volunteering.

In order to become an active Vincentian there is a process that involves formal and informal training. Formal training is provided by the Executive Board and begins with the *Call to Protect* class that every member must take before making home visits. This class offers instruction on how to interact with vulnerable publics like children, elderly, the disabled, etc. Further training on the ins and outs of being a Vincentian is called the Ozanam Formation Experience and consists of four classes over two days.

**Reaching out by Vincentians.** Vincentians are not concerned with awareness and visibility in the community, as that level of reaching out is left up to the main campus. Reaching out for Vincentians mainly centers on fundraising. Vincentians raise their own funds and use those funds to buy food boxes from the main campus or from other local nonprofits, assist with rent/utilities, and otherwise fulfill their mission. A majority of the funds come from the Vincentians themselves and from the local Parishioners. Vincentians donate "secret collections" which are gathered at the beginning of Vincentian meetings. Parishioner donations are collected in the poor box and on the fifth Sunday collection of the month at the Parish. Reaching out for fundraising requires good relationships between the Parish and the Vincentians and that requires establishing trust by using donations responsibly. The Manager of Vincentian Support Services,

who has been a Vincentian since 1996, said, "We are good stewards of the money and the donations we receive" (personal communication, January 27, 2012).

At times a special event or need requires Vincentians to extend regular practices of reaching out. Reaching out for these purposes is usually aided by the main campus which provides flyers for the occasion. On the website under Vincentian Resources are fliers for thrift store support (in-kind donations, times to volunteer, and encouragement to patronize), purchasing a bin to be used at the thrift stores, and announcing when a donation truck will be in the area.

One last element of reaching out noted in this case study was that of Vincentian recruitment. The Council in the state where this case study took place developed a program for recruitment that was so successful it is now used nationwide. Following the program usually results in recruiting between 30 to 40 interested individuals with 7 to 10 of those remaining as new members of the conference, versus an average of 10 signups and 2 to 3 new members without the program. This recruitment program takes place once a year and all the necessary instructions and materials are provided for the conference by the main campus. The program is called the *Invitation to Serve* and consists of reaching out to create awareness and interest in becoming a Vincentian. The program makes connections with interested publics and includes a how-to element of keeping new recruits active. This process is summed up in the packet, which states:

> The Invitation is a comprehensive program to: raise the awareness of your parish about your conference; solicit Pastoral involvement; identify candidates for membership; handle initial contact, orientation, training and formation; and provide ways to retain new members. (St. Vincent de Paul, 2011b, p. 2)

The outreach begins with an "alter call." To raise awareness a message is read over the pulpit after Mass. This can only be done with the consent of the Pastor. Sometimes there is an unwillingness to let conferences use the alter call, so, on behalf of the conferences, the Board of Directors solicits the aid of the Catholic Bishop in the area asking him to write a letter to the Pastors on behalf of St. Vincent de Paul to allow conferences a few minutes at the end of Mass to make this announcement. This demonstrates that St. Vincent de Paul and its conferences need to maintain good relationships with the Ministry in their area.

New members are also petitioned at the Ministry Fair, at church, and through personal invitation to neighbors and friends. Anyone interested signs up to attend an introductory meeting. The introductory meeting is held soon after recruitment and provides information on what it means to be a Vincentian. After becoming aware and informed, the conference focuses on making connections with those recruits still interested. In addition to the formal training provided by the Council, new recruits are given informal training by members of the conference. Mostly this entails being assigned a mentor who takes the new recruit though the ins and outs of meetings and home visits. When someone is ready to accept the call to become a Vincentian the conference has a ceremony for them and they are inducted into the "family" of volunteers. The final step in the program suggests that to keep new Vincentians the conference needs to keep them actively participating and to show appreciation for their work.

