

**Diversity, Inclusion, and Leadership Communication in Public Relations: A Rhetorical
Analysis of *Diverse Voices***

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Abstract

The language we use to talk/communicate about social and professional issues (i.e., produce discourse and construct meaning) constitutes reality. It shapes what we can envision as being possible (or not). This study takes a rhetorical and narrative approach to the topic of leadership communication, diversity and inclusion in public relations and demonstrates how symbolic convergence theory (SCT), as a constitutive theory of communication, can be used by public relations scholars and practitioners to drive change in professional practices, particularly those related to D&I. Using fantasy-theme analysis (FTA) and narrative analysis, we analyzed all the leadership stories (n = 43) in the recent book *Diverse Voices: Profiles in Leadership*. Three prominent rhetorical visions of leadership and D&I emerged from the analysis. We explain how they may be obstructing or slowing down desired change and offer five suggestions for shifts in narratives for speeding up change.

Keywords: symbolic convergence theory, narrative paradigm, leadership communication, public relations, diversity, and inclusion

Introduction

The public relations industry in the United States has a diversity and inclusion (D&I) problem on its hands. After over three decades of research and increasingly urgent trade discourse on this topic, the industry is still far from representing fast-changing societal demographics (Chitkara, 2018; Vardeman-Winter & Place, 2017). We are not suggesting D&I is not a pressing matter in other industries and society in general, but our present focus is to ask why change has been so slow and difficult in the world of public relations. In this study we address two reasons we see as contributing to this problem, one related to practice and the other to scholarship.

First, and in the realm of practice, the role and responsibility of leadership is a key factor. There is ample research suggesting D&I in any industry cannot succeed without leadership support (e.g., see Chrobot-Mason et al., 2013; Gallegos, 2014; Johnson & Hackman, 2018; Northouse, 2018; Offermann & Matos, 2007). No systematic research has been conducted so far to explore the relationship between public relations leadership and D&I; however, trade discourse and a few existing studies indicate low involvement, lack of accountability and a perception among leaders they are performing better on D&I than how others see them performing (Bardhan, Engstrom, & Gower, 2018; Chitkara, 2018; Diggs-Brown & Zaharna, 1995; Hon & Brunner, 2000; Jiang et al., 2016; Len Rios, 1998; Logan, 2011; Mundy, 2015, 2016; PR Coalition, 2005). The second reason is related to scholarship. It is not uncommon to hear at conferences and gatherings of practitioners something like: “Enough research. We KNOW the reality. We need ACTION, and some REAL change.” This suggests frustration that research may not be aiding desired change. It may be time to look closely at the extant D&I scholarship in public relations. Is our research stuck at the descriptive level? While description is necessary to understand complex dimensions of issues, what else do we need to do? As scholars, do we need to focus more on needed interventions and actionable change? By bringing these two issues together, we ask: How are public relations leaders communicating about D&I? Is their communication conducive for envisioning and producing change?

We keep hearing about talk not becoming walk when it comes to D&I in public relations; therefore, we must look closely at the nature of the “talk” to understand why. The language we use to talk/communicate about social and professional issues (i.e., produce discourse and construct meaning) constitutes reality. It shapes what we can envision as being possible or not (i.e., action/inaction) (Bitzer, 1968; Bormann, 1985; Brummett, 2008; Weick, 1995). We take a rhetorical approach in this study, specifically constitutive rhetoric. Examining public relations D&I and leadership communication/language through the lens of rhetoric allowed us to shed some light, from a communication perspective, on why desired change may not be occurring at a faster pace. We approached D&I and leadership communication through a layered theoretical and methodological perspective. Within the rhetorical approach we applied the narrative paradigm, or how stories constitute and shape our realities about issues (Fisher, 1984, 1987). Within the narrative paradigm, we applied symbolic convergence theory (SCT), which focuses on sensemaking and storytelling, and used fantasy-theme analysis (FTA) as our method. We selected the recent publication *Diverse Voices: Profiles in Leadership* (S. Spector & B. Spector, 2018), an outcome of collaboration between The PRSA Foundation and the Museum of Public Relations, as our text. This 365-page collection of 43 stories from diverse public relations leaders

provided appropriate data for rhetorical/narrative analysis for addressing the communication-centered questions we are asking. Currently, there is no other book like it in the larger discourse of public relations. Following our analysis, we offer suggestions for shifts in narratives for speeding up change, and for augmenting rhetorical visions in everyday talk and writing, especially by leaders, for guiding present and envisioning future D&I communication and practices in public relations.

The D&I and Leadership Problem in Public Relations

In keeping with the rhetorical approach of this study, we describe the D&I and leadership problem in public relations, and its attendant research and industry discourse, as a rhetorical situation. According to Bitzer (1968), rhetorical (or meaning-making) discourse about issues exist because rhetorical situations exist. Rhetoric, or how we talk/write/communicate about an issue, is situational and tied to context. Broadly, Bitzer describes a rhetorical situation as having three parts: 1) an exigence or urgent situation that needs resolution, 2) constraints or obstacles that obstruct needed change, and 3) an audience whose thoughts and actions can bring about needed change. Some rhetorical situations persist while others mature and are resolved.

Exigence

In a country where currently minoritized identities will collectively constitute a slim majority by 2050, the level of diversity in the public relations industry is anywhere between 11 and 20% according to various sources (Bureau of Labor Statistics, n.d.; Chitkara, 2018; Vardeman-Winter & Place, 2017). The situation in agencies is particularly dire, and clients are increasingly challenging their agencies to diversify so they can effectively communicate and culturally align with their diverse publics (Barrett, 2016; "Diversity perception study," 2016). Leadership has not shown much initiative and despite the urgency, there is a lot of talk but not much action (Cohen, 2014; Cripps, 2015). Following are some broad strokes of the various dimensions of this exigence.

The public relations industry has long been marked by gender power imbalances which remain true until today. This matter received early attention in industry and scholarship. In 1971, the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) set up a task force to investigate how women were faring in the profession given they constituted the majority but were barely visible in leadership roles (Grunig, Toth, & Hon, 2001). In alignment, scholarship also focused on gender, specifically on pay disparity, discrimination, feminization of the profession, and the lack of women in leadership roles (e.g., Cline et al., 1986; Toth, 1988, 1989). In the 1990s, PRSA continued to focus on glass ceiling and related issues and academic research focused on applying feminist theory and conducting theoretically oriented studies (e.g., gendered styles of leadership and communication in the profession) (see Aldoory 1998; Aldoory & Toth, 2004; Hon, 1995). More recently, scholars have been asking more structure-related questions regarding systemic gender and power disparities in the industry, incorporating more feminist theory, and focusing more on theory-building along gender lines (Fitch, James, & Motion, 2016; Golombisky, 2015; Grunig, Toth, & Hon, 2001; Vardeman-Winter & Place, 2017). On the industry side, while more women are now in leadership roles, there is still a long way to go. Men comprise only about 30% of industry yet dominate leadership (Vardeman-Winter & Place, 2017). Gendered pay discrepancy remains an unresolved issue (Marx, 2014).

