



SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH (SoGSaR)

FACULTY OF PUBLIC RELATIONS, MARKETING AND ADVERTISING

**EXAMINING THE ROLE OF GENDER STEREOTYPES IN CAREER CHOICES IN
PUBLIC RELATIONS**

BY

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DECEMBER, 2024

DECLARATION BY STUDENT

I hereby declare that this research is a result of my own original research and that no part of it has been presented for another degree in this university or any other higher education institute. I further declare that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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CERTIFICATION BY SUPERVISOR

This dissertation has been prepared and presented under my supervision according to the guidelines for supervision and formatting of dissertation laid down by the University of Media, Arts and Communication-Institute of Journalism, UniMAC-IJ.

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to explore the impact of gender stereotypes on career progression, role assignment, and leadership opportunities in the public relations industry. The research was guided by Social Role Theory and Gender Schema Theory. Using a qualitative methodology, data were collected through interviews with 10 public relations professionals. The findings revealed that women are often assigned to nurturing roles, while men are given more visible and strategic tasks, affecting career advancement. The study highlighted the effectiveness of structured mentorship and leadership programs in addressing these barriers. Recommendations included implementing transparent promotion processes, mentorship for women, and gender-sensitive leadership development programs.

Keywords: Gender stereotypes, public relations, career progression, leadership, mentorship

DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to:

The Almighty God who guided me throughout this journey providing me with strength and protection. My late Mother (Mrs Eunice Betty Mawunya Kpor Mottey) who challenged me to pursue higher academics more than her. My family, who have been my constant source of support and encouragement throughout this journey. My team members, who have worked tirelessly to bring this project to life. My mentors, who have guided me with their expertise and wisdom. The people and staff of National Communications Authority (NCA) who will benefit from this project. I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to each and every one of them for their unwavering support, trust, and belief in me. This project would not have been possible without their collective efforts, and I am honoured to have had the opportunity to lead and work alongside such an exceptional group of individuals.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION BY STUDENT	i
CERTIFICATION BY SUPERVISOR	i
ABSTRACT.....	ii
DEDICATION.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iv
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....	viii
CHAPTER ONE.....	9
INTRODUCTION	9
1.1 Background of Study.....	9
1.2 Problem Statement	10
1.3 Research Objectives	12
1.4 Research Questions	12
1.5 Significance of the Study	12
1.6 Scope of the Study.....	13
1.7 Organisation of the Study.....	14
1.8 Chapter Summary.....	15
CHAPTER TWO	16
LITERATURE REVIEW	16
2.1 Introduction.....	16
2.2 Conceptual Review	16
2.3 Theoretical Framework	25
2.3.1 Social Role Theory.....	25
2.3.2 Gender Schema Theory	26
2.3.4 How Underpinning Theories Complement the Study	27
2.4 Empirical Review.....	28
2.5 Chapter Summary.....	31
CHAPTER THREE	32
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.....	32
3.1 Introduction.....	32
3.2 Study Design	32
3.3 Qualitative Research	32

3.4 Population.....	33
3.5 Sampling Procedures and Rationale.....	34
3.6 Sample Size and Justification.....	34
3.7 Method of Data Collection.....	35
3.7.1 Data Collection Instrument.....	35
3.7.2 Data Collection Procedure.....	35
3.8 Data Analysis	36
3.9 Ethical Consideration	37
3.10 Conclusion.....	38
CHAPTER FOUR.....	38
DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION	38
4.1 Introduction	38
4.1.1 Demographic Overview.....	39
4.2 Research Questions/ Interview.....	39
RQ1: How do gender stereotypes influence career choices among PR practitioners?	39
4.2.1 Influence of Gender Roles on Assigned Public Relations Work.....	39
4.2.2 Impact of Gender Expectations on Specialisations in PR	41
4.2.3 Stereotypes' Effect on Recruitment and Promotion in PR Firms.....	43
4.3 RQ2: What are the experiences of PR practitioners regarding career progression and leadership opportunities in the context of gender stereotypes?	45
4.3.1 Career Advancement Experiences in PR and Gender Influence	45
4.3.2 Gender-Based Differences in Leadership Opportunities.....	46
4.3.3 Organisational Practices and Their Impact on Career Progression	48
4.3.4 Perceptions of Leadership Roles Among Male and Female Practitioners	50
4.4 RQ3: What challenges do PR practitioners in Ghana face due to gender stereotypes?	51
4.4.1 Challenges Encountered Due to Gender Stereotypes in PR.....	51
4.4.2 Role of Organisational Policies in Addressing Gender-Related Challenges.....	53
4.5 Chapter Summary.....	55
CHAPTER FIVE	56
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS	56
5.1 Introduction	56
5.2 Summary of Key Findings	56
5.3 Conclusion.....	58

5.4 Recommendations	59
5.5 Areas for Future Research.....	61
REFERENCES	62
APPENDIX.....	74
INTERVIEW GUIDE.....	74

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

GIJ - Ghana Institute of Journalism

IPR - Institute of Public Relations, Ghana

PR - Public Relations

PRAG - Public Relations Association of the Ghana

WiPR - Women in Public Relations

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of Study

Public relations (PR) is a field that demands creativity, strategic thinking, and effective communication (Anani-Bossman, 2021; Osafo, 2020). However, Grunig et al. (2013) points out that career choices in PR are often influenced by gender stereotypes, significantly impacting career progression. Women predominantly occupy roles perceived as supportive rather than strategic, aligning with broader societal stereotypes that associate women with nurturing roles and men with leadership positions (Aldoory & Toth, 2002; Tsetsura, 2015). Studies have highlighted that women in PR face barriers to leadership roles, such as unequal pay and limited access to high-profile assignments, perpetuating a cycle where women are underrepresented in decision-making positions (Place & Vardeman-Winter, 2013).

Tabassum and Nayak (2021) go on to establish that gender stereotypes affect career trajectories, organisational dynamics, and industry practices. These stereotypes not only limit the diversity of thought and practice within the industry but also influence educational and professional pathways. In educational settings, gendered expectations can steer students towards certain specialisations, limiting their exposure to a full range of opportunities (Fitch & Third, 2010). This early differentiation contributes to the gender disparity observed in various PR roles, reinforcing traditional gender roles and affecting professional experiences. Despite women often dominating numerically in the field, they remain underrepresented in leadership roles, facing slower career progression and persistent barriers such as the "glass ceiling" (Dozier et al., 2013a; Toth & Cline, 1989).

In Ghana, gender dynamics in PR present a unique perspective. In recent times for instance, initiatives like Women in Public Relations (WiPR) in Ghana promotes some degree of gender equality. These efforts provide networking, mentorship, and professional development opportunities (WiPR Corporate Profile, 2024). WiPR (2024) contribute to a more balanced industry landscape. Such initiatives indicate a proactive approach to addressing gender imbalances and supporting women's advancement in PR. On this premise, exploring the experiences of PR practitioners in Ghana regarding career progression and leadership opportunities is essential. This involves understanding how gender stereotypes influence their career choices.

Additionally, examining organisational culture within Ghanaian PR firms can reveal supportive environments that mitigate the effects of gender stereotypes as proposed by Obeng (2024). Drawing inspiration from Abakah et al. (2023) and Abonyi et al. (2024), such initiatives from organisations promoting gender equality and offering equal opportunities for professional growth can serve as models for others. These inclusive workplaces help dismantle traditional gender roles, enabling both men and women to succeed in their careers. Therefore, understanding gender stereotypes in Ghana's PR industry is not only a salient academic endeavour but contributes to the global discourse on gender equality. This study aims to provide insights into the experiences of PR practitioners in Ghana, focusing on the influence of gender stereotypes on career choices. By highlighting the local context, the study seeks to enrich the broader understanding of gender dynamics in professional settings.

1.2 Problem Statement

The role of gender stereotypes in career choices within PR warrants critical examination due to persistent disparities in the field. Despite the PR industry being predominantly female, senior-level positions remain male-dominated, highlighting a paradox that suggests underlying gender biases affecting career progression (Grunig, 2006). These biases result in women being

relegated to less prestigious roles, perceived as more suited to their "natural" abilities (Aldoory & Toth, 2002), thus undermining women's potential and contributing to a segmented labor market within PR.

These barriers are not solely due to individual capabilities but are perpetuated by societal expectations and organisational cultures. The persistence of gender norms in career choices limits the diversity of thought and innovation within the industry, reinforcing traditional roles and hindering progress (Place & Vardeman-Winter, 2013).

Additionally, assessing Place's (2012) view that men are often encouraged to pursue strategic roles, while women are steered towards communication-centric positions, reinforcing the divide and affecting career satisfaction and retention presents a worrying outlook. This picture deteriorates further when Heilman et al. (2024) and Williams (2024) dovetails in that these gender stereotypes subtly impact educational and professional development pathways. This early differentiation contributes to the gender disparity observed in various PR roles, with women expressing frustration with the lack of advancement opportunities (Aldoory, 2005).

With regards to that, there is a convincing need to conduct PR research in Africa. Adding to efforts made, this study particularly focuses on exploring how gender stereotypes shape career choices in Ghana unique cultural context. This is premised on scholarly (Anani-Bossman et al., 2023; Mudzanani & Anani-Bossman, 2023; Sriramesh, 2012) positions that most PR literature originates from Western contexts, leading to a knowledge gap regarding PR practices in other regions. By examining the impact of gender stereotypes on career progression in Ghana, this study aims to contribute to the broader discourse on workplace diversity and inclusion, advocating for strategies that promote gender equality and foster a dynamic PR industry.

1.3 Research Objectives

1. To explore how gender stereotypes influence career choices among public relations practitioners in Ghana.
2. To examine the experiences of public relations practitioners in Ghana regarding career progression and leadership opportunities in the context of gender stereotypes.
3. To identify the challenges faced by women (females) as Public Relations Practitioners in Ghana due to gender stereotypes.

1.4 Research Questions

1. How do gender stereotypes influence career choices among public relations practitioners in Ghana?
2. What are the experiences of public relations practitioners in Ghana regarding career progression and leadership opportunities in the context of gender stereotypes?
3. What challenges do public relations practitioners in Ghana face due to gender stereotypes?