**Making connections the Vincentian way.** Arguably the most important connections Vincentians make is with other Vincentians. Because this is a group of volunteers, and because the service is not easy, it is important that there is a sense of friendship and camaraderie between Vincentians and within Districts. "Number two of our mission is friendship and fellowship. …We build our friendship and fellowship in our meetings and the beautiful thing is it spills over

to the people we serve" (Manager of Vincentian Support Services, personal communication, January 27, 2012). The leadership in the conference participating in this case, organizes a friendship dinner at the first meeting of each month where he recognizes Vincentians who have put forth special effort, reached a notable anniversary in service, etc. The dinner is an opportunity for the Vincentians to get to know one another and build a sense of camaraderie. Recognizing and thanking fellow Vincentians is one way they make connections.

A second group with whom conferences need to connect is with other conferences. conferences are responsible for their own funds and sometimes a need may arise that is beyond the ability of one conference to support. Therefore, conferences participate in "twinning," which is a partnership between conferences in helping fulfill a need. After explaining how conferences work with their "sister" conferences, the Manager of Vincentian Support Services explained that open communication between Vincentians, conferences, districts, and St. Vincent de Paul's main campus, was key in these connections.

Conferences also make connections with local nonprofits and businesses in their area for the purposes of assisting the needy. The conference that the researcher visited had a relationship with the local grocery store that provided soon-to-expire food for the conference's pantry. The Manager of Vincentian Support Services explained that each conference has access to the Peoples Information Guide (PIG) which lists all the charity services in the state. Conferences use the PIG to create a list of local agencies to which they can refer clients when needs are beyond what the conference can support. Furthermore, conferences connect with clients by empowering them to take control of their situation. For example, a Vincentian will not call another nonprofit on behalf of a client for assistance. Instead, the Vincentian leaves the information and recommendation in the hands of the client.

Finally, conferences are connected to St. Vincent de Paul's main campus. Although they operate almost as separate agencies, Vincentians rely on the guidance and support of the main campus. One example the researcher observed at the meeting was that conferences create their own guidelines for the ways in which they render assistance to the poor and needy. These guidelines are then voted on among members and sent to the main campus where the Executive Board approves them or requests revisions to be made.

**Nurturing relationships with Vincentians.** The relationship between St. Vincent de Paul and its Vincentians is important to the organization, and therefore nurturing this relationship is important as well. St. Vincent de Paul communicates with Vincentians specifically though a monthly newsletter. The newsletter contains similar elements to the other forms of communication like narratives, statistics, information on programs and services, and recognition of volunteers and donors. The newsletter also includes elements that are specific to the Vincentian relationship. One example is recognition of Vincentians who have dedicated substantial amounts of time or energy to a project or to the cause in general. Some elements are almost administrative in nature, including times and locations for training classes and Vincentian-specific meetings. In short, this publication helps to inform, encourage, instruct, advise, and accolade Vincentians.

Furthermore, the main campus provides tools and training to help Vincentians in their pursuits. One tool, explained earlier, is the *Invitation to Serve* program. The main campus provides each conference with a packet of instructions on how to carry out the program and recruit new members. Also as discussed, St. Vincent de Paul provides formal training for Vincentians. At times training simply consists of an explanation provided in the newsletter expounding on why certain procedures need to be followed. One example is an article in the

January newsletter titled, "Why do you Report?" explaining why it is important to keep track of funds and services and why it is necessary to return paperwork back to the main campus. Training is further supported by Vincentian Support Services located on the main campus. Vincentian Support Services nurtures the relationship with Vincentians by being available to assist Vincentians whenever assistance is required. Two-way symmetrical communication is very important in the relationship between the main campus, the districts, and the conferences. The Manager of the Support Center said, "My job is to support Vincentians – teach, train, get a phone call from them, help them, and just assure them that they are doing the best they can with what we have" (personal communication, January 27, 2012).

**Negotiation: A Visible Element in Relationships with Connected Publics**

The case study suggested that negotiation plays a role in relationships between St. Vincent de Paul and its active publics. Evidence, however, was scare in the data collected from the case study. Observations and interviews did produce evidence to support that St. Vincent de Paul negotiates in relationships with Vincentians and other volunteers. It was suggested in the review of literature that a prosocial organization would employ negotiation strategies that reflected its non-confrontational communication style. Observation and interviews supported that the strategies used for negotiations strived to do what was best for the relationship by avoiding confrontation and conflict.