Race and ethnicity, primary markers of cultural difference and inequity in U.S. society, followed soon after gender in the D&I story. In 1978, PRSA established the first task force on minority affairs. Scholarship showed practitioners of color felt pigeonholed and that they were hired to simply fill quotas, experienced stereotyping, had little input in organizational policy and decision-making, experienced slower advancement compared to their White colleagues, and that all these reasons combined deterred people of color from being attracted to the profession (Kern-Foxworth, 1989a, 1989b; Zerbinos & Clanton, 1993). Studies in the early and mid-1990s highlighted the glaring lack of awareness and support for D&I efforts in the industry, especially among leadership (e.g., Diggs-Brown & Zaharna, 1995). Subsequent research showed practitioners of color did not mind serving as liaisons/facilitators between clients and their racial/ethnic identity groups given they were not restricted to just that function (Len-Ríos, 1998; Tindall, 2009). Applebaum and Walton's (2015) more recent study focused on young African American and Latinx professionals and those who recruit them. Results showed that while respondents are not unhappy in their positions, they still experience challenges (e.g., microaggression, low inclusion, need for better mentorship) and are less inclined to see recruitment and retention efforts as successful compared to White recruiters. In a perceptions study of Latinx and African American practitioners in agency settings ("Diversity perception study," 2016), respondents said while some progress has been made in D&I, advancement to decision-making roles is still difficult for practitioners of color, and they often leave when they get more attractive offers elsewhere.

In an in-depth interview study of public relations leaders at the turn of the century, Hon and Brunner (2000) found that the D&I needle had moved slightly from the 1990s, but not much. In 2004, the PR Coalition (2005), comprising 23 professional public relations organizations, conducted a survey of coalition members which showed 68% of organizations represented in the survey did not have a formal D&I process, nine in 10 respondents felt the industry needed to do a much better job with D&I, and only 15% reported D&I is a top management priority. Ten years later, in Mundy's (2015, 2016) survey of PRSA membership (respondents were 76% White and 76% female), 83% of respondents reported their organizations have official D&I policies/programs in place, and 63% said their organizations are diverse or very diverse. A survey of Arthur Page Society members (Jiang et al., 2016) showed that 53% of respondents are dissatisfied with the D&I efforts of their organizations. Most said they have some sort of diversity mandate/programs, but there was no clear sense of goals, outcomes, and measurement.

While the exigence remains unresolved, the more recent critical turn in public relations scholarship on diversity is highlighting important issues. This line of research critiques instrumental approaches to diversity, i.e., scholarship that does not account for issues such as power, difference and hegemony that form the context for organizational life and industry practices (Edwards, 2009). Scholars are increasingly questioning the culture of Whiteness that still pervades the industry, applying intersectional approaches and critical race theory to emphasize historical and societal power inequities in the industry, focusing on previously excluded marginalized identities such as LGBTQ+ stakeholders, and highlighting structural and cultural changes that are needed for D&I progress (e.g., Ciszek, 2018; Logan, 2011; Munshi & Edwards, 2011; Pompper & Jung, 2013; Tindall & Waters, 2012; Vardeman-Winter & Place, 2017; Vardeman-Winter, Tindall, & Jiang, 2013).

Obstacles

According to Hon and Brunner (2000), “genuine commitment from top management seems to be the best predictor of an integrated diversity strategy for organizations” (p. 334). The PR Coalition (2005) report made similar observations. However, despite such research backed observations, lack of leadership involvement is a glaring obstacle in the path of D&I in the public relations industry. Based on the results of his survey of PRSA members, Mundy (2016) urged that “leadership must be held accountable [for D&I]” (p. 14). According to Jiang et al.’s (2016) survey of Arthur Page Society members, slow movement, lack of accountability regarding outcomes, and minimalist budget commitments for D&I efforts are clear obstacles. Study participants “emphasized consistently that leadership support and commitment is critical to implementing strategies and achieving D&I goals” (p. 19). Past research also suggests there is a discrepancy between how (more homogenous) leaders and diverse practitioners perceive the state of D&I in their organizations. The former holds a more positive impression of the situation than the latter, especially when it comes to inclusion and retention (Bardhan, Engstrom, & Gower, 2018; Applebaum & Walton, 2015; Gallicano, 2013; Jiang et al., 2016; Mundy, 2016). This perception discrepancy is a significant obstacle. The PR Council advises: “CEOs and leadership teams must set the vision and tone, using their influence, visibility and power to advocate for changes and put policies and practices in place” (“Diversity perception study,” 2016, para. 7). However, to do this, leaders must first have a clear and accurate sense of the D&I problem and their own role and responsibility in bringing about change.

Leaders also need to understand the crucial link between “diversity” and “inclusion” and how recruitment of diverse employees does not automatically lead to retention. Inclusion is necessary for diversity to work, and it entails giving voice and opportunity for advancement to those who have been historically oppressed and excluded from societal processes (Sison, 2017). Inclusion is about creating and sustaining an organizational culture of equity that genuinely respects difference and does not perceive diversity to be just an “add-on” to already existing culture (Appelbaum & Walton, 2015; Mundy, 2016). Studies and industry discourse over the decades suggest that the culture of the U.S. public relations industry is not inclusive or comfortable for most underrepresented practitioners. More recently, Chitkara’s (2018) study of agency leaders concluded the industry has a long way to go on the inclusion front.

Along with lack of leadership engagement, lack of inclusion is clearly an obstacle in this rhetorical situation. While recruitment efforts are better today, and more practitioners of color and other underrepresented groups are in mid-level leadership positions, they are barely visible at senior levels; furthermore, subtle discrimination and microaggressions are reported to still be quite common (Applebaum & Walton, 2015; Tindall, 2009). Scholarship on inclusion in public relations is slimmer (almost non-existent) than the research on diversity despite the important relationship between the two (Sison, 2017). Too much focus on workforce composition has pushed inclusion into the shadows of diversity discourse (Vardeman-Winter & Place, 2017).

Audience

According to Bitzer (1968), audiences in a rhetorical situation are those who are in positions to resolve the exigence through how they communicate (i.e., participate in constructing reality). Public relations leaders, while their lack of engagement is an obstacle, are clearly a primary audience in this D&I rhetorical situation (along with others such as clients demanding more diversity in their agencies, underrepresented employees, professional bodies, scholars

producing knowledge, students, educators, and so on), and we focus on them in this study. The spotlight is shining harder on leaders, and for good reason. Despite research, numerous calls, and initiatives for three decades, the D&I needle has barely moved. Research strongly suggests leadership action and involvement can lead to needed change/action (e.g., proactive policies, prioritizing of D&I in talk and walk, budget allocations, building inclusive cultures). However, the needed action and involvement are currently not forthcoming. Therefore, following the argument that how leaders communicate constructs organizational (and industry) reality, we analyzed how public relations leaders who avow diverse identities are telling the story of D&I. Are these stories aiding in constructing a reality that could make the D&I needle move faster and promote the growth of more diverse leadership, or do they need to be altered?

