

MUSEUM-PUBLIC RELATIONSHIPS:  
EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT THEORY  
OF PUBLIC RELATIONS

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Mass Communication

in

The Manship School of Mass Communication

by  
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B.S., Louisiana State University, 2003  
December 2005

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank everyone who made this thesis not only possible, but an exciting and rewarding experience. To my committee, thank you for your excellent guidance. Dr. Banning, your patience and energy are unparalleled. You taught me so much during this project, especially the ins-and-outs of methodology. I am privileged to have one of the greatest public relations scholars on my committee. Dr. Nelson, it has been my honor to work with you. Dr. Lindsay, thank you for your unwavering support, sound counsel, and careful scrutiny during this thesis, and more importantly, throughout my graduate career. Your friendship and the excellent example you set as a teacher, scholar, and leader has impacted my life and will continue to guide me in the future.

In addition to my committee, I would like to recognize Dr. John A. Ledingham. Dr. Ledingham, your selfless contribution of your time and knowledge made this project possible. Your contagious enthusiasm made this project fun. Also, Jennifer Banning deserves a special thanks. You were a wealth of museum knowledge, and I will not forget your graciousness.

I could not have completed this thesis without the love and support of my incredible family. Mi Mi, Dad, Mom, and Trish, to simply thank you would be a severe injustice. Your faith in me fueled me to reach for and achieve new goals. Gran Gran, everything I do is for you. Dr. and Mrs. Loupe, thank you for keeping me focused. I love you all.

To Brandon Woods, you are my inspiration, my courage, and my determination. Thank you for standing by my side.

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study employs the organization-public relationship (OPR) scale to measure member perceptions of an art museum affiliated with a Southern university. The scale is a 15-item, multi-dimension tool developed by Bruning and Ledingham to measure a public's relationship with an organization (Ledingham, 2001). The three dimensions are personal relationship, community relationship, and professional relationship. The study found that member perceptions of the museum-public relationship differentiated members who voted to continue their membership from those who voted to discontinue their membership with the museum. Further, this study supports the relationship management theory of public relations as a viable framework for practicing museum public relations and quantifying museum public relations outcomes.

## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Museums in the United States

Museums, particularly art museums, challenge perceptions and ignite passions, but they can also preserve history, educate people of all ages, and culturally enrich a community. A museum depends on the generosity of private individuals or groups of people for its livelihood. It is imperative for museums to form relationships with these groups, or publics, to sustain. Without effective public relations, a museum is deprived of its cultural and artistic outlet (McLean, 1997). This study investigated museums' growing dependence on public relations, specifically the relationship management theory of public relations.

The United States alone has nearly 16,000 museums, hosting 865 million visitors per year. Art museums receive a little more than 61,000 visitors a year. Admission, museum store, and food sales generate nearly 30 percent of a museum's budget. For most museums, another 35 percent of operating income is private donations. Government funding adds an additional 25 percent with investment income contributing 10 percent (ABCs of museums, 2005). Museums must constantly grapple with the issue of funding, forcing them to seek new publics and new sources of income. According to Wireman (1997), "total federal government support for museums has been declining and competition for state funds is increasing" (p. 23). Museum public relations practitioners must ask themselves an important question: What public relations theories and practices are being utilized to maximize a museum's effectiveness?

## 1.2 Museums and Economic Impact

The importance of museums in today's society is hard to overstate. Museums are community centers, dedicated to public education by providing people of all ages and future generations with knowledge of the nation's cultural and historical heritage (Museums working, 2005). From an economic viewpoint, museums are a \$4.4 billion industry in the United States. Combined, these institutions spend more money than some state governments. While the federal government directly supports the Smithsonian Institution and museums operated by the National Park Service and the Department of Defense, fewer funds go directly and indirectly to museums throughout the country. Smaller museums must fight one another for federal money (Wireman, 1997).

Museums also impact a community's economy. According to Breitkopf (2005), cities across the United States, such as Tampa, Seattle, Pittsburgh, and Denver, are finding that museums are an integral part of "responsible and successful urban renewal" (p. 37). Museums are economic catalysts bringing increased funding, money, resources and visitors to a city (Breitkopf, 2005). While companies consider several factors when relocating, quality of life issues often top this list of deciding factors. According to a recent survey of high technology labor, cultural resources, like museums, are an important consideration, in addition to excellent schools and tax incentives, when considering quality of life in a community (Museums working, 2005).

Civic leaders are also taking notice of a community's cultural and artistic assets. When assessing successful new economy regions, these leaders realize that these assets are essential to quality of life, which, in turn, is imperative to continued growth in the new economy (Museums working, 2005). Denver, Colorado Mayor John Hickenlooper

cites quality of life as his city's main objective. Denver's mayor also states, "Our cultural strength is the foundation of our economic future" (as quoted in Breitkopf, 2005, p. 37). Mayor Pam Iorio, of Tampa, Florida, joins Hickenlooper in her belief that museums are central to stimulating a downtown's economic revitalization and drawing a "creative class" of skilled workers (Breitkopf, 2005).

### 1.3 Museums and Downtown Economic Growth

In several cities, art museums set in motion the downtown development. Wendy Ceccherelli, director of the Seattle Arts commission from 1992 to 2000, credits the Seattle Art Museum with creating "synergy between . . . cultural institutions downtown" and providing stability for the area (as quoted in Breitkopf, 2005, p. 38). Another downtown renaissance occurred in Davenport, Iowa, a community of just under 100,000. The city invested \$113.5 million to revitalize museums and other cultural institutions, sparking new residential developments, office space, and a new baseball park for the minor league team. Dan Huber, an economic developer, stated, "Cultivating the arts and culture is helping us reestablish [Davenport's] downtown as a strong central business district" (as quoted in Breitkopf, 2005, p. 39).

The subject for this study is a museum of arts affiliated with a Southern university. For confidentiality reasons, this museum is called "the subject museum" and the city where this museum is located is called "City A." City A is currently redeveloping its downtown area, attracting new businesses, and aiming to retain its skilled workforce. A legislative-designated agency is charged with setting policies to stimulate and enhance downtown City A for the benefit of the entire community. According to the U.S. Census Bureau's 2000 census, City A's population is just more

than 227,000. Downtown City A accommodates 22,000 businesspeople, 100,000 daily commuters, and nearly 2,000 residents.

In an unprecedented collaboration, the public and private sectors of City A joined forces to create a new arts complex. This structure covers an entire city block, offering art exhibitions, lectures, art classes, theatre productions, and public events (Subject museum, 2004).

#### 1.4 The Subject Museum

The largest single component of this center is the subject art museum (Subject museum, 2004). The museum's permanent collection includes American, Asian, contemporary, decorative, European, and pre-Columbian art. At the time of this study, the subject art museum was open for four months in its new location. The museum had no membership prior to 2004.

The subject art museum has evolved over several decades. It first opened to the public in the 1960s on the university campus. As its permanent collection expanded, the museum quickly outgrew its home. The university began to seriously consider building a new, full-service museum that could educate, serve, and entertain visitors from not only the university community, but the surrounding region, and changed the museum's name to embody a new mission of enhanced educational, cultural, and community involvement.

Through partnerships with the not-for-profit agencies, the city, and the state, the vision for the museum of art was realized with the building of the new arts complex in downtown City A. Inside the new facility, the subject museum plans to increase its collection quality and accessibility, providing unlimited opportunities for study, research, and community involvement (Subject museum, 2004).

In addition to the museum, the arts complex includes a theatre, musical and dance rehearsal spaces, outdoor terraces, classrooms, restaurants, common areas, and a museum store (Subject museum, 2004).

With its move to a new facility, the museum faced many new challenges. The museum's previous campus location starkly contrasts with its new location. Several museums and tourist attractions now surround the subject museum. These museums compete with the subject museum for funding, membership, patronage, and other forms of financial funding and commercial success. An important issue facing the subject museum is funding. The museum changed from free admissions to partially self-generating revenues by charging admission. The museum has educational programs for children and adults, traveling exhibitions, memberships, and many other community and family programs that require planning, resources, and personnel. In a short time, the museum has exponentially increased its offerings and its responsibilities.

### 1.5 Museums and the Need for Public Relations

According to Karp, Kremer, and Lavine (1992), "museums are products of their social context (p. 158). As such, museums must be responsive to their social environments if they are to serve society in the future. The world is moving toward an information society, characterized by ever-changing social needs and goals. Speedy developments in information, communication, and media technologies affect all aspects of people's lives, including professional, domestic, educational, and recreational (Karp, et al., 1992). Museum public relations must constantly adapt to these changing societal needs.

Karp, Kreamer, and Lavine (1992) identify museums' main purpose; "All museums are, at the most fundamental level, concerned with information: its generation, its perpetuation, its organization, and its dissemination" (p. 160). According to Ledingham (2003), public relations researchers are noticing a shift from communication-based theory to relationship-based theory. The primary issue this thesis addresses is: How can museums utilize public relations practices to disseminate information to and build relationships with relevant publics? The importance of relationships between museums and their publics is an important question. Since museums depend on key publics for patronage, they must form mutually beneficial relationships with these publics and maintain the relationships over time. This study centers on research that examines a number of issues relating to the concept of museum public relations. These issues include past and current public relations practices in museums and relationship models of public relations for organizations.

The researcher will examine the public relations practices of the subject museum to address these issues. The subject museum has a collection of more than 3,500 works of fine and decorative art. Previously housed in a small facility on campus, the museum reopened in its vastly larger facility in downtown City A in March 2005. The newly expanded museum is a vital part of City A's efforts to improve the cultural and economic value of the city (Subject museum, 2004). Additionally, the researcher has unique access to resources at the subject museum. As a former employee of the museum, the researcher has intimate knowledge of the museum's public relations practices and membership.

This study will address public relations in museums, a subject largely unstudied. The researcher will also study relationship management theory in a new context:

museums. This unique point of view will further test this theory as a practical framework for public relations theorists and practitioners. Focusing on the actual relationships of the subject museum, this research links theory to practice. The timing of this study is especially significant since the subject museum recently moved to an upscale facility in a developing downtown area (Subject museum, 2004). With expansion comes more financial responsibility. Also, the subject museum faces the task of jump-starting downtown City A's economic development. Effective public relations is imperative to the success of both challenges. This study is a benchmark for the subject art museum. With this baseline study, the museum can measure its public relations progress in the future.

## CHAPTER 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

To understand public relations in the museum context, one must first grasp several concepts: the history and evolution of public relations as discipline; the nonprofit sector's emerging prominence in the U.S.; and the nature of museums, including their economic and financial challenges.

