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Activism in "Paradise": Identity Management in a Public Relations Campaign Against Genetic Engineering

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This article seeks to develop a theoretical understanding of the role of identity and power in issues management campaigns. It illustrates through original research how issues management strategies involving the management of multiple identities can motivate significant public activism. In this research, environmental interest groups attempted to influence public policy on genetic engineering in New Zealand, a country where genetic engineering issues are strongly contested and related public policy decisions will have outcomes of significant economic importance, nationally. The findings show that identity management strategies successfully extended public debate about genetic engineering and demonstrated the power of activist groups to influence the direction of government public policy.

In this article, I develop a theoretical understanding of the role of identity and power in the issues management campaigns of activist groups. I suggest that identity management is a central concept that usefully contributes to an understanding of how discursive strategies can be used in issues management campaigns to obtain public consent and influence public policy, and discuss the implications of this for public relations theory and practice. This article takes a critical perspective that explores the discursive tensions implicit in the rhetorical construction of a political and national identity for New Zealanders in a public relations campaign against genetic engineering (GE).

The Half-Gallon Quarter-Acre Pavlova Paradise, the title of a book by Austin Mitchell (1972), sums up the lifestyle identity of New Zealand in the 1950s and

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1960s. It typified a country where people could own their own land and home; enjoy wholesome, locally produced food and drink; and where pride in the pioneering spirit was strong. “Paradise” meant the land of plenty, and was a source of immense national pride. In the 1950s and 60s, “New Zealanders both lived and believed in the dream of a bountiful land in which all aspirations for work, leisure and material prosperity could be achieved under the eye of a benevolent state” (Archives New Zealand, 2002, ¶ 5).

More recently, an identity has been constructed for New Zealand in conjunction with a brand identity for export products and inbound tourism. This identity maintains the image of “paradise” but rearticulates it in terms of New Zealand’s “clean, green image,” an environmental paradise (see http://www.mfe.govt.nz/about/clean_green_nz.htm; and http://www.purenz.com). This image of “paradise” exists in tension, however, with current political and economic discourses, which suggest an identity for New Zealand as a “knowledge economy” that depends on innovation and “cutting edge” technologies such as biotechnology (*Speech From the Throne,* 2002).

Although there is already considerable investment in biotechnology research in New Zealand (Marsh, 2000), unlike in many other countries there have been no commercial field trials of genetically modified products. In fact, a moratorium on commercial field trials existed from April 17, 2000 (Fitzsimons, 2000) until October 2003. In this article, I discuss how a coalition of environmental interest groups called “GE Free” campaigned to increase public awareness and to influence government policy about issues surrounding genetic engineering. The campaign took place between July and October 2001, after a report written by a Royal Commission on Genetic Modification was released and before the government announced a policy direction in this area. The campaign argued against the introduction of commercial field trials of genetically modified products in New Zealand. The phrases *genetic modification* and *genetic engineering* are used interchangeably throughout this article, as they are in the report of the Royal Commission.

BACKGROUND—THE GENETIC ENGINEERING DEBATE IN NEW ZEALAND

Issues related to the introduction of genetic engineering technologies have gained increasing public awareness in New Zealand since 1998 but no clear majority support for a particular policy direction has emerged (A. Henderson, 2001; A. Henderson & Weaver, 2003). Public knowledge about genetic engineering is a contested site. Competing arguments result from the different priorities accorded to environmental, economic, technological, and political values and represent the diverse positions currently held by New Zealanders. A short summary of the progress of the debate provides a background for the GE Free coalition campaign.

New Zealand's relative geographical isolation from other nations and its unique biodiversity mean that, from an environmental perspective, genetic engineering presents the potential for significant ecological risk (Fitzsimons, 1998). At the same time, New Zealand's heavy economic reliance on income generated from primary export industries suggests that the adoption of genetic engineering technologies presents the potential for significant economic gain through export earnings from genetically modified primary produce in overseas markets (Williamson, 1999). Additionally, the government seeks to maintain a competitive edge in international markets through creating a "knowledge economy" based on industries such as information technology and biotechnology (O'Sullivan, 2001).

As a result of political pressure from both the Green party and the Alliance party, the Government set up a Royal Commission on Genetic Modification in July 2000, aimed at informing public policy in this area. The process of enquiry adopted by the Commission was the subject of criticism (Beston, 2000; A. Henderson, 2001). Members of the public were allowed to make written submissions but not to present evidence as witnesses to the Commission; this opportunity was reserved for groups deemed to be "interested parties" to the issues. Although the Commission arranged specific *hui* or meetings, to consult with Maori, and a Youth Forum, the number of public meetings held with the Commissioners was limited. In recognition of this limited public input, a public survey was commissioned in March–April 2001 after submissions were completed but before the Commission's report.