Value of a Rhetorical/Narrative Approach: Understanding the D&I and Leadership Problem as a Communication Phenomenon

One way of producing and understanding knowledge is through narratives and narrative analysis (Czarniawska, 1997; Littlejohn, Foss, & Oetzel, 2016). The notion of narrative knowledge uses the metaphor of the world-as-text—alerting us to the constitutive nature in which stories rule our lives and social institutions (Lyotard, 1979/1986). The argument in communication (and public relations), drawing mainly on the rhetorical tradition, is that humans are homo narrans, or storytelling beings (Fisher, 1984). Fisher (1984) explains that the primary function of narrative communication “is to offer a way of interpreting and assessing” (p. 351). He further elaborates that “the subject of such discourse (narrative) is symbolic action that creates social reality” (p. 353). In other words, our organizations, institutions, and professions are communicatively constituted through storytelling. The potential of the storytelling and narrative paradigm has not been sufficiently tapped in public relations. Kent (2015) reminds us narratives can be used effectively in client work and in public relations theory building. Similarly, Elmer (2011) writes that “the stories that [PR] practitioners tell, about themselves, their work, their organizations, their clients and working relationships” are “a potentially rich source of information about the occupation” (p. 48).

A constitutive rhetorical approach suggests that communication is an outcome of professionalization and vice versa. What we say, how we say something, where we say something, to whom we say something, and so on are products and creations of professional practices. These practices are the kernels of stories that ultimately get adopted into stories, i.e., the stories we tell about professional practices become how we make sense of others’ practices. Thus, taken-for-granted professional practices need to be understood first and foremost as communicative phenomena. This is not to deny that material structural barriers do not exist to create disadvantages; however, policies and established practices and beliefs are supported by discourse that makes any practice, policy, or belief “normal.” Communication iteratively establishes and reinforces these practices, and ultimately must eliminate these practices if necessary. Communicators can exercise agency to intervene and disrupt meaning systems to reconstitute reality (e.g., the D&I problem in public relations). From a symbolic convergence theory (SCT) perspective, especially one modeled on fantasy-theme analysis (FTA), changing the raw materials of stories—or the antenarratives (Boje, 2001)—can alter fantasy themes, which can, in turn, shift rhetorical visions, which could, in the case of this study’s topic, change the current unsatisfactory reality and practices of D&I in the public relations profession.

Symbolic convergence theory (SCT) and fantasy-theme analysis (FTA)

Symbolic convergence theory (SCT) is a useful theoretical lens for identifying common themes, collective understanding, and shared visions in communication texts. It explores the narrating process by which unique entities come to share reality. Bormanean fantasy-theme analysis (FTA) is the method connected to SCT. Almost 30 years ago Vasquez (1993) combined the situational theory of publics with SCT to offer what he called a Homo Narrans paradigm for theory-based and story-centered investigations of organizations and their publics. Subsequently and sporadically, the SCT and FTA approaches have been used to study risk communication, corporate social responsibility, corporate website image analysis and to strengthen the theorizing of social capital in public relations contexts (see Kartikawangi, 2017; Palenchar & Health, 2002; Park, Hong, & Lee, 2016; Saffer, 2016). Despite its methodological suitability for analyzing the creation of shared realities among internal and external publics and stakeholders, SCA-FTA remains underutilized in public relations scholarship as does its potential for developing theory in public relations and organizational communication contexts (Olufowote, 2006).

Symbolic convergence theory emerged in the 1970s from small group research. Bales (1970) identified that groups have a shared consciousness and behave similarly because of shared visions and fantasies. Bormann (1972, 1982, 1985; see also Bormann, Cragan, & Shields, 1994, 2001) built upon Bales' work by developing a theory (SCT) and a method of analysis (FTA). According to Bormann (1985):

The symbolic convergence theory of communication is a general [social and communication] theory within the broad framework that accounts for human communication in terms of *homo narrans*. The theory explains the appearance of group consciousness, with its implied shared emotions, motives, and meanings, not in terms of individual daydreams and scripts but rather in terms of socially shared narrations and fantasies. (p. 128)

The theory explains how “symbolic convergence creates, maintains, and allows people to achieve empathic communion as well as meeting of the minds” (Bormann, 1983, p. 102). The seen but unobserved nature of rhetorical visions embedded in stories—which can be critiqued as positive or problematic—is what makes stories so compelling. Often, communicators are unaware of how the subtle ways in which we communicate maintain institutional order. Uncovering institutionalized communicative practices that support the status quo is a step toward changing the status quo.

Messages embedded in stories focus the attention of participants in communication, creating rhetorical visions of what is right and wrong, moral or unjust, acceptable or unacceptable, and so forth. Symbolic convergence theory explores the narrating processes (e.g., structure, plot, heroes, villains, and scenes) by which entities (e.g., the public relations profession) come to shared understanding. With its focus on storytelling and sensemaking, SCT suggests that the world we inhabit—the one that exists for us—is a result of the stories we tell and the rhetorical choices we make. Other assumptions of SCT from within this paradigm are that communication constitutes reality and that reality is the outcome of communication that converges to create shared understanding.

Fantasy-theme analysis (FTA) is a method of rhetorical analysis that focuses on rhetorical texts with the goal of identifying narrative elements in dramatizing messages, fantasy chains, fantasy themes, and fantasy types that are formative of rhetorical visions (Bormann, 1985; Foss, 2009). Dramatizing messages are those that contain “a pun or other wordplay, double entendre,

figure of speech, analogy, anecdote ... or narrative” (Bormann, 1985, p. 130). These are identifiable when group members engage in fantasy chaining, often unconsciously, by using emotive words or signaling consensus by communicating similar messages. In written text, a consensus is observable as repetitive patterns across stories.

In FTA and SCT, fantasy is not imaginary or detached from reality; instead, it is “the creative and imaginative [shared] interpretation of events” (Bormann, as cited in Foss, 2009, p. 98). A fantasy theme is the repetition of chains that create conventional frames of reference from which to interpret events in the past, orient toward current events, or envision events in the future. In short, “fantasy themes tell a story about a group’s experience that constitutes a constructed reality of participants” (Foss, 2009, p. 98). Fantasies create the assumptive system that groups use to ground and warrant acceptable arguments and practices (D&I practices and arguments in public relations in this case). When several fantasy themes address similar issues, this results in fantasy types, which are heuristics that allow the group to address common issues facing group members. A group’s rhetorical vision of itself is the result of the unification of various fantasy themes and types. A rhetorical vision is the unifying communicative script that gives participants shared identities and a shared view of events (Bormann, 1985). All themes, types, and visions begin with pieces of stories, or antenarratives. Once a storyline becomes established and taken-for-granted, it becomes institutionalized and supports institutional practices, policies and sensemaking (see Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005; Weick, 1995). Fantasy-theme analysis is a method of uncovering narrative logics that create problematic fantasy types and rhetorical visions, which can be re-imagined through conscientious choices about what we say until what we say becomes widely adopted and taken-for-granted, thereby producing change.