The strongest support for negotiation was shown in the interactions between Vincentians. Observations at conference meetings revealed that even though Vincentian members all support the same cause, they are also individuals with conflicting opinions. Also observed was that different individuals adopted different styles of negotiation; those noted were compromising, cooperating, and unconditionally constructive. For example, the majority of the discussion

suggested that all parties were willing to cooperate in their negotiation despite differing opinions. Disagreements were explored, alternative solutions were suggested, and solutions were agreed on by all parties. There were Vincentians who held strong opinions about how funds should be spent, often these individuals would adopt a compromising strategy where they would listen to other opinions and attempt to find a middle ground as part of the cooperation process. In addition, there were individuals in the discussion whose sole purpose seemed to be to reconcile the differences between opinions in an unconditionally constructive approach.

These illustrations suggest that support for the cause is paramount to conflicting opinions; that is, negotiating strategies were all win-win because the conference was striving to reach a goal that was best for the cause. During negotiations it was clear that members felt passionately about the work and held varying views on how it should be accomplished, yet while negotiations were taking place every member who wanted to speak was heard and no one was interrupted. After all opinions were voiced a solution was put forward and voted on.

Sometimes an issue will arise among Vincentians that requires a mediator to step in and help the situation. This is one of the reasons St. Vincent de Paul has Vincentian Support Services. The Manager of Vincentian Support Services related that she often will step in to assist a situation of conflicting opinions. She described negotiations as acts of cooperation and compromise where the final solution is "best for the relationship, best for the people we serve, and for the good of the society. That's what our rule book says – the good of the society" (personal communication, January 27, 2012).

The independent nature of conferences allows for Vincentians to discuss and decide among themselves how they want to distribute their resources in supporting the poor and needy. In fact, Vincentians create their own guidelines generally regarding the service they render.

These guidelines need to be negotiated between the conference and the Board of Directors. The process entails the Vincentians submitting the guidelines and the Board of Directors approving them or asking for revisions. This is a type of principled negotiation on behalf of the Board of Directors; if guidelines fail to meet the Board of Directors' approval then revisions have to be made. On the other side of the equation, Vincentians make the revisions demonstrating an unconditionally constructive negotiation strategy because they do what is best for the relationship, and that is to follow the Board of Directors' standards.

St. Vincent de Paul also negotiates in relationships with other active publics. For example, at times negotiations take place with volunteers who want to serve because "everyone has their own expectations of what volunteering is" (Volunteer Coordinator, personal communication, January 27, 2012). Volunteer Services has to balance the needs of the organization with the needs of the volunteers. "It's tough to balance the needs of all the stakeholders. In volunteer services we have to consider so many people's needs," – clients, volunteers, managers, staff, donors – "so we have so many different stakeholders and we have to balance the happiness of so many different people. That's one of the biggest challenges we face" (Volunteer Coordinator, personal communication, January 27, 2012). In the circumstances that were related, the researcher noted accommodating, compromising, and cooperating styles depending on what parties were involved and the needs of each side. The ultimate goal, as it was among Vincentians, is to arrive at a solution that is best for the relationship. Major Giving/Donor Support explained that in donor relations accommodating negotiation is usually the best route to take.

Difficulties infrequently arise with donors. An unhappy donor is worse than no donor, so when a problem does come to our attention, we *listen* and resolve the matter to the

donor's satisfaction. …Respect is paramount. The desired end result is a satisfied donor and a deepened relationship. (Major Giving/Donor Support, personal communication, January 29, 2012)

Finally, the case study produced one instance of perseverance negotiation. The conflict arose in a Facebook post regarding controversy in Oregon over a veteran who was told he could not display his flag at the complex where he was living, the complex being run by an Oregon Council of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. The immovable point in this debate was that this Council, located in a different state, had no say in the issue even though local publics felt perhaps it did. In this instance, St. Vincent de Paul refused to argue with the individual but responded to each comment with respect and integrity. The point that should be made was that even though the comment was voiced on Facebook, the opinion of the individual was not ignored or avoided by St. Vincent de Paul; it was addressed non-confrontationally.