In this report, issued on July 27, 2001, the Royal Commission's overall recommendation was that New Zealand should "preserve opportunities" (Royal Commission on Genetic Modification, 2001, p. 2): Opportunities should exist simultaneously for the potential development of both organic production in primary industries and growth in primary production involving genetic modification as well as opportunities for possible health, medical, and other research benefits from genetic modification technologies. The Royal Commission recommended limited rights to commercial field trials of genetically modified crops and products. However, the voluntary moratorium on these field trials was extended until the end of October 2001 to coincide with the expected announcement of Government policy on genetic modification.

The Commissioners' recommendations provided no clear direction for New Zealand. Scientific and industry groups have argued that the legislative and financial costs of gaining consent for research and for commercial field trials in New Zealand will drive research off-shore (Black, 2001; Watkin, 2001). Organic growers and concerned environmentalists have argued that "buffer zones" recommended by the Commission will not limit the possible spread of genetically modified material to organic crops or the natural environment and that consumers do not want genetically modified food products (M. Henderson, 2001). Different interest groups in New Zealand, each with a different identity, were recognized by the Royal Commission as having unique values and positions in the debate; New

Zealanders were not represented as a single cultural group with a common identity. In fact, the Commission called for further research to explore the social and cultural implications of genetic modification, as an aid to decision making.

Public submissions to the Royal Commission had overwhelmingly focused on concerns about the introduction of genetic modification to New Zealand: 92% of the 11,000 individual submissions, presented in writing, were against the introduction of genetic engineering to food or the environment (Greenpeace, New Zealand, 2001.) This was a huge number of submissions given the population of New Zealand of approximately four million people. The public survey showed that over 50% of the people surveyed in New Zealand felt that there were disadvantages in using genetic modification in processed foods, farm animals, research using animals, and commercial crops. Approval of genetic modification was, however, higher for medical research, the development of medicines and vaccines, and pest control (Royal Commission on Genetic Modification, 2001, Appendix 3, p. 181). The Government chose to deliberate on these recommendations for 3 months before announcing a strategic direction for New Zealand policy on genetic modification. It was during this waiting period that the GE Free coalition mounted a campaign instigated out of a fear that public concerns about genetic modification would be discounted by the Government.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

Dozier and Lauzen (2000) and Motion and Weaver (2005) argued for a critical discursive perspective in public relations research that moves away from the dominant functionalist paradigm viewing public relations, issues management, and activism from the perspective of managerial best practice (J. E. Grunig, 1992; L. A. Grunig, 1992; Heath, 1997). Recent emphasis in public relations theory on dialogic communication and relationship building (Kent & Taylor, 1998; Taylor, Kent, & White, 2001; Taylor, Vasquez, & Doorley, 2003) would also suggest that further research is needed that focuses on concepts and strategic options in issues management from an activist perspective, in an attempt to build theory that accounts for both commonality and difference in managerial and activist campaigns (see also Heath, 2001; Smith & Ferguson, 2001). In this article, I draw on four theoretical perspectives: the power of language in creating meaning, the power of public communication campaigns, the role of identification in issues management, and the use of the Internet to build relationships.

Language and Power

The role of language in the debate about genetically modified foods and the power constituted in language construction and use are the focus for this article. This focus on the social construction of meaning in issues management stems

from the position that discourse shapes and is shaped by society (Fairclough, 1992). Critical language studies focus on how power is controlled through language and ideology (Putnam & Fairhurst, 2001). Political actors use slogans and campaigns, for example, to construct and impose their view of the world and seek the support of the publics on whom their power depends (Bourdieu, as cited in Thompson, 1991). In Foucauldian (Foucault, 1988) terms, such political discourse is a "technology" of power, a means of framing, of production, and of practice, which constitutes an implicit power over the individual. It is possible, therefore, to analyze the ways in which various "technologies" determine the rationality that is assumed as universal but is simply a way of representing knowledge or "truth." A more postmodern language analysis focuses on the instability of meaning: Power is contested, there are multiple discourses, and hegemony is negotiated through competing meanings (Putnam & Fairhurst, 2001).

Habermas (1996) used the term *legitimacy* to explain how liberal democracies depend on gaining a degree of citizen approval for policy positions, based on laws of reason. If a political interest group can gain recognition for the position it holds on a public issue like the use of genetic engineering technologies, then it may succeed in legitimating the use of that power. Alternatively, groups such as the GE Free coalition may seek to resist the official government discourse by articulating a counterdebate. Citizen activism may be designed to delegitimate an expected government stance.