In sum, SCT and FTA embrace an understanding of communication that sees it as both a meaning-making and a meaning-giving function. Communication informs and, therefore, forms and transforms the environment as well as interlocutors vis-à-vis (re)storying efforts. Fantasy themes form the basis of rhetorical visions and reveal a group’s shared consciousness (i.e., symbolic reality), which justify past practices, guide current practices, and drive future practices. Using FTA as our method, we identify D&I rhetorical visions shared by diverse public relations leaders. We then suggest ways to shift themes for more productive outcomes through rhetorical interventions.

Data and Analysis

In this study, we analyzed the recently published book *Diverse Voice: Profiles in Leadership* (Spector & Spector, 2018) to identify common narrative themes and the shared symbolic realities (i.e., fantasies) emerging from this collection of 43 stories from diverse public relations leaders. The book is an appropriate choice to apply our claims about narrative and SCT because the stories are purposefully crafted and edited, making language choices and phraseology deliberate and meaningful. We communicated with the first editor of *Diverse Voices* to glean more details about the editing process and better understand the construction of these stories. The leaders featured in the book were identified jointly by the then president of the PRSA Foundation (Judith Harrison, a D&I leader in the profession), the incoming president (Joe Cohen, another strong advocate for D&I in the profession), and the two editors Shelley Spector and Barry Spector (also strong advocates of D&I in the industry). Special effort was made to

represent the race, gender and sexuality dimensions of diversity. While all the stories are in first-person voice, they are based on interviews conducted with all the leaders featured in the book. The interviews were recorded and transcribed, and the editors then wrote them up as first-person narratives in ways to capture reader interest as well as stay faithful to the interview. These stories were then sent back to the leaders. They were finalized after several revisions and edits and only once the leaders were satisfied with the outcome (S. Spector, personal communication, December 19, 2020). Thus, while it is safe to assume that the final stories faithfully reflect leaders' voices, a caveat is in order: findings may reflect the type of questions the editors asked and how each narrative was developed. We must also note that according to the press release for *Diverse Voices*, the goal of the book is "to help communications leaders and professionals better understand the challenges faced by minorities in the field" and "serve as a resource for organizations to create inclusive workplaces that foster retention and career growth" ("PRSA Foundation and Museum of Public Relations," 2018, paras. 1, 2)

We used rhetorical analysis, which is an inductive approach to analysis that moves from open to axial coding, and we specifically used the procedures and methods of narrative analysis and FTA explained by Foss (2009). Fantasy-theme analysis first identifies patterns related to characters, actions, and settings in stories and then uses the patterns to identify fantasy themes that support specific rhetorical visions. Narrative analysis also identifies trends in characters, actions, and settings, and focuses as well on temporal and causal relations, tone, voice, and points of view in stories. By bringing these two forms of analysis together, we were able to follow the protocols of FTA at the sentence level while not losing focus on overarching plots among stories.

Procedurally, we read a copy of *Diverse Voices* in its initial form multiple times, making marginal notes and highlighting potential narrative themes. Since no digital version of the book is available, we scanned the book's pages into readable text (PDF), which we then converted into an Excel spreadsheet. Each paragraph of the text was placed into a cell. We read through each chapter in this format, making detailed notes related to passages we honed in on from initial readings of the book, particularly references to diversity, inclusion, leadership, industry, and organizations. We also coded for characters, actions, and settings. Consistent with FTA, we considered both human and non-human entities as characters (e.g., a human character is the leader or a mentor in a story; a non-human entity is an organization or policy that acts upon humans). We noted how each entity was treated in context (positively, negatively, or neutrally), the characters' actions and to whom the action was linked. We also considered what actions might not have been taken or explained when such non-actions might provide insights about rhetorical visions. Setting themes suggest where the actions take place, the characteristics of places where the action occurs, and whether the action occurs in the past, present, or future.

In addition to rhetorical analysis, we also used two automated text analysis software: LIWC2015 and ParallelDots AI. LIWC provides a computerized analysis of keywords and their emotional expressions used in everyday language, as well as keyword frequency. For example, the word "engage" is used 38 times throughout the book and in a manner that expresses affect, positive emotion, and sociality. An example that illustrates the effectiveness of this coding is as follows. Andrew McCaskill notes: "And with privilege comes a responsibility for retention and the survival of all the people with whom I *engage*. I try to think about that when I'm advocating for my coworkers, be they black, Asian, white, female or different-abled - whatever the case may

be” (emphasis added, p. 35). While we found the coding to be useful in terms of searching for similar action themes, we mostly used it to identify keyword frequency (e.g., “diversity” or “inclusion” are referenced at a rate of 8.4 times per chapter). ParallelDots AI assists with sentiment analysis of a text, which means it scans passages to determine whether the language is expressed with positive, negative, or neutral emotion. This software aided our thinking about the tone of passages as we coded them; however, we relied solely on our analysis of context while interpreting each story’s narrative elements.

Tables 1, 2, and 3 list the most common narrative elements that are relevant to our findings, interpretations, and implications. Examples in Table 1 highlight recurring characters are the practitioners/leaders, future practitioners (students and early career practitioners), and mentors (those who helped the leader in the story). Leaders are represented in the plot of stories primarily by “I + verb” (e.g., “I yearned...” [David Albritton, p. 141]), a combination that occurs 2,663 times in the text (~3% of the text). This finding makes sense because these are first-person narratives. However, the use of action-oriented power verbs and the low number of “we” statements (n=170) is noteworthy. Representations of future practitioners are overwhelmingly positive and suggest millennials believe in and want multicultural workplaces. References about younger generations and millennials tend to focus on recruiting them into the industry. However, what stood out through the coding is that only a handful of leaders narrate the current generation as future leaders or, as Cheryl Proctor-Rogers states, the “most important assets” (p. 69). This is important to note because the lack of reference to the future, while supporting a narrative of diversification (i.e., bringing in more diverse employees) does not sufficiently elevate the theme of inclusion and advancement (i.e., helping diverse employees see themselves as leaders in the future). Leaders/mentors in the stories exist primarily as authors-as-mentors/leaders, mentors-of-authors, or leaders-of-organizations-and-industry. Authors-as-mentors/leaders are represented positively (i.e., leaders do not critique themselves), as are mentors-of-authors. Leaders of organizations and industry are represented both positively and negatively for their successes or failures at building diverse and inclusive organizations. They serve as exemplars of good and bad D&I practices.

