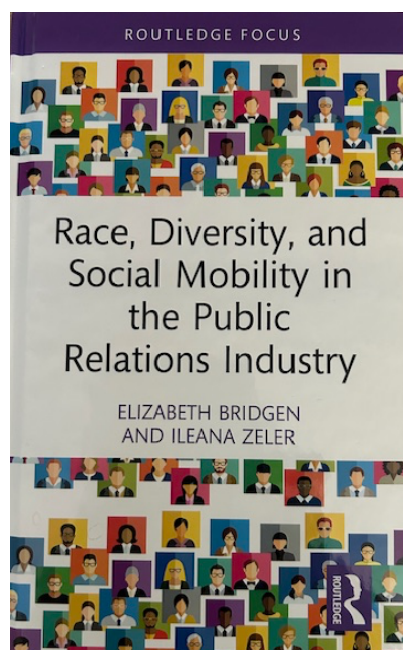


BOOKS

**Race, Diversity, and Social Mobility in the
Public Relations Industry**
**Elizabeth Bridgen and Ileana Zeler, 2025, Abingdon, UK and
New York, USA, Routledge, 82 pages.**



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The authors of *Race, Diversity, and Social Mobility in the Public Relations Industry* are well known researchers with a passionate interest in the lived experiences and challenges of those working in practice. Elizabeth Bridgen is Head of Academic Development (Partner Provision) at Buckinghamshire New University (UK) with a track record of researching the experiences of those often excluded from scholarship. Ileana Zeler, PhD, is Associate Professor at the University of Barcelona (Spain) with dual interests in both strategic communication and gender challenges. Although the data sets used are primarily UK focused, this international writing collaboration enables a fresh perspective, reflexive thinking and wider analysis.

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The text reveals the authors' desire to explore fully the combination of factors that affect recruitment, retention and wider social mobility influences in the public relations industry. These factors include religion, ethnicity, social class, accent, geographical location, gender, sexuality, disability, neurodiversity and age. By looking at a diverse range of dimensions of diversity, equality, and inclusion, the authors in their own words 'endeavour to offer a short but comprehensive examination of the multifaceted landscape of public relations and communication' (Bridgen & Zeler, 2025, p.2).

The authors draw on recent scholarship, industry reports and empirical evidence through interviews to highlight the business imperative and social justice case for diversity, equality and inclusion. The book rightly amplifies the importance that all individuals should be able to access employment, training and development, and wider career opportunities, free from direct and indirect discrimination, and toxic workplace practices. The authors make the convincing and cogent case that the public relations industry falls short of this ideal. What brings the text alive is the use of *readings* peppered throughout chapters allowing individuals to retain their own voice, telling their own stories to open a conversation with practice.

The book is in three parts. Chapter 1 explores the literature on marginalisation in particular drawing on critical race theory, social mobility scholarship and wider dimensions of diversity within the field of public relations. It recognises the powerful tenet of intersectionality that reinforces multiple forms of marginalisation acting as a powerful force that perpetuates a public relations industry continually reproducing itself in its own image; an industry that is predominately white, male in more senior roles, and drawn from higher socio-economic backgrounds.

In chapter 2, the authors share empirical data from interviews with British practitioners that exhibit characteristics of diversity, as well as wider observations from practice-based literature. The authors share their research approach, challenges and the importance of using thematic conversations rather than set questions. Using a more innovative methodology allows the book to contribute to deepening methodological pluralism in public relations research, which is an added benefit for the reader.

Findings show that lack of diversity and discrimination remains rife in practice despite initiatives designed to encourage greater equality, diversity and inclusion. Although these initiatives do in part contribute to improving confidence, skills, and building professional networks, the authors argue 'structural barriers in terms of race, discrimination and lack of representation in leadership positions in the public relations industry remain significant' (Bridgen & Zeler, 2025, pp.47-48). Many of the initiatives referenced in the book tend to impact early career opportunities, a key question is how to make lasting change encouraging true diversity, inclusion and mobility within public relations practice.

The final chapter looks at the complex current challenges and pathways to secure a diverse future. The authors make the point that practice is increasingly recognising the intersection of race and other diversity dimensions. However, conversations inside the public relations industry take place against a backdrop of political and economic debates that can tackle or hinder diversity aspirations. Some diversity initiatives in practice are being critiqued as tokenistic, whilst some point to the need to address whole system change.

As to the future, the book points to multi-dimensional change from governments and international bodies implementing policies to promote diversity; to industry bodies expanding professional networks, mentoring programmes and building leadership opportunities; organisations and agencies reviewing their own inclusion practices; and for all practitioners to recognise 'their own role challenging biases, fostering inclusivity, and advocating for their colleagues' (Bridgen & Zeler, 2025, p.55).

The book however remains optimistic. Although there is a long way to go, individual and collective actions are gradually making an inroad and improvements are achievable. It is up to all of us to push for change. Overall, this is an excellent book. If there is one criticism is that it is too short. The subject needs expanding beyond the UK to draw on international comparisons, to learn from wider practice, and to ensure the urgency of transforming public relations practice into a truly inclusive and welcoming practice remains front of mind. Perhaps this can become the next book.

REFERENCES

Bridgen, E. & Zeler, I. (2025). *Race, Diversity, and Social Mobility in the Public Relations Industry*. Routledge.