1.5 Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is multi-faceted, contributing to academic knowledge, policy formulation, and professional practice. By examining the pervasive gender biases within the Ghanaian PR industry, this research enhances the existing body of knowledge, offering a fresh perspective on how these stereotypes shape career trajectories. This study addresses a critical gap in PR literature, which has predominantly focused on Western contexts, thus adding a valuable African viewpoint to the discourse. From a policy perspective, the findings of this research provides evidence-based insights that can inform the development of gender-sensitive policies within the PR industry and related sectors. Policymakers and industry regulators will benefit from understanding the specific barriers women face in advancing to leadership roles.

This understanding can lead to the formulation of strategies and regulations aimed at promoting gender equality and ensuring a fair and inclusive work environment.

In terms of practice, this study offers practical recommendations for PR firms and organisations. By highlighting the impact of gender stereotypes on career progression, the research encourages organisations to adopt more equitable practices. These practices may include targeted mentorship programs, equitable hiring and promotion processes, and initiatives that foster a supportive environment for all genders. PR professionals and industry leaders gain actionable insights that can drive meaningful change within their organisations. The primary beneficiaries of this study include women in the PR industry, who stand to gain from increased awareness and efforts to dismantle gender-based barriers. PR firms and organisations also benefit from the enhanced diversity and innovation that comes with a more inclusive workforce.

Additionally, educational institutions can use the findings to shape curricula and career guidance programs, ensuring that students are not limited by gendered expectations. Furthermore, this study lays the groundwork for future research on gender dynamics in PR within Ghana and other African contexts. It paves the way for subsequent studies to explore related issues, such as the intersectionality of gender with other factors like ethnicity and socioeconomic status. By broadening the scope of PR research, this study inspires ongoing scholarly inquiry and contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the field.

1.6 Scope of the Study

The scope of this study encompasses an in-depth examination of gender stereotypes within the public relations industry in Ghana. It investigates how these stereotypes influence career choices, progression, and the overall professional experience of PR practitioners. The research focuses on qualitative data collection, involving interviews with PR professionals and industry

leaders. Additionally, it analyses organisational policies and practices to understand the systemic barriers women face. By concentrating on various regions within Ghana, the study aims to capture a broad spectrum of experiences and insights. This comprehensive approach will provide a thorough understanding of the gender dynamics in Ghana's PR industry.

1.7 Organisation of the Study

This study is structured into five main chapters, each addressing distinct aspects of the research topic. Chapter One provides an introduction to the study, outlining the background, problem statement, research objectives, research questions, significance of the study, and the scope. It also includes definitions of key terms and concepts relevant to the study. This foundational chapter sets the stage for the subsequent sections by establishing the context and focus of the research.

Chapter Two presents the literature review, which delves into existing scholarly works and theoretical frameworks pertinent to gender stereotypes in career choices within public relations. The chapter explores the historical context, key theories, and empirical studies that have examined gender dynamics in the public relations industry. It critically analyses the impact of gender stereotypes on career progression, the influence of organisational culture, and the role of education and training in shaping career paths. The review provides a comprehensive understanding of the issues at hand and identifies gaps in the literature that this study aims to address.

Chapter Three outlines the research methodology employed in the study. It details the research design, approach, and methods used for data collection and analysis. This chapter explains the selection of participants, sampling techniques, and data gathering procedures. It also addresses ethical considerations and the steps taken to ensure the reliability and validity of the findings.

The methodology chapter provides a clear roadmap of how the research was conducted, ensuring transparency and rigour in the study process.

Chapter Four focuses on the data analysis and discussion of findings. It presents the results of the research, with a detailed analysis of the themes that emerged from the data. The chapter explores how gender stereotypes influence career choices and progression among public relations practitioners, supported by direct quotes and examples from the participants. It also compares the findings with existing literature, highlighting areas of convergence and divergence. This chapter offers critical insights into the lived experiences of practitioners within the context of gender dynamics in the Ghanaian public relations industry.

Finally, Chapter Five concludes the study with a summary of the key findings, conclusions, and recommendations. It reflects on the implications of the research for policy, practice, and future studies. The chapter provides actionable recommendations aimed at addressing gender disparities and promoting a more inclusive work environment in the public relations sector. Additionally, it suggests areas for further research to build on the insights generated by this study.

1.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter has provided an overview of the entire study, including its background, problem statement, objectives, research questions, and the significance of the research. It has also outlined the scope of the study and defined key terms to be used. Furthermore, it has explained how the thesis is structured into five chapters, each contributing to a comprehensive analysis of the topic. The next chapter reviews relevant literature to establish the theoretical and conceptual framework for this research.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter sets the stage for a comprehensive exploration of the existing scholarly discourse on gender roles within the public relations industry. It aims to contextualize the discussion by tracing the historical development of these roles and examining how societal and organisational structures perpetuate gender stereotypes. This section is critical as it not only reviews past and current research but also introduces theoretical perspectives that guides the analysis of gender dynamics in professional settings, particularly within the Ghanaian context.

2.2 Conceptual Review

Public relations practice, which originated in the early 20th century, has been defined in numerous ways, evolving with technological innovations and changing roles (Public Relations Society of America, 2020). Public relations is described as a strategic communication process that fosters mutually beneficial relationships between organisations and their publics (Ihlen, van Ruler, & Fredriksson, 2009). Nonetheless, Habermas (1978) contended that public relations serves as a tool for organisations to cultivate consensus, not through rationality or sound arguments, but by presenting themselves as having the public interest at heart while concealing their true business intentions. Bernays (2015) refuted this view, describing public relations as the engineering of public consent.

Cheney and Christensen (2001) expanded on this by asserting that the practice aims to garner goodwill from an organisation's various publics to prevent them from hindering the firm's profit-making potential. Additionally, Dozier et al. (2013) argued that public relations encompasses more than persuasion strategies and includes initiatives like media relations and advertising, which are specialized public relations activities. The overall preparation,

execution, and assessment of communication with both external and internal groups, which influence an organisation's ability to meet its objectives, are core aspects of public relations and communication management. Cutlip et al. (2006) offered another perspective, defining public relations as the management function that identifies, establishes, and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organisation and the publics upon whom its success or failure depends.

Investing in public relations aids organisations in achieving their goals with ease and efficiency (Anani-Bossman, 2021). Efficient public relations campaigns are essential for organisations to inspire and attract the public to their services, regardless of the quality of those services. A well-executed public relations program can shape and enhance the image of an entity, institution, or nation. During periods of adverse advertising or crisis, successful public relations efforts can minimize misunderstandings and foster mutual understanding between the organisation and its audiences (Harrison & Galloway, 2005). The Public Relations Society of America (2020) for instance notes that;

...by contributing to mutual understanding among groups and institutions, public relations helps our dynamic, pluralistic society to make decisions and work more effectively. It helps to put into balance private and public policies.

Public relations encompasses a variety of social groups, including corporations, trade unions, government agencies, charitable associations, hospitals, schools, universities, and religious institutions. These entities must cultivate successful relationships with various audiences, such as workers, stakeholders, clients, local communities, shareholders, other organisations, and society at large, to achieve their goals (Public Relations Society of America, 2020). Understanding and considering the views and beliefs of these populations is crucial for the management of organisations to meet their objectives. Public relations professionals act as counsellors to management and mediators, transforming private goals into socially acceptable policies and actions (Public Relations Society of America, 2020). This evolution has shifted

the sector from its less reputable past to a role focused on building essential relationships between a company and its main audiences. This perspective highlights public relations as a management function and clarifies the responsibilities and duties of practitioners.

Public relations has evolved significantly from being just an additional component of corporate governance to becoming the central element around which an organisation's reputation and public goodwill are built (Thompson, 2013). Amoakohene (2015) categorizes the evolution of public relations in Ghana into four distinct stages: pre-independence, post-independence, professionalisation, and revival. Asante (2016) observes that during the colonial period, public relations primarily involved public information dissemination. This practice entailed the colonial administrations employing one-way communication to convey information and garner support for their policies. Hansen (1968) notes that British agents, assisted by local interpreters, were typically responsible for these efforts.

Significant changes within the government sector led to the establishment of the Ghana Institute of Journalism (GIJ) in 1959 by the government, aiming to train public relations professionals to replace colonial practitioners (Asante, 2016). The professionalisation stage began in 1971 with the creation Public Relations Association of the Ghana (PRAG), as noted by Kilu and Akron (2014). Hermann Alah, with the support of a few public relations practitioners, spearheaded this movement (Asante, 2016).

In West Africa, public relations has been notably prominent in Nigeria and Ghana, as observed by Behrman et al. (2012). The PRAG underwent reorganisation and was renamed the Institute of Public Relations, Ghana (IPR), adopting a new constitution and code of ethics in an effort to rebrand (Anani-Bossman, 2018). This revival aimed to establish high standards of practice and integrity within the profession. Asante (2016) highlights that the IPR became the exclusive

professional body for public relations practitioners in Ghana, dedicated to providing a professional structure for practice and enhancing the status and capabilities of its members.

Since its revival, public relations practice has progressed from press agency to two-way asymmetrical communication. During World War I, two-way asymmetrical communication emerged from behavioural and social sciences (Dozier et al., 2013b). This approach uses research to identify the most effective communication channels and messages to gain public support without altering the organisation. Despite this evolution, elements of press agency, public information, and two-way asymmetrical communication remain in various professional practices. According to Wu and Baah-Boakye (2014), the profession has strengthened since 2000, with robust support for research activities within the field.

The historical evolution of gender roles within the public relations industry has been significantly shaped by broader societal expectations of the shifting dynamics of the workforce (Daymon & Demetrious, 2016). Initially, public relations, like many professional fields, was dominated by men; however, the 20th century witnessed a profound shift. Research indicates that as public relations evolved into a more defined profession, especially post-World War II, it saw an influx of women, primarily due to the expansion of educational opportunities and the professionalisation of the field (Choi & Hon, 2002).

