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Critiquing Human Resource Development’s Dominant Masculine Rationality and Evaluating Its Impact

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The purpose of this article is to critique human resource development’s (HRD) dominant philosophy, practices, and research; illustrate how they negatively affect women HRD practitioners and recipients; and recommend alternative conceptualizations of the field. This article is grounded in a critical feminist theoretical framework, draws on critical theory and critical management studies, and is inspired by the author’s ongoing disenchantment HRD’s overreliance on “performative” ideas and practices.

Keywords: critical HRD; feminism; performative HRD; masculine rationality

Challenging Dominant Masculine Rationality in Human Resource Development

Human resource development (HRD) is an emerging field of practice and research. Broadly concerned with the humans in organizations, HRD has historically been focused on issues related to the development of workers and the organization with regard to training, career development, and organization development (OD; McLagan, 1989). The field has decidedly humanistic roots traceable to the human relations movement and prominent in the creation of the field of OD (Burke, 1992; Greiner & Cummings, 2004; Porras & Bradford, 2004; Waclawski & Church, 2002; Wheatley, Tannenbaum, Yardley Griffin, & Quade, 2003; Wirtenberg, Abrams, & Ott, 2004). It is a field founded on employee advocacy, yet it is situated in a system saturated with sexism, racism, and managerialism.

I contend that HRD is at risk of becoming, or perhaps already is, co-opted into hegemonic practices of management that are rendering it unable to fulfill
its pivotal role: humanistically facilitating development and change. Change agents strive to meet the cliché of “thinking outside the box,” challenging the status quo, and innovating in ways that help us see problems and opportunities in new lights. Yet HRD is increasingly thinking “inside the box” of capitalism and masculine rationality making it ever more difficult for the profession to behave ethically, sustainably, or creatively.

The purpose of this article is to critique HRD’s dominant philosophy, practices, and research; illustrate how they negatively affect women HRD practitioners and recipients; and recommend alternative conceptualizations of the field. This article is grounded in a critical feminist theoretical framework, draws on critical theory and critical management studies, and is inspired by my ongoing disenchantment HRD’s overreliance on “performative” ideas and practices.

The human resource (HR) field in general is an excellent candidate for a post-structural feminist analysis as it has been historically applauded as a welcome movement away from Taylorist scientific management and toward a more human and humane workplace (Storberg-Walker & Bierema, 2008). Yet I maintain that the field is at risk of perpetuating the very philosophy it rose to challenge. Although many of HR’s innovations have been heralded as moving the workplace away from the external controls that have accompanied the rise of scientific management, today’s HR innovations have also been critiqued for simply moving the locus of control more toward the internal and self-regulation, guided by what feminists call the panoptic gaze of the “other” as legitimate masculine authority. For instance, although workers today are valued for their whole person and treated humanely in the workplace, management has created means of worker surveillance such as monitoring communications, self-surveillance, 360-degree feedback, and self-directed work teams that might be viewed as a kinder gentler means of managerial control (Alvesson & Willmott, 1992). These measures are subtle means of maintaining White male power, a vestige of management.

This article presents one perspective, not a claim to one “truth.” Through interrogating dominant views and proposing alternative ways of conceptualizing the field, I aim to attempt what Calas and Smircich (1999) describe as “help[ing] us to understand the exclusions on which writers need to rely to represent ‘positive knowledge,’” (p. 658). The goal of my work is to unsettle the settled ideas and practices that shape HRD.

**Unsettling HRD**

I contend that HRD is strongly influenced by masculine rationality, meaning it identifies with masculine attributes such as being strong, mechanical, assertive, objective, and controlled. Masculinist rationality is an assumption that masculine traits of objectivity, aggressiveness, and performance are the standard and that adhering to them is a neutral behavior that should not be questioned. It is convenient for those in power, typically White males, to establish expectations that leave little room for others to question the prevailing
standards that elite White males have themselves created. For instance, the definition “HRD is a process of developing and unleashing human expertise through organization development (OD) and personnel training and development (T&D) for the purpose of improving performance” (Swanson & Holton, 2001, p. 90) is focused on performance, a prevailing definition in HRD created by White males.

Society is steeped in masculine rationality and generally lives unquestioningly with its assumptions that promote inequitable social systems and practices such as management, capitalism, sexism, and racism. Naturally, masculine rationality trickles down to smaller social systems, including fields such as HRD. When masculine rationality is challenged, its challengers are often accused of being irrational by its beneficiaries who seek to maintain the privileges afforded by the status quo. My own critiques of HRD’s performance orientation have been described as “contain[ing] gross errors and misunderstandings” (Swanson & Holton, 2001, p. 131). In part, I believe that performance-based HRD has become such a dominant voice in HRD because of its advocacy by powerful male figures in the field and its advancement by practitioners and researchers, both female and male. Our masculine, rational, and performative outlook privileges management—generally a male-dominated and controlled enterprise—and is also used in a competitive sense to build HRD’s credibility among the management elite. It distresses me that the field is so uncritical of these linkages. Masculine rationality also silences other voices, particularly more feminist ones. Ruddick (1996) drawing on Code explains as follows:

The ideals of rationality and objectivity that have guided and inspired theorists of knowledge throughout the history of western philosophy have been constructed through excluding the attributes and experiences commonly associated with femaleness and underclass status: emotion, connection, practicality, sensitivity, and idiosyncrasy (Code, 1993, p. 21). (p. 248)

The field’s adoption of masculine rational frameworks and methods is apparent in its overreliance on economic models and performance-enhancing interventions. Its quest to prove its worthiness with management is also an effort to prove HRD’s rationality. This pursuit has caused the field to dismiss other models and interventions that challenge the “rational HRD way.”

One way this masculine rationality is evident is through HRD’s omission of marginalized groups in its research. This problem was illuminated in Bierema and Cseh’s (2003) feminist analysis of more than 600 Academy of Human Resource Development conference articles from 1996 to 2000. They found that HRD research overwhelmingly excluded issues of equity and access in the workplace. Very few studies promoted diversity or emphasized issues of social justice. Women’s voices and experience were ignored, as were asymmetrical power arrangements. Gender was rarely used as a category of analysis—even when data were collected by gender. Furthermore, organizational “undiscussables” such as
sexism, racism, patriarchy, or violence received little attention in the literature, and HRD research has only weakly advocated change. They concluded that HRD research may be reproducing inequitable power relationships in organizations rather than restructuring them.