**Advocacy Communication in a Prosocial Organization**

The case study of St. Vincent de Paul thus far has shown that communication in a prosocial nonprofit organization is generally non-confrontational, at least in this intent. One unexpected find in the case study was an advocacy appendage of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul called *Voice of the Poor (VOP),* organized and operated by Vincentians. The mission statement of VOP is:

> Believing in the dignity of every person, Voice of the Poor supports Catholic social teaching. Under the direction of the Diocesan Council, we will advocate for justice on behalf of those in need, while educating St. Vincent de Paul members about economic and social issues impacting the poor. (St. Vincent de Paul, 2010b)

According to the Director of Community Relations:

Voice of the Poor is, I think, so vital because it's the advocacy arm. It's somewhat

controversial internally that not everyone understands how important it is for us to not

only deliver services but we need to be an advocate for the poor at the legislative level.

So it takes an extraordinarily dedicated person to be a part of voice of the poor. (personal

communication, January 27, 2012)

Although more research is necessary on this branch, the communication methods of this

advocacy group appear to be mainly non-confrontational, though perhaps they do cause strain.

That is, they send mailings to members, legislators, and the public, testify at government

hearings, and go to Washington to meet with Senators and Congressmen to advocate for different

bills on the table. The advocacy group does not seem to target businesses or other established

organizations but instead seems to be pressuring government in behalf of St. Vincent de Paul's

mission statement; that is, VOP pressures these entities to assist in the cause of assisting the

poor.

Understanding St. Vincent de Paul's mission statement and knowing that internally the

concept of advocacy is a controversial branch suggests that, as the change agent spectrum

proposes, an organization can engage in advocacy and still be considered prosocial. Indeed, it

seems that part of its prosocial cause is to advocate on behalf of the poor, a group that is

marginalized without means to advocate for themselves.

## Observations and Suggestions for Further Study

This study began an investigation into the practice of prosocial public relations by first

asking if public relations plays an important role in a nonprofit organization trying to reach its

goals. The preceding results demonstrate that, for a nonprofit organization, public relations is

practiced by every department from communications and community relations, to corporate and

donor relations, and even into volunteer services. Each department participates in public relations through strategic communication and outreach that helps to establish the image and reputation of the entity with target publics. As part of its very foundation, the organization builds up its internal resources to establish an identity and reputation through which it can reach out to the community and establish connections with target publics. These connections translate into the manpower and funding the organization needs to carry out its mission. Public relations then maintains and nurtures the relationships with connected publics through public relations to perpetuate the work of the organization. In answer to the first main research question, this case study supports and builds the theory that public relations and communication are important functions in a prosocial organization.

The case study also produced evidence relating to the propositions suggested by the first research question. The results found that the prosocial organization employed models of negotiation focused on win-win solutions in their relationships with publics. Observed strategies, as discussed in the results, included compromising, cooperating, unconditionally constructive, mediated, accommodating, and principled. These observations suggest that win-win styles of negotiation are most effective in communication relationships with key publics. This is likely because strategies like compromising, cooperation, unconditionally constructive, mediated, and accommodating are focused on doing what is best for the relationship by keeping communication open, engaging in dialogue, and reaching resolutions that are satisfactory to all parties. Future research should continue to examine the role of negotiation in public relations, especially regarding prosocial organizations. While negotiation did not present itself in aspects of media relations or in connecting with corporations, other similar organizations, or the government,

results did suggest that negotiation might play a role in these relationships as well; future examination is needed in this area.