This shift had implications for the roles assumed by men and women in public relations. Women were often steered towards roles considered to be more aligned with 'feminine' traits, such as event management and client relations, which emphasised interpersonal communication and nurturing skills (Grunig et al., 2013). In contrast, men were more likely to occupy roles that required 'masculine' traits such as crisis management and strategic planning, which were perceived as requiring assertiveness and analytical skills (Aldoory & Toth, 2002).

This segregation of roles has contributed to a tiered structure within the profession, where leadership and high-status roles are disproportionately held by men.

The situation in Ghana reflects these global trends but is influenced by local cultural and economic factors. In Ghana, Omane et al. (2022) highlight that gender stereotypes are deeply ingrained and continue to influence career trajectories in public relations. These stereotypes not only limit the entry of women into certain specialties within the field but also affect their advancement to leadership positions (Adu et al., 2019). Women in Ghanaian public relations often report having to work harder to prove their competence in roles traditionally viewed as masculine.

This historical context is crucial for understanding the current gender dynamics within public relations in Ghana. It highlights the persistent influence of gender stereotypes on career choices and the professional development of PR practitioners. As the field continues to evolve, there is a growing recognition of the need to address these gender disparities. Efforts are being made to create more inclusive environments that value diversity and the unique contributions of all professionals, regardless of gender. The ongoing dialogue in academic and professional circles about gender roles in public relations not only sheds light on historical inequalities but also sets the stage for future advancements.

Gender stereotypes profoundly impact career progression, particularly within the public relations sector (Jiménez-Marín et al., 2022). Stereotypical perceptions and expectations about gender roles often hinder the advancement of women to strategic and leadership positions. Wright (2020) underscores that the glass ceiling remains a persistent barrier; this metaphor describes the invisible yet formidable hindrance women face when aspiring to top-tier positions. Women are significantly underrepresented in senior roles, a discrepancy not merely

reflective of qualifications or ambitions but deeply rooted in gender biases (Glass & Cook, 2016; Dozier, 1988).

Further compounding this issue are wage disparities. Studies (eg. Dotson, 2011; Vardeman-Winter & Place, 2017) indicate that women in public relations frequently receive lower compensation than their male counterparts for equivalent roles. Such wage gaps demotivate and convey a lack of recognition for women's contributions, consequently impacting their career satisfaction and progression. Limited access to critical networking opportunities, often informally available predominantly to men, exacerbates these challenges. Networking is crucial in public relations, often leading to strategic roles and enhanced career trajectories (Anani-Bossman et al., 2023). The exclusion from these networks places women at a distinct disadvantage, reinforcing gender-based segregation within the industry.

Exploring the experiences of public relations practitioners sheds light on the pervasive influence of gender stereotypes on career trajectories (Reigstad, 2021). Personal accounts reveal that women practitioners often perceive a need to adopt traditionally 'masculine' traits to be seen as effective leaders or to advance in their careers (Place, 2015). This expectation to conform to a specific leadership archetype not only stifles diversity but also perpetuates the gender stereotyping that hinders genuine meritocracy in career advancement. The evidence is clear: dismantling these barriers requires a multifaceted approach that involves policy changes, awareness programs, and organisational commitments to equity. Addressing these entrenched stereotypes is not merely a matter of fairness but also a strategic imperative for the public relations industry, which thrives on diversity and innovation.

Organisational culture represents the collective values, beliefs, and principles of organisational members (Driskill, 2018). It influences the behaviour of individuals within the organisation and dictates the manner in which people interact and solve organisational problems. Gender

dynamics within organisations are shaped significantly by these cultural elements, as they determine the roles and expectations assigned to individuals based on gender (Bullough et al., 2022). Scholars like Padavic et al. (2020) emphasise that organisational culture is a powerful force that molds employee behaviour and perceptions, particularly in terms of gender roles.

In public relations, Clayton et al. (2021) underscores that the examination of organisational culture reveals its dual potential to perpetuate or mitigate gender stereotypes. These firms often operate in highly competitive environments where gender perceptions can influence career trajectories. For instance, Wrigley (2020) discusses how PR firms, traditionally dominated by female employees at the lower levels but male at the top, exhibit a cultural dynamic that can reinforce gender stereotypes. This dynamic not only impacts the professional growth of women but also affects the overall effectiveness of the firm.

Delving deeper into the policies and practices of PR firms provides further insight into the gender-based experiences within these organisations. Kossek and Buzzanell (2018) shows that the absence of supportive policies such as flexible working hours, maternity and paternity leave, and equal opportunities for leadership development contribute to an environment that marginalizes female practitioners. Furthermore, the general workplace environment, often described as competitive and aggressive, tends to favor traditionally masculine styles of communication and leadership, sidelining those who do not conform to these norms.

The implications of such a workplace environment are profound. They extend beyond individual experiences to affect the strategic outputs of PR firms. As Grunig et al. (2013) articulate, when gender stereotypes go unchallenged within organisational cultures, they limit the range of creative strategies and solutions that diverse teams can offer. The challenge for PR practitioners, therefore, lies in navigating these cultural landscapes and advocating for practices that foster an inclusive and equitable workplace (Bardhan & Gower, 2022).

Identifying these challenges aligns with the broader objective of understanding how organisational culture within PR firms influences gender dynamics. By evaluating these policies and practices, the discussion illuminates the subtle yet significant ways in which gender stereotypes are embedded within organisational cultures. It becomes essential for these organisations to acknowledge and address these cultural elements to not only enhance gender equity but also to leverage the full potential of their diverse workforce.

Education and training play pivotal roles in shaping career choices, particularly within the public relations sector (Gregory & Willis, 2022). These educational systems and professional training programs often serve as the initial platforms where future practitioners form their professional identities and career aspirations. Akosah-Twumasi et al. (2018) argue that educational content and pedagogical approaches can profoundly influence how students perceive and engage with their prospective professions.

In the context of PR, the influence extends to gender norms within the profession (Edwards, 2018). For example, educational curricula that highlight the successes of predominantly male leaders in PR can subliminally encourage the perpetuation of male-dominated leadership paradigms. Conversely, Jackson and Tomlinson (2020) lend weight to this argument noting that programs that incorporate discussions about gender disparities and the value of diversity in leadership can challenge existing gender norms and encourage a more inclusive perspective among future professionals. Furthermore, the type of training provided plays a crucial role. As noted by Daymon and Demetrious (2016), practical training that emphasises real-world experiences and ethical dilemmas can equip students with the tools to navigate and potentially transform the gendered landscapes of their chosen careers. Such training helps students recognize and critically analyse the gender dynamics they are likely to encounter in the workplace. Thus, educational institutions and training programs do not merely impart knowledge; they also act as gatekeepers that can either reinforce or challenge societal and

professional norms, including those related to gender. By understanding these dynamics, PR practitioners can better appreciate the foundational role that their professional education and training play in either endorsing or contesting traditional gender roles within their career paths.

Addressing gender stereotypes requires a multifaceted approach (Kuteesa et al., 2024), particularly within professional environments where such biases often impede equitable opportunities (Kossek & Buzzanell, 2018). Literature reveals that mentorship programs serve as a significant catalyst in nurturing potential and counteracting gender biases. Goerisch et al. (2019) highlight the positive impact of mentorship, where experienced leaders guide and support less experienced individuals, fostering a growth environment that transcends gender constraints. Further enhancing the workplace landscape, equitable promotion practices ensure fairness in career advancements. Research by Shah (2023) indicates that transparent criteria for promotions contribute to minimising subjective biases, ensuring that decisions are merit-based rather than influenced by gender. This approach not only promotes fairness but also enhances organisational performance by placing the most competent individuals in leadership roles.

Additionally, organisational policies that explicitly address gender diversity are crucial. According to Attah-Boakye et al. (2020), policies that mandate gender diversity in recruitment and team composition have shown promising results in various global corporations. These policies as affirmed by Dartey-Baah et al. (2020) often include flexible work arrangements and parental leaves, which support a balanced work-life dynamic for all employees, regardless of gender. Such strategic implementations have yielded positive outcomes not only in mitigating gender stereotypes but also in enhancing overall organisational health. For instance, companies that have adopted these inclusive practices report higher job satisfaction and lower employee turnover rates (Mickson et al., 2021). The interconnection between diverse, inclusive workplaces and increased productivity underscores the broader implications of adopting such strategies. It is evident that while challenges persist, the deployment of targeted strategies and

interventions, both in Ghana and globally, plays a pivotal role in addressing gender disparities in the workplace. The success of these initiatives continues to build the foundation for more inclusive professional environments where gender does not dictate one's career trajectory.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

2.3.1 Social Role Theory

The Social Role Theory proposed by Eagly in the late 20th century, explores gender differences through societal roles assigned to individuals (Eagly, 2013). It traces its origins to the broader field of social psychology, where it emerged as a response to observed discrepancies in the behaviour of men and women. The major contributions of the theory include; a systematic framework for understanding how societal expectations shape individual behaviour, particularly gender roles (Eagly & Wood, 2012). Key concepts of the theory involve;

- a) Role congruity and sex-typed roles
- b) Highlighting how expectations are internalized.

This theory aims to explain the persistence of gender differences in behaviour and societal roles, offering a broad scope for analysing gender dynamics across various cultures and contexts.

Worthy of note is that the Theory offers robust insights into the mechanisms through which gender roles are perpetuated and legitimized. One of the strengths of this theory is;

- a) Its applicability in different cultural and societal contexts, making it a versatile tool for cross-cultural studies on gender roles (Vogel et al., 2003).
- b) It provides a clear lens through which the impact of social expectations on behaviour can be viewed, aiding in the formulation of gender equality policies.

However, the theory also faces limitations.

- a) It sometimes oversimplifies the complexity of individual identities and interactions that transcend societal roles (Jackson, 1998).
- b) Critics argue that it does not fully account for biological and psychological differences that might influence gender roles independently of societal expectations.

This theory remains a crucial, though still developing, strand within social psychology, requiring ongoing refinement to address its shortcomings and increase its explanatory power.

2.3.2 Gender Schema Theory

The Gender Schema Theory was developed by Sandra Bem in the 1980s. It serves as a cognitive approach to understanding gender development (Bem, 1983). It posits that;

- a) Individuals internalize gender schemas, which then influence their perceptions and behaviours.