The ways in which public issues are signified in discourse then both represent and institute power and resource allocation, through public policy decisions and the enactment of those policies through regulation by legal institutions. The communication processes of the Royal Commission on Genetic Modification (2001) provide an example of how discourses about genetic engineering were constructed and contested in an attempt to influence the commissioners' recommendations on policy direction and the future regulation of genetic engineering.

Neo-liberal political and economic policies in New Zealand in the 1990s became commonly accepted as normal, to the point where alternative viewpoints had to compete for recognition against this yardstick. Government policy privileged free-market agendas and deregulation and effectively increased the power of corporate business. Commercial outcomes for scientific research were prioritized, including the development of genetic modification technologies. Many scientists interpret risk in a positivistic way and see publics as misunderstanding the scientific assessment of risk; they may believe that only experts should therefore make policy decisions. Additionally, evidence suggests that publics are increasingly constructed by organizations as consumers, rather than citizens, a construction frequently accepted by publics themselves (Cheney, 1998). Publics then may be actively engaged in constructing knowledge about issues without necessarily feeling able to take political action. However, when economic, ethical, social, and political concerns are accorded the same value as scientific concerns, risk is seen as so-

cially constructed, and lay concerns are validated (Priest, 1995). Neo-liberal political and economic policies have also recently been contested in New Zealand (Kelsey, 1997; Leitch, 1994; J. Scott, 1997; Weaver & Motion, 2002). In the submissions and witness briefs presented to the Royal Commission and in this issues management campaign, interest groups and members of the general public sought to legitimate or resist both scientific constructions of risk and neo-liberal political and economic discourses. The power to control these discourses through public communication campaigns presented an opportunity to control public knowledge about genetic engineering.

Public Communication Campaigns and Power

Salmon (1989) defined public communication campaigns as "a form of social intervention prompted by a determination that some situation represents a social problem meriting social action" (p. 20). However, as Paisley (1989) pointed out, two styles of public communication campaigns may in fact be distinguished: A public communication campaign can either be defined as a process of communication, with an educative function, or as an objective of communication, with a strategy of social control. Public communication campaigns that attempt to educate publics by extending public knowledge frequently rely on asymmetrical public relations tactics, typical of J. E. Grunig's (1992) public information model. O'Keefe (1989) pointed out that such tactics might include the use of both controlled media (in the form of advertisements, Web sites, direct mail, newsletters, and public service announcements) and uncontrolled media (such as media releases, opinion pieces, and publicity from events).

Research suggests, however, that when public communication campaigns seek action, as in a fundraising campaign, the campaign must somehow meet the needs of the participating publics (Ledingham, 1993). Similarly, a propaganda approach to public relations is less effective than a two-way communication campaign in a crisis, in issues management, or where there are competing images—as in a tourism promotion campaign (Tilson & Stacks, 1997). In such situations, the combination of both interpersonal communication and a promotional campaign seems more effective in both increasing public knowledge and providing the motivation that turns knowledge into action. This is consistent with the more recent emphasis on the underlying dimensions of effective two-way public relations as being research-based, symmetrical, and based on either mediated or interpersonal communication depending on the context and publics involved (L. A. Grunig, J. E. Grunig, & Dozier, 2002). Public relations then can play a democratic role through the use of symmetrical communication and the practice of societal corporatism, rather than simply being seen as self-interested organizational advocacy (J. E. Grunig, 2000).

Alcalay and Taplin (1989) emphasized the importance of community in public communication campaigns—using local resources and opinion leaders, meeting local needs, and potentially activating the participation of local community members—and suggested that the media can set agendas, cultivate beliefs, and widen or close knowledge gaps by breaking the "spiral of silence" that exists around social issues (Noelle-Neumann, 1984). In a spiraling process, when one view dominates the public scene another disappears from public awareness; its adherents become mute, often preferring to be silent rather than to risk isolation. Normalized discourses hide the plurality of ideologies circulating in hidden public spheres layered beneath the surface. Rakow (1989) suggested that there is no free marketplace of ideas: Organizations and interest groups in fact control information, competition for resources is not equal, and experts have largely taken over the role of deciding the direction of social reform. Rakow called for the whole basis for public information campaigns to be inverted such that institutions should be "subordinated" (p. 181) to dialogue between publics.

Benhabib (1996) and Habermas (1996) also called for a move to a deliberative democracy that depends on dialogue (e.g., symmetrical public relations communication) as a means of making political decisions and therefore allows more easily for a politics of difference. Mouffe (1996) additionally argued that collective identities create relations of power, that pluralism is political:

> To deny the need for a construction of collective identities and to conceive democratic politics exclusively in terms of a struggle of a multiplicity of interest groups or of minorities for the assertion of their rights is to remain blind to the relations of power. It is to ignore the limits imposed on the extension of the sphere of rights by the fact that some existing rights have been constructed on the very exclusion or subordination of others. (p. 247)

Mouffe (1999) demanded a new balance of power resulting from the legitimation of oppositional discourses that contest the power of financial and administrative resources and collective identities.