Not long after the publication of the Bierema and Cseh (2003) study, an editorial in Human Resource Development Quarterly appeared that was critical of the application of a feminist research framework because of and alleged “inherent bias.” The editorial brazenly suggested “unisex research” as a way of avoiding such bias:

The solution as I see it to the inherent bias of Feminist Research is to move on to Unisex Research. Unisex Research is proposed to be an overarching value on top of mature research methods to ensure that those methods are not distinguished or distinguishable on the basis of sex. Once in place, Unisex Qualitative Research projects, Unisex Case Study Research projects, Unisex Theory Building Research projects, etc., can take place with the threat of bias under better control. Thus, the generation of significant new knowledge without a sexual bias will advance our scholarly understanding of phenomena being investigated. (Swanson, 2004, p. 118)

This editorial provides a prime example of masculinist rationality and an exhibit of a powerful elite White male telling us what should, and should not, count for knowledge. He paints feminism as irrational, reactionary, and plain wrong. Yet he appears to overlook that he is also working from a theoretical framework. Yet because his is the “default” dominant masculine rational one, it is nearly invisible and above critique. “Unisex research,” in my view, claims the stance of rationality by claiming that it is “an overarching value,” “mature,” “controlled,” and superior to feminist methods. It disturbs me that the field easily accepts or ignores editorials like Swanson’s, but it is indicative of HRD’s general apathy toward power dynamics and their influence on organization life or interest in critique. If the field is to develop in a multifaceted manner, it is important to open up debate and welcome multiple conflicting understandings of it. Exploring critical HRD provides one avenue toward alternative conceptualizations and understandings of HRD.

**A Critical HRD**

HRD is a field that values reflective practice (Grieves, 2003; Yorks, 2005), questioning assumptions (Argyris, Putnam, & Smith, 1985; Senge, 1990), and embracing change (Burke, 1992; Schein, 1987, 1988). Yet when challenged to apply these tools to itself, HRD appears to adopt a resistant unreflective theory-in-use that significantly contradicts its espoused theory. Some scholars have recommended that HRD undertake a more rigorous critique of its principles and practices that incorporates critical theory (Elliott & Turnbull, 2003; Fenwick, 2004, 2005; Sambrook, 2003), but such calls have been largely
ignored and in some cases, discouraged. Critical HRD receives more robust treatment in Great Britain where it has thread status at the International Critical Management Studies Conference and at the Academy of Management’s Critical Management Studies special interest group. Critical HRD is slowly gaining traction at the Academy of Human Resource Development Conference, with 2009 representing the first time it has been officially recognized as a stream of research.

Elliot and Turnbull (2003) are concerned “that the methodological traditions that guide the majority of HRD research do not allow researchers to engage in studies that challenge the predominately performative and learning-outcome focus of the HRD field” (p. 971). They make a plea to open HRD theory to broader perspectives. I have proposed a starting point for considering critical HRD and offer this working definition:

Critical HRD challenges performative HRD philosophy and practice arguing for a critical and socially conscious HRD that problematizes its precepts by challenging the commodification of employees; involving multiple stakeholders; contesting the nature of power relations; pursuing wide-ranging goals; providing alternative, nonoppressive, and holistic models for cultivating development in work context; and transforming the workplace.

The definition speaks to what I see as the major critiques of HRD:

- a performative philosophy
- the commodification of employees
- the allegiance to shareholders
- the ignoring of power relations
- the lack of alternative models and theories for HRD practice

Each of these elements will be discussed in the next sections.

**HRD is Performative**

I contend that HRD is dominated by a performative philosophy that must be critiqued for how performativity has (mis)shaped the field. Performativity—a natural by-product of masculinist rationality—is a shift away from human values and toward efficiency and performance (Lyotard, 1984). Performativity has become the overarching goal in industrialized workplaces that have been downsized, smartsized, and globalized with “performance-enhanced” workers (note, this is not the same as Butler’s, 1990, definition of performativity pertaining to gender performance). HRD has conformed to conventional management philosophy by devising methods of “unleashing human expertise” in ways that benefit the enterprise, defining “success” with linear rational measures and careful consideration of its return on investment, referring to workers as “resources” or “productivity brokers,” providing unequal access to...
learning and development for marginalized workers, viewing employee development as primarily an “investment in human capital,” giving lip service to issues of diversity, and demanding enhanced performance from fewer workers. This drive for performance has clouded HRD’s focus on human development and sharpened its focus on productivity, performance, and profit. Blindly incorporating performativity into one’s HRD repertoire may also be a deeper response to HRD’s marginalized status in most organizations. Embracing performativity becomes a channel for enhancing HRD’s secondary status and justifying its existence. Thus, HRD professionals master identities as “performance consultants” without a great deal of critical awareness about the orientation or the discourse itself.

Performativity has invigorated the rise of managerialism where those running an organization are afforded undeserved leeway to make decisions that are assumed to be rational, schooled, and ethical. Our society has fueled the rise of such management power by granting corporations more legal rights than citizens and valuing money and the life it brings on human systems (deGeus, 1997). Performativity also parallels other manifestations of patriarchy in that it is based on masculine rationality that strives to enhance power and control in the organization. “Performativity . . . carries the added message of masculinity: the commonsense expectations of men’s behavior. That is, the competition, aggression, the functionality of performance measurement, all framed within notions of emotional control, rationality and endurance” (Whitehead, 1998, p. 212).

Holton (1999) contends, “Because many HRD practitioners have developmental values and roots, they view the notion of performance outcomes and accountability for developmental processes with disdain and avoid it” (p. 37). I disagree and believe there is nothing inherently wrong with performance, but it needs to be balanced with other organizational and community variables and considered in the totality of the health of the organization using multifaceted critical criteria. The problem as I see, it is that performativity has eclipsed how HRD is defined, discussed, and delivered. To rectify the problem will require HRD to become more antiperformative in its stance.

**HRD Commodifies Workers**

Performance-based HRD often commodifies workers. Labor becomes commodity or commodified when it is done in exchange for something else. Commodification transforms work relationships into products that are bought and sold and preserves the masculine rational goals of profitability and performance. This transaction attitude toward labor grew out of industrialization and cultivated a very narrow concept of production (productivity, performance, and profit). Preindustrialization labor was important for subsistence and life, such as farming. Now, labor’s value is as a commodity to be bought and sold with little or no consideration of its life-enhancing qualities. Hart (1992) highlights this contrast noting subsistence production values sustaining and
improving life. Commodity production, conversely, values producing goods and services for profit. Hart alleges that commodity production erodes quality of life in the name of profit. HRD focused only on profit maximization creates the same effect, commodifying employees. This commodification is dehumanizing as employees learn to market themselves, increase their value to the organization, and improve performance. The organization responds in kind by forming a transaction-oriented relationship with workers where their labor can be easily bought or sold, and cast aside when it is no longer needed.