This framework emerged from the intersection of cognitive psychology and gender studies, aiming to address gaps in existing theories concerning how gender-related information is processed and integrated into the self-concept. Major contributions of this theory include;

1. The elucidation of how gender identity is moulded by societal schemas and the cognitive processes underlying gender-role acquisition (Starr & Zurbriggen, 2017).

Key concepts involve 'gender schemas,' which are mental structures that guide individuals in interpreting the world in gendered terms. The purpose and scope of this theory extend

- 1) To explaining variances in gender role development across different societies and its influence on personal identity formation.

The strength of Gender Schema Theory lies;

- I. In its integration of cognitive psychology with gender studies, offering a detailed account of how gender perceptions are formed and maintained (Canevello, 2020).
- II. This theory has been instrumental in educational and developmental psychology, providing insights into how children assimilate gender roles (Davis & Wilson, 2016).
- III. Its applicability in devising interventions for reducing gender stereotyping in educational settings highlights its practical value.

However, Starr and Zurbriggen (2017) notes that the theory also encounters limitations,

- I. Notably its lessened focus on the role of biological factors in gender identity development.
- II. Furthermore, it has been critiqued for not sufficiently accounting for the variability of gender identities beyond the binary framework.

Despite these limitations, Gender Schema Theory remains influential in the fields of psychology and gender studies, calling for further empirical research to broaden its scope and address its constraints.

2.3.3 How Underpinning Theories Complement the Study

The Social Role Theory and Gender Schema Theory offer a strong theoretical lens for exploring this study. For instance, the Social Role Theory explores the societal expectations that assign specific roles based on gender. This perspective is crucial in understanding the structural and cultural forces that guide career choices in public relations. It explains why certain roles within the industry are gendered, influencing both the recruitment process and the career progression of individuals. In harmony with this, Gender Schema Theory provides insight into how these societal norms become internalized, shaping individual cognitions and behaviours. This theory is critical for understanding how personal perceptions of gender roles influence practitioners'

career decisions and aspirations within the PR field. It helps elucidate the cognitive processes through which gender stereotypes are maintained and operationalized in professional settings.

By integrating these two theories, the study addresses key research objectives. It not only identifies the external factors that influence career choices but also reveals how these factors are internalized to affect individual career trajectories. This dual approach allows for a deeper exploration of both the visible and subtle barriers that perpetuate gender disparities in leadership and strategic roles in public relations.

Thus, the combination of Social Role Theory and Gender Schema Theory is essential to fully capture the complexity of gender dynamics in the PR industry. It ensures a holistic analysis that is capable of informing effective interventions aimed at promoting gender equality. This theoretical grounding is vital for developing comprehensive strategies that can challenge entrenched gender roles and foster a more inclusive and equitable professional landscape in Ghana.

2.4 Empirical Review

Several researchers have done work on public relations but this research looks at some which are in line with this work. Wu and Baah-Boakyee (2006) conducted an exploratory study on the public relations practices within Ghana. The aim was to fill a gap in the understanding of such practices in an African context. Utilising a questionnaire, the researchers surveyed 64 public relations practitioners, uncovering several key findings. Firstly, the majority of these professionals undertake management roles within their organisations. Secondly, interpersonal communication was identified as the paramount skill for practitioners in Ghana. Additionally, the study found a considerable overlap between public relations and marketing functions. Regarding gender equality, the findings suggested that male and female practitioners perceive equal treatment within their organisations. This study contributed significantly to the broader

knowledge base of international public relations practices, especially within less-studied cultural settings like Ghana.

Omane et al. (2022) on the other hand explored the marginalisation within Ghana's public relations industry. The researchers set out to identify the extent of this marginalisation and the strategies employed by practitioners to manage its impact. Employing a qualitative case study methodology, the investigation involved interviews with three public relations and communications practitioners. Findings indicated that although marginalisation was prevalent, issues such as salary and compensation were not significant concerns. Instead, exclusion from key decision-making groups, gender biases, and insufficient logistical support were identified as central to the marginalisation experienced. Omane et al. (2022) further revealed that effective management of marginalisation involved dual strategies: the enhancement of individual competencies among practitioners and the fostering of supportive organisational environments. Recommendations from the study emphasised the necessity for professionals to engage in continuous learning through online resources and advocated for legislative support from the Institute of Public Relations Ghana to standardize the profession, ensuring practice by only certified individuals.

In Adu et al. (2019) as well, the study sought to assess the role of women in Ghana's public relations sector, particularly their breakthroughs against the 'glass ceiling' and their advocacy for upcoming female professionals. This research utilized thematic analysis of interviews with ten women occupying leadership roles within the field. The investigation identified six themes encapsulating these leaders' experiences: their definition of public relations, the dynamics within Women in Public Relations (WiPR), the encountered challenges, the double standards they face, their professional achievements and inspirations, and the strategic recommendations they proposed for WiPR. Results highlighted that gender significantly influenced their professional challenges and successes, with specific barriers in promotion and salary

inequalities impacting their industry presence and societal perception. These professionals also redefined public relations as a managerial role traditionally viewed as male-dominated and discussed WiPR's initiatives aimed at fostering women's success in the field. Adu et al. (2019) also noted emerging shifts in the industry's gender dynamics, perceived as beneficial for women's future roles in public relations.

De Alwis and Bombuwela (2013) in another study examined the impact of the glass ceiling on the career development of women in the private sector in Sri Lanka. The study, structured around a comprehensive literature review, aimed to ascertain the influence of various factors—individual, familial, organisational, and cultural—on the career trajectories of female executives. Utilising a self-administered questionnaire, data from 150 female executives were analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. The results indicated a moderate negative correlation between the glass ceiling and women's career development. Significantly, while individual, organisational, and cultural factors were found to adversely affect women's career advancement, family factors specifically impacted the glass ceiling phenomenon itself. The findings led De Alwis and Bombuwela (2013) to conclude that the glass ceiling significantly hinders the career development of executive-level women in Sri Lanka's private sector. The study culminated with recommendations for future research and identified limitations of the current investigation.

In addition, Yeboah and Thompson (2012) investigated the gender-related aspects of women's success in Ghana's media and communication industry. Since the liberalisation of the business environment in 1992, Ghana has seen significant growth in this sector, encompassing journalism, public relations, and advertising. Despite increased competition, several women have achieved notable success, as evidenced by various awards received by them and their organisations. The study, which drew on interviews with three prominent women, explored their career trajectories to examine the impact of gender on their professional achievements.

The findings from this exploration highlighted that these women's successes are marked by significant gender-related challenges, resonating with previous literature (Okpara 2006; Steiner 2002). The study thus contributes to understanding the complexities faced by women in achieving professional success in media-related fields in Ghana.

2.5 Chapter Summary

The chapter encapsulated the major findings and discussions presented in the literature review. It reflected on the profound impact of historical gender roles and how they have shaped career progression and organisational culture in public relations. The chapter also evaluated strategies aimed at mitigating gender stereotypes and enhancing workplace diversity. Additionally, it highlighted the application of Social Role Theory and Gender Schema Theory in understanding the internalisation and perpetuation of gender roles within the industry. This synthesis of literature and theory aimed to establish a solid foundation for investigating the influences on career choices among public relations practitioners in Ghana.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the research methodology employed in this study, encompassing the systematic approach to data collection, analysis, and interpretation. It details the specific methods and techniques used to ensure the reliability and validity of the research findings. This chapter also discusses the rationale for choosing these methods, aligning them with the research objectives and questions.

3.2 Study Design

The research design is critical in addressing the research questions and serves as a guide for selecting the appropriate data needed for analysis (Abbott & McKinney, 2013). For this reason, a descriptive approach was used to probe this study. Bell et al. (2018) clarify that a descriptive research design is a data collection method that addresses questions about the current status of subjects in the sample. Yeomans (2017) states that social science researchers often favor and frequently use this method.

3.3 Qualitative Research

Philosophically, the research methodology is driven by the desire to interpret the phenomenon from the subjective perspective of stakeholders, rather than solely relying on empirical observation (Hennink et al., 2020). This approach emphasises understanding from the participants' viewpoints. Qualitative research aims to capture the diverse, holistic, and individual facets of the human experience, reflecting these experiences within their context (Myers et al., 2013).

The qualitative research process, described by Denzin and Lincoln (2011) as an interpretive approach, can include case studies, interviews, personal experiences, and observations. This method was adopted in this study. Researchers using qualitative approaches seek to explain phenomena based on the meanings individuals assign to them, thereby challenging the fundamental assumptions of positivism by showing that empirical information can be interpreted independently (Mason, 2017).

Given the study's objectives, a descriptive qualitative approach is ideal for examining stakeholder insights on the influence of gender stereotypes on career choices in public relations. This approach is essential for capturing detailed narratives necessary for understanding the personal experiences of PR practitioners (Salkind, 2010). Qualitative methods also facilitate the exploration of sensitive issues within a supportive and empathetic framework, encouraging open and honest communication (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2010). This is vital for providing valuable insights into the unique challenges and coping strategies of women in the PR industry.

3.4 Population

One goal of scientific research, according to Wimmer and Dominick (2009), is to describe the nature of a population, which includes groups or classes of subjects, variables, concepts, or phenomena. For this research, the population was drawn from key stakeholders within the public relations industry in Ghana. This selection is crucial due to their direct involvement and experienced insights in this specific field. These stakeholders, including PR practitioners, industry leaders, and educators, possess a wealth of practical knowledge and understanding of the cultural, social, and professional dynamics influencing career choices in PR. Their perspectives are invaluable in providing a comprehensive and informed view of the subject matter.

3.5 Sampling Procedures and Rationale

Sampling involves selecting a subset of the population of interest in a research study (Turner, 2020). This leads to the creation of a sample, which is a group of individuals or entities chosen for assessment from a broader population (Suri, 2011). Non-probability sampling, as described by Oppong (2013), relies on the researcher's subjective judgment rather than random selection, making it less strict and often based on the researcher's experience (Noy, 2008). Unlike probability sampling, non-probability sampling does not provide an equal chance for all individuals in the population to participate (Shaheen & Pradhan, 2019). This qualitative approach includes various types, with this study focusing on the purposive sampling technique to select participants who can provide the most relevant and insightful information for understanding the role of gender stereotypes in career choices within the public relations industry in Ghana.