Table 1: Characters relevant to findings, interpretations, and implications

Character	Example
Leader (Author)	I knew the products, I knew the mission and I knew the culture of the military customers, so it was easy for me to fold back into that environment. It was a great experience, and my career was thriving at Raytheon. (David Albritton: p. 141)
	When I first walk into a meeting, sometimes the first thing that hits me is that I'm the only person who looks like me. But I typically forget that quickly. I know that the value I bring as a communicator is equal to anybody else. (Lisa Chen: pp. 184–185)
Future Practitioners/Early Career	My current team at Wells Fargo is extremely diverse; about half were born and raised outside of the U.S. It's very cool to have that! The team is made up in large part of millennials. Whereas my generation

had to work so hard to advance diversity, this millennial workforce sees diversity as a matter of a fact, a given. When they don't see the diversity, or when they don't feel that inclusion is important, they just pick up and leave to find it somewhere else. (Rosanna Fiske: p. 55)

If recruiters expand their pool to include City College of New York, San Diego State, Jackson State or Howard University, they're going to get a lot more brown faces, a lot more Latinos, a lot more first-generation students from other countries. It's like fishing. If you only have a hook that will attract a certain type of fish, then you're not going to get diverse talent into your agencies or your departments. (Rochelle Tillery Larkin Ford: pp. 82-83)

Leaders/Mentors

Let's face it, the godfathers and the godmothers in these companies – typically the most senior executives – aren't tapping diverse future talent on the shoulder and giving them the opportunity to rise through the ranks. (Neil Foote: p. 288)

As my mentors changed the game for me, I try to pay it forward every chance I get. Paving new avenues for the future generation of Latino leaders is critical to the overall well-being of our nation, especially within the realm of communications and marketing. (Veronica Potes: p. 339)

Table 2 presents samples of the action and setting themes in the stories. While each leader's story includes various kinds of actions, especially in terms of taking action (e.g., I + verb), the underpinning actions mostly follow a beginning-middle-end pattern of the leader's (1) path into the profession (often framed as an accident), (2) early career challenges or successes, and (3) current leadership role. Mentors, leaders, organizational constraints, or external exigencies are often the inciting incidents of the plot—reasons the author overcomes early career challenges—as well as the catalysts for their growth later in the story. For example, a mentor may have provided support or may have been an exemplar at the right time and in the right way when the leader in the story needed to overcome the challenges presented early in the story—usually challenges related to racism or sexism. Chapters, since they are non-fictional, provide expository comments, i.e., leaders offer their opinions about the historical, present, and future state of D&I in public relations. To be noted again is stories' lack of references to the future until the end of each chapter—stories generally focus on the past and present. Reference to the future typically—though not always—presents a neutrally toned suggestion. For example, “We [current leaders] need to spend more time training, mentoring and sponsoring young people of color as they come into our organizations in order to achieve workforces and management teams that reflect more accurately the country today” (Armando Azarloza, p. 254).

Table 2: Actions and settings relevant to findings, interpretations, and implications

Narrative Element	Example (Beginning, middle, end)¹
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Actions

Judith Harrison, a musician, *discovered* PR by accident. She obtained a job at Burson-Marsteller through an employment agency. After four years of work, she took on various roles at various companies, and then launched her own firm [pp. 148–149]. Recession hit. She became a recruiter, working for Chen Sam, Elizabeth Taylor’s publicist. She worked in HR for some time [pp. 149–152]. Nine years later, she worked at Weber Shandwick where she became a D&I leader. Her goal now is “leaving our industry and the world beyond more diverse and inclusive than when I found them” (p. 153). She reflects on her career, indicating mostly positive and extraordinary experiences, with notes that most bias in business these days is unconscious rather than direct (e.g., “HR manager in leading firm’s marketing department had a Confederate flag hanging on wall.” pp. 154–155). She explains the challenges facing PR today and that D&I is not an initiative but an imperative and begins with leaders [pp. 156–157]. She ends chapter with note, “We’ve made progress in changing the face of our industry, but we need to move faster. I applaud the efforts ...and am excited about what individuals and organizations collaborating on DEI can achieve going forward” (p. 157).

John Onoda started his career as a newspaper reporter. According to him, “Being a minority was just a factor to deal with among many other factors... / I’d say I’ve had a good, fast-moving career” (p. 232). In the early part of his career, he was often the youngest and also only minority in the room. Later, when he was in senior management for iconic brands, he was the only minority in the room full of people expecting a “Robert-Redford-looking guy” (p. 233). The thesis of the story is to not let others intimidate when one is the “other.” Onoda suggests there is not just one path and that his career was likely marked by some missed opportunities or bias; but it is hard to tell when someone is racist or just a jerk—‘dogfights’ are part of large organizations and personal attacks happen [pp. 233–235]. He suggests industries need to predict change, but PR has done a poor job with diversity: “I know a lot of diverse professionals feel like they do not belong” (p. 237). A key to his success has been mentors, though all outside of PR. A key challenge is that big agencies are scaling back and consolidating, so significant gains in diversification is unlikely. [pp. 237–238].

Settings

Agency/Organization

Rather than try to hit my head against the wall [at small think tank early in career], I decided that this was not a place I could flourish in, if they could not understand the benefits of supporting diversity.... / If you’re a diverse person in that room and you don’t think you can

... speak up, or you're not listened to, what's the point of being there in the first place? (Lisa Chen: p. 186, 189)

Twitter is a very diverse place. The company is passionate about making sure that there is diversity not only of people but of thought, of different experience levels and backgrounds. It's been great. (Brandon Lee: p. 208)

Industry

Not all my experiences were positive. Right after I graduated from Howard, I was invited to a national PRSA conference reception by Hal Warner I show up and the people at the door asked, "Well, who are you?" They said I was not supposed to be there. My name was not on the list. They wouldn't let me in, although others were walking in without checking first if their names were on the list. I just happened to be black in a place where there were no other black people. No other black people in that room. None. Zero. Just me. (Rochelle Tillery Larkin Ford: p. 83)

All in all, PR is a great industry for people who like a challenge, are adaptable, have a creative mindset and consider themselves strong communicators... (Jessica Casano–Antonellis: p. 115)

Do not let yourself get pigeonholed in *places* where you don't want to be. (emphasis added, Damon Jones: p. 170)

Note: The actions (plot) of the chapter are paraphrased because providing quotations proved to be too lengthy. Page numbers are provided for reference to sections of text that support the paraphrased text.