Public communication campaigns then may contribute to public knowledge, seek to change the normalized discourse, and foster the existence of this plurality of public spheres, creating the potential for altering the dynamics of issues management and power relations.

Identification and Issues Management

Organizations and interest groups contribute to the social construction of reality when they use issues management communication to manage the political environment: "Issues management is the strategic use of issues analysis and strategic

responses to help organizations make adaptations needed to achieve harmony and foster mutual interests with the communities in which they operate" (Heath, 1997, p. 3). The emphasis again is on establishing relationships and dialogue, on two-way public relations communication. Issues managers have two choices: to change the organization's culture and align it with societal expectations or to change external cultures and increase harmony with the organization. Heath argued that the key elements of any issues management campaign include differentiation (establishing unique attributes or positions on an issue), association (establishing positive attributes or positions by alignment with existing positive attributes), identity (creating a persona characteristic of the organization), and goodwill (establishing that policies benefit others).

Heath (1997) suggested, however, that the opinions held by different publics may limit the ways in which they respond to information if there is no shared understanding or "zone of meaning" (p. 192). Zones of meaning with publics may be established through focusing on fact (information publics want in order to understand issues), values (people contest the morality of issues through public debate), and policy (deciding the wisest and most preferred choice). Although, as Heath commented, people are often simply asked to trust the symbolic identity of an organization.

This suggests that a link must be articulated between the internal and external communication of the organization or activist group; that is a shared understanding must be created between *all* stakeholders. Organizations must "attempt to manage both identifiable issues and their own identities" (Cheney & Christensen, 2001, p. 233). An interest group resisting the normalized discourse needs, therefore, to articulate a particular identity to facilitate legitimation of this counterdiscourse and to gain support. As Burke (1973) suggested, verbal rhetoric has a power that can create action through identification by establishing rapport or sympathy, or by antithesis (establishing what the organization is not), or through inaccuracy or omission (by limiting awareness). Researchers must avoid reifying organizational identities, and must recognize their place in discourse, looking for ambiguities and the ways in which issues, values, identity, and image are linked and are dependent on the power of language to manage their symbolic meaning (Cheney & Vibbert, 1987; Jones, 2002). For example, the work of Sha (1999), which investigated the links between the identity of activist organizations and national identity, demonstrated how cultural identity can be used to create unity and mobilize publics.

Identity may be seen as "belonging"—a process of identification, how people perceive their own position in the debate; identity also may be seen as "representation"—how different interest groups and organizations present a "face" on issues such as genetic modification to other publics and stakeholders; thirdly, identity may be seen as a way of organizing—how individuals create structures that build an identity as an organization or interest group (Cheney & Christensen, 2001; R.

Scott, Corman, & Cheney, 1998). In this sense, identity management is an important strategy in issues management, and allows a recognition of how social reality is created through discursive and institutional practices (Cozier & Witmer, 2001), and of the power invested in the structuring contexts of public relations (Durham, 2005).

Activist Publics

The use of Internet technology by activist groups is one example of such a structuring context in which the establishment of a network of Internet communication may contribute to a structural identity for activist publics. L. A. Grunig (1992) defined an activist public from a managerial perspective as “a group of two or more individuals who organize in order to influence another public or publics through action that may include education, compromise, persuasion, pressure tactics, or force” (p. 504). More recently, perspectives on publics have included mass, situational, agenda-building, and “homo narrans” perspectives that recognize both the political participation of publics and how publics use communication to solve problems (Vasquez & Taylor, 2001). “New publics” have been recognized that involve online communities participating in communication about issues without necessarily taking the role of activists (Cozier & Witmer, 2001). The emergence of new discourses, and a more dialogic emphasis on relationship-building, may then increasingly be facilitated through communication using the Internet (Heath, 1998; Kent & Taylor, 1998; Taylor, Kent, & White, 2001; Taylor, Vasquez, & Doorley, 2003).