3.6 Sample Size and Justification

The next step involves using the purposive sampling technique to select a sample for the study. Purposive sampling is a non-random method where the researcher sets specific criteria for selection, rather than relying on chance (Palinkas et al., 2015). This technique is commonly employed in qualitative research to identify and choose information-rich cases relevant to the study's focus (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2010). While the sample may not represent the entire population, qualitative researchers do not view this as a flaw. According to Fusch and Ness (2015), purposive sampling is valuable when the researcher aims to gain deep insights rather than generalize findings. Holloway (1997) supports that qualitative research often requires a limited number of participants to thoroughly explore the topic. Yin (2009) suggests that a sample size between four and thirty respondents is effective. For this study, a sample size of ten participants is proposed.

3.7 Method of Data Collection

3.7.1 Data Collection Instrument

The primary data collection tool for this study was an interview guide. Data can be gathered using various techniques, with interviewing key informants being one of the most effective. The interview served as the study's main source of results. Developing an interview guide is a crucial step in the qualitative analysis process. In qualitative research, the researcher is often considered the research instrument because qualitative data is produced, collected, analysed, and interpreted through the researcher. The interview guide is beneficial for outlining the interview process, planning, and directing the conversation toward the relevant topics and issues. It helps the researcher know what questions to ask, in what order, and how to follow up effectively.

Using semi-structured interviews as the data collection method allows participants to fully express their views. This approach is preferred because it lets participants articulate their perspectives in their own words, rather than being confined to the researcher's predetermined questions, as often occurs in quantitative studies. Interviews are widely regarded as the most effective method for gathering experiential narrative content, providing a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of human phenomena (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2013). Furthermore, interviews are recognized as a reliable tool for exploring experiences and beliefs (Lukka & Modell, 2017). Semi-structured interviews generated rich data for this study by enabling participants to share their opinions freely, without researcher influence.

3.7.2 Data Collection Procedure

Interviews with key informants provided primary data for this study. Qualitative data can be obtained from various sources, including interviews, documentation such as brochures and pamphlets, semi-structured face-to-face interviews, and observations (Wright-St Clair, 2014). Key informants, through probing and prompting questions, offer in-depth and rich knowledge

(Denscombe, 2014). This technique captures not only verbal responses but also respondents' emotions and body language. The interviews primarily provided a context for respondents to articulate their thoughts in their own words, creating a two-person conversation. This method also generates contextualized understandings based on specific interactional episodes.

All targeted participants received letters requesting their participation in the study, assuring them of confidentiality and explaining that the information gathered was used for academic purposes. Permission to conduct the interviews was also sought. The researcher conducted in-depth interviews with primary informants at a pre-arranged location. This session aimed to introduce the research subject, build rapport, answer questions, obtain consent to participate, and permission to tape record the interviews. This phenomenological interview approach allowed for deep engagement and communication with participants, resulting in rich data on their perspectives. The researcher took field notes during the interviews, and the process continued until data saturation is achieved, indicated by repeating themes rather than the number of participants.

3.8 Data Analysis

The data collected was edited to ensure that responses are suitable. The data analysis process in this study is based on inductive content analysis, as outlined by Elo and Kyngäs (2008). This involves four key steps: familiarisation with the data, open coding, organising the data, and abstraction. Qualitative research aims to see the world through the eyes of others, placing oneself in the shoes of another. The researcher's attempts to hear participants' voices and make sense of the results will guide data interpretation in this qualitative study (Sutton & Austin, 2015).

Thematic analysis, which is suitable for recognising, analysing, and documenting trends or themes from data, is one of the most frequently used qualitative data analysis techniques. This

method involves breaking down textual data, coding each segment into patterns, and identifying rich sources of themes for interpretation. According to Speziale et al. (2011), qualitative data analysis begins with listening to participants' verbal descriptions, followed by reading and re-reading the verbatim transcriptions or written responses. The analysis also followed Tesch's (2013) method for analysing qualitative data.

The steps in Tesch's method are as follows: First, the researcher listens to audiotapes and reads all transcriptions to get a sense of the whole data, jotting down emerging ideas. Next, each interview transcript is re-read, with underlying meanings noted in the margins. Positive and negative experiences are highlighted differently in all transcripts. A list of topics is then compiled, and similar topics are clustered together. Columns are drawn to categorize major topics, unique topics, and leftovers. This compiled list is used to compare the data, with topics coded and checked for new categories. Descriptive words for the topics are assigned and turned into categories, with related topics grouped to reduce the list. Each category is checked and alphabetized. Finally, the data is analysed and explored to generate meanings. Participants were asked to validate the analysed data, and adjustments were made as necessary.

3.9 Ethical Consideration

While there is no apparent risk in participating in this study, the researcher is acutely aware of ethical considerations and demonstrated professionalism when engaging with participants. Ethical considerations in academic research was strictly observed. Respondents were assured of the confidentiality of the information gathered, and it made clear that the research was solely for academic purposes. Participants had the freedom to opt out of the study at any point if they choose. To protect their identity during analysis, pseudonyms replaced respondents' names. Additionally, the study ensured that all inputs from other sources are duly cited and acknowledged, maintaining academic integrity.

3.10 Conclusion

This chapter provided an overview of the research method used in the study. The outlined approach forms the basis for data collection and analysis, enhancing the reliability and credibility of the research findings. Additionally, it reviewed the research philosophy and methodological techniques that underpin the dissertation writing process.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the analysis and discussion of data collected from Public Relations Professionals. The focus is on understanding how gender stereotypes shape career progression, role assignment, and leadership opportunities within the PR industry. Pseudonyms, such as P1, P2, and P3 (see Table 1), have been used throughout this chapter to ensure the confidentiality and privacy of the participants, adhering to ethical standards in qualitative research. The use of pseudonyms protects the identity of the respondents while allowing for an honest exploration of sensitive topics. Data were analysed thematically, with attention paid to both individual experiences and broader patterns that emerged from the responses.

Table 1: Breakdown of Participants

Role/Position	Pseudonyms
PR Consultants	P1, P5
Public Relations Managers	P2, P6, P8
PR Officers	P3, P9, P10
PR Academic	P4, P7

Source: Field Data (2024)

4.1.1 Demographic Overview

The demographic overview covers a diverse range of public relations practitioners with varying levels of experience and roles. The participants consist of both male and female professionals, with women being predominantly represented in roles such as public relations officers and educators, while men tend to occupy positions such as public relations managers and consultants. On average, the participants have been employed in the public relations industry for approximately 10 to 15 years, with a few exceeding 20 years of experience. The majority of women are concentrated in roles involving client relations, media communications, and event management, which often align with gendered expectations of nurturing and supportive tasks. Meanwhile, men are more commonly found in strategic, high-stakes roles such as crisis management and corporate communications. The participants' career trajectories reflect the influence of gender stereotypes, which often shape job responsibilities and opportunities for advancement. Despite this, both male and female participants have accumulated significant professional experience, with most holding mid-level to senior positions within their organisations. Their extensive experience across different sectors of public relations provides valuable insights into how gender affects career progression and role distribution within the industry.

4.2 Research Questions/ Interview

RQ1: How do gender stereotypes influence career choices among PR practitioners?

4.2.1 Influence of Gender Roles on Assigned Public Relations Work

The study aimed to examine the influence of gender roles on the type of public relations work practitioners are assigned. The role of gender in shaping the assignment of tasks within PR emerged strongly from the data. The data consistently identified the existence of gendered patterns in task allocation. P3 noted that *“the gender divide in the profession, particularly highlighting how women are pushed into roles that are undervalued, such as client liaison and*

event management, which often lack the prestige of roles men are assigned, such as crisis management or strategic consulting.” This observation resonates with the broader discourse on gender stereotypes that continue to influence career trajectories in the PR industry (Aldoory & Toth, 2002; Place, 2015). Studies confirm that women often occupy positions perceived as nurturing, such as media relations and event coordination, whereas men tend to dominate in higher-stakes, decision-making roles (Anani-Bossman, 2021; Tabassum & Nayak, 2021).

However, perspectives on the cause of this phenomenon varied. P2 provided a counterpoint, stating that *“this task division is not inherently marginalising. Rather, in their view, women’s roles align more with relational tasks like public engagement or media relations because of their suitability for such work.”* This perception is noteworthy, as it supports earlier literature that women in public relations may naturally gravitate toward certain roles due to perceived or real strengths in interpersonal communication (Grunig et al., 2013). Yet, this notion has also been critiqued for reinforcing stereotypes, suggesting that women should fit into particular roles while men handle strategic work (Dozier et al., 2013).

A recurring theme across responses was the subtle persistence of stereotypes despite progress. P10 acknowledged that *“women are still “assigned to roles seen as nurturing—client services, community engagement, but added a note of optimism, observing that more women are stepping into leadership roles.”* This shift may reflect broader global changes within the industry, as noted by Omane et al. (2022), who found that while marginalisation persists, women are increasingly challenging these barriers. P4 echoed this, stating that *“things are changing, but the old stereotypes still linger,”* highlighting a tension between progress and persistence. This supports the notion that while initiatives like Women in Public Relations (WiPR) in Ghana promote gender equality (WiPR, 2024), ingrained biases continue to shape task distribution.

Gender bias in task allocation also reflects broader organisational culture issues. P6 described how men often take on “*visible, high-profile assignments,*” leaving women to perform support work behind the scenes. This perspective draws attention to how gendered assumptions are entrenched in workplace culture, reinforcing roles that limit women’s visibility and advancement (Clayton et al., 2021). These findings align with Grunig et al.’s (2013) argument that organisational cultures often perpetuate stereotypes, affecting women’s ability to take on leadership roles or tasks with strategic importance.

In sum, gender roles clearly influence how work is distributed in PR, and while some participants viewed this division as a natural alignment of strengths, others perceived it as a persistent bias that limits women’s opportunities for growth. The findings illustrate the enduring challenge of gender stereotyping within the profession, as seen through the relegation of women to “supportive” roles and men to “strategic” ones. The application of Social Role Theory (Eagly & Wood, 2012) helps explain this phenomenon, as societal expectations around gender roles are internalized and manifested in professional settings. The theory posits that these roles are culturally constructed and maintained, often limiting individuals’ potential based on their gender. By relying on gendered perceptions of “nurturing” versus “strategic” capabilities, PR firms continue to reinforce these divisions, even as the profession evolves.