Observations also suggest that all four models of public relations are used in the practices of a prosocial organization. All the models seemed to serve different purposes and target different publics and were all essential to the success of the nonprofit. Publicity and informational communication were used in reaching out to build up the awareness of the organization, its cause, and its subsequent programs and services. Messages that were promotional were targeted to increase support for the case, and informational messages were targeted to increase the identity and reputation of the entity. Two-way communication was most effective in connecting with publics and nurturing relationships with active publics. Dialogue was especially important in the transition from aware to active publics – from finding the right fit for supporting opportunities whether it be volunteering or donating, to making sure volunteers feel that their service is appreciated and being put to good use. The organization used feedback from supporters to improve communication media like the *Vincentian Connection* and took care to respond to posts from publics on social media. Future studies should examine the models of public relations as used in other prosocial organization to see if all models are generally used also. This study suggested that two-way communication is most effective in making connections and keeping connected to essential publics; other studies should examine this hypothesis relating to public relations in other similar organizations.

The second purpose of this study, as stated by the second main research question, was to build or challenge the theory of prosocial public relations as practiced by a real-life nonprofit organization committed to prosocial change. The case presented evidence to support that the prosocial organization builds up, reaches out, and makes connections as proposed by Bob (2005)

and Wakefield et al. (2011). The case also established that one of the most important elements in the success of a nonprofit is its efforts to nurture relationships with active publics. Although this practice should seem obvious, it was not suggested in the prior review of literature. The results of this study showed that once a public is connected and active the organization needs to keep the lines of communication open with these publics to encourage further support and participation, and foster goodwill and trust. This case study provided some examples of the methods St. Vincent de Paul uses in implementing these elements of building up, reaching out, making connections, and nurturing relationships. The following paragraphs will discuss the observations of the specific ways in which the case used communication to establish and maintain relationships with latent, aware, and active publics and suggest areas where future research might continue to build the theory of prosocial relationships.

**Using the Situation Theory of Publics in Prosocial Public Relations**

In this case, it became apparent that the situational theory of publics (Grunig & Hunt, 1984) is useful in discussing the publics of prosocial activist organizations. The theory also includes five concepts that help describe how the publics relate to the organization: problem recognition, constraint recognition, level of involvement, and information seeking and processing. The theory helps to identify the publics to which communication is directed in reaching out, making connections, and nurturing relationships. Messages for reaching out are tailored to increase problem recognition and affect level of involvement though invitations to participate. Messages to aid reaching out are available to information-seeking publics on the organization's website, in its brochures, and through other tools of communication; the organization sends out information to processing publics via media relations and word-of-mouth

from connected publics. Most of this communication, however, is one-way in the form of information or promotional messages.

Two-way communication is essential in relationships with aware and active publics. Messages targeted to aware publics are designed to overcome perceived constraints by offering various means by which to support the organization or become involved in its programs. Opportunities for involvement vary from activities that require little effort, to activities that are much more involved. These invitations and opportunities are communicated though the media and through the organization. Messages are supported by the departments and staff of the nonprofit to facilitate dialogue and make experiences with the nonprofit positive and rewarding.

Once a public becomes active, the organization engages in two-way communication to build and nurture relationships. The dialogue included communication from the organization regarding results and statistics from its programs and services and feedback from active publics. It was also apparent that in relationships with and among active publics, negotiation played a role. The goal in negotiations where conflicting opinions arose was to reach a conclusion that was best for the relationship. This dialogue keeps active publics connected to the organization so that they both seek and process messages. In addition, these means of public relations also assist in maintaining and supporting the level of involvement.

**Strategies for Building Up**

The results of the case study led to the observation that building up internal resources has contributed to the Society of St. Vincent de Paul's efforts in creating and managing a successful prosocial organization. Before a nonprofit can focus on reaching out and making connections, it must first have a clear purpose supported by relevant programs and services and be run by competent leadership and staff. Building up establishes the identity of the organization through

which it can reach out and connect to target publics. The case study built up by creating a strong, clear mission statement and organizing specific programs and services that contribute to the fulfillment of that mission. Furthermore, St. Vincent de Paul created unique aspects to its programs such as providing comprehensive services to the poor and providing others with opportunities to serve. These unique angles set St. Vincent de Paul apart from other nonprofits. In addition, the nonprofit has established a reputation in the community as a trustworthy organization that uses contributions responsibly to fulfill its mission through its programs and services. Publics that have positive experiences participating in programs and services perpetuate the reputation of St. Vincent de Paul as a legitimate and effective nonprofit.