The setting of actions is mostly, and predictably, in organizations (agencies or corporations) in the public relations industry. Collectively, the stories present the industry and these organizations as improving but still lacking in diversity—especially at levels of leadership. Action verbs and the tone of passages make the collection of stories motivational and inspiring. Leaders present the industry as an excellent career choice for members of underrepresented groups at both the agency and corporate settings, but not necessarily a home or place to be oneself. Finally, leaders tend to collectively paint corporate (in-house) environments as being more favorable to growth and leadership opportunities than agencies.

Table 3 presents a selection of other relevant narrative elements. These relate to tone, temporal relations, and type of narrative. Tone establishes the mood of narratives. As noted above, the overall tone established in stories is generally motivating and inspiring, especially in relation to the leaders' overall experience in the industry. This makes sense because these leaders overcame challenges, are at an apex in their career as leaders, and hope to inspire younger professionals.

Temporal relations reflect how events occur in a story. The leaders provide a linear account of their experiences in the industry. Most details in stories cover the past and present, however, as we have already noted, the future does not get much narrative attention. The leaders, individually and collectively, do not extend into an imagined future or re-imagine events in the past by noting an event occurred as X but should have occurred as Y. For example, a leader may narrate a microaggression against them and their personal reactions and thoughts, but not elaborate on possible ways in which they could have responded or acted. Most minoritized practitioners do not have the luxury to speak freely and push back in overwhelmingly White workplaces since such action could work against them professionally. However, when writing about such incidents, it is possible to re-imagine through narrative what some possible ways to address such situations in the moment might be so that the past is not repeated in the future. This point is important because, as we discuss later, this temporal relation obstructs a rhetorical vision that would guide the next generation towards inclusion and leadership.

Overall, the positive tone in the stories represents the present. The past is presented in a negative-to-neutral tone as leaders begin stories in much the same way. Most leaders indicate they fell into public relations: “How did I get into public relations? It found me” (Catherine Hernandez-Blades, p. 20). They then describe their early-career challenges with some reflection on the current state of the industry: “Right now, there is *not one* African-American running any top 10 PR firm; *not one* Hispanic, *not one* Asian. That’s a problem. It *baffles* me to this day” (p. 5, emphasis added [negative sentiment]); the asyndeton in Kim Hunter’s statement captures the urgency). But the tone is balanced with comments like “Has [being ‘other’] held me back? I don’t know. I’ve had a good career. I worked [as an executive] for the largest company in America at its time. I probably could’ve done even more, let’s put it that way, if I had all those mainstream attributes” (John Onoda, p. 233). The future is presented in a neutral-to-positive tone with little specificity: “As my mentors changed the game for me, I try to pay it forward every chance I get. Paving new avenues for the future generation of Latino leaders is critical to the overall well-being of our nation, especially within the realm of communications and marketing. Play it. Win it. Change it” (Veronica Potes, p. 339).

Table 3: Other narrative elements relevant to findings, interpretations, and implications

Narrative Element	Finding	Example
Tone	Positive: motivational and inspiring	As a diverse leader, I approach problems differently. Where one of my peers might see a problem, I see an opportunity. ... I think the efforts to drive diversity within our industry should be holistic, not just for the younger generation coming into the field but also for mid-level leaders already in the industry ... (Marvin Hill: p. 91) But despite being black, I’ve been able to succeed in this business. (Mike Paul: p. 244)

		But all in all, it's been a wonderful, wonderful career so far. I work with some of the smartest people on the planet on some of the very coolest things on the planet. (Brandi Boatner: p. 261)
Temporal relations	Past (negative-to-neutral)	Look, I've been in this business since the early '90s. And despite all the efforts to improve diversity, there's not been much improvement ... <i>whatsoever</i> . (Mike Paul: p. 245)
	Present (positive)	See Tone.
	Future (neutral-to-positive)	... And I continue to learn and tell students coming into the profession, the ability to learn is their greatest competitive advantage. (Brandi Boatner: p. 261)
		I would say to those who are trying to nurture and grow talent, be intentional about it. It doesn't just happen. So identify your talent, grow that talent and put that talent in a good place. And for others I would say, I don't care what color you are, if you work for me, I expect you to be very, very good, but I also expect you to be yourself. Be good and be yourself. That's it. (Andy Checo: p. 311)
Type of narrative	Underdog	When I remain focused on my goals, the possibilities for success are endless. Having a plan and working my plan requires an investment of time and resources. Yes, I'm a risk taker. If I fail at something, it only means I'm in the game and that I'm challenging the status quo. (Cheryl Procter-Rogers: p. 69)
	Quest	While focusing on creating and leading a great recruiting team, I thought more about the importance of diversity and inclusion (D&I) ... I started reading about D&I best practices and arranging meetings with D&I leaders at companies that were making progress. After inundating my manager with multi-page memos about what we should be doing in this area, she asked if I would like to take on the role of D&I leader (Judith Harrison: p. 152).

Note: Examples do not represent the totality of perspectives across stories. Rather, they are examples that occur repetitiously to present an emerging theme. As would be expected, there are variations on themes. Also, temporal relations focus on *elements of narrative*, not the past,

present, future of the industry—though how the future is narrated (or not narrated) is a focus of our study because that does shape future practices according to SCT.

In fiction, types of narratives include comedy, romance, tragedy, and irony. In non-fiction and socio-cultural forms of writing, these familiar narratives are too broad. Thus, we drew upon Kent's (2015) master plots in public relations to identify the narrative types used by leaders. We determined two overarching master plots across the stories that make up the rhetorical vision shared by the leaders: underdog and quest. The underdog plot is typical in U.S. storytelling because it aligns with the culture of individualism. It is a story of the lesser powerful individual against something bigger than themselves (e.g., systemic discrimination). The quest is the story of the protagonist looking for something that may be tangible or intangible. Kent explains, "the protagonist hopes their life will be changed if they find the object of their quest" (p. 485). The stories in *Diverse Voices*, collectively, suggest the leaders were on a quest to find an inclusive workplace or industry. Anecdotes suggest the leaders found some incomplete version of inclusion. Some leaders find inclusion here-and-now by changing their perspectives, and some find it when organizations and industries evolve. Few, however, describe and re-imagine the future and how it could be more inclusive and promote diverse leadership.

Overall, the narratives are more observational rather than participatory. Leaders describe the world (of public relations); however, they do not so much describe activities in the world. This, according to our analysis, reduces the lessons (or concrete takeaways) for readers because stories lack specifics on how-to engage the world and change it in the future. Table 3 provides samples of text representing statements that support the two master plots in observational language.

Findings (Rhetorical Visions)

Through our analysis, we identified three rhetorical visions across all 43 stories.