4.2.2 Impact of Gender Expectations on Specialisations in PR

Additionally, the study sought to investigate how gender expectations shape the specialisations or roles PR practitioners gravitate towards. Investigating this aspect was crucial to unveil the subtle pressures that guide individuals toward or away from certain career paths, ultimately influencing diversity within specialisations. The data revealed a strong influence of gender expectations on the career paths and specialisation of PR practitioners in Ghana. P8 observed that “*women are moving into positions focused on customer experience or community engagement, while men occupy roles with a focus on decision-making or analytics.*” This

observation illustrates how societal norms influence not just the roles practitioners are assigned but also the paths they choose, often steering women toward roles that emphasise emotional intelligence and men toward more analytical or strategic roles (Jiménez-Marín et al., 2022). This insight resonates with Social Role Theory, which highlights how deeply embedded societal expectations shape occupational roles based on gender (Eagly, 2013).

A consistent thread throughout the responses was that gender expectations create a type of funnelling effect, where men and women are channelled into roles deemed suitable for their gender. P9 emphasised that women are “*often pushed into roles like client relations or social media,*” reflecting societal assumptions about women’s ability to handle emotional labour better than men. Similarly, P3 noted how women are “*expected to take on roles that involve relationship-building, with men seen as better suited for decision-making positions.*” This is consistent with earlier studies (Place & Vardeman-Winter, 2018), which argue that gendered expectations limit career possibilities for women, particularly in strategic roles where leadership is needed.

However, the data also revealed differing perspectives on whether this gendered division is problematic. P5 expressed a more neutral stance, suggesting that women “*choose roles like internal communications and that this is not necessarily the result of societal pressure.*” This view aligns with earlier research indicating that while societal expectations exist, some women may still choose these roles out of genuine interest (Fitch & Third, 2010). However, as argued by Jackson and Tomlinson (2020), even if individuals make these choices, they are often influenced by a gendered framework of career possibilities, which could limit broader strategic opportunities for women.

P6 added a critical perspective, identifying an “*unwritten rule that high-stakes roles like crisis management are reserved for men,*” noting that this is not about capability but about societal

expectations. This observation challenges earlier claims that individuals naturally gravitate toward their roles based on skills, suggesting instead that these roles are deeply gendered and constrained by broader social norms. P2 reinforced this idea, stating that “*women are often funneled into content creation or social media because these roles are perceived as less confrontational.*” This perception of confrontation aligns with Grunig’s (2006) argument that public relations often marginalizes women by positioning them in roles that emphasise communication over strategy.

The findings underscore how gender expectations continue to shape not only the roles PR practitioners occupy but also the long-term specialisation choices they make. This division reflects broader cultural beliefs about gender roles that are ingrained from an early age, ultimately guiding the career paths of both men and women. The application of Social Role Theory further illuminates how these occupational roles are socially constructed and maintained. Gender expectations thus perpetuate stereotypes, subtly shaping individuals’ decisions about their specialisation within the PR industry in Ghana, reinforcing the challenges women face in breaking into strategic and leadership roles.

4.2.3 Stereotypes’ Effect on Recruitment and Promotion in PR Firms

Furthermore, the study explored how stereotypes, both positive and negative, impact recruitment and promotion processes in PR firms. This inquiry was important to highlight any biases that could disadvantage or favor certain gender groups, affecting career growth and organisational equity. The data indicate that gender stereotypes heavily influence recruitment and promotion in public relations firms, reinforcing specific roles for men and women. According to P3, “*women are often recruited for roles such as event management or client liaison,*” which creates a barrier to career advancement as these positions are rarely viewed as pathways to leadership. P1 similarly observed that women are frequently hired for roles that emphasise “*soft skills,*” such as relationship management and media relations, while men are

often directed towards more strategic or leadership-focused positions. This aligns with findings from Aldoory and Toth (2002), who noted that women in public relations are frequently assigned roles perceived as nurturing or supportive, limiting their opportunities for advancement.

P6 highlighted the implications of this recruitment bias on promotions, noting that “*when it comes to promotions, men are the ones being pushed for leadership roles.*” This reflects a broader industry pattern, as identified by Place and Vardeman-Winter (2018), where men are promoted faster due to their placement in high-visibility roles. Furthermore, P10 emphasised the long-term impact, stating that “*women have to work twice as hard to break into those same [leadership] positions*” because they are often hired into less visible roles. This reflects the enduring impact of stereotypes on career trajectories, where women’s advancement is hindered by the perception that they excel in relational, rather than strategic, capacities.

However, some participants acknowledged the dual nature of these stereotypes. P5 referred to the stereotypes as a “*double-edged sword,*” observing that while they may help women secure roles that emphasise emotional intelligence, they simultaneously prevent women from being considered for promotions into high-level, strategic positions. This is consistent with the conclusions of Tabassum and Nayak (2021), who argued that these stereotypes can both benefit and limit women’s career prospects depending on how these traits are valued. These findings can be best understood through Social Role Theory (Eagly & Wood, 2012), which explains how societal expectations shape occupational roles. Women in PR are often assigned roles aligned with perceived “feminine” traits, while men are placed in leadership or decision-making positions, perpetuating gender disparities in both recruitment and promotion.

4.3 RQ2: What are the experiences of PR practitioners regarding career progression and leadership opportunities in the context of gender stereotypes?

4.3.1 Career Advancement Experiences in PR and Gender Influence

The study aimed to document the career advancement experiences of PR practitioners, focusing on the influence of gender stereotypes. This line of inquiry was necessary to capture real-world implications of stereotypes on professional growth, providing insight into the systemic barriers individuals may face. The data reveal distinct experiences with career advancement in public relations, heavily shaped by gender stereotypes. Participants commonly acknowledged that stereotypes related to gender influenced their career paths, although the degree of influence varied. P1 emphasised the difficulty of breaking through gendered expectations, explaining, “*women are often expected to stay in the background, managing clients or events, while men are encouraged to be more forward-facing and take on leadership roles.*” This viewpoint was echoed by P9, who noted:

“I’ve often found myself stuck in roles like event coordination or media relations—important, yes, but not the kind of roles that fast-track you to leadership. Men in my office were consistently given more visible, strategic positions, which meant they moved up faster.”

Contrasting with these experiences, P2 shared a more nuanced journey, where gender stereotypes initially shaped their career, but intentional effort allowed them to shift toward more strategic roles. P2 remarked, “*early in my career, I was often pushed toward roles that emphasised empathy and communication, such as client relations. These roles didn’t necessarily set me up for leadership.*” However, by actively seeking more strategic projects, P2 was eventually recognized for promotions. P5 also shared this blend of frustration and motivation, expressing that:

“Gender stereotypes have both hindered and motivated me in my career. Early on, I was often pigeonholed into roles that were seen as more suitable for women, like media relations or event coordination.”

Others, like P4, did not personally experience these limitations but observed how stereotypes influenced the career decisions of female colleagues and mentees. P4 said, *“I see how many of my female mentees hesitate to apply for leadership roles because they believe they’ll be overlooked in favor of men.”* This aligns with Gender Schema Theory, which suggests that individuals internalize societal gender norms, limiting their own aspirations (Bem, 1983). P7, too, noted that many talented women in PR hit roadblocks because of such stereotypes, even though they personally did not encounter these challenges in their academic career.

Thus, while some participants were able to overcome these barriers through persistence, the general sentiment reflects how gender stereotypes constrain women’s career progression by pushing them into supportive roles. Social Role Theory (Eagly & Wood, 2012) explains this dynamic, suggesting that societal roles steer women toward tasks perceived as nurturing, which, although valuable, don’t easily translate into leadership positions. The data reveal that overcoming these stereotypes requires intentional effort, but not all women have equal opportunities to break through these barriers.

4.3.2 Gender-Based Differences in Leadership Opportunities

The study also intended to uncover perceived differences in leadership opportunities available to men and women within the PR industry in Ghana. Investigating these perceptions was vital to understanding how leadership roles are distributed, potentially revealing disparities in access to authority and decision-making positions. The responses reveal consistent differences in how leadership opportunities are presented to men and women in the PR industry in Ghana. A common theme was the disparity in visibility and responsibility given to men versus women.

P3 observed that:

“Most men are more often placed in positions of authority early on, such as leading strategic campaigns or managing crises. Women, meanwhile, are expected to handle roles like event planning or client management, which,

while essential, don't give the same experience needed for leadership positions."

This suggests that women are often placed in roles that do not have the same strategic importance or visibility, a view also emphasised by P10, who noted, *"men are given more opportunities to lead projects or handle crisis communications, which positions them for leadership roles."* P2 on the other hand also pointed out this disparity, stating that:

"Men and women are presented with very different pathways to leadership. Men are often given high-profile assignments that involve corporate strategy or crisis management, which makes them more visible for promotions."

This comment suggests that the lack of high-profile, strategic assignments limits women's ability to advance into leadership roles, a finding supported by Aldoory and Toth (2002), who argued that women in PR are frequently assigned to roles that emphasise relational or supportive tasks rather than strategic decision-making. However, P4 highlighted the roots of this problem in early career development, stating:

"Men are encouraged to pursue roles that lead to leadership, like crisis communication or strategic planning, while women are often directed toward supportive or client-facing roles. This creates a gap in experience and confidence."

P4's observation relates closely to Gender Schema Theory, which suggests that societal expectations about gender roles are internalized from an early age, shaping career aspirations and opportunities (Bem, 1983). This early conditioning influences the type of leadership opportunities offered to men and women, with men being steered toward roles that lead to promotions while women are often left behind. P8 and P9 echoed similar sentiments, noting that men are more likely to be fast-tracked into leadership positions. P8 remarked, *"men are more likely to be offered leadership roles or strategic assignments, while women are often directed toward roles that focus on client relations or media engagement."* This difference in assignment creates an uneven playing field when it comes to career advancement, as women's roles don't offer the same leadership potential. P9 added:

“Men in PR are often fast-tracked into positions of authority, especially in areas like corporate strategy or crisis management. Women, however, are frequently kept in roles that focus on relationship-building or event coordination.”