### 2.1 Public Relations History

Evidence of public relations practices in the United States can be traced to the late 1800s when executives in the railroad industry attempted to unite the public and the private entities as a means to garner governmental support for their businesses. Other industries, such as electric utilities and telephone, followed suit in the 20<sup>th</sup> century with public relations campaigns that helped establish approval for monopolies in each industry under the auspice of “public interest” (Lieber, 2005). Cutlip, Center, and Broom (2000) point out that the genesis of public relations actually dates to ancient civilizations. Iraqi farmers in 1800 B.C. used bulletins to let each other know how to best sow crops, create irrigation systems, and deal with mice. Kings of ancient India employed spies to determine public opinion, publicly support the king, and spread positive rumors about the government (Cutlip, et al., 2000).

However, the birth of modern public relations is often credited to Ivy Lee. Lee fashioned an analytical approach to public relations communication. His campaigns pulled from psychological and scientific concepts, helping legitimize public relations practitioners. By combining economic and ethical theory with scientific methods, Lee forever changed the perception of the public relations practitioner from press agent to strategic public relations communicator. In 1906, he issued a “Declaration of Principles”

which served as Lee's philosophy of public relations. According to Lee, the public was to be informed, not ignored by business or fooled by press agents (Cutlip, et al., 2000).

Following Lee, another prominent figure in the history of public relations, Edward Bernays, helped define the discipline. Bernays argued that society would succumb to chaos unless public relations practitioners "manipulated" public opinion or "engineered" public consent. By "manipulation," Bernays meant that practitioners must organize thought into logical patterns in a positive manner. Bernays taught the first course in public relations at New York University in 1923 (Cutlip, et al., 2000). In the following three decades, his perspective of public relations emerged as the model for public relations in society (Lieber, 2005).

Since its modern inception nearly 100 years ago, public relations has evolved from several diverse definitions. Early attempts to explicate the purpose of public relations focused on its core functions of press agency and publicity. As modern public relations changed, definitions of public relations began to include many concepts including strategic management, evaluation and measurement of results, and long-term commitment. Lengthy definitions emerged, focusing on what public relations does, rather than what public relations is (Overview and, 2005).

The Public Relations Society of America addressed this issue in 1988, developing and formally adopting a definition for public relations which is widely used today. PRSA's definition is as follows: "Public relations helps an organization and its publics adapt mutually to each other" (Overview and, 2005). According to PRSA, this definition implies "the essential functions of research, planning, communications dialogue, and evaluation" (Overview and, 2005). The word "organization" is not as limiting as

“business” or “company.” Similarly, the word “publics” in this definition indicates that organizations have many publics from which they aim to earn support (Overview and, 2005).

## 2.2 Public Relations Theory

In their comprehensive textbook, Cutlip, Center, and Broom (2000) explain that “public relations deals with the relationships that organizations build and maintain with publics” (p. 220). Theoretical models of public relations help understand and organize these relationships which are subject to ever-changing political, social, economic, and technological changes in society. Cutlip et al. (2000) view public relations through a systems perspective. In 1952, researchers borrowed the concept of ecology from the field of life sciences to explain to public relations students and practitioners that public relations is concerned with the interdependence of organizations and others in their environments. According to Cutlip et al. (2000), “a system is a set of interacting units that endures through time within an established boundary by responding and adjusting to change pressures from the environment to achieve and maintain goal states” (p. 229). Systems theory applies to public relations because “mutually dependent relationships are established and maintained between organizations and their publics” (Cutlip, et al., 2000, p. 228). Spicer (1997) also explains public relations in the context of systems theory; “Public relations is an organizational function that helps a set of interdependent organizational units work together to adapt to a changing environment” (p.57). Systems theory is important because it shifted focus from internal organizational workings to a focus on the interdependence of an organization and its environment. Also, this theory

serves as a valuable heuristic tool to better conceptualize organizational public relations and interdependencies (Spicer, 1997).

Grunig and Grunig (1989) identified four theoretical models for public relations: press agency, public information, two-way asymmetrical, and two-way symmetrical. The first two models utilize the one-way model of communication. Press agency, or the publicity model, utilizes communication for propaganda that attempts to draw media attention. The public information model resembles the idea of a “journalist-in-residence” who is in charge of disseminating information to specific publics. The latter models depend on two-way communication between the organization and its environment. Communication in the asymmetrical model focuses on advocacy, persuasion, and presenting an organization’s claims. In contrast, the symmetrical model puts the people and their ideas above the organization, incorporating diverse views and encouraging innovation and community building (Spicer, 1997).

The closed system, or functionary model, views the public relations practitioner as technician. The practitioner is limited to monitoring the environment. In the open systems, or functional model, public relations practitioners become part of top management, or the “dominant coalition” (Cutlip, et al., 2000). This type of system uses “two-way symmetric” practices. Communication flows two ways, exchanging information from both sides of the organization-public relationship. Both closed and open systems emphasize the important role communication plays in social systems (Cutlip, et al., 2000). While different models apply to varying situations, problems, and environments, Grunig and Grunig (1989) found that proper training and experiences lead public relations practitioners to use the two-way symmetrical model which focuses on

communication techniques to further mutual understanding and benefits between an organization and its public.

Contrary to its early focus on communication, public relations is increasingly viewed as a strategic management function. In a study of more than 300 organizations, Grunig and Grunig (2000) found that public relations is an essential strategic management function, as it identifies an organization's strategic publics and develops communication techniques to build relationships with those publics. In recent years, public relations theory has been shifting from communication-based theory to relationship-based theory. Researchers are beginning to recognize relationships, rather than communication, as the central role of public relations. Communication with key publics is merely one tool of the public relations practitioner.

An emerging paradigm centers on relationship management as a public relations theory (Ledingham, 2003a). Replicating a 1984 study conducted by Ferguson, researchers analyzed 748 abstracts from public relations journals to investigate theory building by public relations scholars. While no dominant paradigm emerged, theory about public relationships accounted for nearly 10 percent of the theory class of articles, the second largest share (Sallot, Lyon, Acosta-Alzuru, & Jones, 2003). Sallot et al. (2003) identified James E. Grunig, Robert L. Heath, Larissa Schneider Grunig, W. Timothy Coombs, and John A. Ledingham as the most "prolific" scholars who contributed to theory development in public relations. Of these authors, Grunig and Grunig, Coombs, and Ledingham have written on the concept of relationship management in public relations.

Broom, Casey, and Ritchey (1997) noted the importance of defining relationships in public relations before building an organization-public relationship theory. According to Ehling (1992), the shift from changing publics' beliefs to building and maintaining relationships "indicates an important change in the conceptualization of the primary mission of public relations." Yet, without a definition for relationship, "researchers cannot derive valid and reliable measures useful for positing and testing public relations theory," and "practitioners cannot describe and compare organization-public relationships with any validity or reliability" (Broom, Casey, & Ritchey, 1997, p. 86). Ledingham and Bruning (1998) responded by defining a relationship as "the state which exists between an organization and its key publics, in which the actions of either can impact the economic, social, cultural or political well being of the other" (p. 62).

### 2.3 Relationship Management Theory of Public Relations

According to Cutlip et al. (2000), their public relations textbook "is about building and maintaining relationships" (p.1). Due to the increasing interdependence of individuals and groups, "establishing and maintaining relationships in all levels of social systems have become important areas of scholarly study and professional practice" (Cutlip, et al., 2000, p. 1).

The emergence of the relational perspective can be traced from four major developments in public relations, including: "1) recognition of the central role of relationships in public relations, 2) reconceptualizing public relations as a management function, 3) identification of components and types of organization-public relationships, their linkage to public attitudes, perceptions, knowledge, and behavior, and relationship measurement strategies, and 4) construction of organization-public relationship models

that accommodate relationship antecedents, process, and consequences” (Ledingham, 2003a, p. 182-3).

The most significant contribution of this article is its development of a new framework for public relations. Ledingham’s (2003a) theory of relationship management is as follows:

Effectively managing organizational-public relationships around common interests and shared goals, over time, results in mutual understanding and benefit for interacting organizations and publics (p. 190).

In this theory, public relations is defined by Ledingham (power point presentation, 2005) as “the ethical and effective management of organization-public relationships, focused over time on common interests and shared goals to support mutual benefit” (p. 7).

While public relations literature has traditionally focused on the use of communication to influence and manipulate key publics, a major shift is occurring in this discipline. Researchers are acknowledging relationships as the appropriate framework for public relations theory. According to Ledingham (2003a), “the building and sustaining of organization-public relationships requires not only communication, but organizational and public behaviors, a concept central to the relationship management perspective” (p. 194). More importantly, Ledingham (2003a) holds that communication is a strategic tool within the relational perspective; thus, communication practices such as making press releases, speeches, and reports help build and maintain organization-public relationships. This new theory of public relations has important implications for future researchers as well as practitioners. Researchers, teachers, and practitioners must learn to

manage relationships using both communication and behavioral tools to study, teach, and practice public relations.

Ledingham (2003a) summarizes the literature on the relational perspective of public relations, constructing a general, relationship theory. The major premise of relationship management holds that “public relations balances the interests of organizations and publics through the management of organization-public relationships” (Ledingham, 2003a, p.181).

Loyalty, satisfaction, and expectations are all central to the organization-public relationship. First, an organization must be involved with and supportive of its key publics. These actions encourage loyalty toward the organization from the community in which it operates. Research also shows that relationship scores are useful in predicting customer satisfaction; thus, the organization-public relationship should be considered when an organization develops customer satisfaction plans. Finally, an organization’s ability or failure to meet a public’s expectations often determines whether or not the relationship is sustained. Coombs (2000) argued that relationship damage “tends to be a result of either (1) incongruence between the public and private definitions of a relationship, or (2) the people involved in the relationship have different expectations of each other” (p.2).

Another important advance in relationship management theory was the development of relationship measurement strategies. According to Ledingham (2003a), “organization-public relationships mimic the ten phases of the coming together and the coming apart of interpersonal relationships” (p. 10). After identifying 17 dimensions important to interpersonal, marketing, and other types of relationships, Ledingham and

Bruning (1998) operationalized five dimensions including trust, openness, involvement, investment, and commitment. For this typology, these dimensions are operationalized as follows: 1) trust: “an organization doing what it says it will do,” 2) openness: “sharing the organization’s plans for the future with public members,” 3) involvement: “the organization being involved in the welfare of the community,” 4) investment: “the organization investing in the welfare of the community,” 5) commitment: “the organization being committed to the welfare of the community” (p. 62). Upon examining the connection between these dimensions and public perceptions, attitudes, and choice behavior, the researchers found that a public’s awareness of a specific organization’s community support is linked with a positive predisposition toward that organization (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998). The authors created a scale that consists of three dimensions: personal relationship, community relationship, and professional relationship. The scale consists of fifteen items that revolve around the public relations issues of “reciprocity, mutual legitimacy, and mutual understanding” (Bruning & Galloway, 2002, p. 310).