Rhetorical Vision 1: Underdogs on a Quest

A primary rhetorical vision sustained across the themes across chapters that we identified vis-à-vis coding of characters, actions, settings is that of underdog on a quest. This vision is sustained by frequent use of the pronoun "I" with actions showing success against odds or by leaders' uniqueness in settings. Some samples are (see also Tables 1–3):

So when I finally did start my own agency, I knew exactly what to do because of those seven years of seeing firsthand what not to do. In hindsight, it was a very good learning experience for me. (Patrice Tanaka, p. 96)

I stuck with it, and accepted all the challenges, even when I felt underqualified and in over my head. (Jessica Casano-Antonellis, p. 113)

Minoritized individuals, by definition, are underrepresented and therefore do not have too many people like themselves to lean on (and be mentored by) as they work through the challenges presented by an oppressive system. Thus, given the facts about the poor representation of minoritized groups and the state of D&I in the profession, members of underrepresented groups must do extra work related to performances of everyday self. Thus, it is not surprising that overall, the leaders' stories highlight how they worked against the system, sought change, and became victorious in their professional quest.

While we certainly do not intend to minimize what these leaders have individually accomplished in the face of great odds, this rhetorical vision is a familiar U.S.-American trope popularized by Horatio Alger in his series of books about individuals from humble backgrounds rising to a secure position through hard work, determination, courage, and honesty. It is a classic plotline in stories about the U.S.-American entrepreneur or leader (Johansson, 2004). The pull-oneself-up-by-the-bootstraps story reflects the United States' highly individualistic culture. One's successes are attributed to their willingness to take charge of their lives. The criticism of these kinds of individualistic stories is they may reinforce stereotypes of the "model minority," reinforce values of competition over collective action and alliance building and reinforce "us-them" barriers.

Rhetorical Vision 2: You're on Your Own

Since the U.S. public relations industry sorely lacks diversity and organizations struggle to establish inclusive environments, it is not surprising, therefore, that overall, the quest for D&I in the stories takes the form of personal triumphs rather than a collective victory in transforming the industry.

A result of a solo quest vision, however, is that the stories are not very inclusive for readers for at least three reasons. First, the leaders and their mentors take actions that drive successes for the leader or make individualistic efforts towards D&I. Absent are details about other supporting or background characters who are not mentors or leaders. The stories lack thick descriptions and details of mundane practices. While this is not necessarily a requirement of storytelling, leaving out prosaic characters and details does impact fantasy chains; there is no coherent rhetorical vision around inclusion. Readers, especially those from underrepresented groups, may feel like they are on their own, which runs counter to the book's purpose. If leaders featured in *Diverse Voices* interacted themselves with diverse voices, we do not know what these interactions looked or felt like because there are few details about interactions with non-leaders. Second, the stories generally do not use the plural pronoun "we" and this further reinforces that the journey is a solo quest. The third reason is the stories do not invite readers to inhabit the world of the story and envision themselves as part of the tale. The stories report observations to an individual reader rather than asking for participation from readers. This type of voice is primarily achieved through tone. The combination of reasons noted above makes the overall narrative tone and perspective of the stories, though positive and inspiring, not very inclusive and geared toward collective action in the future.

Rhetorical Vision 3: Doing D&I in the Future Looks Like ...?

While the stories collectively focus primarily on the past and present, and contain few details about the future, references to the profession's future that do exist occur briefly in the last paragraphs of chapters. This results in a narrative lack of vision for the future. Again, from a SCT perspective, this is problematic because future practices will be less collective and more incoherent. Moreover, the past may repeat itself.

We want to be clear that it is not our intent to say that the leaders featured in *Diverse Voices* do not provide solid advice (they all do) or that they do not have good ideas about how to change and improve the future of D&I in the profession. In fact, when the topic of focus is D&I, the past and the present are especially important to emphasize. This is particularly true in the case of *Diverse Voices* since a primary goal of the book is to help highlight on the struggles of underrepresented practitioners. From an SCT perspective, however, the lack of specificity in a

vision for the future in the stories is consequential for the future of D&I in the profession. For example, of the 43 stories, Emile Lee's provides the most detailed advice that projects a future-orientation (note that Lee's style of writing cuts against the previous two visions, providing a useful example for writing in a way that eliminates the non-desirable aspects of the first two rhetorical visions):

As an industry, we need to do better at how we recruit from colleges. We have to position PR as a good career choice for minority students. We need to do better in the interviewing and recruiting processes to ensure we have the right levels of diversity in the mix. / Why not have the various minority PR associations – Hispanic, African-American and Asian-American – collaborate. This way we can all learn from one another and encourage more of an understanding across racial lines. / As for advice I would give minority students and young professionals, here's what I would tell them: Find a mentor – or three – both within your current company (who can also act as an internal champion) and from the outside. (p. 120)

While a good example, Lee's narrative could still include more details on how to recruit, how to collaborate, or what type of mentor to find. Without specificity, the vision is blurry. The lack of detail in the overall narrative (all the stories combined) about future practices and how to build more diverse leadership is an issue to be addressed. Repetition of examples of desirable future practices—with specific details—is needed to produce and sustain a preferred D&I vision conducive to change and to guide future practitioners/leaders.

Suggestions: Constructing Futuristic and Inclusive Fantasy Themes Through Conscientious Plotting

As already described, a benefit of a combined SCT-FTA approach is that it offers researchers and practitioners an opportunity to suggest and perform interventions into discourse (including how we tell stories). Linguistic alternatives can establish preferred rhetorical visions, which can become real social practices (Brummett, 2008) and hence produce change in the future. Thus, we offer five writing/communication/storytelling strategies, drawn from our analysis and interpretations, that we believe would make the rhetorical vision of D&I and leadership in public relations more inclusive and futuristic. While we use examples from the stories we analyzed to demonstrate our suggestions, we would once again like to emphasize we are not criticizing the leaders' stories. We are simply suggesting how future writing might be changed to generate the rhetorical and futuristic vision of inclusion, empowerment and diverse leadership.

Suggestion 1: Consider More Plural, "We" Language

Lee's example above provides a good example of how we might write using a pluralistic orientation. In other examples, however, small modifications could generate a more inclusive style. In this example, consider the substitutions in brackets: "We have to educate every diverse professional on what a successful career track is and how you [we] can effectively manage that. It's not just showing up every day and doing your [our] best work" (David Albritton, p. 146). Slight changes can bring the storyteller and the reader closer together and produce a sense of collective responsibility for D&I. Here is an example of we-oriented language that does not

explicitly use the word “we”: “Like many diverse leaders in the industry, I approach problems differently.” Contrast this with the original: “As a diverse leader, I approach problems differently” (Marvin Hill, p. 91). Our suggested sentence casts “diverse leaders” as more central to the plot. Of course, sometimes I-oriented or you-oriented language is needed. Choices need to be mindfully made to generate inclusive language and future-oriented visions for collective action and change.