In conclusion, while leadership opportunities exist for both men and women, they are distributed in ways that favor men due to the gendered nature of task assignments. Social Role Theory effectively explains why men are funneled into more visible, strategic roles, while women are often relegated to less visible positions that don't carry the same career advancement opportunities. At the same time, Gender Schema Theory helps to illustrate how societal conditioning from an early stage influences these disparities, reinforcing gendered career paths that limit women's leadership potential in the PR industry in Ghana.

4.3.3 Organisational Practices and Their Impact on Career Progression

Moreover, the study aimed to identify organisational practices that either supported or hindered career progression due to gender. This inquiry was essential to expose institutional mechanisms that perpetuate or counteract gender inequalities, providing a foundation for organisational reforms. The data demonstrate that organisational practices related to gender have both facilitated and hindered career advancement in public relations. Many participants highlighted practices that have constrained their progress due to gender stereotypes and informal networks. P6 described the lack of transparency in promotions as a significant hindrance, noting that *“men tend to get promoted faster because they're assigned more visible, strategic roles, whereas women often find themselves in behind-the-scenes positions.”* This mirrors P9's experience, who emphasised the barrier of informal networking, stating, *“men often form stronger connections with senior leaders outside of work, which helps them secure promotions. Women, however, are frequently left out of these opportunities.”* These views align with the broader concept that informal, male-dominated networks continue to limit women's access to career advancement opportunities, a challenge identified in previous studies (Grunig et al., 2013).

On the other hand, many respondents acknowledged organisational efforts to support women's advancement, particularly through formalized mentorship and leadership development programs. P8 described how formalized mentorship programs have helped level the playing field. P8 asserted that "organisations that formalize mentorship programs and leadership training for women have supported my career progression by providing access to the same networks and opportunities men have." P3 echoed this, explaining that "*a lack of formal mentorship for women has historically been a barrier but that the introduction of mentorship programs aimed at women has made a significant positive impact on their career progression.*" These findings align with research suggesting that formal mentorship is critical in addressing gender imbalances in leadership development (Fitch & Third, 2010).

In contrast, P5 discussed the challenges posed by the gendered distribution of tasks. P5 in this regard explained that "*early on, I was frequently placed in roles involving client relationships or event management, which didn't offer the strategic exposure needed for promotion.*" This is a pattern observed by many participants, where women are often assigned to nurturing roles that are undervalued in terms of leadership potential. However, organisations that prioritize performance over gender and provide equal opportunities for strategic projects have allowed women like P5 to overcome these barriers and advance in their careers. These experiences reflect Social Role Theory (Eagly & Wood, 2012), which explains how gender roles shape organisational expectations and task assignments, often relegating women to supportive roles and limiting their advancement.

In sum, the data reveal that both informal networking cultures and task assignments hinder women's career progression, but formalized mentorship and leadership development programs have been instrumental in supporting women's advancement. The contrast between these organisational practices underscores the need for more structured, transparent processes to ensure equitable career progression for all.

4.3.4 Perceptions of Leadership Roles Among Male and Female Practitioners

Lastly, the study explored how male and female practitioners perceive leadership roles within their organisations and the broader PR industry. Understanding these perceptions was critical to uncovering differing attitudes and expectations about leadership, which could influence how leadership potential is recognized and nurtured. The data reveal clear differences in how male and female PR practitioners perceive leadership roles, often influenced by traditional gender norms. Men tended to view leadership as a platform for visibility, strategic influence, and control, whereas women more commonly associated leadership with team-building and support. P4 explained that:

“Men often see leadership as a way to take control and influence high-stakes decisions, while women tend to approach leadership as an opportunity to lead teams with a focus on collaboration and long-term growth.”

This sentiment was reinforced by P1, who observed that men view leadership as a chance to exert influence, while women approach it with an emphasis on fostering relationships and teamwork. These findings suggest that men are more likely to pursue leadership roles for the authority and visibility they provide, while women are more cautious and focus on the relational aspects of leadership.

Similarly, P2 described how men tend to “focus on high-profile projects” in leadership, while women are more concerned with team dynamics and ensuring client satisfaction. P3 added that men see leadership as a “*fast track to career success,*” while women often approach leadership with more deliberate preparation and relationship-building, which can slow their advancement. This distinction in perceptions contributes to the observed gender gap in leadership positions, as women may be more selective in pursuing leadership roles, waiting until they feel fully prepared, whereas men may pursue these roles more aggressively.

P7 highlighted this difference in leadership ambition, stating that “*men often approach leadership as a position of power, focusing on strategic influence and decision-making,*” while

women view it as a chance to foster collaboration. This slower approach among women may explain why men often rise more quickly to leadership roles, even though women may be equally or more capable. These differences align with Gender Schema Theory (Bem, 1983), which posits that men and women internalize societal expectations about their roles, leading them to pursue leadership in distinct ways.

The data also indicate that these differing perspectives on leadership can impact how quickly men and women rise to leadership positions. As P6 noted:

“Men in my organisation tend to see leadership as a status symbol, a way to control decision-making and lead high-profile projects. Women, meanwhile, often approach leadership with an emphasis on team support and collaboration.”

This disparity in leadership aspirations aligns with Social Role Theory, as men and women are socialized to prioritize different aspects of leadership based on gendered expectations (Eagly & Wood, 2012). In conclusion, the differences in how men and women perceive leadership roles reflect broader societal gender norms. Men tend to pursue leadership for strategic influence and control, while women prioritize relationship-building and team cohesion. These perceptions contribute to the differing rates at which men and women ascend to leadership positions, as men often seek leadership roles more quickly, whereas women take a more measured, team-oriented approach. This gendered division in leadership aspirations underscores the importance of organisational practices that actively support women in leadership by offering opportunities that cater to both strategic and relational strengths.

4.4 RQ3: What challenges do PR practitioners in Ghana face due to gender stereotypes?

4.4.1 Challenges Encountered Due to Gender Stereotypes in PR

The study aimed to identify the specific challenges PR practitioners encounter in their careers as a result of gender stereotypes. This inquiry was crucial to directly link gender bias to tangible barriers, making visible the struggles practitioners face in navigating a gendered professional

landscape. The challenges related to gender stereotypes were consistently acknowledged by the respondents, with many citing how these stereotypes have shaped their career experiences.

P2 emphasised visibility as a key issue, remarking that:

“There’s this unspoken belief that women are more suited for behind-the-scenes work—handling clients, managing events, or coordinating media relations. While those are important roles, they don’t give you the same visibility or access to senior leadership.”

This lack of visibility, combined with the frequent assignment of women to supportive roles, creates significant barriers to career advancement. P1 echoed this frustration, explaining that early in their career, they were “constantly assigned tasks like event planning or client relations, which didn’t allow me to showcase my strategic capabilities.” P9 also highlighted the challenge of being sidelined for leadership roles, noting that:

“The stereotype that women are better at handling the softer aspects of PR, like client management or event coordination, means that we’re often passed over for the strategic roles that men are given.”

This stereotype reinforces the gender divide in roles that lead to leadership opportunities, making it more difficult for women to break into high-level strategic positions. Social Role Theory (Eagly & Wood, 2012) helps explain these patterns, as societal roles historically assigned nurturing, communication-heavy tasks to women, creating a division between “feminine” and “masculine” work.

Another frequently mentioned challenge was the assumption that women are less suited to handling high-pressure, strategic tasks. P8 observed that “*men are often given crisis management roles or high-level strategic assignments because they’re seen as more equipped to handle them,*” a perception that not only limits women’s opportunities but also reinforces the notion that men are better suited for leadership. P3 further highlighted the stereotype that “*women are less assertive,*” resulting in men being assigned to decision-making roles under

the belief that they are better equipped to handle pressure. This stereotype, prevalent in many organisations, perpetuates the gender imbalance in leadership.

In contrast, P4 pointed to the pressure to conform to gendered expectations, explaining that *“women in PR are often expected to excel in communication-heavy roles like media relations or community outreach, while men are placed in decision-making positions that align with leadership.”* This expectation restricts women’s ability to break out of communication-focused roles and move into more strategic, decision-oriented positions. Gender Schema Theory (Bem, 1983) offers insight into this phenomenon by explaining how internalized societal norms shape individuals’ perceptions of gender roles, limiting the opportunities available to women in leadership.

4.4.2 Role of Organisational Policies in Addressing Gender-Related Challenges

The study further explored the role of organisational policies and practices in either perpetuating or addressing gender-related challenges. Investigating these aspects was necessary to highlight how institutional structures contribute to or mitigate the effects of gender stereotypes, offering pathways for policy improvements within the industry. The findings shared varied perspectives on how organisational policies either perpetuate or challenge gender-related barriers. Many noted that informal practices, such as networking, often favor men. P2 stated that:

“Informal practices within the organisation, like networking outside of work hours, tend to perpetuate gender-related challenges. Men are more likely to bond with senior leaders in these settings, which creates opportunities for career advancement that women miss out on.”

P9 echoed this sentiment, emphasising how *“in environments where these processes are informal, men often benefit from stronger networks, which perpetuates gender biases.”* These findings are consistent with the literature, which points to the informal networks that men often have access to, giving them an advantage in career advancement (Aldoory & Toth, 2002).

On the other hand, several participants mentioned that structured mentorship and leadership development programs had helped combat these challenges. P8 highlighted how formal mentorship programs have helped level the playing field, stating, *“Organisations that introduce clear policies for leadership training and mentorship for women have helped combat these challenges.”* Similarly, P1 pointed to the positive impact of organisations *“where there are clear policies aimed at creating equal opportunities, such as mentorship programs for women or transparent promotion processes.”* These policies provide women with greater access to leadership opportunities and help to dismantle the stereotypes that limit their career progression.