The leadership of St. Vincent de Paul is passionate about and committed to the cause. Qualities of the leadership include communication, business, and relationship building skills. Future studies should examine the role of leadership further, expounding on the skills leadership requires in a prosocial nonprofit. For example, this case did not find that transnational ability or second-language skills were necessary for the leadership of this organization; future studies that examine nonprofits on a larger, or more global, scale should look to see if these elements are present as suggested by Bob (2005).

The leadership of St. Vincent de Paul was involved in reaching out through media relations, speeches, storytelling, and writing letters for the newsletters and annual reports. Leadership also played a role in making connections by personally networking, and nurturing relationships by appealing to the natural self-interest of donors and other organizations. Future examinations might consider looking deeper into the role of leadership in nurturing relationships. For example, what does a leader of a nonprofit do behind the scenes to help ensure future participation from key publics? In what ways does leadership engage in two-way communication

with donors and volunteers to cultivate and develop support? In other words, future research should delve into the leadership aspect of building up to examine other ways leaders are involved in public relations and communication, and what effect their involvement specifically has on the organization's visibility and ability to gain support as the make connections with donors.

Staff members are also an important element in building up because they participate in making connections and nurturing relationships. At St. Vincent de Paul, staff members were passionate about and dedicated to the cause, were able to fill pivotal roles with professional knowledge, and were willing to be flexible in their job assignments. Again, in this case cultural sensitivity or second-language skills were not addressed and future research should look at the qualities of staff members to see what else may apply in the success of a nonprofit.

**Strategies for Reaching Out**

Latent and aware publics are those not naturally connected to the cause. The case study of St. Vincent de Paul demonstrated that these are the publics to which public relations reaches out. Latent publics are those who may be looking for a cause to support, or if made aware of the cause would become active. Reaching out also targets aware publics such as those who are in tune with the cause of basic human needs and those who are aware of the organization but do not actively support the cause. Communication also targets publics who have ties to the cause, in this case Catholic clergy, but for whatever reason are not active. Messages are targeted toward these publics in the form of one-way communication – both information and publicity. These messages are tailored to foster problem recognition and encourage involvement. In addition, there is reaching out to targeted audiences who may not be looking for long-term involvement by offering minimal-effort opportunities to become involved.

The communication tools used by St. Vincent de Paul in reaching out are the website, brochures, and published reports for information seeking publics and media outreach for information processing publics. For the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, media outreach was successful when messages were tailored to the needs of the media outlet or specified to fit the local environment. According to the Manager of Communications, media relations does not guarantee coverage, and though the organization has offered to allow journalists access to the intimate workings of the nonprofit, the media has not taken up the offer of beneficent embedding. Therefore, future research may want to examine Cottle and Nolan's (2007) argument regarding that and other strategies of media relations.

The goal of reaching out for St. Vincent de Paul is to raise awareness and establish the reputation of the organization. However, this study did not examine the effectiveness of these methods, and therefore, this topic should be considered by future research. For example, how much of the traffic on St. Vincent de Paul's website is aware publics seeking more information about the organization's programs and services, and what percentage of those became involved in supporting the cause? Or does reaching out through the media really raise the awareness and credibility of the organization as it seems to in this particular case?

This study observed that clients were not a target public of messages that reach out. Future research should examine if this is the case with other nonprofits as well. More specifically, this may just be the case with already long-established nonprofits as opposed to nonprofits that are just starting out. It seems likely that before the Society of St. Vincent de Paul became the established organization it is, there may have been lots of efforts to reach out to clients that involved listening to and assessing their needs. In fact, Vincentians do this sort of reaching out still. Future studies that look at the early development of prosocial organizations

should examine how programs and services are determined and developed. This may produce a missing aspect of this case study that relates to both reaching out and building up. In beginning organizations the intimate involvement of the public the organization aims to serve may play a role. Government and city officials also did not appear to be targets for reaching out communication. This may be because methods to reach out to government and city officials takes place on a more personal level, like reaching out to corporations, rather than with mass messaging. It may also be that the advocacy branch of the nonprofit reaches out to and makes connections with this target audience. Future studies should consider this area further in relation to other nonprofit organizations.