Kim (2001) developed a reliable, four-dimension scale with sixteen items to measure the organization-public relationship. The dimensions include trust, commitment, local or community involvement, and reputation. The researcher tested the scale in two studies by embedding the scale in two different surveys, the first given to community residents and second to members of an on-line company. The four-dimension scale was verified in both studies. Kim (2001) explains the importance for a valid and reliable public relations scale; “By using a unified instrument for measuring the relationship,

public relations practitioners and scholars can accumulate consistent data for measuring the bottom line impact of public relations”(p. 810)

Literature concerning public relations as relationship management pulls concepts from various disciplines, including mass media, interpersonal communication, interorganizational behavior, social psychology, marketing, and management. Thus, several models of organization-public relationships (OPRs) exist. An early model of relationship management, advanced by Broom, Casey, and Ritchey (1997), encompassed antecedents, properties, and consequences of OPRs . Drawing from systems theory and interorganizational relationship theory, the researchers posited that relationships “represent the exchange or transfer of information, energy or resources” (Broom, et al., 1997, p. 94). In this model, antecedents are perceptions, motives, needs, behaviors, and environmental pressures that cause relationships to form. Relationship properties were exchanges, transactions, communications, and other “interconnected” activities. Consequences of OPRs were “outputs that have the effects of changing the environment and of achieving, maintaining or changing goal states both inside and outside the organization” (Broom, et al., 1997). Consequences included goal achievement, dependency, or routine and institutionalized behavior.

In 2000, scholars offered another model, consisting of three parts: situational antecedents, maintenance strategies, and relationship outcomes. Grunig and Huang (2000) reconceptualized the above model, changing “relationship concepts” to “maintenance strategies.” Each step has concept measures: “environmental scanning” for antecedents; continuous “observations by management and publics” for relationship

states; and “coorientational measurement” for consequences (Grunig and Huang, 2000, p. 94).

Toth (2000) argued for a different model. Her model offers an interpersonal view of public relations and describes two approaches. The personal influence approach uses interpersonal communication to “dominate individuals,” to adopt either the organization’s or the public’s viewpoint. This model is closed with static attributes. The second approach, a personal influence approach, uses interpersonal communication to uncover “mutuality of understanding,” focusing on “agreement” and “consensus.” This model is open with dynamic attributes. According to Toth (2000), the ultimate goal of interpersonal communication is building and maintaining relationships. In this model, mutuality of understanding, credibility, trust, emotion, immediacy, intimacy and similarity, and dominance-submission are measured along an individual continuum.

Ledingham (2003b) developed the most recent model of relationship management: SMARTS PR. SMARTS is an acronym for Scan, Map, Act, Rollout, Track, and Steward. This model offers a process for managing OPRs with specific steps (scan – analysis, map – plan, act – produce, rollout – implement, track – evaluate, and steward – adjust).

#### 2.4 Nonprofit Organizations and Public Relations

While little research specifically addresses museums and public relations, there is a limited body of literature about nonprofit organizations. Sukel (1978) pointed out the discrepancy between for-profit and nonprofit literature; “In comparison to the profit sector, the study of non-profit organizations has been chronically neglected. Empirical and theoretical work in management and organization theory seems to tip in favor of the

profit sector, a surprising neglect because the non-profit sector is growing about twice the rate of national income growth” (p. 348). According to Cutlip et al. (2000), the nonprofit sector, or the third sector, in the U. S. reports expenditures of more than \$350 billion and employs approximately 7.1 million people. The social and administrative sciences have devoted little attention to artistic and cultural organizations in particular (Sukel, 1978).

Several characteristics help define the third sector. Nonprofit organizations are 1) organized, or have indicators of permanence like charters, meetings, and rules; 2) private, or not controlled by government; 3) nonprofit distributing, or do not attempt to generate profits for the owners or directors; 4) self-governing, or independent of external controls; and 5) voluntary, or composed of some charitable contribution.

The nonprofit sector includes foundations, health care, social welfare, education, museums, churches, and many other types of organizations. While these different fields use varying public relations tactics, “promoting public service and building public trust are common to all” (Cutlip, et al., 2000, p. 525). All of these organizations depend upon public support in varying forms, like fund raising and volunteered time, and all nonprofits must deal with social, political, and economic trends.

According to Cutlip et al. (2000), nonprofit public relations has experienced important changes in the past two decades. The first change is the emergence of marketing concepts and management by objectives in communication strategies. Technology has also impacted communications selectivity and reach. Paid advertising is a popular communications tactic for disseminating controlled messages of nonprofit organizations. This sector has also experienced pressure from boards of directors to enlist professional public relations assistance to raise standards. Finally, the researchers

note a trend toward building coalitions in communities to ensure essential publics are being heard. These special circumstances and changes demand different public relations skills and theories.

Libraries, museums, and art groups are nonprofit organizations that greatly contribute to the “quality of American life” (Cutlip, et al., 2000, p. 550). These entities directly compete with one another for funding, volunteers, and donations. The authors point to the recession in the early 1990s as the time when people began to question the relevance of arts and cultural organizations. Due to lagging support from foundations and the government for museums and other cultural institutions, the nonprofit sector depends on public relations more than any other sector in the U.S. Cutlip et al. (2000) explained, “more effective two-way communication” with all relevant publics “will be required in order to build and maintain the relationships needed to achieve public-interest goals” in the nonprofit sector (p. 536). In his study of the artistic-cultural organization, Sukel (1978) called for the development of performance assessment measures and quantifying measures. Thus, the need for public relations in this type of organization is clear.

## 2.5 Issues in Museum Research

Museum literature varies from exhibition planning to visitor demographics. A body of research focuses on museum funding. Cutlip et al. (2000) explained that nonprofit organizations derive financing from three major sources: 1) private charitable giving in the form of monetary gifts from individuals, corporations, and foundations; 2) government support or payments in the form of grants and contracts for services; and 3) private fees and payments in form of proceeds from the sale of services or products to

the consumer (p. 528). Museums depend on similar outside sources for money. Federal and state money provides approximately 14 percent of total museum budgets in the U.S. Despite funding through programs in several agencies like the Departments of Education and Transportation, the National Endowments for the Arts and Humanities, and The Institute of Museum and Library Services, federal support for museums is declining, directly increasing the competition among museums for state funds (Wireman, 1997). The American Association of Museums reported in April 2005 that the upcoming fiscal year would be challenging for federal funding programs that contribute to museums. According to an AAM Aviso, the 2006 appropriations cycle will be complicated due to the growing deficit, permanent tax cuts, and reorganization of the House and Senate appropriations subcommittees (Tough times, 2005).

Museums look to foundations and corporations for more funds. Businesses within or outside the community may financially contribute to an exhibition. Museums with endowments increased 20 percent from 1989 to 1996 with a median value growing from \$125,000 to \$750,000 in the same time frame (Wireman, 1997).

Trustees or museum members who live outside of the community constitute another source of income. Some museums have patrons that contribute annually to a museum. For example, the Madeline Island Historical Museum in Wisconsin enjoys a “patron network” comprised of friends and family of museum founders who feel ownership in the museum and subsequently contribute money each year (Wireman, 1997).

Finally, museums receive money from visitors outside the area and sales from museum products and stores. Admissions, memberships, gift shops, restaurants, and parking generate income for museums.

In the 1970s, the issue of developing museum performance indicators to help manage and make grants to museums emerged in the U.S. With ever-dwindling resources, museums needed to define the positive changes they made to communities. Sukel (1978) found that the economic model of for-profit organizations does not work for nonprofit cultural organizations. He explained that “spiraling costs, lack of financial support, imposition of attendance fees and discrimination against the poor confront the executives of artistic-cultural organizations with most agonizing decisions which simultaneously have economic, financial, moral, and philosophical trade-off dimensions” (Sukel, 1978, p. 351).

The movement to develop museum performance indicators made a major step in 1993 with a conference held in Wintergreen, Virginia. The Institute, “Measures of Success: Accountability Systems for Museums,” was a three-day program partly supported by a federal grant agency, the Institute for Museum Services. The Institute noted the funding sources consistently require a “higher level of quantitative information to supplement the typically qualitative evaluation” of resource allocation (Weil, 1995, p. 21). Participants in the Institute concluded that the stress of shrinking resources from customary funding sources necessitated finding measures to efficiently allocate remaining resources as well as to assure outside funding sources that the resources were being directed to accomplish the appropriate programs. While the participants

championed performance indicators, they also warned against museum employees sacrificing the museum's mission to accomplish good quantitative scores (Weil, 1995).

## 2.6 Museums and Economic Development

Wireman (1997) explains that while museums have always contributed to economic development, only in recent years have economic developers and museums devoted more attention to forming partnerships. She defines economic development as the creation of jobs, higher incomes for a community or an individual, and a growth in the taxable base.

Several trends in society explain the impact museums have on economic development. In the United States, the economy shifted from being manufacturing to information-based. Today, most jobs deal with marketing and designing products, not making them. Jobs no longer center around physical resources like oil or coal mining, and technological advances like the Internet enable many smaller businesses to emerge. A museum enhances the attractiveness of these rural areas and can attract new jobs.

Another trend points to the shift toward service jobs. More than 75 percent of Americans work in the service industry. Service jobs include everything from lawyers to hotel managers and receptionists. Museums attract tourism to an area and provide full-time and volunteer jobs that train the workforce with valuable skills for other jobs in the service industry such as public relations practitioners, retail managers, and other non-profit agencies.

The American population also demonstrates an important trend – demographic shifts. Overall, the population is older. The first of the baby-boomer generation will be 60 in 2006. More women with children work outside the home, providing more

households with dual income, but less leisure time. The population is also more culturally diverse. Museums and economic developers must understand that older people are looking for places to retire. With higher household income, Americans are able to afford second homes. People with less leisure time are looking for quick getaways, and minorities are also swelling the tourism market.

Museums directly contribute to economic growth. Within the U.S., museums represent a \$4.4 billion industry. Museums spend money, supporting local communities by paying employees or buying supplies locally. This industry also provides many jobs, including directors, management staffs, curators, educational directors, security, maintenance, shop managers and clerks, exhibit designers and installation teams, membership directors, marketing staffs, fundraisers, and volunteers. Local businesses supported by museums include construction companies for expansions, renovations, or exhibition construction, painters, office suppliers, caterers, furniture, carpentry, and many other service providers.

Another important contribution to economic growth is a museum's ability to enhance the quality of life in a community. According to Wireman (1997), museums establish an "ambiance for a town through exhibits, special events, and outreach to schools and other organizations" (p. 26). Museums can highlight a community's heritage, validating local residents' contributions to the community, or making an area more attractive for new businesses or retiring people, ensuring people that they are not moving to a "cultural wasteland" (Wireman, 1997, p. 27).