The transparency of promotion and role assignments also emerged as a critical factor. P6 observed that *“organisational practices that emphasise ‘who you know’ over performance can perpetuate gender-related challenges,”* while P5 noted that *“organisations that lack transparency in promotion and role assignment often perpetuate gender stereotypes.”* These informal, network-based practices allow gender biases to persist, as they give men an advantage in accessing leadership roles. However, organisations that introduce structured promotion processes based on performance were seen as making strides toward equality. P10 emphasised that:

“When promotions and assignments are left to informal networks or perceptions about what men and women are suited for, gender-related challenges persist. But organisations that formalize these processes...help break down these stereotypes.”

The data indicate that while informal networks and lack of transparency in promotions perpetuate gender-related challenges, formalized mentorship, leadership training, and performance-based promotion systems play a significant role in combating these barriers. Social Role Theory is again relevant here, as organisations that perpetuate traditional gender roles through informal practices reinforce the division of labor along gender lines. Conversely,

formal policies that prioritize equal opportunities challenge these stereotypes, allowing women to advance in their careers based on merit rather than gendered perceptions.

In conclusion, the challenges tied to gender stereotypes are deeply embedded in both organisational practices and societal norms. While informal networks and stereotypical role assignments continue to hinder women's advancement, structured organisational policies and formalized programs offer a pathway to breaking these barriers. The data demonstrate that the solution to these challenges lies in creating transparent, performance-based systems that allow women to access the same opportunities for leadership and strategic roles as men.

4.5 Chapter Summary

The fourth chapter analysed the data from interviews with public relations professionals, focusing on the impact of gender stereotypes on their career progression and role assignment. The analysis highlighted the significant barriers faced by women in PR, particularly regarding visibility and access to leadership roles. Stereotypes that position women in nurturing roles and men in strategic ones were found to hinder women's advancement. The chapter also discussed how formal mentorship and leadership development programs have helped combat these stereotypes. Overall, the chapter provided insights into the structural and cultural factors that perpetuate gender-based challenges within the PR industry.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter summarizes the key findings of the study, drawing conclusions based on the analysis of data collected from PR professionals. It reflects on how gender stereotypes influence career progression, role assignment, and leadership opportunities. The chapter also offers practical recommendations for addressing these issues within the PR industry, with particular attention to the role of organisations, industry associations, and policymakers in fostering gender equity. Additionally, areas for further research are suggested, with the aim of expanding the scope of understanding on gender dynamics in PR.

5.2 Summary of Key Findings

The aim of this study was to explore how gender stereotypes influence career progression, role assignment, and leadership opportunities within the PR industry. Specifically, it sought to examine how these stereotypes affect women's experiences in the workforce, particularly in relation to recruitment, promotion, and leadership development. The study aimed to identify the organisational practices that either perpetuate or combat these gender-related barriers and to understand how male and female PR practitioners perceive leadership roles differently. The objectives of the study were to: investigate the challenges faced by PR practitioners that are tied to gender stereotypes; assess the organisational policies that impact gender-related career progression; examine the perceptions of leadership roles held by male and female PR practitioners; and explore how these factors combine to influence the overall career trajectories of women in PR.

The findings revealed that gender stereotypes significantly influence the career advancement of women in the PR industry. One key challenge highlighted was the persistent assumption that women are better suited to nurturing or supportive roles, such as client relations or event planning, while men are perceived as more capable of handling strategic, high-pressure assignments. Many participants noted that these stereotypes relegated women to roles that offered little visibility or leadership potential, creating a barrier to career progression. For example, several respondents shared that women are frequently placed in communication-heavy roles, which do not carry the same strategic weight as roles typically assigned to men, such as crisis management or corporate strategy. These gendered divisions were found to limit women's opportunities for promotion into leadership positions.

Additionally, the data demonstrated that informal networking practices within organisations often favored men, granting them more access to senior leaders and career advancement opportunities. The lack of formalized career development programs or mentorship for women was another recurring issue, with several participants expressing frustration over how these informal networks allowed men to progress more rapidly. However, in organisations where formal mentorship and leadership training programs were implemented, women were better able to overcome these barriers. Structured programs focusing on gender inclusivity were found to significantly contribute to women's access to high-profile projects and promotions, helping to level the playing field in terms of career advancement.

The study also found distinct differences in how male and female PR practitioners perceived leadership roles. Men tended to view leadership as a means to gain visibility, make strategic decisions, and assert control, while women often approached leadership as an opportunity to foster collaboration, support their teams, and build long-term relationships. This divergence in leadership aspirations contributed to differing rates of career advancement, with men often seeking leadership roles more aggressively and advancing more quickly as a result.

The findings demonstrate that gender stereotypes continue to shape the PR industry, influencing role assignments, career advancement, and leadership opportunities. While some organisations have made progress by implementing inclusive policies and leadership development programs, there remains a persistent need to address the structural and cultural barriers that limit women's access to leadership roles. The study's findings underscore the importance of creating transparent, performance-based systems that ensure equal opportunities for all practitioners, regardless of gender.

5.3 Conclusion

Public relations is an essential component of modern communication, acting as a bridge between organisations and their publics. Its role in shaping brand image, managing crises, and fostering relationships makes it a critical industry in today's interconnected world. Within this space, the PR industry in Ghana holds considerable significance, serving as a vital tool for businesses, government bodies, and non-governmental organisations. It provides strategic communication that influences public perception and supports organisational objectives.

Despite its importance, the PR industry, like many other sectors, remains influenced by societal constructs, particularly gender stereotypes. These stereotypes often shape not only the perception of who is suited for various roles but also how tasks are assigned within organisations. Women, despite their growing numbers in the field, frequently find themselves in roles that limit their strategic involvement, often relegating them to positions centered around client management or event coordination. Men, by contrast, are more often pushed toward high-stakes roles that influence decision-making and organisational strategy.

The study delves into these dynamics, analysing the extent to which gender influences role assignment, leadership opportunities, and career progression in PR. The insights gathered highlight how stereotypes continue to shape the professional trajectories of PR practitioners.

While these stereotypes create barriers, certain organisational practices, such as mentorship programs and leadership training, have emerged as crucial tools in combating these challenges. The implications for practice are clear: organisations that actively work to dismantle these barriers can foster more equitable workplaces, enhancing productivity and innovation. By breaking the cycle of stereotypical role assignment, organisations can unlock the full potential of their workforce.

In Ghana, where the PR industry continues to expand, this study holds particular relevance. The Ghanaian context is shaped by both traditional values and modern economic aspirations. As a result, gender dynamics play a significant role in professional environments. Addressing gender-based challenges in PR is not only essential for the individuals involved but also critical for the development of the industry as a whole. By understanding how these stereotypes impact professional growth and leadership potential, the findings of this study underscore the need for more inclusive practices within the sector. The study provides a foundational understanding of the factors limiting career advancement for women in PR and highlights the broader need for a shift in how roles are perceived and assigned within the industry.

Ultimately, the study emphasises that for the PR industry in Ghana to thrive, it must adopt practices that promote gender equity and ensure that all practitioners, regardless of gender, have equal access to leadership opportunities. This study is not only significant for the PR field but also for Ghana's broader push toward creating more inclusive and equitable professional spaces.

5.4 Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, it is evident that gender stereotypes and informal organisational practices continue to impact the career advancement and leadership opportunities of women in public relations. These challenges must be addressed systematically

to foster an equitable environment within the PR industry. The following recommendations are aligned with the study's objectives and provide practical steps for organisations, industry leaders, and policymakers to implement.

Organisations should establish clear, transparent promotion pathways that prioritize merit over informal networks. This will ensure that all employees, regardless of gender, have equal access to leadership positions. Firms in the PR industry must implement structured mentorship and leadership development programs specifically aimed at elevating women. These initiatives should be designed to increase visibility and exposure to strategic roles that are often reserved for men. Leadership training programs should focus on equipping women with the skills needed for high-pressure decision-making roles, including crisis management and corporate strategy. Human resource departments should take responsibility for creating and enforcing these programs, ensuring their alignment with company goals and gender equity standards.

Industry associations, such as public relations bodies in Ghana, should collaborate with educational institutions to challenge gender stereotypes early in career development. These collaborations can introduce young women to strategic roles and leadership pathways within the PR industry. Institutions offering PR training should include gender sensitivity modules that address stereotypes and educate both men and women about equitable career development practices.

Policymakers should also play a key role by promoting gender diversity and equity in the workplace through legislation. Policy frameworks that encourage gender-balanced leadership within industries can provide the necessary leverage to hold organisations accountable for perpetuating discriminatory practices. Policies that enforce transparent hiring and promotion processes would serve to further reduce the informal biases that hinder women's career progression.

5.5 Areas for Future Research

Future research should explore the intersection of gender and other social factors, such as age, education level, and socioeconomic background, to provide a more holistic understanding of how these variables influence career progression in the PR industry. Further studies should also investigate how different types of organisations—whether large corporations, small PR firms, or non-profits—are addressing gender challenges and whether the solutions implemented in one setting can be effectively applied to another. Finally, longitudinal studies would be beneficial to track the long-term effects of mentorship and leadership programs aimed at breaking down gender barriers in the workplace.

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APPENDIX

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interview Guide

Objective 1: To explore how gender stereotypes influence career choices among public relations practitioners in Ghana

1. In what ways have you observed gender roles shaping the type of public relations work practitioners are assigned?
2. How do gender expectations affect the specialisation or roles PR practitioners gravitate towards in Ghana?
3. How do you believe these stereotypes (in any, ie. positive/negative) impact the recruitment and promotion processes in PR firms?

Objective 2: To examine the experiences of public relations practitioners in Ghana regarding career progression and leadership opportunities in the context of gender stereotypes

1. Can you describe your experience with career advancement in public relations? What role, if any, did gender stereotypes play?
2. In your opinion, what differences exist in how leadership opportunities are presented to men and women in the PR industry in Ghana?
3. What organisational practices, if any, have either supported or hindered your career progression in public relations due to gender?
4. How do male and female PR practitioners perceive leadership roles differently within the context of your organisation or the wider PR industry?

Objective 3: To identify the challenges faced by public relations practitioners in Ghana due to gender stereotypes

1. What specific challenges have you encountered in your career that you believe are tied to gender stereotypes?
2. What role do organisational policies or practices play in either perpetuating or combating gender-related challenges in your PR career?