According to Basgen and Blunden (n.d.), the process of commodification has accelerated during recent decades. They describe the rise of women’s paid labor as one example:

“Women’s work”—cleaning, cooking, caring, rearing, teaching, washing, sewing, and so on—is now carried out by women selling their labor power in factories . . . and then purchasing the products on the market as commodities. This process is everywhere today; everything has a price tag, everything has become a commodity. (Basgen & Blunden, n.d.)

They cite the privatization of government services as another example of commodification. This is particularly evident in an age of school vouchers, corporate universities, privatized public transportation, health maintenance organizations, and other services that require the user to purchase them rather than the public to provide them through tax revenues. Human interaction is also being replaced by machines evident in daily activities such as banking, self-checking aisles at the grocery store, automated airline check-in, and the universally dreaded voice mail system. Employee identities have become commodities as well where corporate education programs may function to duplicate the organization within the person (Covaleski, Dirsmith, Heian, & Samuel, 1998), with educational programs aimed at instilling the organization’s values, goals, and discourse, thus enhancing their marketability to the organization. The explosion of the knowledge economy and rise of learning organizations also suggests that knowledge is the latest thing to be commodified. Commodification is a prominent feature of the knowledge economy where there is,

An emphasis on productive capacity with regard to knowledge and control as an asset in order to yield value to its owners. The intellectual nature of the commodity makes the control of labour in knowledge economies a key determinant of “profitability.” Consequently, the efficient capture, control and exploitation of the surplus value of workers’ labour is of central importance. (Fletcher, Boden, Kent, & Tinson, 2007, pp. 433-434)

People, or commodities that yield profit, are usually under surveillance to ensure they are being productive.

Commodification is a double-edged sword that has been described as inevitable in that it is simultaneously dehumanizing and freeing, requiring
consumers to sacrifice a certain degree of human dignity but at the same time, giving them power in the market place. Commodification integrates people into capitalism in a situation where the market succeeds because of consumer dependence that becomes self-perpetuating. Technology and wealth creation have accelerated this process. Although corporations would not exist without profits, the performance improvement orientation loses sight of balancing human and organizational needs. This imbalance has caused HRD to align with organizational interests with the expectation that humans will follow suit, or else. There is also anticipation that the human needs should parallel those of the organization:

When individual’s needs are consistent with the organization’s, there is no tension. When the individual’s needs are not congruent with the organization’s performance requirements, and the organization is providing the required learning experience, a tension exists and inevitably results in some degree of organizational control. For this reason, learning professionals in HRD must balance practices that lead to the most effective adult learning with those that will lead to performance outcomes (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 1998, p. 122).

This demand for enhanced employee performance that is aligned with organization goals signifies the commodification of employee needs, learning, and autonomy.

**HRD is Beholden to Shareholders**

Another critique of HRD is its failure to consider all of its stakeholders. Notably, HRD functions in a gray area where its practitioners are expected to satisfy management while simultaneously serving employees. The expectations of these two stakeholder groups may be contradictory, leaving the HRD practitioner in a no-win situation where personal ethical principles must be abandoned to achieve managerial expectations (Marsick, 1997). Korten (1996) observed in a speech to the Academy of Human Resource Development Conference that there is a “serious disconnect between your own values and the realities of life in many of the corporations in which you work” (p. 1). HRD tends to favor a stockholder orientation that is performative, placing value on economics and performance, only considering social responsibility when it is profitable or required by law. The stockholder orientation privileges managerial and organizational interests:

A corporation is the private property of its stockholders and exists to create wealth and provide goods and services to the market. While obligated to comply with legal constraints, its primary goal is profitability; only secondarily is it to be concerned with goals, policies and strategies aimed at serving the needs of external publics. (Acar, Aupperle, & Lowy, 2001, p. 29)
A stockholder orientation generally favors procedures and processes that save or make money, at the expense of making the worker’s life more difficult or unpleasant. Alternatively, the stakeholder orientation advocates for organizational social responsibility to widely affected parties. Freeman (1984) describes stakeholders as “any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization’s objectives” (p. 46), and suggests that corporations exist with society’s permission and consequently must become a steward to external stakeholder groups. Clarkson (1995) defines primary stakeholders as those on whom a corporation depends for survival such as shareholders, investors, employees, customers, and suppliers. Secondary stakeholders as those who are influenced or affected by the organization but not engaged in transactions essential to the organization’s survival.

A stakeholder perspective acknowledges that addressing multiple, sometimes conflicting needs is a process of negotiation in HRD where power relations play out among different groups with varying degrees of power. A critical HRD recognizes and values multiple stakeholders and seeks outcomes that matter for all parties. The contradictory nature of HRD work is not well understood or addressed in the literature or practice. Fenwick and Bierema (2008) explored how social responsibility commitments were understood and implemented by HR professionals in Canada and the United States. They found that the participants did not see the corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiative within their purview. Given our current era of corporate misbehavior, it is alarming that HR is not connecting CSR with recruitment, training, or development or seeing it as part of its mission.

Critical HRD is socially conscious HRD (Bierema & D’Abundo, 2004), which requires that organization practices be implemented democratically and involves a diverse range of stakeholders, including customers, employees, suppliers, and citizens in policy development and oversight. Critical HRD also recognizes that certain interests are privileged when decisions are made, questions who benefits from HRD, and ensures that stakeholders have voice or a “place at the planning table” (Cervero & Wilson, 2005). HRD can play a role in involving these parties in policy development and making the decision makers more aware of these groups as strategies are being formulated and implemented. Ultimately, management interests should be balanced and negotiated with others who are affected by the work of the organization.

**HRD Ignores Power Relations**

A more critical approach acknowledges that management is a political social practice that has been influenced by historical and cultural power relations. HRD’s failure to recognize how some organization members are privileged while others are marginalized or disenfranchised by its work is problematic. Swanson’s (2004) call for “unisex research” is an example of this
nonrecognition. A critical HRD acknowledges that HRD is dominated by a masculine epistemology that has historically served to preserve power relations in a manner that marginalizes women and people of color. This masculine epistemology is manifested in HRD’s performative value system that effectively devalues, ignores, and silences nondominant groups, preserving patriarchal power in both theory and practice.

Critical HRD rejects the technical rationalist perspective that managers and the managed should be naturally divided social positions. Vince (2003) argues that “HRD is clearly a political activity” (p. 1) and calls for a critical HRD that addresses emotions and politics, reflective practices, and a revised understanding of leadership practice. Sambrook (2003) predicts that as the critical study of HRD matures, we will hear more about HRD’s role in promoting CSR and its more humanistic and emancipatory role in both helping individuals and transforming sociopolitical structures.