Economic developers know that museums attract tourists. San Antonio's exhibition: "Mexico: Splendors of Thirty Centuries" attracted 265,000 people, 131,000 of

which were visitors outside the city. The \$2.5 million exhibition brought \$80 million to the community. Retail stores accumulated \$15 million, restaurants \$27 million, hotels \$40 million, state government through sales taxes of hotels \$5 million, and the city government \$2.8 million. While smaller museums and collections may not attract such audiences, the impact of museums is clear.

Museums attract tourists in many ways. In addition to enhancing the cultural quality of a city, museums can join resources with nearby museums in other towns to create an attractive regional package. By sponsoring special events, museums create destination sites for a day, weekend, or longer period of time. Also, museums can increase the amount of time a tourist stays in a community. As tourists stay longer at museums attractions, they often visit local restaurants and other retail or tourist attractions (Wireman, 1997).

## 2.7 Museum Public Relations

With increasing economic importance and shrinking sources of income, public relations has grown in importance for museums. A museum must understand its publics to attract visitors, satisfy various publics, enhance its programs, and thrive as a museum (Adams, 1983). According to Adams (1983), museum public relations includes listening to, communicating with, and responding to key publics.

While little scholarly research exists on public relations as it specifically relates to museums, Adams (1983) presents a framework for museum public relations. A museum's public relations officer must establish meaningful relationships, coalescing the museum's programs and goals with the needs and interests of its diverse publics. Most importantly, the public relations practitioner forms community relationships for the

museum, continuously watching issues as they arise in these communities so the museum can contribute to the development of solutions (Adams, 1983).

According to Adams (1983), a successful public relations plan for a museum depends on six fundamental requirements. The first objective is to understand a museum's programs, collections, and publics in order to effectively communicate. Second, one must continuously measure and evaluate the publics' opinions of the museum, adjusting the museum's message as necessary. Next, the public relations program requires a policy-making procedure taking public reactions and the museum's needs into account. The procedure must balance these interests within a framework of the museum's mission, vision, and goals. Fourth, the plan must define needs, set goals, and indicate methods for performance evaluation. The fifth element is a purposeful communications plan utilizing appropriate media to reach target publics. Finally, the public relations plan includes a long-term vision enabling the museum to anticipate opportunities and obstacles to handle each outcome properly (Adams, 1983).

A first step in communicating with a museum's public is identifying and accumulating knowledge about its members. Adams (1983) suggests conducting a publics audit to define internal and external museum groups, analyze their importance to the museum, and identify existing or potential problems with each of these groups. Publics include, but are not limited to employees, trustees, volunteers, members, community residents, donors, government officials, opinion leaders, regulatory bodies, and professional peers (Adams, 1983). According to Ambrose and Paine (1993), a successful museum aims to provide services that meet its users' needs. Also, a good

museum researches its market to understand who these users are and to identify their specific needs.

Museums should always employ methods to measure a public relations plan's effectiveness (Loomis, 1987). Evaluation of various publics' impressions and opinions of the museum should produce positive and negative responses. Once positive responses are known, those museum actions may be reinforced. Likewise, negative opinions may be identified and promptly corrected. A survey is a specific tool often used to gauge public perceptions of museums. Loomis states that this tool may also "help museum staff members determine who is likely to be a part of the museum audience and identify specific public perceptions of the museum that may be changed through public relations programs" (p. 117).

In his book about museum public relations, Adams (1983) states that successful public relations entails "a relationship with, rather than simply to, the public" (p. 1). Discussing museums and marketing, McLean (1997) agrees that "the lowest common denominator is about building a relationship between the museum and the public" (p. 1-2). This relationship is built on the open exchange of information and ideas (Adams, 1983). Recent literature on museums discusses a 'new museology' where society, often broken into specific publics, is central to the interpretation of museums (McLean, 1997). As museum professionals reconsider disciplinary principles and exhibition methods, key publics are "becoming more involved in the choice and interpretation of exhibit topics" (Karp, Kremer, & Lavine, 1992, p. 182).

Evidenced by Adams (1983) and Loomis (1987), museums have long been interested in building relationships with publics. Today, the public relations aspect is a

necessity. According to McLean (1997), “the most significant threats to museums come from central and local government” (p. 221). Museums are becoming more dependent on wealthy benefactors and public subsidy to generate income since the current political climate lacks long-term vision and policy cohesion. In this time of “financial stringency,” governments also take a lead role in encouraging museums to market themselves (McLean, 1997, p. 37). In order to receive government money, a museum must prove its quality of service by developing performance indicators (McLean, 1997). A survey would be an example of an appropriate indicator. With limited government grants, museums are at the mercy of their publics.

From this literature, the following research questions and hypotheses emerge:

RQ1: Is relationship management theory applicable in the museum context?

RQ2: Is the organization-public relationship scale reliable?

To test this theory’s relevance in the museum context, the researcher looked at Ledingham’s (2003a) axioms for relationship management. The first hypothesis addresses relationship management principles in the specific context of museums.

H1: The tenets of relationship management theory hold in the museum context.

- a) Tenet1: Organization-public relationships have antecedents and consequences and can be analyzed in terms of relationship quality, maintenance strategies, relationship type, and actors in the relationship.
- b) Tenet 2: The continuation of organization-public relationships is dependent on the degree to which expectations are met.

To address the second research question, the researcher measured museum members’ perceptions and expectations of the subject museum. In several studies of

relationship management, Ledingham and Bruning (1998) found that a public's perception toward an organization was linked to their future behavior. If reliable, Ledingham's organization-public relationship scale should distinguish between members of the museum who wish to remain with or leave the museum.

H2: Respondent perceptions of the organization-public relationship will differentiate members who say they will continue their memberships with the museum from members who say they will discontinue their memberships.

### CHAPTER 3. METHOD

The methodology consists of a survey, following suggested design criteria. According to Fowler (1993), the three components of a survey include sampling, question design, and total survey design. A survey is administered to a specific population. The researcher has the option to conduct a census, or to collect “information about every individual in a population” (Fowler, 1993, p. 4). Another option is to sample, or choose a subset of a population that is representative of the entire population. When sampling, a researcher must devise a method whereby each individual has an equal opportunity of being included in the survey and use probability methods for choosing the sample (Fowler, 1993). This study utilizes the census method. The museum’s membership was obtained from the development’s office database. The researcher chose July 1, 2005 as the cutoff date for membership. As of July 1, 2005, the total number of members was 673, and for record keeping purposes, this is the sample for this study. New memberships to the museum after this date were not surveyed or included in this study. Accessibility to this list and the manageability of mailing 673 questionnaires encouraged the researcher to conduct a census rather than a sample.

Question design is the next component of surveys. Fowler (1993) states that designing questions for surveys is designing a measure, not a conversational inquiry. Researchers write standardized questions to measure subjective phenomena to avoid too much variance in answers (Fowler, 1993). Wimmer and Dominick (2003) present general guidelines for constructing survey questions. The researcher should use short, clear questions while keeping the purpose of the study in mind. Also, researchers must avoid double-barreled, highly detailed, embarrassing, or leading questions (Wimmer &

Dominick, 2003). Questions can be classified as one of two types: closed or open. Closed questions include a list of acceptable answers from which the respondent must choose. When using open questions, the researcher does not provide a list of acceptable answers (Fowler, 1993). In his study of organization-public relationships, Ledingham used short, closed-ended questions. This study uses the same questions as Ledingham, modified only to refer to the study's specific organization—the museum.

Another component is total survey design. Survey design includes mode of data collection, type of population, response rates, costs, and length of data collection. The mode refers to the type of survey, such as mail, telephone, or email. Type of population addresses the issue of whether the researcher's respondents are likely to understand, participate, and complete the survey. For example, a population with poor reading and writing skills might be less likely to correctly complete and return a written survey. Since the demographics for most museum goers indicate that these people are usually older and well educated, the researcher did not anticipate this problem (McLean, 1997).

Nonresponse is an important issue for mail surveys. The museum's membership includes people living in other cities and in other states. In addition, people are bombarded daily with marketing and advertising materials disguised as personal mail. The researcher utilized several methods, including multiple mailings, to reach these respondents.

Another issue, cost, varies from survey to survey. While mail surveys may at first appear cheaper than telephone surveys, postage and printing for surveys and follow-up surveys cannot be overlooked. According to Fowler (1993), "mail surveys usually take two months to complete," while "telephone surveys...can be done more quickly than

mail or personal interview surveys of comparable size” (p. 62). Ledingham (2001) used a telephone survey in his study. A staff helped him phone his participants to obtain data. The researcher does not have a staff to place phone calls. Phoning even a sample of the 673 museum members is beyond the researcher’s ability. While possibly more expensive, the mail survey is more feasible.

The population for this study is the subject museum’s membership. This group consists of 673 members. Members vary in level, ranging from the lowest level, Student members, to the highest, Endowment Society members. The other membership types and costs fall between these two levels. The researcher obtained a list of the museum’s members and addresses from its membership database. The list includes the member’s name, address, and membership level. The list obtained for this study consists of only active members, or members who have paid their museum membership in full. This population was chosen to identify public perceptions of and attitudes toward the museum. The sampling method is a census, providing the researcher with a comprehensive and exhaustive view of participants’ attitudes.

To ensure confidentiality, each member was assigned a number. This number appeared as the room number on the questionnaire’s return envelope. Once the questionnaire was returned, the researcher found the corresponding name by number and deleted the name off the master list so that participant would not receive unnecessary subsequent mailings. After checking the list, the envelope was thrown away and the researcher only kept the paper with the filled-out questions, keeping its author’s identity confidential and untraceable.

This study utilized Bruning and Ledingham's (1999) organization-public relationship scale. According to Bruning and Ledingham (1999), this instrument "can be used to measure the influence that perceptions of the organization-public relationship have on consumer attitudes, predispositions, and behavior, as well as an opportunity to track changes in organization-public relationship perceptions over time" (p. 157). The OPR scale was embedded in a survey. Following Ledingham's (2001) government-community study, the questionnaire listed five statements for each type of relationship under study: personal, community, and professional.

The researcher only changed the organization's name to that of the subject museum. For confidentiality purposes, "Museum Name" represents the subject museum in this study. The personal relationship consisted of the following statements: 1) I feel that I can trust the Museum Name to do what it says it will do, 2) The Museum Name seems to be the kind of organization that invests in its members, 3) I think that the Museum Name takes into account my convenience in all of our interactions, 4) The Museum Name demonstrates an interest in me as a person, and 5) The Museum Name understands me as a member.

The community relationship also consisted of three statements: 1) The Museum Name is open about its plans for the future, 2) I feel that the Museum Name supports events that are of interest to its members, 3) I think that the Museum Name strives to improve the communities of its members, 4) The Museum Name shares its plans for the future with its members, and 5) I think that the Museum Name actively plays a role in the lives of the communities it serves.