The Use of the Internet to Build Relationships

Roper’s (2002) survey of 150 activist Web sites convincingly demonstrated that, internationally, the authority of corporates has been questioned in relation to the authority of the sovereign state, leading to world-wide activism and media comment (see also DeLuca & Peeples, 2002; Perkins, 2000). Roper found that Web sites are used to organize—networking, strategy co-ordination, and training—allowing the generation of mass responses to events and policies. Web sites are also used to inform: Citizens are empowered to contest public policy to ensure it stays in line with the public good. This may include shared research results, training on how to conduct research, how to organize campaigns, how to use the Internet and other media, and legal assistance. Roper also suggested that Internet sites are used to reposition the discourse, through brand-based activism—counteradvertising that exposes advertising techniques—and providing counterinformation from academics. Such Web sites then position Internet publics as citizens rather than consumers and can provide a direct way of communicating news to publics that bypasses media filters.

The emergence of the GE Free coalition as an activist group represented a struggle to ensure that individuals are legitimately able to articulate alternative discourses on genetic engineering in a newly deliberative public sphere. The coalition used Web sites as one means to achieve this, in an attempt to influence the debate surrounding genetic engineering.

METHOD

In line with these theoretical perspectives, a critical interpretive approach was adopted to look at the communication aspects of this issues management campaign on three levels. I used Fairclough's (1992) method of critical discourse analysis to analyze the texts, the discursive practices (the ways in which messages were communicated to publics), and the social practices (the ideologies underlying the strategies evident in the campaign). This qualitative methodology sought to examine rich data to gain new insights into the discursive social construction of genetic modification by activist groups, emphasizing the role of language in constructing meaning (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995; Geertz, 1973; Schwandt, 2000). To capture the complexity of this activist campaign, I chose a combination of document analysis and semistructured interviews. Such methodological and theoretical triangulation is a way of adding richness and depth to the understanding of data, ensuring the rigor and authenticity of the data collection (Janesick, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 2000).

Over the 3-month period of the campaign, I analyzed the GE Free coalition Web site and associated member Web sites, together with related press releases, to establish the main themes used by the coalition in its communication about genetic engineering issues and to explore the discursive practices evident. I conducted semistructured interviews with spokespersons from lobby groups representing both anti-GE and pro-GE stances to establish the underlying strategies for the campaign: one of the main drivers of the GE Free coalition campaign; the GE spokesperson for Greenpeace New Zealand; and a spokesperson for the Life Sciences Network, a group representing 22 organizations including major industry groups, science organizations, and Crown Research Institutes. I used Owen's (1984, 1985) method of thematic analysis to examine the dominant themes evident in the texts, searching for ideas that were recurrent, or repetitive, terms of high intensity or that clustered around particular subjects in the texts.

ANALYSIS

The GE Free Campaign

After the report of the Royal Commission in July 2001, a number of environmental interest groups, many of whom had gained "interested person" status and

presented submissions to the Royal Commission, combined to form the GE Free coalition. They commenced a deliberate and unified political campaign for a genetic engineering-free New Zealand both to represent the viewpoints of the wide member base and to generate further support for their position. The following member groups were listed on the GE Free Web site on August 27, 2001: Biodynamic Gardening and Farming Association of New Zealand, Bio-Gro, GE Free New Zealand in food and environment (Rage), Greenpeace New Zealand, Green Party, Jews for GE-Free food, Pesticide Action Network NZ, Safe Food Campaign, and Soil and Health Association of New Zealand (NZ).

The objectives of this issues management campaign were to increase public awareness about genetic engineering, to encourage public demonstration against genetic engineering, to influence the Government in favor of limiting genetic engineering to laboratory-based research, and to prevent the introduction of GE field trials (Annette Cotter, GE spokesperson for Greenpeace New Zealand, personal communication, June 21, 2001). The GE Free campaign demonstrated three main communication strategies. These involved, first, communicating with publics in an unmediated way; second, encouraging public lobbying of government; and third, creating media events to gain media attention.

Before this campaign, media reports about genetic engineering had included a confusing array of information from a range of interest groups as well as opinion pieces reflecting different positions on genetic modification from editors, experts, and policy analysts. There is some evidence that publics were uncertain what information could be trusted, both because of a distrust of the agendas of commercial interests and a distrust of media agendas (A. Henderson, 2001; A. Henderson & Weaver, 2003). The coalition provided extensive unmediated information to its publics and contributed to public knowledge via Web sites and through public meetings. The campaign contributed factual information in the form of overseas opinion surveys, international scientific reports, and information about field trials and the commercial production of genetically modified crops in other parts of the world. The three key messages in this campaign were the following: "Ban all field trials and commercial releases of genetically engineered organisms into the environment; keep GE-foods out of the country; and restrict genetic engineering to contained laboratories." (*GE FREE NZ Ours for the Picking!,* 2001). The campaign endorsed environmental values and favored policies that protected New Zealand's unique flora and fauna.