Power dynamics receive little attention in HRD education. To gain an understanding of how HRD and OD are power issues theoretically, I analyzed popular textbooks (Cummings & Worley, 2005; French & Bell, 1999; Gilley & Maycunich, 1998; Hargreaves & Jarvis, 2000; Phillips, 1999; Swanson & Holton, 2001; Walton, 1999; Yorks, 2005). Searches were made of the books’ table of contents and subject indexes to see how the issue of power was being addressed. Only four of the eight reference power, and none substantively. Yorks (2005) refers to power once, and Walton (1999) refers to power four times. Cummings and Worley (2005) reference power on 5 pages of their 694 page volume. French and Bell (1999) only address power acknowledging “organization development has been criticized for not taking into account power in organizations” (p. 282) and conceding that OD is still in the early stages of understanding power. None of these books offer a thorough discussion of power or acknowledge that power structures are grounded in patriarchy and highly resistant to any initiatives that might threaten them, such as a robust attempt and addressing diversity.

A key rationale for encouraging human resource developers to be critical lies in the realization of how powerful managers now are in the world, yet how poorly traditional HRD education has prepared them for considering questions of power and responsibility. (Trehan, 2004, p. 30)

Traditional management and HRD education have reproduced prevailing relations of power and reinforced management superiority in organization life. “It is no longer acceptable that HRD educators allow managers to maintain the illusion that their choices and actions are without political consequences” (Trehan, 2004, p. 31). Overlooking dynamics that significantly affect the goals HRD hopes to achieve impinges our ability to be effective or implement lasting change.

So far, this article has argued that HRD is dominated by masculine rationality that compromises its goal of addressing humanistic equitable organization
change. The field does a poor job of addressing diversity, acknowledging power dynamics, or considering alternative conceptual frameworks. A more critical HRD is proposed that critiques HRD’s performative stance, commodification of workers, loyalty toward stockholders, and disregard of power relations. The real consequences of HRD’s dominant masculine rationality. The next section illustrates how this orientation affects women, both those working in HRD and those served by it in organizations.

Women in HRD

Close your eyes for a moment and imagine an entry-level HRD practitioner. What does this person look like? Now, imagine a senior-level executive of HRD. In each instance, what did you see? Did you imagine a woman or a man? Did you picture a White person or a person of color? and What type of setting did you envision for your imaginary HRD people? It is likely you visualized women at the entry level and a White male at the executive level, both working in corporations. Why do we do that? Our gendered and race-based programming runs deep, just like our narrow views of what HRD is and where HRD is practiced.

Where are the women in HRD? Women populate the field and academic programs. Yet the top-level executive positions are held by men. The most widely recognized scholars are primarily White males who advocate performative theoretical frameworks valuing capitalistic, masculine, and rational models. Research has shown little movement into areas that call for attention related to sustainability and diversity. Few people in HRD seem to be alarmed by the field’s constriction. Although the field appears dominated by masculine rationality, women have been involved in HRD throughout history.

Women’s Place in HRD History

Historically, HR activities have been “women’s work.” In 1964, Miller and Coghill chronicled women’s role in the evolution of personnel administration in the U.S. Personnel work grew because of the introduction of activities designed to improve the condition of workers along with the introduction of measures to enhance the internal efficiency of an organization. The growth of personnel work paralleled the rise of women in personnel management who were hired to promote employee betterment and welfare. Women also evolved the technical side of personnel work. Miller and Coghill suggest that women were channeled into personnel roles because they were similar to their roles in social reform movements in the decades leading to World War I. Women in personnel work held various titles such as “house mother,” “matrons,” “social secretary,” and “employment manager.”

Miller and Coghill (1964) offer observations on dynamics influencing women’s movement into personnel administration. This work did not start out
to be performative or masculine, but shifted that direction in parallel with industrialization:

- The social structure of post Civil War business elites lacked good role models for addressing the human side of problems associated with rapid industrialization. The available models were decidedly feminine: mother, nurse, teacher, and social worker.
- The most pressing humanitarian and public relations problems involved women and very young workers, reinforcing the role of women in creating industrial welfare work.
- The impulse toward “employee betterment” had religious roots, reinforcing the tendency to select women to direct that work, as religion was viewed as more within a “women’s sphere” at the time.
- The rise of scientific management affected personnel work and a new association with a “hard” masculine field. This did not immediately preclude a good outlook for women, as witnessed by early scientific personnel managers such as Mary Gilson and Millicent Pond and consultants such as Katherine Blackford and Lillian Gilbreth.
- The input of military psychologists after World War I did much to diminish the earlier view of the personnel field as at least equally hospitable to women as to men.
- Employee welfare activities under the “American Plan” assumed more overtones of “exploit” (masculine image) than of “nurturance” (feminine image) that characterized the earlier less sophisticated experience.
- Growth of the association between collective bargaining and personnel activities clearly diminished the opportunity for women to rise to the top in an occupation now dominated or threatened with domination by an overt, if qualified, “conflict” motif.

So historically, the HR function has feminine roots. Its focus shifted with industrialization when men took over these roles. Miller and Coghill (1964) close their article with the following observations:

Today, although the personnel field may be regarded as less self-consciously “masculine” than such functions as production, engineering, finance and sales, women operate at a competitive disadvantage. Still, their opportunities remain better here than in any of the other major specialized functions of management. “Getting along with people” is still an essential element of the job. In earlier times, training as a woman was seen as an asset in dealing with the problems of “humanizing” work organizations. Where so much lip service is paid to concern with the “whole man” it might be well to remember that the whole man is at least partly feminine. Given the stresses confronting members of large organizations now and in the immediate future as they face the implications of computerization, automation, reduced expense accounts, and related trauma, the personnel field may suffer from its decreasing reliance on women practitioners. (p. 44)

**The Feminization of HRD**

Miller and Coghill’s (1964) words were written more than 40 years ago, yet they could have been written today. During the past 20 years or so, the HRD sector has become feminized and this is reflected in both pay scales and gender
Although the field is feminized, it is dominated by masculine rationality, showing the power of patriarchal systems in society. HR is one of the few professions to have more female managers than male, yet men make more money and hold the top jobs. The Labour Force Survey 2001, based on a 1% sample of employees in the United Kingdom, found that women accounted for 57% of personnel, training, and industrial relations managers. The only higher proportions of women managers were health and social services managers (73%) and office managers (66%). The lowest percentage of women managers were among production and maintenance workers (6% to 7%). The survey also found a negligible number of female directors or CEOs (www.statistics.gov.uk). The survey results are summarized in Table 1.