The professional relationship included the following statements: 1) The Museum Name is not involved in activities that promote the welfare of its members, 2) The Museum Name does not act in a socially responsible manner, 3) The Museum Name does not see my interests and the museum's interests as the same, 4) I think that the Museum Name is not honest in its dealings with members, and 5) The Museum Name is not willing to devote resources to maintain its relationship with me.

Using a 7-point Likert-style scale, the participants marked their answers for the above questions by circling one number. This continuum allowed participants to rate the museum's performance over a range of services. The questions were clearly marked and close-ended to encourage participants' understanding and to increase completion rates (Fowler, 1993).

In the survey, members were asked their level of agreement with each of the relationship statements. The respondents were also asked their inclination to remain members of the subject museum if the costs and benefits of a comparable museum exist. This question measured Ledingham's (2003) concept of loyalty within the organization-public relationship. To keep the museum's identity confidential, "Museum Name" refers to the subject museum's name. For this study, the dichotomous question read: "I plan to continue my membership with the Museum Name next year," with a space to mark "yes" or "no" as a response.

Additionally, respondents answered a number of demographic questions including age, gender, education, and income. McLean (1997) holds that demographics are invaluable to museums as they are the primary way to segment the museum's publics. A museum may choose from several ways to segment its publics. Segmentation by life-

cycle uses the demographics of age and family composition while geographic segmentation looks at local residents, day-visitors, and tourists. Arguably becoming obsolete, social class is another segment, determined by occupation, income, and education.

Other demographics include marital status, home ownership, and zip code. In addition to McLean's (1997) recommended demographics, Ledingham (2005a) suggests using marital status and home ownership to better understand an organization's publics. Zip code determines a respondent's proximity to the museum. All of the above demographics correspond with demographics from Ledingham's (2001) study. By collecting the same demographics, the researcher will be able to collect relevant data and compare results with past studies. See Appendix A for a copy of the complete survey.

According to Dillman (1978), the best way to achieve a high response rate is to maximize the benefits and minimize the costs for recipients. He also lists three criteria to maximize survey response: 1) minimize the costs for responding, 2) maximize the rewards for doing so, and 3) establish trust that those rewards will be delivered (Dillman, 1978). In another study, Kanso (2000) analyzed research articles from major journals consisting of a 36-year period and found that key factors affecting mail survey response rates include follow-up postcards, monetary incentives, stamped return postage, and university sponsorship. The journals included *Public Opinion Quarterly*, *Journal of Marketing Research*, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *Journal of the Market Research Society*, *Journal of Advertising Research*, and *Journal of Marketing*. Follow up postcards remind respondents to answer the previously mailed questionnaire. This type of follow-up increased the response rates up to 36 percent. Monetary incentives increased response

rates from a 9.2 percent decrease to a 42.6 percent increase. According to Kanso (2000), business reply envelopes can be less personal for recipients, and this attitude reduces the response rate. For 40 of 48 comparisons, stamped return envelopes produced a higher response rate than business reply envelopes. Researchers also hypothesize that questionnaire participants may have received benefits from their universities and feel more inclined to respond to a university sponsored questionnaire. Kanso's (2000) study found that sponsorship increased response rates by 19.2 percent.

The survey for this study was included in a packet with a cover letter and a pre-addressed, pre-stamped return envelope that was mailed to each participant. The subject museum's letterhead was on the envelope and cover letter, providing legitimacy for the respondents. Dillman (1978) states that "identifying with a known organization that has legitimacy" helps establish trust between the researcher and the participants (p. 18). The researcher increased response rates by aligning himself with the museum, while the cover letter explained that the study was conducted by an independent party. The pre-addressed, stamped return envelope encouraged the return of completed surveys. The cover letter outlined the importance of this project, enlisted the members' help, and offered an incentive for completing the survey. Each recipient was offered a coupon for a free coozie featuring the subject museum's logo in appreciation for participating. This incentive is another method for increasing the response rate and maximizing rewards for the respondents (Dillman, 1978; Karso, 2000; Wimmer & Dominick, 2003).

The time period for this project was May 2005-September 2005. The researcher applied for IRB approval in May. Upon receiving approval, the researcher sought permission from the subject museum to use its membership as the sample for this thesis.

The researcher drafted a document stating the specific uses and guidelines for the museum logo, its membership list, and its name as reported in the study's findings. See Appendix B for the consent document. After receiving the museum's permission, the researcher compiled and mailed the survey packets.

The time period for the survey was July 7, 2005 through August 25, 2005, following Fowler's (1993) suggested duration for mail surveys. Museum attendance increases in the summer months as students are not in school, and working men and women take time off from work. The population will be more attentive to recreational correspondence in the summer (McLean, 1997). While research suggests a higher response in the summer, the subject museum is newly opened, and this is its first summer in operation. The programs, like the museum, are new, and lack of knowledge of the museum might lower response rates. The researcher used official museum letterhead to demand members' attention, decreasing nonresponse.

One week following the initial mailing, the researcher mailed a postcard reminder to all members. This mailing "serves as both a thank you for those who have responded, and as a friendly and courteous reminder for those who have not" (Dillman, 1978, p. 183). Week three was the next mailout. This mail was sent only to members who had not responded. The packet included another letter and a replacement questionnaire. This letter informed nonrespondents that their survey had not been received, and it encouraged the respondents to participate (Dillman, 1978).

Once the data was collected, the researcher conducted a number of tests using SPSS. The desired response rate for mailed surveys was 20 percent. The three scales were summed, and each was tested for validity using Cronbach's alpha (Wimmer &

Dominick, 2003). Given the exploratory nature of this study, the researcher looked for an alpha above 50 percent. The indexes were examined with descriptive statistics to see if they varied by demographic category. If any significance appeared, an ANOVA was run.

For H1 a), a t-test determined if those who are likely to remain as members differed significantly from those who are not likely to be members. T-tests were also used to determine if there was a difference for each relationship index between males and females, owning or renting a home, and having or not having school aged children. An ANOVA was run for household income, age, marital status, and education. If any significance was found, the researcher used Bonferroni post hoc tests.

For H1 b), a linear regression determined if there was a linear relationship between relationship type and overall satisfaction with the museum.

For H2, a t-test determined if those who are likely to remain as members differed significantly from those who are not likely to be members for each relationship index.

## CHAPTER 4. RESULTS

Of the 673 questionnaires mailed out, 286 were returned by members of the subject museum resulting in 248 completed questionnaires. The response rate was 42.5 percent, and the completion rate was 36.8 percent.

To test the internal consistency of the organization-public scale, the researcher used Cronbach's alpha. The coefficient alphas for the three types of relationships were as follows: the personal relationship was .91, the community relationship was .90, and the professional relationship was .88. The alpha for all 15 items was .66. These results indicate that the three relationship indexes are reliable.

**Table 1: Reliability Analyses for Relationship Scales**

Type of Relationship	Reliability (alpha level)
Personal (5 Questions)	.91
Community (5 Questions)	.90
Professional (5 Questions)	.88

The mean age for respondents was 59, with 105 males responding, 178 females responding, and 3 people not indicating their gender. A majority of respondents (88 percent) own a home, and nearly 58 percent of respondents reported an average household income of more than \$100,000. The researcher found museum members to be highly educated, with 56 percent reporting that they completed a post-graduate degree and another 30 percent reporting that they completed a 4-year college. The museum membership is represented by members from 102 different zip codes. The researcher obtained completed questionnaires from 53 (52 percent) of the 102 zip codes.

The first hypothesis states that the tenets of relationship management will hold in the museum context. The first tenet holds that organization-public relationships can be

analyzed by relationship types (personal, community, and professional) and by the actors in the relationship. For H1a), the researcher looked at demographic variables in relation to the three relationship types. Paired-samples t tests and one-way ANOVAs were conducted to evaluate the relationship between each demographic variable and the relationship types. The t test results revealed that there is a significant difference between men and women for all three of the relationship types. The male mean for the personal relationship ( $M = 9.22, SD = 12.77$ ) was significantly lower than the female mean ( $M = 16.56, SD = 13.59$ ),  $t(253) = -4.58, p < .0001$ . The male mean for the community relationship ( $M = 10.03, SD = 13.25$ ) was significantly lower than the female mean ( $M = 17.12, SD = 14.33$ ),  $t(240) = -4.08, p < .0001$ . The male mean for the professional relationship ( $M = 10.87, SD = 14.19$ ) was significantly lower than the female mean ( $M = 17.94, SD = 15.11$ ),  $t(247) = -3.89, p < .0001$ .

These results indicate that women rated the items in the three relationship scales higher than men. A higher rating indicates a more favorable perception of the museum-member relationship. See Tables 2 for results. See Table 3 for means for each item on the OPR scale.

**Table 2: Relationship Means for Men and Women**

Relationship Type	t score	Mean	
		Men	Women
Personal	-4.58*	9.22	16.56
Community	-4.08*	10.03	17.12
Professional	-3.89*	10.87	17.94

\* =  $p < .0001$

**Table 3: Relationship Means for Men and Women per Item**

Relationship Type	t score	Mean	
		Men	Women
<b>Personal</b>			
1. I feel that I can trust the museum to do what it says it will do.	-4.53*	2.12	3.69
2. The museum seems to be the kind of organization that invests in its members.	-4.77*	1.93	3.49
3. I think that the museum takes into account my convenience in all of our interactions.	n/a	1.78	1.78
4. The museum demonstrates an interest in me as a person.	-4.24*	1.75	3.01
5. The museum understands me as a member.	-4.45*	1.68	3.00
<b>Community</b>			
6. The museum is open about its plans for the future.	-4.60*	1.89	3.36
7. I feel that the museum supports events that are of interest to its members.	-4.73*	2.04	3.64
8. I think that the museum strives to improve the communities of its members.	-4.63*	2.01	3.58
9. The museum shares its plans for the future with its members.	-4.85*	1.83	3.39
10. I think that the museum actively plays a role in the lives of the communities it serves.	-4.62*	1.95	3.48
<b>Professional</b>			
11. The museum is not involved in activities that promote the welfare of its members.	n/a	1.07	1.07
12. The museum does not act in a socially responsible manner.	-2.91*	0.79	1.22
13. The museum does not see my interests and the museum's interests as the same.	-2.87*	0.97	1.48
14. I think that the museum is not honest in its dealings with members.	-2.30*	0.79	1.13
15. The museum is not willing to devote resources to maintain its relationship with me.	-2.32*	0.91	1.28

\* = p<.0001

The t test results also showed a significant difference between museum members with school-aged children and members without school-aged children for the three relationship indexes. This demographic question read, “Do you have any school age children living at home?” The respondent could check the blank in front of “yes” or the

blank in front of “no.” Respondents who marked “yes” are designated as “with children” and respondents who marked “no” are designated as “without children.” The with children mean for the personal relationship index ( $M = 4.70, SD = 9.93$ ) was significantly lower than the without children mean ( $M = 21.12, SD = 11.91$ ),  $t(251) = -12.43, p < .0001$ . The with children mean for the community relationship index ( $M = 4.89, SD = 10.40$ ) was significantly lower than the without children mean ( $M = 22.26, SD = 12.12$ ),  $t(238) = -12.34, p < .0001$ . The with children mean for the professional relationship index ( $M = 5.43, SD = 11.46$ ) was significantly lower than the without children mean ( $M = 23.39, SD = 12.72$ ),  $t(245) = -12.03, p < .0001$ .