Individual members of the general public were encouraged to lobby government by sending letters to local media, or phoning newstalk radio programs, and by sending preprinted postcards to five ministers: Pete Hodgson (Research, Science, and Technology), Marian Hobbs (Environment), Jim Sutton (Agriculture), Annette King (Health), and the Prime Minister, Helen Clark. The postcards featured five different slogans and graphics typical of the rhetoric used throughout the campaign:

> Genetically engineered organisms are unpredictable and their release irreversible. Keep GE in the lab.
> This is not a testing ground. Keep our environment GE free.
> Agriculture—the backbone of this country. Don't muck it up. Keep NZ fields GE free.
> Our children are not guinea pigs. Keep GE out of our food.
> Safe food, sure markets, treasured land. GE free NZ. Ours for the picking.
> (*GE FREE NZ Ours for the Picking!,* 2001)

Banners, posters, and stickers also were made available to the public, so that New Zealanders were encouraged to individually declare their support for a GE free environment.

The coalition communicated via Web sites, by email, and by telephone to organize and coordinate regional action. Individual contact people in the GE Free network were listed on the Web site for 40 different regions of New Zealand, giving telephone, address, and email contact details. Individuals, organizations, and regions were all encouraged to register as GE free:

> The GE free register map will be used as a tool to pressure Local and Regional Concils and the Government to declare New Zealand as a GE free environment. The map (but not the register) will also be made available for the media. We believe that a map, that gradually fills up with green "no go" areas during the run up to the Government making its decision relating to the Royal Commission will be a powerful tool, a media focus and an inspiration for the GE Free campaign. (*GE FREE NZ Ours for the Picking!,* 2001)

New Zealanders were encouraged to make genetic engineering a regional issue because local body elections were to be held on October 15, 2001. Information stalls were organized outside local council buildings and councils were encouraged to declare their regions GE free. During the campaign, Nelson and Napier were declared GE free, and 7 out of 14 Wellington mayoral candidates campaigned for Wellington to be GE free.

The coalition organized rallies, and *hikoi* (marches) to focus media attention on the campaign itself, and to ensure the issues raised would have wide-ranging popular appeal. The first rally was in Auckland on September 1, 2001, with more than 10,000 people marching. Further rallies then were organized in main centers around the country to create a national day of action on October 6, 2001. In Auckland, a ring of huge posters around the Town Hall and, in Wellington, a giant GE free sandwich, 64.5 m long, ensured further media attention. Giant billboards were erected in Auckland, and a GE Free sign was painted to cover a paddock in the Bay of Plenty.

The involvement of high profile New Zealanders ensured further publicity and media attention for the campaign. A GE Free New Zealand photographic cam-

paign, the brainchild of Alannah Currie, former member of the 80s band, The Thompson Twins was described as follows:

> The idea was twofold, first to promote the forthcoming rally at QE2 Square in Auckland on September 1 and second, in the long term, to become an ever evolving online exhibition of images showing opposition to genetically engineered food in our foods and in our bodies. (*GE FREE NZ Ours for the Picking!,* 2001)

Other New Zealand entertainers were filmed or photographed preparing posters in support of the campaign, including Bic Runga, Rena Owen, Rachel Hunter, Dave Dobbyn, Stella, Mikey Havoc and Newsboy, and actors from the popular soap, *Shortland Street* (Doyle, 2001). A GE Free celebrity dinner in Auckland was organized by Tom Bailey of the Thompson Twins, and internationally renowned fashion designers Karen Walker, Marilyn Sainty, World, and Zambesi designed T-shirts in support of the campaign (Zander, 2001).

The level of media attention gained by the GE Free campaign, and the significant numbers of people attending rallies throughout New Zealand suggest that the campaign was highly successful in raising public awareness of the issues involved and gaining popular support for a GE free stance.

DISCUSSION

The GE Free campaign represented a site of resistance to normalized political and economic discourses in New Zealand. This issues management campaign relied on the construction and management of multiple national and political identities for New Zealand based on the rearticulation of three previously held identities: (a) clean, green, and environmentally friendly—"100% pure"; (b) "paradise"—reminiscent of the wholesome land of plenty created by New Zealand pioneers; and (c) a "grassroots community" of politically active citizens (as in the nuclear-free protests of the mid-1980s). This represented a complex interplay of political and economic identities centered on New Zealanders as citizens and consumers. Citizens have voting power. Consumers have buying power. If consumers choose not to buy genetically modified products because of lifestyle values, and their opinion influences policy formation, they are acting as citizens. As the work of Moffitt (1994) on multiple images and multiple publics suggested, individuals construct multiple positions for themselves, continuously. In this campaign, publics could identify with one or all of the identities created for New Zealand, through a process of belonging (R. Scott et al., 1998), as either consumers or citizens or both.