In 2003, Hanscome and Cervero observed that although the HRD role has become more integrated and strategic, this growing importance of the function is not reflected in the current pay and prestige levels allotted to these functions managers, many of whom are women.

The HRD sector is similar to all other paid work domains in that “female-dominated occupations pay less than male-dominated fields with similar educational requirements” (Jacobs & Blair-Loy, 1996, p. 209). In HRD circles, this pay differential is sometimes referred to as the feminization of HRD (Roos & Manley, 1996, p. 511).

### Table 1: Percentage of Women Managers by Industry

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Health and social services</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office managers</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personnel, training and industrial relations</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertising and PR</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospitality and leisure</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restaurant and catering</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial institutions</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail and wholesale</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shopkeepers</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality and customer care</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial managers and chartered secretaries</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distribution, storage and retail</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing and sales</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICT managers</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production works and maintenance</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production managers</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ackah and Heaton (2003) examined the career progression of human resource professionals among credentialed HR professionals. They explored the impact of the acquisition of a HR professional qualification on career progression for male and female managers. They found that the careers of men and women do differ, with men receiving more internal promotions, whereas women were pursuing career progression in other organizations. Women were also found to be less successful in terms of earnings and more likely to perceive barriers to their careers such as lack of role models and more difficulties with self-confidence than men. The authors suggest their findings deserve consideration when designing curriculum to account for raising the confidence and aspirations of female managers.

A 2004 postal survey conducted among the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) graduates examined the professional identities of human resource practitioners (Thompson, 2004). Her work was inspired by the dearth of women who hold top HR jobs, in spite of a near balance of midlevel managers when comparing women and men. She reported that although in 2002, 69% of all CIPD members were female, only 8.5% held senior executive or director positions, compared with 25% of the male membership. Her results suggested that women favor HR roles “more befitting personnel management than HRM” (p. 63) through their desire to help employees on maximizing profitability. Men, on the other hand, showed more proclivity toward profit maximization that she suggests may provide them a springboard toward upward levels of management. Furthermore, 72% of CIPD members are women as compared with only 28% of the 124,500 membership who are men (Tasker, 2005).

Tasker (2005) reports British figures from the Chartered Management Institute that reveal a significant pay gap between men and women in middle management HR posts. On average, women earn salaries of £41,000, whereas men earn £49,000. A recent U.S. HRD study yielded similar findings showing that women HRD practitioners’ salaries lag behind those of men employed in the same job types by an average of $7,813 per year. In the entire range of HRD jobs presented in the article, men’s salaries averaged $66,035 compared with women’s $55,598 (Dobbs, 1999). “Gender Pay Differential in HR Salaries Is £8k” (2004) reported an £8k difference in pay between men and women in the United Kingdom because of the lack of women at the senior level. The report indicated, however, that women’s pay is increasing at a faster rate than men’s. Although there are fewer men in HR, their relative numbers increase with job seniority. Only 40% of HR directors are women that perpetuate the glass ceiling at the executive levels.

The “feminization of HRD” is noted further, according to statistics illustrating a 10-year trend that began in the 1980s in which men’s entry into HRD-related categories decreased by 3.1%, whereas women’s entry into HRD increased by 49.2% (Hanscome & Cervero, 2003; Roos & Manley, 1996). The more limited salary range in HRD job categories is one possible reason for the decline in men’s
entry into the field (Hanscome & Cervero, 2003; Roos & Manley, 1996) along with the lower prestige equated with HRD jobs (Hanscome & Cervero, 2003). HRD has historically served a more feminine function from the welfare-oriented programs that were a reaction to industrialization to more recent government-sponsored programs such as affirmative action and movements toward workplace equality. Men may be deterred from entering HRD because of concerns on restricted career mobility associated with the HRD sector given its reputation as a dead-end job not leading to advancement (Roos & Manley, 1996).

**Women HRD Practitioners and Power**

“Much of the current management and training literature is sparse about how issues of gender and power inform the day-to-day experiences of HRD managers” (Hanscome & Cervero, 2003, p. 511). Hanscome and Cervero (2003) observe that what exists tends to focus on diversity practices and strategies for scaling the career ladder. They contend, “Serious discussion about the real-life connections between gender and power at the organizational level is also absent in many HRD training texts” (p. 512). They surveyed several popular HRD textbooks (Cummings & Worley, 2005; Johns, 1996; Raymond, Hollenbeck, Gerhart, & Wright, 1996) and concluded the following:

Women’s workplace challenges were subsumed under the umbrella of organizational diversity or pay issues, thus seriously diluting the everyday problems that women experience. Although gender and power appear as separate listings in the indexes, they are not connected, as in cross-referencing or sub-indexing. As well, although power is linked to hierarchal structures, gender inequalities are only briefly mentioned in terms of the glass ceiling. (p. 512)

Hanscome and Cervero (2003) examined how gender and power influenced the interpersonal relationships among HRD managers through strategies HRD managers employed to negotiate day-to-day interactions. Five female and 5 male HRD managers were interviewed using critical incident techniques to explore specific workplace interactions. Two major conclusions of the study indicated that the experiences of female and male respondents regarding the exercise of power were profoundly different and that the strategies used by respondents generally reflected the gendered contexts of power.

The habitual disregard for gendered power relations in textbooks and research consequently results in organization inequalities and unfair management practices. One must look to literature outside HRD (such as, in adult education or critical management studies) for discussions of how gender and power shape organization life. Devos (1996) argues that a lack of critical perspectives in the literature on work-based training has resulted in sparse attention being given to issues of gender and power within organizations, noting that it results in a lack of an adequate framework for analyzing and understanding
power dynamics. Lacking such analytical tools threatens to perpetuate oppressive organizational practices and structures. The irony of the feminization of HRD is that the field is dominated by masculine rationality—principles and practices that are often implemented by women—steeping the field in hegemony. Not only are women HRD workers marginalized in terms of pay, promotion, and prestige but also the very patriarchal policies they implement serve to prevent women from reaching their full career potential.

**HRD for Women**

Anna Quindlen (1997) once noted that women workers “spend their days doing a job most of their co-workers think they can’t handle, and then they will go home and do another job most of their co-workers don’t want.” Her glum portrait sums up the situation of many women in the paid workforce where they must work twice as hard for half as much and simultaneously meet demands of family life.