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul used storytelling as one of its main methods of communicating the objectives and programs of the organization. Not only could future research look into this area as a way of raising awareness for other nonprofits, but should also examine its purported effectiveness.

Events were observed to be effective ways that St. Vincent de Paul reached out to target publics. Fundraisers and drives were successful presumably because they offered a means for a low level of involvement. Beyond raising awareness and establishing the organization's reputation, the purpose of reaching out is to encourage publics to act, to support, and to become involved.

**Strategies for Making Connections**

In making connections, communication is focused on establishing a relationship with volunteers, donors, other organizations, and clients. Successful connections are made through two-way symmetrical communication. The practice of making connections does not occur until a public, latent or aware, makes the decision to act – which is why reaching out is so important.

Connections can be made regardless of the public's level of involvement as long as the

organization has practices in place that engage the public beyond one-time involvement. St.

Vincent de Paul does this by having departments specifically related to the area of interest,

whether it is volunteering, donating, or interest in corporate partnerships. In addition to the

communication that reaches out to invite involvement, communication that makes connections is

usually based on firsthand experience or personal contact with the organization.

Connections with clients are relatively easy as the organization's purpose is to aid the

poor. Clients who come to St. Vincent de Paul for help are treated with respect and dignity and

often return to support the organization if their circumstances allow. With volunteers,

connections are made through campus tours, communicating the larger scope of the organization,

and providing volunteer experiences that are satisfying and rewarding. Volunteers feel connected

to the organization when they feel that their services are needed and appreciated. St. Vincent de

Paul accomplishes this by providing a range of capacities in which to serve and making sure

volunteers are always given a task to complete. At the end of the experience, volunteers are

thanked for the time they have donated. These are examples of two-way communication that are

so important to making connections with active publics.

Connections with donors are made in a similar fashion. Donors are invited to experience

the work St. Vincent de Paul does firsthand by taking a tour or volunteering. Donors are also

made to feel like their contributions are needed and appreciated. Part of connecting with donors

sometimes entails dialogue allowing the donor a say in how the donation will be used; it would

be interesting for future studies to examine how often this may be the case. Finally, with

organizations, connections are made through personal contact by networking or through the

corporate ambassador program. Other organizations form partnerships with St. Vincent de Paul if

the relationship is mutually beneficial. For example, by partnering with the prosocial organization, the other organization should be able to see benefits like improved employee moral or high public perception of corporate social responsibility. On behalf of St. Vincent de Paul, corporate partnerships are essential to carrying out the work of the nonprofit. Future research may look at the benefits of corporate partnerships with nonprofits, not only from the point of view of the nonprofit but also from the point of view of the corporation. Studies may also consider other public relations strategies that occur in these relationships.

These areas leave much to study for future research, especially regarding how these connections are made from the perspective of the target publics. Also interesting for future studies will be if these methods of making connections are similar in other nonprofits, or if these methods differ between various organizations.

**Strategies for Nurturing Relationships**

Once a public is active – that is, they have actively participated in support of the organization, and a connection has been made – the work of public relations is no longer to reach out to this public but to create opportunities for them to continue to volunteer, donate, and reach out to others. The Society of St. Vincent de Paul nurtured relationships by keeping involved publics active by providing communication and further opportunities for participation regardless of the level of involvement. The main communication media were newsletters, e-newsletters, social media, and a blog. These methods communicated appreciation to publics for their services, events, fundraisers, and drives, and reported back on how contributions are used to help the nonprofit serve the needs of the poor. Because this aspect was uncovered by this case study future studies should look for other methods, similar or different, used by other nonprofits to

preserve and cultivate relationships. In fact, secondary research may also produce elements of nurturing relationships that have not been identified and defined as such in prior studies.