Two possible economic identities for New Zealand are evident in the genetic modification debate. First, an identity is constructed as comparable to other na-

tions; this involves maintaining scientific research expertise, developing cutting-edge technologies (including biotechnology) and competing in global markets. Second, an identity is constructed as different from other developed nations; this involves maintaining a “clean, green image” and a unique biodiversity to foster tourism opportunities and the niche marketing of organic products.

The first conceptualization of economic identity is frequently articulated by the major business and scientific organizations represented in the debate. For example, the Life Sciences Network argued that “New Zealand is a biological nation who … could benefit greatly from this sort of technology” (William Rolleston, Chairperson, Life Sciences Network, personal communication, September 16, 2001). It reflects the concerns of organizations whose identity is associated with, and prioritizes, economic discourses centering on growth, profit, and market share. New Zealand is identified in terms of an organization competing in the global marketplace on the basis of new technology and product development. In this sense, discourse about science and technology has been colonized by economic discourse (Moffitt, 1994). The legitimation of such discourses occurs through the use of the rationalist arguments of scientific and neo-liberal interest groups (Habermas, 1996).

In contrast, the second conceptualization of economic identity, favored by the GE Free coalition, is articulated with environmental discourses prioritizing biodiversity and ecological sustainability. These discourses are often ethically based, arguing for the collective social good on the basis of cultural values (Habermas, 1996). However, New Zealand was additionally conceptualized by the GE Free coalition as an organization competing in the global marketplace on the basis of niche organic markets. The coalition aimed to strengthen and legitimate the environmental argument by adding an economic justification by using a rhetoric of difference (Burke, 1973) to give an alternative perspective to the prevailing market-based rationalization for genetic modification. In one of the banners used during the protest marches, the protest was positioned as part of the antiglobalization movement, against transnational corporate business, with the slogan “Rage against the machine.”

Arguing for a New Zealand identity as 100% pure is both an economic argument, arguing for a different market for New Zealand goods at home and overseas, and a scientific argument, arguing for the privileging of biodiversity and environmental sustainability. This is also an argument based on lifestyle and identity. The representation of New Zealand in the postcard slogan: “Safe food, sure markets, treasured land. GE free NZ. Ours for the picking” is a rearticulation of the “half-gallon, quarter acre, pavlova paradise” (Mitchell, 1972) and reflects the earlier identity of New Zealand and of New Zealanders being self-sufficient “do-it-yourselfers” in creating a land of plenty (typical of the 1950s and 1960s). In this campaign, identification is also facilitated through the use of rhetoric, which establishes rapport with publics (Burke, 1973); being self-sufficient means a col-

lection of individuals and small businesses resisting the "take-over" by big business, threatened on a global level by interests such as Monsanto.

The GE Free campaign also depends on a conceptualization of political identity for New Zealand on two levels. First, the campaign constructs New Zealand as a collection of individuals with the democratic right to debate the issues and influence national public policy. At the same time, New Zealand is conceptualized as a small nation or global participant in international world affairs with freedom of choice in terms of the right to be different from other countries, such as the United States. This choice is represented in both the preferred economic direction for New Zealand's primary produce (for niche organic markets) and in deeply held environmental principles in a rearticulation of the stances taken over the Springbok tour and New Zealand's nuclear-free position of the 1980s. Similarly, both issues initially divided the nation, whereas the nuclear-free stance pitted New Zealand in a "David and Goliath" stand against the might of the United States (Foote, 1999; Lange, 1990; White, 1998). Citizen activism at the time of the Springbok tour of New Zealand in 1981 and New Zealand's nuclear-free stance in the 1980s resulted in the legitimation of ideological stances that successfully pressured the governments at that time to adopt public policy consistent with these viewpoints. The focus of the GE Free campaign involved very similar campaign tactics (e.g., large public rallies and marches and the declaration of nuclear-free zones in regions of New Zealand) to resist the official discourse of the time but the GE Free campaign had the addition of Web-based tactics to provide information and to coordinate action.

New Zealanders then are represented as politically active, unafraid to stage political protests and take a different ideological position from the positions frequently articulated in normalized discourses internationally. Identity management is used in this campaign as a way of organizing, of creating an interest group of activists (R. Scott et al., 1998), and the Web-based activism of the GE Free coalition as a means of issues management in this campaign is consistent with Roper's (2002) findings. The GE Free campaign used Web sites to organize (networking, strategy coordination, and training), allowing the generation of mass responses to events and policies as well as using email, telephone, and public meetings to organize public participation. Web sites, as well as public meetings and mass media, were used to inform—to communicate knowledge about genetic modification—empowering publics as citizens to contest public policy. Web sites also were used to reposition the discourse scientifically, economically, and politically, providing counterinformation from academic sources.