This article has established that the HRD field is pervaded by masculine rationality that values performance over all other outcomes, and also that HRD has been feminized, evident in lower salaries and levels for women as compared with men. Women have not fared so well in this area as a profession, but what about women whom are served by HRD? Women play a key role in the global workplace, yet their work and influence are relatively invisible, even in HRD. The text *HRD Trends Worldwide* (Phillips, 1999) makes no mention of gender or women, and of the 16 trends identified, issues of diversity are strangely absent. The International Labour Organization (ILO, 1990) reports that women are excluded from high-profile training programs 38.8% of the time, yet more than 39% of employers feel this is a nonissue. In a 2007 report on Global Employment Trends for Women, the ILO concluded “More women than ever before are in work, but a persistent gap in status, job security, wages and education between women and men is contributing to the ‘feminization of working poverty.’” Women are disadvantaged by HRD in terms of developmental opportunities, life–work balance, and diversity training, among other issues.

**Women’s development.** Women’s developmental disadvantage is compounded by a hidden workplace curriculum that teaches them how to assimilate to a patriarchal culture and suppress their female identity (Bierema, 2002). Women and men receive different developmental experiences in their careers (Federal Glass Ceiling Commission, 1998; Knoke & Isho, 1998; Ohlott, Ruderman, & McCauley, 1994). In fact, Still (1985) found that men tend to be sent to training that is promotion-oriented whereas women receive training for functional skills for their current job. Male-dominated managerial hierarchies decrease women’s opportunities for career encouragement and training (Tharenou, Latimer, & Conroy, 1994), and women do not have equal access to management development programs (Limerick & Heywood, 1993; Still,
1985). Just as in management, women tend to become sidelined and marginalized in management education and experiences that would groom them for ascending the career ladder. Women are also at a developmental disadvantage in the workplace because of the hidden curriculum that teaches them how to assimilate patriarchal culture, and expectations that they will suppress their female identity to succeed by masculine standards (Bierema, 2003; Hayes & Flannery, 2000). Social expectations for the “ideal worker” are gendered, and businesses define them through masculine criteria such as aggressiveness, independence, devotion, nonemotionality, and rationality (Rothausen-Vange, 2004).

Several authors have noted that although extensive research exists considering variables that hinder women’s advancement, scarce literature exists about factors that facilitate such development (Hite & McDonald, 2004; Knorr, 2005; Osipow & Fitzgerald, 1996). Hite and McDonald (2004) also point out that the majority of research on women’s careers focuses on college-educated managers, not nonmanagerial women. They conducted focus groups with 26 nonmanagerial women and found their participants adapted their career goals to meet other life circumstances; and that family responsibilities, job security, and organizational support systems influence their career success and satisfaction.

Hite and McDonald (2004) surveyed Black and White women managers and found differences in their perceptions of opportunities available based on race and gender. Black and White women share similar views when comparing opportunities between White women and men for getting hired, promoted, receiving salary increases, and other workplace challenges. When making comparisons with either men or women of color, White women were far more optimistic about the opportunities for people of color than were Black women. Hite and McDonald’s study explores how issues of race are ignored among Whites and HRD practitioners.

Carter (2002) used phenomenological methods of heuristic inquiry to collaborate with nine midcareer women as coresearchers to explore learning in professional developmental relationships. She collected interview and journal data for 6 months. She found that women’s developmental relationships are created and sustained largely through talk. Furthermore, they experience not only instrumental performance-based learning but also what Mezirow (1991) calls “transformative” learning—learning that significantly revises beliefs, attitudes, and values and results in a changed worldview or perspective. Carter has argued that her findings should call into question how managerial communication has been construed. She contents that it has been neglected as a developmental process.

Women’s development is mitigated by a number of factors. Women’s career development is different than men’s and models are inadequate to describe it (Benko & Weisberg, 2007; Bierema, 1998; Farmer & Associates, 1997; Hewlett, 2007). The type of development women experience tends to keep them at midlevels rather than groom them for upward mobility, and development is not equal across racial groups. Yet Whites lack awareness about the systemic racism pervading HRD.
Life-work balance. Women’s development and advancement are typically defined in male terms based on performative measures such as promotions, pay, and prestige. What is rarely asked, however, is how women define “success.” Patriarchal organizations seem to have already defined it for them. O’Reilly (as cited in Tischler, 2004) concludes that success is not related to gender discrimination but, rather, how hard women choose to compete, noting the hardest competitors tend to be men. Yet who defines the terms of the competition? Why are these terms not being questioned? Top jobs require crushing demands of long work hours and travel. This workaholic value goes relatively unquestioned in the United States where we now clock more hours on the job than any other country on earth—500 hours a year more than the Germans and 250 hours more than the British (Tischler, 2004).

Women’s family responsibilities have a major impact on the nature of their labor force participation (Davies & Thomas, 2000; Hochschild, 1997; Wilson, 1999). There is an assumption that family-friendly policies positively affect women’s labor force participation. These policies are measured by level of public child care, parental leave arrangements, and other financial-related child support (van der Lippe & van Dijk, 2002). Rothausen-Vange (2004) argues that “ideal worker” images are masculine creating expectations that all employees are constantly available to employers making it difficult to simultaneously be available to the family. Making family a priority is still taboo for executive women. Rogier and Padgett (2004) validated this perception in their study of perceptions toward women working a flexible schedule. Participants reviewed a packet of materials simulating the personnel file of a female employee in an accounting firm who was seeking promotion from manager to senior manager. Participants perceived the female employee on the flexible schedule as less dedicated to her career and motivated to advance, although there were no differences in perceived capability. Brenda Barnes, formerly CEO of PepsiCo and the first woman executive who quit to spend more time with her children, “will be forever branded as The Woman Who Walked Away” notes Tischler (2004, p. 52), even though she continued serving on corporate boards and teaching at the university level while she was out of the workforce. Today, she is CEO of Sara Lee.

Trends in the labor market indicate that many women value autonomy, family–work balance, and maintaining a wider-ranging network than do men. In surveys of 4,700 workers in Britain and Spain, only 20% of women considered themselves “work centered” making careers a primary priority (55% of men in the study defined themselves as work centered; Hakim as cited in Tischler, 2004):

Hordes of women refusing to play the career-advancement game aren’t doing so because they can’t hack it, but because they’ve lost faith in the institutions they’ve worked for and are tired of cultures driven by hairy-chested notions of how companies must function. (Tischler, 2004, p. 60)
Instead, women are leaving organizations to form their own businesses. The number of women-owned businesses increased by almost 90% during the 1990’s (Korn/Ferry International, 2001). Organizations need to encourage the creation of alternative definitions of success and support and reward women’s pursuit of success on their own terms.