**Other Observations from St. Vincent de Paul**

This particular case presented several interesting aspects that involved communication and public relations that may or may not be elements in other nonprofit organizations. For starters, the organizational structure of St. Vincent de Paul involves a branch of dedicated volunteers that reach out and make connections apart from the work of the main campus to further the work of the nonprofit. The communication between St. Vincent de Paul and this public was crucial to the success of the organization – so much so that the organization provided these volunteers with specific tools and training to carry out their goals. This demonstrates two-way communication with this very active public. In addition, St. Vincent de Paul also provided this group with its own department and staff dedicated to helping them in their endeavors further through two-way communication. It would be interesting to see if other prosocial nonprofits also have groups of dedicated member-volunteers who require special tools and training to carry out their work and extend the reach of the nonprofit to local communities on personal levels.

Next, this case presented an advocacy branch that is a part of the organization but operates independently. It would be interesting to further examine if the existence of this branch of advocacy is present in other prosocial organizations. In other words, is it just part of the movement within the change-agent spectrum for the nonprofit organization (between prosocial communication and advocacy communication)? Or is part of effecting prosocial change advocating on behalf of the cause, making it a necessary element of communication within prosocial activism? It may be that this advocacy branch of St. Vincent de Paul is more an element of reaching out to government agencies and officials in an effort to build mutually

beneficial, non-confrontational relationships as opposed to creating pressure to advocate for change. Future research should look at the different ways non-confrontational groups interact in government relations; perhaps government relations with activist groups can be prosocial without traces of pressure advocacy or confrontation.

**Final Thoughts**

In conclusion, the observations of this study strongly support the theory of prosocial public relations as suggested by Wakefield et al. (2011). The case study supported that communication and public relations were essential aspects of the everyday operations of the organization and were employed by each department. Communication and outreach to targeted publics helped to establish the image and reputation of the entity. As part of its very foundation, the organization builds up its internal resources to establish an identity and reputation through which the organization reaches out to the community, and establishes connections with target publics. These connections translate into the manpower and funding the organization needs to carry out its mission nurtured by further public relations and communication with active publics to perpetuate the work of the organization.

The case of a prosocial nonprofit organization as examined in this study showed that the organization built up internal assets like leaderships, staff, and a clear, strong mission statement supported by programs and services. Furthermore, the organization reached out to latent and aware publics through publicity, promotion, and information to communicate with information-seeking and information-processing publics to raise the visibility of the organization and encourage active participation. The organization made connections with active publics through two-way communication which increased support for the cause and helped to establish the reputation of the organization as a legitimate, trustworthy, and effective establishment.

The case study further uncovered nurturing relationships as an additional fourth element to the process of prosocial public relations. Much of the communication from the organization was targeted to maintain and encourage relationships with active publics, an aspect that seems elementary to public relations but may be overlooked in the contemporary process of integrated communication which focuses public relations to "branding" and marketing functions. Nurturing relationships encompasses the roots of public relations to engage with active publics in two-way dialogue, supporting the relationships through communication. This study found that active publics maintain a high level of involvement if they are nurtured.

Without communication the organization would be hard-pressed to gain visibility and support for the cause. Communication is essential in defining, promoting, and sharing the purpose of the organization and its supporting programs. While these observations support the theory of prosocial public relations by demonstrating that communication and public relations play a vital role in the ability of a prosocial organization in carrying out its mission, there is more research that needs to be done. Foremost, because this study was exploratory in nature, the results of this study should not be taken as rigid conclusions, but rather as observations that require further testing and research to either support or challenge the postulations. The major delimitation of this studying is that it was a single-case study; therefore, the researcher suggests that other similar case studies be conducted in order to compare observations. In this way the research can begin to establish conclusions that can be generalizable to larger populations, and thus provide increasing insights into prosocial public relations.

Continuing to expound on this theory of prosocial public relations, and the strategies and methods involved, will strengthen public relations theory. Furthermore, studies such as this one offer insight into an area of public relations that does not receive much support by current public

relations theory. By creating theory that is specific to helping prosocial organizations build up, reach out, connect, and nurture relationships, practitioners in the field will better be able to guide the practices of the organizations for which they work.

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