For this demographic variable, members of the subject museum without school-aged children rated the items on the three relationship scales significantly higher than members with school aged-children. The results indicate that participants without school-aged children perceive their relationships with the subject museum more favorably than members with school children. See Table 4 for results. See Table 5 for means for each item on the OPR scale.

**Table 4: Relationship Means for Museum Members With or Without School-Aged Children**

Relationship Type	t score	Member has school-aged children	
		Yes	No
Personal	-12.43*	4.70	21.12
Community	-12.34*	4.89	22.26
Professional	-12.03*	5.43	23.39

\* =  $p < .0001$

**Table 5: Relationship Means for Museum Members With or Without School-Aged Children**

Relationship Type	t score	Mean	
		Yes**	No***
<b>Personal</b>			
1. I feel that I can trust the museum to do what it says it will do.	-13.72*	1.01	4.82
2. The museum seems to be the kind of organization that invests in its members.	-13.73*	0.92	4.51
3. I think that the museum takes into account my convenience in all of our interactions.	-13.03*	0.90	4.26
4. The museum demonstrates an interest in me as a person.	-13.33*	0.79	3.99
5. The museum understands me as a member.	-12.60*	0.81	3.87
<b>Community</b>			
6. The museum is open about its plans for the future.	-13.36*	0.90	4.35
7. I feel that the museum supports events that are of interest to its members.	-14.25*	0.93	4.74
8. I think that the museum strives to improve the communities of its members.	-12.77*	1.02	4.58
9. The museum shares its plans for the future with its members.	-13.05*	0.91	4.32
10. I think that the museum actively plays a role in the lives of the communities it serves.	-12.65*	0.99	4.44
<b>Professional</b>			
11. The museum is not involved in activities that promote the welfare of its members.	-9.22*	0.58	2.20
12. The museum does not act in a socially responsible manner.	-9.09*	0.41	1.60
13. The museum does not see my interests and the museum's interests as the same.	-8.71*	0.53	1.91
14. I think that the museum is not honest in its dealings with members.	-8.72*	0.38	1.53
15. The museum is not willing to devote resources to maintain its relationship with me.	-9.09*	0.44	1.75

\* p = .0001

\*\* Yes = respondent has school-aged children

\*\*\* No = respondent does not have school-aged children

The ANOVA results for household income, education, home ownership, and marital status showed no significant differences by relationship type.

The one-way analysis of variance found a significant relationship between the age demographic variable and the personal relationship index. The results show some correlation at the .1 level for the between the age demographic variable and the community relationship index. The independent variable, age, included seven levels: 18 to 28 year olds, 29 to 39 year olds, 40 to 50 year olds, 51 to 61 year olds, 62 to 72 year olds 73 to 83 year olds, and 84 year olds and above. The dependent variable was the personal relationship index. The ANOVA was significant,  $F(6, 234) = 3.53, p = .002$ . Follow-up tests were conducted using the Bonferroni procedure.

The results indicate that members of the subject museum age 84 and above rated the items on the three relationship scales differently than members in the 40-50 age group and the 51-61 age group. The 95% confidence intervals for the pairwise differences, as well as the mean differences for the age groups are reported in Table 6.

**Table 6: 95% Confidence Intervals of Pairwise Differences in Mean Ages in the Personal Relationship Index**

Age (in years)	18-28	29-39	40-50	51-61	62-72	73-83
Mean Difference with Age 84 and above	5.85	7.93	8.77	8.32	6.17	6.48
Confidence Interval	-2.18 to 13.87	0.14 to 15.73	2.07 to 15.47*	1.89 to 14.75*	-0.47 to 12.80	-0.46 to 13.43

\*  $p=.002$

The second tenet of relationship management holds that the continuation of the organization-public relationship depends on the degree to which expectations are met. To address this hypothesis, the researcher looked at the satisfaction index and the relationship duration index in relation to the personal, community, and professional indexes. For H1b), a linear regression analysis found that the three relationship types are linearly related to overall relationship satisfaction. As described in the method section,

museum members were asked to rank their overall satisfaction (1 = mutually satisfying; 7 = not mutually satisfying) in regard to the museum. The results indicated that as the rating for the personal relationship increases, the rating for satisfaction decreases. The satisfaction ratings were reverse coded, so approximately 47 percent of the variance of the personal index was accounted for by the linear relationship with the satisfaction index. A strong correlation exists between the community index and satisfaction, as well as between the professional relationship index and satisfaction. Nearly 38 percent of the variance of the community index and 25 percent of the professional index was accounted for by the satisfaction index.

These results indicate that as participants rated the items for each relationship scale higher, they rated their overall satisfaction with the subject museum higher. If museum members perceived their personal, community, and professional relationships favorably, they rated their satisfaction higher. See Table 7 for results.

**Table 7: Correlation Between Relationship Indexes and Museum Member Satisfaction Index**

Relationship Type	Slope (Beta)	R <sup>2</sup>	DF
Personal	-.68	.47*	1, 253
Community	-.61	.38*	1, 238
Professional	-.50	.25*	1, 247

\* = p<.0001

A linear regression analysis was also conducted to evaluate the prediction of the relationship duration index in regard to the personal, community, and professional indexes. Museum members were asked to rate their relationship duration (1 = short term; 7 = long term). The results reveal that approximately 31 percent of the variance of the personal index was accounted for by the linear relationship with the relationship duration index. Approximately 36 percent of the community index was accounted for by the

linear relationship with the relationship duration index, and 30 percent of the professional index was accounted for by the linear relationship with the relationship duration index.

These results indicate that participants who rated the items on the three relationship indexes high, rated their overall relationship with the subject museum as long term. As member perceptions of the museum-public relationships become more favorable, the relationship duration becomes more long-term. See Table 8 for results.

**Table 8: Correlation Between Relationship Indexes and Relationship Duration Index**

Relationship Type	Slope (Beta)	R <sup>2</sup>	DF
Personal	.56	.31*	1, 251
Community	.60	.36*	1, 237
Professional	.55	.30*	1, 47

\* =  $p < .0001$

The second hypothesis states that respondent perceptions of the organization-public relationship will differentiate members who say they will continue their memberships with the museum from members who say they will discontinue their memberships. The corresponding statement in the survey read, “I plan to continue my membership with the LSU MOA next year.” Respondents either checked the blank for “yes” or “no.” Respondents who voted “yes” correspond to members who advocated continuing their memberships, while respondents who voted “no” correspond to members who advocated discontinuing their memberships. For H2, a one-sample t test found that there was a significant difference between respondents who advocated continuing their memberships and those respondents who advocated discontinuing their memberships for the personal relationship scale  $t(227) = 67.85, p = .0001$ . Museum members who voted to continue membership had a substantially higher mean ( $M = 26.28, SD = 5.85$ ) than those who indicated they would not continue membership ( $M = 19.00, SD = 10.01$ ).

A one-sample t test for the community relationship scale revealed a significant difference between respondents who advocated continuing their memberships and those who advocated discontinuing their memberships  $t(214) = 77.79, p = .0001$ . Museum members who chose to continue membership had a significantly higher mean ( $M = 27.75, SD = 5.22$ ) than those who chose not to continue membership ( $M = 21.07, SD = 9.82$ ).

Another one-sample t test for the professional relationship scale indicated a significant difference between respondents who advocated continuing their memberships and respondents who advocated discontinuing their memberships  $t(224) = 79.10, p = .0001$ . Museum members who voted to continue membership had a substantially higher mean ( $M = 29.37, SD = 5.40$ ) than those who indicated they would not continue membership ( $M = 22.29; SD = 9.20$ ).

The results indicate that participants who voted to continue museum membership rated the items for the relationship indexes significantly higher than participants who chose to discontinue museum membership. Museum members with favorable impressions of the museum-member relationship voted to continue membership while members with less favorable impressions chose to discontinue membership. See Table 9 for results. See Table 10 for means for each item on the OPR scale.

**Table 9: Decision to Continue or Discontinue Membership by Relationship Type**

Relationship Type	Mean	
	Continue Membership	Discontinue Membership
Personal	26.28	19.00
Community	27.75	21.07
Professional	29.37	22.29

**Table 10: Relationship Means for Decision to Continue or Discontinue Membership**

Relationship Type	t score	Mean	
		Continue	Discontinue
<b>Personal</b>			
1. I feel that I can trust the museum to do what it says it will do.	30.66*	5.54	0.27
2. The museum seems to be the kind of organization that invests in its members.	29.75*	5.19	0.25
3. I think that the museum takes into account my convenience in all of our interactions.	29.73*	4.95	0.22
4. The museum demonstrates an interest in me as a person.	27.15*	4.56	0.21
5. The museum understands me as a member.	26.44*	4.47	0.21
<b>Community</b>			
6. The museum is open about its plans for the future.	28.26*	5.03	0.26
7. I feel that the museum supports events that are of interest to its members.	31.67*	5.43	0.25
8. I think that the museum strives to improve the communities of its members.	31.13*	5.38	0.24
9. The museum shares its plans for the future with its members.	28.01*	5.02	0.25
10. I think that the museum actively plays a role in the lives of the communities it serves.	30.54*	5.22	0.23
<b>Professional</b>			
11. The museum is not involved in activities that promote the welfare of its members.	16.08*	2.54	0.23
12. The museum does not act in a socially responsible manner.	13.99*	1.76	0.19
13. The museum does not see my interests and the museum's interests as the same.	15.09*	2.20	0.22
14. I think that the museum is not honest in its dealings with members.	13.26*	1.70	0.18
15. The museum is not willing to devote resources to maintain its relationship with me.	14.38*	1.95	0.21

\* =  $p < .0001$

Museum members were asked two questions in addition to the questions that comprise the organization-public relationship scale to better understand museum-public issues. For confidentiality purposes, "Museum Name" is used in place of the subject

museum’s name. The questions were as follows: 1) In your opinion, why are people similar to you not members of the [Museum Name]? and 2) What can the [Museum Name] do to improve its relationship with you? The respondents were instructed to choose only one answer for each question.