Diversity training. The American Society for Training and Development’s 2002 state of the industry report ranked diversity as the second most prevalent concern of HRD professionals (VanBuren & Erskine, 2002), yet diversity training may falsely raise expectations, reinforce stereotypes, and create resentment among employees. Zhu and Kleiner (2000) identify several reasons for the failure of diversity training, including unrealistic goals, nonsupportive top management, national backlash (based on the erroneous assumption that it is White male bashing and the counter reaction of “reverse discrimination”), increased lawsuits, and few meaningful action steps. They offer corrective steps of stopping the denial of harassment and discrimination, removing the “diversity” label, establishing zero tolerance of discrimination and harassment policies, and demonstrating commitment at all levels of the organization.

The dominant diversity discourse heralds pluralism and multiculturalism, and it is generally believed that celebrating diversity is universally good. Yet Malik (2001) argues that the problem with embracing diversity and multiculturalism is it celebrates difference noting, “America is not multicultural; it is simply unequal” (p. 33). Campaigning for equality involves challenging accepted practices and policies, going against the grain, and seeking social transformation (Malik, 2001). Celebrating diversity on the other hand, “allows us to accept society as it is—all it says is ‘we live in a diverse world, enjoy it.’ It allows us to accept the divisions and inequalities that characterize the world today” (Malik, 2001, p. 34). Malik concludes that only in an equal society does difference have any meaning, because only in equal societies can difference be freely chosen. Given these problems with diversity training, organizations must ensure that such programs are carefully executed in an ethical, constructive, and sincere manner. Diversity programs also need to be sensitive to social context. This is increasingly important as the workplace globalizes.

This section has illuminated how HRD’s dominant masculine rationality has affected women in HRD. HRD has been feminized, yet it continues to advance patriarchal practices and policies that marginalize women in organizations through unequal developmental opportunities, life-balance challenges, and ineffective diversity training. The next section identifies ways to challenge HRD’s dominant masculinity.

Challenging HRD’s Dominant Masculinity

This article began by offering a critique of HRD’s narrow masculine rational orientation that is endangering the field’s relevance and impact. Next,
women working in the HRD profession and women who experience HRD were profiled to underscore how HRD’s masculinist rational epistemology consequently marginalizes some workers. To conclude, I would like to raise questions and challenges to the field.

Many questions come to mind as we mire ourselves in new ways of thinking about HRD. How do we reconcile a field that has been feminized, yet remains dominated by performativity? I argue that the predominance of men at the top of the field perpetuates its passion with performativity and keeps women “in their place.” How do we expand the discourse to include new conceptions of the field? How can HRD better serve women, people of color, and other marginalized groups? How can HRD be more sustainable? Who owns HRD? Who should evaluate HRD? How can HRD be more equitable? and How should HRD professionals be trained if we are seeking sustainable organizations? These are the questions HRD must grapple with if we intend to be relevant, representative, and responsible.

**Identifying Sustainable HRD Models**

The arduous work of challenging our HRD theories and practices can begin by conceptualizing and testing alternative frameworks and models for HRD. The dominant performance paradigm permeating HRD is objectionable because it has intellectually pigeonholed the field and represents masculine rational domination of it. We all understand the importance of organizations being profitable, yet HRD has helped perpetuate the development of a rigid and narrow view of profitability that is being exported globally (Johnson, 1998; Senge, 1990). This is alarming as consumption outpaces growth, corporate injustice is commonplace, jobs are outsourced to the lowest bidder, our natural resources are being depleted, the environment is polluted, and people starve when there is enough food in the world for everyone. Marjorie Kelly, cofounder of *Business Ethics* magazine observed,

> We have words for racism and sexism, but wealth discrimination isn’t fully recognized. It is a bias in favor of the wealthy and against labor, the environment, and the community. Concern for the public good must become the animating force of our economic order. (http://www.americanswhotellthetruth.org/pgs/portraits/Marjorie_Kelly.html)

Kelly’s call for preserving the public good holds an important message for our work. Yet HRD practitioners do not see a clear role in promoting sustainability in their organizations (Fenwick & Bierema, 2008). A more optimistic view of HR’s role in social responsibility is promoted by Lockwood (2004) who suggests that HRD leaders who are strategically implementing CSR programs have demonstrated return on investment, taken a role in promoting organization ethics, and built management and human capital into key business transactions. She reports
that 63% of HR departments are spending on learning and training initiatives related to CSR, 40% are changing company policy in response to environmental issues, 36% are changing company policy in response to grassroots pressure to change certain business practices, and 32% are increasing involvement in social programs. She suggests that OD leaders can influence three primary standards of CSR—ethics, employment practices, and community involvement.

Critical approaches seek transformation that makes the world a more equitable place. A critical HRD could help transform management from a rational, bureaucratic, hierarchical, and masculine practice to one that is nonlinear, flat, and more parallel to natural models (Helgesen, 1990; Wheatley, 1992). It is not just the critical management studies paradigm calling for change. Transformation is being called for by even mainstream media and organizations. *Fortune* magazine recently ran the article advocating “tearing up the Jack Welch playbook” (Morris, 2006) arguing that a new set of rules is called for based on a historical context that demands agile, niche businesses, a customer and outward focus, a penchant for passionate workers, and managers who are courageous and soulful.

Hoque (2007) advocates a social business model for companies seeking to make a difference. “Social businesses have a humanitarian mission but are set up to earn a profit in a model superior to traditional philanthropy because it is self-sustaining” (p. 45). Goldman Schuyler (2004) advocates an organization health model that is holistic and concerned with creating organizations that promote well-being of workers, management, the organization, community, and other stakeholders. She argues that as organizational practitioners, we are most effective when the change process includes the following: (a) skills in organizational change and business, (b) a model for organizational health, and (c) practical theoretical approaches for maintaining individual health (encompassing physical, spiritual, and mental well-being). To help organizations through change in a way that promotes well-being, we need to help leaders must attend to vision, teamwork, and individual development (Goldman Schuyler, 2004). It is also important to make sure the organization is providing resources for workers who are grappling with the changes themselves.

**Advocating Responsibility**

CSR goes hand-in-hand with sustainability. The atrocities of corporate crime have hurt countless people who put trust in their leaders. HRD professionals have escaped unscathed by ethical scandals such as Enron or the recent collapse of the financial markets, thanks to the world’s preoccupation with profitability and performance. Yet the HR people who hired, trained, promoted, and monitored these corporate criminals are culpable. HRD needs to incorporate responsibility and sustainability into its repertoire.

The current environment is seeing pressure for organizations to be socially responsible, sustainable, and ethical. HRD is increasingly being called on to
support these goals through well-managed programs, policies, and practices (Lockwood, 2004). Lockwood (2004) suggests that we can communicate the value of CSR through communications, employee relations, health, safety, and community relations.