Suggestion 2: Include Prosaic Details and Background Characters

Although leaders do turn to specific moments in their careers, stories could include more descriptive details. Storytelling offers an opportunity to provide the little details around characters, actions, and settings. For example, when describing racist/microaggression incidents, the interpersonal information, including the reactions of authors or bystanders, could provide empowering details for changing future actions. Brendan Lee provides an example in his chapter: “I’ve heard a lot of times in my career from friends and colleagues, whether they were joking or not, ‘You’re the whitest black person I know’” (p. 211). Lee then offers some prosaic details about how he replies in these situations, thereby providing example practices to model in everyday life.

Suggestion 3: Avoid the Horatio Alger’s Trope

It is easy to get lured in by this storyline wherein personal success is attributed mostly to individual skills and abilities. For example:

I’ve looked for opportunities where my experiences could help, volunteered to expand my responsibilities and immersed myself in projects outside of what would be considered core communications responsibilities, to take on projects related to customer experience, sponsorships, brand, partner and alliance marketing. Why? The experiences I gained from each of these opportunities made me a better communicator and business leader as a result. (Emile Lee, pp. 122-123)

Of course, we are not suggesting that individual efforts should not be acknowledged; rather we are suggesting including other details that illustrate achievements are a combination of various turns of events (including happy accidents) and other people (unmentioned background characters) who play a role in personal success. Additions of prosaic details and background characters into the story could eliminate the trope. Since rhetorical fantasies create the assumptive system upon which we operate, reinforcing individualism and competition may work counter to efforts to build collective action and inclusion.

Suggestion 4: Focus More on the Future and on How-To Scenarios

Overall, the stories in *Diverse Voices* are presented in a neutral or positive tone. We are not suggesting that books of this nature be negative in tone; however, we suggest more gritty, emotive details. Mike Paul establishes a mood that hits the emotive mark:

Sadly, diversity and inclusion (from board to intern) that mirrors the population worldwide, won’t happen in my lifetime. It will be the task of the next generation of leaders to stamp out racism, prejudice, selfishness, unethical and immoral behaviors as well as white privilege. (p. 245)

He then offers many details and a call to action, specifically addressed to “white folks,” at the end of the chapter: “As Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said, ‘In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends’” (p. 248). This final line generates

enough momentum to cast the reader into a vision of specific, future action, i.e., to be a “friend” to a colleague of color, one must speak up. A reading of the final lines of each chapter in *Diverse Voices* does not often project the reader into a future doing something productive or concrete to advance D&I.

Suggestion 5: Use Creative Narrative Structures

The stories in *Diverse Voices* do not use many narrative devices. Table 3 provides the narrative elements prevalent in the stories. When narrating stories, creative strategies can be deployed, such as imaginary reflections (e.g., “I wish I would’ve said this”), flashbacks, flashforwards, and multiple types of voice. Stories can especially project into the future and offer prophecies, which would support more potent rhetorical visions. In particular, the use of prophecy should be encouraged, especially if the goal is to change the future for D&I.

Conclusion

Public relations leaders are in strategic positions of power to improve the state of D&I in the industry. How they narrate and construct messages regarding D&I is consequential because from the SCT-FTA perspective we adopt in this study, humans make sense of their work through shared experiences, language, and symbolic action. Therefore, their communication constructs the reality from which change can be imagined and acted upon through concrete practices. Applying this constitutive rhetoric argument to storytelling, Kent (2015) emphasizes that “if public relations professionals are truly storytellers ... we should understand how to tell them” (p. 488). In short, *how* leaders tell D&I stories matters. This is of course true for all practitioners, but our focus in this study is on leaders. *Diverse Voices* is an outcome of efforts by leaders in the profession who are advocates of D&I, and our analysis has value for leaders and practitioners who are advocates as well as those who wish to and/or must become advocates.

We posed this question at the beginning of this study: How are public relations leaders communicating about D&I? Is their communication conducive for envisioning and producing change? Our rhetorical analysis of *Diverse Voices* identified three primary rhetorical visions, which we explained could obstruct D&I practice and hinder desired change. As we described earlier in the article, the exigency in the rhetorical situation regarding D&I in the world of public relations is an ongoing one, and our findings show the blurry rhetorical vision for the future and lack of concrete details are obstacles that need to be addressed. The struggles narrated in the stories by diverse leaders are no doubt useful for helping those (especially other leaders) who are inclined to see the state of D&I and their own performance through rose-tinted glasses understand the current reality better. But change will not occur unless we can re-envision the future. We offer five suggestions that we hope will help all leaders (the primary audience in the rhetorical situation that can make a difference) develop clearer visions in alternative ways that will help produce desired change.

The SCT-FTA rhetorical method we have applied in this study is no doubt an academic method which allows us to study communication texts. However, we hope our five suggestions will assist leaders and practitioners in industry spaces apply its value in how they communicate (verbally and in written form) about D&I with internal and external stakeholders. Our overall suggestion is that while describing the past and present of D&I is no doubt important, the use of more inclusive, collectivist and future-oriented language will likely yield inclusive rhetorical

visions and practices and catalyze the pace of D&I change in public relations. Such a narrative shift will also provide clearer visions and practices for future leaders to work with and build upon. Through mindful communication and reflexive storytelling practices, leaders can use words, phrases, and so on more carefully to forge and narrate into existence a more inclusive industry and leadership that more accurately reflects our increasingly diverse society. In time, according to SCT, the new ways of speaking will form a preferred rhetorical vision, which will inform practices, which will change and improve the industry and its leadership in terms of D&I. We hope the SCT-FTA lens will help further clarify to practitioners/leaders that the individual rhetorical choices they make in their communication and D&I storytelling practices do add up in constructing overall visions that have consequences for the future.

In closing, we want to reiterate that public relations leaders currently sharing stories need to be applauded. *Diverse Voices* is a much-needed volume in the industry's D&I discourse. Our goal in this study is not to undercut its value but to offer ways to improve future similar efforts and overall leadership communication about D&I. We understand one book cannot do it all and that more effort is needed. *Diverse Voices*, according to its press release, aims to aid a better understanding of the struggles faced by minorities in the profession; we believe the stories achieve this goal. The second goal, to serve as a resource to aid the growth of more inclusive workplaces in the future by promoting retention and career growth, remains a rhetorical challenge. The missing link is between the problems the stories identify and the vision and concrete actions needed to change the future. Finally, we propose producing more D&I oriented texts in the profession's discourse that narrate clear and detailed rhetorical visions that imagine a different and achievable future (e.g., how-to guides on practices such as using more inclusive and collectivist language, more books like *Diverse Voices*, etc.). These narrations, if scripted in ways that avoid the pitfalls we identified in our analysis, may result in Rosanna Fiske seeing her vision fulfilled: "I wish that diversity was just ingrained in everything we do, as part of our reality every day; that there wouldn't be this overt effort of having to make diversity a key component. ... Inclusion is the name of the game" (p. 55).

We cannot be what we cannot see (or envision). Public relations leaders have the responsibility to clearly imagine and narrate into existence a more inclusive future with more diverse leadership.

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