The results show 53.4 percent of the participants chose “not interested in museum collection” when asked why people similar to themselves are not members of the subject museum. Only 6.8 percent of the participants indicated that museum membership “costs too much.” To improve its relationship with members, 28.3 percent of the participants chose “improve member benefits,” 22.0 percent chose “coordinate more group programs,” and 18.8 percent chose “increase personal contact.” A desire for more benefits and contact suggests an imbalance in the museum-member relationship. See Table 11 for results.

**Table 11: Results for Opinion Questions**

<u>Question #1*</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
A. no time	56	23.7
B. costs too much	16	6.8
C. live too far from museum	38	16.1
D. not interested in museum collection	126	53.4
<u>Question # 2**</u>		
A. improve member benefits	63	28.3
B. increase personal contact	42	18.8
C. provide more family programs	36	16.1
D. host more social functions	33	14.8
E. coordinate more group programs	49	22.0

\*N = 236; \*\*N = 223

## CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

### 5.1 Discussion

The purpose of this investigation was to determine whether relationship management theory was applicable in the museum context. The results of this study reveal that the tenets of relationship management theory, set forth by Ledingham (2003a), do hold for museums, and the OPR scale distinguishes between members of the museum who voted to continue membership and members who voted to discontinue membership.

The findings pose implications for public relations and museum scholars. First, this thesis furthers the relationship management theory by proving its applicability in a new context – museums. The results indicate that the subject museum is one more setting where relationship management theory applies; thus, the study broadened researchers' scope and understanding of this theory. Also, this study supports the OPR scale as a reliable measuring tool for organization-public relationships. The tool effectively measured museum-member relationships.

For the subject art museum, this study provided several findings. First, the OPR scale differentiated between men and women's perceptions of the different relationship types. Next, there are also differences in relationship perceptions between members with and without school-aged children. Finally, the findings indicate that participants believe the subject museum should increase member benefits to improve its relationship with its members.

Hypothesis 1a) holds that organization-public relationships can be analyzed by its members. Testing demographic variables in relation to the three relationship indexes revealed that museum-public relationships can be analyzed by member type. The

researcher found that male and female museum members possess significantly different perceptions of the three relationship types. This finding has important implications for museums. One explanation might be that men and women have different motivations for belonging to a museum; thus, public relations practitioners might need to treat these groups differently in their marketing initiatives.

Differences also emerged between members with school-aged children and members without school-aged children. The means for the relationship indexes were much higher among respondents without school-aged children. Also, when asked what the subject museum could do to improve the museum-member relationship, approximately 16 percent of the respondents answered “provide more family programs.” The subject museum has several membership levels, including a “dual/family” level. Of its 673 members, 18 percent joined at the family level. This research suggests that members with school-aged children is an important public that the museum cannot afford to lose. Members with children will have a different museum experience than members without children. Practitioners must recognize the different relationship perceptions and tend to the needs of parents with school-aged children.

In hypothesis 1b), the tenet addressed the concept of mutual benefit and relationship duration. The survey questions, asking members to rate their overall satisfaction with the museum and to rate their relationship as short term or long term, shed light on the role that organization-public relationships play in identifying member opinions and behaviors. Museums depend on key donors and their memberships to sustain. Increased member satisfaction can translate into stronger, longer relationships.

By identifying and understanding the different types of relationships, museums can target their public relations efforts.

The second research question asked if the OPR scale is reliable. To answer this question, the researcher presented respondents with a dichotomous, behavioral statement. Members were asked if they planned to continue or discontinue their memberships with the museum. The “yes” or “no” answer was compared for each relationship type. According to Ledingham (2001), the organization-public relationship scale can determine a public’s behavior. If reliable, this scale would differentiate members who voted to stay with the museum from members who voted to leave. The results of this study indicate that the scale is reliable and further supports the validity of this relationship scale. The researcher found a significant difference in the means of members who voted to continue their memberships and members who voted to discontinue their memberships; therefore, the relationship scales are effective in measuring the perceptions of museum members. Members who rated the OPR items higher are linked to continuing museum membership. Members who perceived the museum activities and services lower on the scale tended to discontinue museum membership.

Bruning and Ledingham’s (1998) relationship dimensions of trust, openness, involvement, commitment, and investment do matter in the museum context. Bruning and Galloway (2003) point out that the personal relationship dimension assigns “human qualities to a non-human entity” and that these qualities “are similar to the elements of satisfying personal relationships” prominent in interpersonal relationship literature. Museums that want to build a personal relationship with members should develop public relations programs and initiatives that build trust, exhibit openness about the museum’s

operations, and invest time in important public members. In the museum context, building a personal relationship can be accomplished in several ways. Communicating regularly with members through a newsletter, emails, and a frequently updated website establishes trust between the organization and publics and projects openness. Museums may also personalize communication, addressing the member by name (not “museum member”) on mailings and correspondence. For donors who contribute large sums of money to museums, the organization should keep these donors informed in regard to their donations and recognize each donor according to his/her specifications. Some donors wish to remain anonymous while other people prefer recognition for substantial gifts to museums.

The next dimension is the community relationship. This relationship focuses on “organizational efforts to build and/or improve the communities in which the organization operates” (Bruning & Galloway, 2002, p. 316). The community dimension is extremely important for museums locating in downtown districts. Across the United States, museums serve as catalysts for economic growth in redeveloping downtown areas. Without building a strong community relationship, a museum might fail to reach important publics, adversely impacting a region dependent on the museum for cultural and commercial appeal. Museums have an obligation to support downtown events that interest its members, improve its members’ communities, and be active in their own communities.

The results of this survey also indicate that museum members expect the organization to act in a professional manner, providing benefit to both museum

member and museum. According to Ledingham (2001), “public members expect mutuality in their interactions with an organization. They expect that mutuality to be demonstrated through organizational behaviors just as organizations expect public behavior as the result of their initiatives” (p. 292). As in any relationship, if the “costs” of museum membership exceed the “benefits,” the quality of the relationship declines. Mutuality is a central concept in relationship management (Ledingham, 2003a). Museum members expect museums to devote resources to maintain a relationship, integrate members’ interests with the museum’s interests, and be socially responsible. The results reveal that members of the subject art museum believe the museum could improve its relationships by increasing member benefits. The museum must continue to devote resources to its members. Regular mailings, member events, member discounts to events and in the museum store, and other “perks” help the subject museum maintain a feeling of mutual benefit for the organization and its members.

In addition to the OPR scale questions, the researcher posed two opinion questions on the survey. These questions yielded interesting results. For confidentiality purposes, “Museum Name” refers to the subject museum’s name. The first question asked, “In your opinion, why are people similar to you not members of the [Museum Name]?” A majority of the respondents believed that more people like themselves were not members of the subject museum because they are not interested in the museum’s collection. This finding suggests that public relations practitioners have an opportunity to reach new publics through traveling exhibitions. For this question, “no time” was the second most common answer. Key museum publics must understand the utility of being

a member. The museum's public relations programs should focus on the benefits of museum membership which might outweigh the time costs.

Results of the second opinion question, "What can the [Museum Name] do to improve its relationship with you?" did not result in one predominant answer. To improve the museum-member relationship, most respondents suggested improving member benefits and coordinating more group programs. This finding reinforces the notion of mutual benefit in relationships. As in any other relationship, museum members are most concerned with "what's in it for them." Public relations initiatives should focus on explicating member benefits. Coordinating more group programs corresponds with members' expectations that the museum should expend resources on its members.

As an initial look at relationship management and museums, this study is an important first step toward developing the relationship management theory in a new context. Broom et al. (1997) define relationships as either processes that should be measured over time, or as states that can exist and be described at a single point in time. This thesis measures and describes museum members' perceptions of their relationships with the museum at a single point in time. Additional studies of this museum will contribute to measuring the subject museum's relationships with its members over time. The results from this study describe members' perceptions of and relationships with the subject museum at a critical time in the museum's history. In March, 2005, the subject museum transformed from a small, free-admission museum on a university campus to an expanded, admission-based museum in a developing downtown area. In addition, the museum did not even have a membership prior to 2004. The results of this study serve as a benchmark for public relations practitioners to measure future public relations

initiatives against. Since member experience with the museum in this new context is limited, the public relations function is critical to the museum's success. The subject museum cannot afford to waste time and resources on public relations initiatives that do not cater to members' needs or attract capital. The organization-public relationship scale effectively measures members' perceptions and helps predict members' behaviors. With a baseline study, PR scholars and practitioners can easily measure specific programs to understand which initiatives are improving or not improving relationships.

This research also demonstrates the value and application of OPR research to museums. Traditionally, public relations practitioners measured impact by "communication outputs," like the number of stories or ads placed in various forms of media. The subject museum currently clips stories and advertisements from magazines and newspapers from local and national media. This traditional practice quantifies reach, but cannot explain the value of public relations to the museum. Relationship management theory measures the perceptions of the museum's relevant public, specifically, its members, and predicts their behavior. By measuring members' perceptions, the museum can gain insight to current public relations practices that are viewed favorably or unfavorably by members.

In the museum context, Goulding (2000) points out that most museum research focuses on gathering statistical data that result in little more than a demographic profile (Goulding, 2000). Museum scholars and practitioners can find value from the results of this study. This scale helps quantify the value and influence of relationships which helps manage museum-public relationships. The three relationship scales can help quantify

museum-public relationships. Museum public relations and marketing practitioners can tailor programs to specific public needs and measure their effectiveness.

## 5.2 Limitations of the Study

Due to the exploratory nature of this study, some limitations exist. The researcher measured the members of only one museum in one city. Also, this study only measures the museum members' perceptions at one point in time. Relationship research warns that relationships change over time and are not static. A longitudinal study would increase insight into these relationship dimensions, highlighting factors that can predict changes in museum-public relationships.

The “newness” of the museum can be viewed as an impediment in this study. The subject art museum was open for four months when this study took place. Prior to 2004, the museum had no membership. The subject museum has not had time to build relationships with many of its members. Since the museum has only been operating in its new facility for a few months, many members do not have extensive experience with the new facility. Conducting the same study with a more “established” museum might yield different results. This limitation is somewhat mitigated by the value of this study as a public relations benchmark.

When interpreting the results of this study, the reader must keep in mind that this is an art museum affiliated with a Southern university. Much larger museums with greater resources probably have higher quality, and more frequent, public relations efforts. The results of this study are also hard to generalize for museums, simply because museums drastically vary in nature. Museums can be governmental or private, and they vary in type, such as museums of anthropology, natural history, aquariums, historic sites,

planetariums, zoos, and nature centers. Each museum is characterized by its unique make-up, location, resources, and orientation.