The principle of social justice may take many forms. It requires us to consider “who benefits?” from HRD. Cervero and Wilson (2005) eloquently describe how competing interests and asymmetrical power relations can be negotiated. Dedication to social justice also assumes a wider commitment to redistributing power in society. This means that we also need to consider how HRD interventions will affect groups in the organization that have been historically marginalized because of class, race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, ethnicity, or other positionalities, and how the organization’s actions will affect the wider community.

Creating New Measures of Organization “Health”

“Success” tends to be narrowly defined in terms of profitability in most organizations. An alternative HRD would help organizations be more accountable to stakeholders by ensuring a living wage was provided to all workers, and that “success” was redefined to mean more than profitability. HRD could lead in the development of instruments to evaluate organizations based on their overall health, ethics, environment, economics, stakeholders, fairness, diversity, social responsibility, sustainability, and living wage, not simply money earned. HRD also has the potential to help create employee-managed and owned organizations that are accessible to all employees regardless of gender, race, class, religion, physical ability, or sexuality. Business Ethics magazine (now CRO, Corporate Responsibility Officer) has developed rubrics to measure organizations’ ethical behavior. Such rubrics are helpful as we create new means of measuring organizations impact on the world.

Reconsidering “Who Owns HRD?”

Simply, following the basic tenets of critical HRD will result in new ways of thinking and practicing in the field. One unchecked assumption in HRD is that it is owned and controlled by the organization. Yet what future could we imagine for HRD that is sourced from elsewhere? Broadening our view to workforce development or countries that have national HRD policies provide important starting points for rethinking HRD ownership. What if HRD were community owned? It seems that ownership of knowledge and learning should be retained by citizens, both individuals and the community, rather than corporations.

With such a scenario, organizations would go to one public source for their HRD needs. In many ways, this would eliminate duplication of effort now occurring within organizations and provide opportunities for more out-of-the
box thinking. Training and development would not be the first function to get cut and programs could be developed and delivered with less politicization. Women and people of color would have a more level-playing field when it came to receiving training for advancement rather than simply maintaining their current positions.

Although a community-owned HRD may be a fantasy, it offers an opportunity to imagine it in a new light and to consider possibilities we may never have imagined. It may not even be so far fetched in an environment where unchecked corporate greed has resulted in a worldwide collapse of financial markets. Creating a new source of HRD would require significant policy change and investment. The moment is ripe for alternative proposals where it is becoming increasingly evident that the modern organization is failing in a number of areas, including ethics, sustainability, and providing living wages to workers.

Meaningful evaluation of HRD practice should be conducted by stakeholders other than management, such as employees and communities. The venue for HRD practice has been exclusively corporate, at least in the mainstream discourse. HRD needs to broaden its horizons and focus on nonprofit organizations, professional associations, government, and small business as viable places for human development. Finally, HRD needs to critically assess whether it is working to institute masculine, rational, and performative management practices, or interrogate them in the name of meaningful lasting change. Bringing the stakeholders to the table is a key step in creating a more critical HRD.

Transforming HRD Curriculum

The influence of masculine rationality is evident in academic programs. The World Resources Institute and Aspen Institute (2005) released its biennial report *Beyond Grey Pinstripes* concluding that more business schools are improving at educating students about the social, environmental, and economic perspectives of business success in a competitive global economy, but it is still a significant minority. The report also found that more business schools offer courses in ethics, CSR, or environmental sustainability. The United States is not leading this charge however as three of the top-five ranked schools, and 12 of the top 30, are located outside the United States. The good news is that some business schools are advancing in this area. The bad news is that teaching and research on these topics is often marginalized or considered fringe from mainstream innovations.

Sustainability education is scarce in academic programs, including HRD. Not only is sustainability absent from the curriculum but also few academic programs offer courses in diversity or multiculturalism. Although it is likely that diversity is addressed in some current HRD courses, Kuchinke (2002) found that only 44% of programs covered diversity as a content area. Kuchinke further notes that although workforce diversity is one of several topics
addressed in the HRD literature, it has not yet made the transition to being part of the core curriculum of graduate HRD programs, yielding a “gap between graduate education and emerging professional roles” (p. 140). Perhaps one reason academic HRD programs omit diversity content is because there are few HRD sources that adequately address it. Few HRD programs have taken the step to integrate critical perspectives, yet they will be increasingly important for academic programs that are training practitioners for global, diverse, and complex contexts.

Creating More Equitable HRD

Clearly, HRD is failing to sufficiently serve the learning and development needs of women, people of color, and other marginalized groups. Many HRD programs function to advance men in the organization and keep women and other marginalized groups from moving into coveted positions of power. HRD is dominated by performative discourse (Bierema, 2000; Rigg, Stewart, & Trehan, 2007), which may be one reason that it overlooks development that does not fit within the masculine productivity-oriented paradigm. As HRD practitioners, it is important to be mindful of this sexist performative bias and significantly more critical of how development programs are designed and distributed, and how they marginalize women by either ignoring them or channeling them into programs that are unhelpful in advancement. HRD needs a more holistic approach that considers multiple global stakeholders. We also need to consciously involve stakeholders in the decision-making process about development. All employees should have access to and control on their developmental experiences and these opportunities should be available across a range of levels in the organization. Programs should not only challenge the performative bias of the organization but also help its members achieve success on their own terms. Finally, organizations and HRD professionals have a social and ethical responsibility to honor all learners in their learning and development.

Conclusion

This article has challenged HRD’s lack of engagement in critique of or debate on its theoretical frameworks. HRD is steeped in a masculine rational tradition that is preventing consideration of alternative conceptualizations of the field and perpetuating inequities. HRD’s masculine rational blinders are putting the field at risk of becoming co-opted into hegemonic practices that are preventing it from fulfill its goal of humanistically facilitating development and change. Ironically, HRD has become feminized, yet perpetuates masculine rational philosophies and practices. HRD’s lack of self-critique or openness to alternative models may result in it becoming irrelevant, shallow, and unable to address the core political currents that dictate organization behavior, life, change, learning, and performance.
This article has attempted to unsettle our understandings of HRD and see the consequences of narrow conceptions of the field through women’s experience as HRD professionals and HRD recipients. HRD’s skewed focus toward masculine, managerial, and monetary interests results in abandonment of its humanitarian roots and prevents the field from serving as the organization conscience, change agent, or employee advocate. This state of affairs is a call for new ways of defining and doing HRD that are more critical, inclusive, and responsible.

References


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