Web sites, therefore, possibly play some role in creating a public sphere for dialogue about genetic modification; although, there is much debate about whether Web sites themselves provide for the two-way communication necessary for the creation of a Habermasian public sphere (Lewis, 2000; Taylor, Kent, & White, 2001; Weaver, 2002). In this campaign, the actions taken by publics could be said to represent their participation in the debate; there was certainly some opportunity

created for dialogue in the sense that Heath (1997) referred to in the creation of "zones of meaning." This may represent a move toward a democracy similar to a conceptualization of "deliberative democracy" (Benhabib, 1996; Habermas, 1996; Mouffe, 1996).

The GE Free coalition campaign was initiated because of a perception that public input into the Royal Commission on Genetic Modification (2001) had not been heeded—that individuals and environmental interest groups lacked power in the debate. The campaign sought to delegitimate the accepted government and industry position on genetic modification by the use of advocacy tactics but also sought to increase dialogue and debate about genetic modification, a strategy that would seem consistent with J. E. Grunig's (2000) concept of social corporatism.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

It is interesting to speculate to what extent similar activist campaigns would be successful in other countries given the international and global nature of the genetic modification debate. Economically, which market values will be favored? Will organic or nongenetically engineered produce become sought after, or will the benefits of genetic modification technologies be preferred? Scientifically, will genetic modification technologies gain legitimation from their association with corporate businesses and global markets, or will environmental concerns to protect world biodiversity, and indigenous rights to culturally appropriate agricultural practices, take precedence?

Managing Multiple Identities—The Challenge for New Zealand

A number of tensions are still evident in the somewhat paradoxical set of identities for New Zealand in this debate, and it is uncertain which identities will prevail. First, it may be hard for the GE Free coalition to maintain the perception of risk associated with genetic modification. They have successfully kept genetic engineering in the laboratory in New Zealand, kept global businesses such as Monsanto out, and ensured a strict regulatory framework for research. This very success means that the threat is somewhat minimized. GE Free will have to maintain the threat of genetic engineering in the absence of visible genetic engineering crises. (Apartheid practices in South Africa and the memory of the Chernobyl disaster gave the "racism in sport" and "nuclear-free" campaigns far more dramatic visual images.) Second, the current meaning of "New Zealand is being left behind in the market place" that has been associated with arguments for increasing the use of genetic modification technologies also could shift,

given the European and Japanese markets' rejection of genetic modification products; New Zealand may be left behind in the organic marketplace. Kiwi fruit and apple exporters in New Zealand certainly believe that their key markets overseas are not in favor of genetic modification (Collins, 2003), and there are indications of a change in opinion internationally that suggests less faith in the benefits of genetic modification (Fitzsimons, 2003).

Implications for Public Relations Theory and Practice

The GE Free campaign was relatively successful from a public relations perspective. It built relationships with publics, gave a voice to the groups concerned about genetic modification technologies, and encouraged participation in the debate. It was partially successful in influencing government policy: The voluntary moratorium on genetic engineering commercial field trials was officially extended until October 2003. The campaign bought time, ensured that there would be continuing debate about the regulatory environment, and effectively contested the dominant discourses about genetic engineering. It demonstrates successful issues management through the management of identity to create overlapping "zones of meaning" for multiple publics in the debate. This campaign "made prolonged conflict a central strategy" (Murphy & Dee, 1992, p. 17) to allow an opportunity for the emergence of oppositional discourses, the creation of genuine dialogue that recognized the legitimacy of multiple identities and value systems, and the plurality of discourses that these generate.

This critical analysis indicates that identity management is a useful concept contributing to a theoretical understanding of how discursive strategies can be used in issues management campaigns to obtain public consent and influence public policy. The research reinforces the importance of exploring issues management from the perspective of activists and supports developing theories of publics (Cozier & Witmer, 2001; Vasquez & Taylor, 2001). It is also consistent with current public relations perspectives emphasizing the role of relationship-building and dialogue and supports other research demonstrating how the Internet can facilitate both dialogic public relations and activism.

Activist groups interested in learning from this case study may see value in establishing overlapping "zones of meaning" to communicate with multiple-interest groups and develop an issues management campaign that depends on the management of multiple identities to create a complex stance on a public policy issue such as genetic engineering. As Cheney (1991) pointed out, organizational rhetoric is the business of managing identities.

In this article I contribute a theoretical understanding of the role of identity management in public relations campaigns that focus on contested public policy issues where there are diverse, multiple publics. I suggest the need for continuing critical public relations research, focusing on the discursive construction of shared

meaning, and exploring further the complex identification processes represented in the management of multiple identities.

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