EXPLORING HOW FEMALE PUBLIC RELATIONS MANAGERS IN HIGHER-EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS GAIN INFLUENCE

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ABSTRACT

This study explored how female public relations (PR) managers working in higher-education institutions gain influence in their jobs. The researcher conducted 12 semi-structured interviews with female, senior-level, PR professionals who work in colleges and universities. Using thematic analysis (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002), the researcher uncovered that female PR managers gain influence in the higher-education setting through collaborative relationships, managing issues/crisis and through their personality characteristics of honesty, decisiveness and tenacity. The participants remained outnumbered in male-dominated higher-education administration and lacked advanced degrees possessed by many other college and university leaders. Feminist standpoint theory (Hartsock, 1983), which emphasizes studying power relations from the perspectives of marginalized individuals, guided this study. The participants have proven themselves in crisis communication yet still lack influence in strategic decision-making, which suggests further change is needed to move them beyond their roles as crisis communicators to become trusted counselors during their institutions’ strategic planning and policy-making.