### 5.3 Conclusions

The results of this study further Bruning and Ledingham's relationship management theory of public relations. In addition to a local government, a telephone company, and an electric company, the museum serves as one more context that helps build the relationship-management theory of public relations. Before this study, the OPR scale and the theory of relationship management had not been tested in the nonprofit, or third sector. In 1998, Ledingham and Bruning studied relationship management in the for-profit sector, using the OPR scale in a survey given to local telephone subscribers. Kim's (2001) study also utilized the for-profit sector to test this theory. Bruning et al. (2004) refined the theory, focusing on a supplier of electrical service in a major mid-western city. Ledingham's (2001) study centered on government-citizen relationships and their contribution to community building. As indicated by the literature, the nonprofit sector is a growing source of jobs and revenue in the United States. Applying relationship management in the context of museums advances this theory, shedding light on its usefulness in a new business sector.

Relationship management appeals to scholars and practitioners "because the approach requires that practitioners develop initiatives centered on the notion of mutual benefit, thus maintaining equilibrium between organizational and public interests" (Bruning et al., 2004). Quantifying public relations efforts is a step forward in museum research. As funding becomes tighter and competition among museums grows, museums depend on their publics for patronage and support. According to Bruning et al. (2004),

“Scholars and practitioners who use the relationship management perspective determine programmatic success based upon assessing the attitudinal, evaluative, and/or behavioral changes that take place because of effective organization-public relationship management” (p.436). Museum and public relations scholars can apply the findings in this study to different museums, exploring the relationship concept further. For museum scholars, this theory provides a clear purpose: build and maintain mutually beneficial relationships with publics. Future research may build upon this study and develop museum-specific models of relationships.

Practical applications for public relations practitioners also emerge from this study. The OPR scale allows museum public relations practitioners to measure member perceptions of the museum. This valuable information enables practitioners to reinforce successful programs or to change ineffective PR initiatives, rather than simply measure the amount of communication produced in a newspaper or magazine. The demographic section detailed museum members’ characteristics. Practitioners at the subject museum can use this information to generate new programs or PR materials that appeal to specific groups within the larger membership public. Public relations practitioners benefit from this study since the relationship management theory provides a tool, the OPR scale, to measure and quantify PR initiatives and different organization-public relationships.

This museum-public study presents implications for City A officials, economic developers, retailers, and foundations. These entities all have an interest in the subject museum and in the downtown redevelopment. The results from this study indicate that the subject museum can measure its members’ perceptions and behaviors. Understanding and continuing mutually beneficial relationships ensures the future success of the

museum. The museum's success directly contributes to downtown revenue and encourages further development in the area.

Finally, this study impacts museum members. As the museum depends on its members for patronage, the members, in return, depend on the museum for cultural experiences and an improved quality of life. Viewing museum public relations through the perspective of mutual benefit ensures that the museum will continually seek the public's opinions and cater to the community's needs. In doing so, the museum will flourish and continue to enhance the economic and cultural landscape in the community.

This study presents several avenues for further research. As noted earlier in the discussion, relationships are continuous and change with time. A subsequent study of the subject museum could measure the effect of public relations initiatives on relationships over time. Qualitative research could also help explain why respondents chose to continue or discontinue their relationships with the museum. Focus groups and in-depth interviews could gain further insight into members' perceptions of each type of relationship.

An interesting finding in this study was the difference between men and women when rating their relationships with the museum. Future studies should address this issue to determine the reasons behind the discrepancy. Specifically, researchers should ask men and women why they join museums, what benefits they hope to derive from membership, and what they expect from museums in exchange for their patronage.

The subject art museum can conduct focus groups to address the differences between men and women, members with or without school-aged children, and the opinion questions. This approach would shed light on differences between men and

women and identify issues for parents with younger children. The second opinion question on the survey indicated that members want more benefits. Talking with museum members will better determine what benefits they value or what benefits they feel are lacking.

Future research should also address the relationship perspective in museums on a broader scale. An interesting study would apply this theory in museums located in developing downtowns across the United States. Comparing the relationship ratings, especially the community index, would shed light on successful museum public relations practices. Downtowns redevelop using museums and cultural centers as anchors. This trend is occurring across the country. A study would quantify the public relations efforts of successful and less successful museums, helping interested parties understand practices that lead to the success of the museum, which ultimately is the success of the community.

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5. In your opinion, why are people similar to you not members of the XXXXX? Please check only one answer.

- A. NO TIME
- B. COSTS TOO MUCH MONEY TO BE A MEMBER
- C. LIVE TOO FAR FROM THE MUSEUM
- D. NOT INTERESTED IN THE MUSEUM'S COLLECTION

6. What can the XXXXX do to improve its relationship with you? Please check only one answer.

- A. IMPROVE MEMBER BENEFITS
- B. INCREASE PERSONAL CONTACT
- C. PROVIDE MORE FAMILY PROGRAMS
- D. HOST MORE SOCIAL FUNCTIONS
- E. COORDINATE MORE GROUP PROGRAMS

### Demographics

Finally, we would like to ask some questions about yourself to help interpret the results. Again, your responses will be confidential.

1. Please indicate your gender.

- MALE
- FEMALE

2. Please indicate which age group you belong to.

- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-64
- 65 and over

3. Do you own or rent your home?

- OWN
- RENT
- OTHER

4. Do you have any school age children living at home?

- YES
- NO

5. Please indicate your approximate household income before taxes.

- LESS THAN \$10,000
- \$10,000 - \$19,999
- \$20,000 - \$29,999
- \$30,000 - \$39,999
- \$40,000 - \$49,999
- \$50,000 - \$74,999
- \$75,000 - \$99,999
- \$100,000 OR MORE

6. Which of the following best describes your marital status?

- MARRIED
- DIVORCED
- WIDOWED
- SEPARATED
- NEVER MARRIED

7. What is the highest level of education you have attained?

- LESS THAN HIGH SCHOOL
- HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA OR GED
- SOME COLLEGE
- FOUR YEAR COLLEGE DEGREE
- POST GRADUATE WORK/DEGREE

8. Please provide your zip code.

\_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX B: CONSENT DOCUMENT

August 3, 2005

XXXXXX  
Executive Director  
XXXXXX Museum of Art

Dear XXXXXX:

I am writing you to request approval of my thesis questionnaire and permission to use the museum's logo and letterhead for my Master's thesis.

In the following attachments you will find the original and remaining mailings I will send to members of the XXXXXX for my thesis.

The sample for this study is the membership of the XXXXXX as of July 1, 2005. Memberships obtained after this date will not receive a questionnaire. As of this date, there are 673 members. Each member in this sample will receive a questionnaire. The researcher chose to include all members in the sample due to its manageable size and to avoid samplings errors. The researcher obtained a list of the museum's members and addresses from its membership database. The list includes the members' names, addresses, and membership levels. The list obtained for this study consists of only active members, or those who have paid their museum memberships in full.

The goal for this study was to achieve a 20 percent response rate. After the first mailout, the researcher calculated a 21 percent response rate and subsequently adjusted the expected response rate to account for the second questionnaire mailout. The adjusted response rate for this project is 35 percent.

This thesis is an independent research project. The researcher paid for all materials, rewards, and postage. The researcher did not receive any outside funding. The XXXXXX expended no funds for this project.

The researcher will obtain the museum director's approval before each mailing to the XXXXXX members.

Mailout 1

This letter was sent to all members of the XXXXXX. The letter was accompanied by a preaddressed, stamped envelope. The cover letter was photocopied from museum letterhead. The logo also appeared on the return address on the packet envelope. This image was produced from a jpeg of the museum's logo, provided by the museum development director. The packet included a return envelope, questionnaire, and the cover letter. The researcher mailed this packet on July 7, 2005.

#### Mailout 2

This mailout consisted of a postcard thanking participants who responded and urging nonrespondents to fill out the questionnaire as quickly as possible. The postcard did not use any XXXXX insignia. The researcher mailed this postcard on July 14, 2005.

#### Mailout 3

This letter will only be sent to members of the XXXXX who have not replied or responded to earlier mailings. The researcher requests the use of the XXXXX's logo for the return address on the packet envelope. This will greatly increase the response rate since members will recognize this logo, and the mailing will be consistent with the first round of surveys. Like the previous mailings, the researcher will provide all materials including postage, paper, and envelopes. The researcher will mail this packet on August 11, 2005.

This letter will be accompanied with the same questionnaire sent in the original mailing and a stamped, preaddressed return envelope. The return envelope will look as follows:

Mary Schoen  
Address  
City A, XX XXXXX

Attn: Mary Schoen  
XXXXXX Museum of Art Survey  
Address  
Rm 301  
City A, XX XXXXX

#### Mailout 4

This mailout will be another postcard. This postcard will thank respondents and also act as a coupon to receive their reward. The postcard will only be mailed to respondents who completed their questionnaires. The researcher will mail this postcard on August 15, 2005.

For Mailout 1, the returned questionnaires were collected by the museum front desk assistant and held for the researcher. No museum employees were allowed to open or view the returned questionnaires.

The researcher will pick up responses from the museum daily. The completed questionnaires in the return envelopes will be locked in a museum file cabinet until the researcher picks them up.

To ensure confidentiality, each return envelope is coded with a room number that corresponds with the number the researcher assigned to each member. As the researcher

receives completed questionnaires, the name is struck from the master list so that the participants are not unnecessarily mailed another questionnaire. The envelope with the number is thrown away, leaving the questionnaire untraceable.

Upon collecting all questionnaires, the researcher will compile the data in SPSS. The questionnaires will only be viewed by the researcher, ensuring confidentiality. The researcher will not disclose any of the respondents' identities, and the researcher will not share any of the results of the questionnaires with any outside parties.

The researcher will use SPSS, a type of statistical software, to analyze the collected data. Three public relations scales are embedded in the questionnaire. Specifically, the researcher is looking at personal relationships, community relationships, and professional relationships. Once all results are entered into SPSS, the three scales will be summed, and each will be tested for validity using Cronbach's alpha. Given the exploratory nature of this study, the researcher will look for an alpha above 50 percent. Each scale will be summed into indexes, and an ANOVA will be run on each index. The indexes will be examined with descriptive statistics to see if they vary by demographic category. If any significance appears, an ANOVA will be run.

The results of this study are solely intended for use by the researcher in order to complete her Master's thesis at Louisiana State University. The results will be published online, according to LSU's standards. The researcher agrees to only use the museum logo and letterhead for the purposes outlined above. For the duration of this study, the researcher agrees to refer to the XXXXX as "a museum of arts affiliated with a Southern university," keeping the identity of the museum confidential. This description will also be used in any subsequent articles or conference papers written about the museum.

Mary Schoen  
Graduate Student

## VITA

Mary P. Schoen is a graduate student at the Manship School of Mass Communication at Louisiana State University. She graduated from LSU in 2003 with a bachelor of science degree in business management. Her passion for museums evolved as she served as a marketing and public relations intern at a local museum. Upon receiving her Master of Mass Communication in December, 2005, Ms. Schoen plans to pursue a career in marketing and public relations in the nonprofit sector. Ms. Schoen's other research interests include public relations issues in higher education, the internet as a public relations tool, and blogging ethics.