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Tracing HRD's Rational Masculine Roots: Feminist Alternatives for a More Mindful HRD

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Abstract: A classic management text was deconstructed using postmodern methods to illuminate the connections between knowledge and gender. A similar analysis was performed on a selected contemporary HRD course text in order to examine how issues related to performance and gender were being addressed.

The field of HRD espouses humanistic roots traceable to the human relations movement and developed in the creation of the field of organization development (OD). In spite of its espoused compassionate history, we contend that HRD is at risk of becoming, or perhaps already is, co-opted into embodying hegemonic practices exclusively focusing on benefiting management, to the exclusion of working towards economic and social justice. Dominant HRD discourse is rendering the field of HRD unable to fulfill its pivotal role of humanistically facilitating development and change

HRD is a feminized profession whose discourse, scholars, and leaders continue to be masculine and rational. A feminized profession is defined as one highly populated with women who neither receive equitable pay nor hold the most influential positions as compared with men. We believe this trend, combined with increasing pressures for HRD to exclusively generate financial returns, is cause for concern and calls for a critical feminist assessment of the field. The HR field in general is an excellent candidate for a poststructural feminist analysis as it has been historically applauded as a welcome movement away from Taylorist scientific management, and towards a more human and humane workplace. Although many of HRD's innovations over the years have been heralded as moving the workplace away from the external controls that have accompanied the rise of scientific management, today's HRD innovations have 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 that might be viewed as a kinder, gentler means of managerial control. These measures are subtle means of maintaining power imbalances, a vestige of historical management assumptions, as the findings of our deconstruction illustrate.

We contend that HRD remains dominated by a masculinist rationality that uses masculine traits of objectivity, aggressiveness, and performance in the service of management and powerful shareholders. By relying exclusively on these valued criteria, we fear that other, less powerful stakeholders have become lost in the performative shuffle. We seek to recast the priorities of the field to include theory, research, and

practice focused on humanistic development and change. We believe that the field of HRD must accommodate alternative values, perspectives, and epistemological assumptions in order to stand against the tide of economic hegemony.

Purpose of the Study/Theoretical Framework

The initial purpose of our research was to examine how the connections between masculine epistemology and organization theory contribute to our understanding of contemporary HRD theory. We have attempted to trace HRD's rational and masculine roots using a post structural feminist analysis of some key literature and theorists. Our research questions included: How has enduring discourse through literature and theory influenced the development of HRD theory and practice? How is knowledge created and reproduced in the field? How has HRD attended to issues of gender and diversity? For this article, the lead author then selected one contemporary HRD work to uncover possible connections between historical and current masculine epistemologies.

Because HRD draws from multiple disciplines, it is influenced by a number of domains (Chermack, Lynham & Ruona, 2003). This multi-focal attribute of HRD has created the environment for disagreement about the goals, methods, practices and scholarship of HRD and this disagreement plays out in the discourse of the discipline. Although there is disagreement about the goals and purposes, the dominant discourse has been a strong allegiance with performative theoretical frameworks. We contend that this discourse has evolved the field into one that presents HRD as a rational, economic, strategic task that enhances organization performance. We further contend that HRD is rooted in rational masculinity as evidenced by its discourse and practices. "The inherent association of masculinity and rationality starts to become associated with effectiveness and efficiency, and they, in turn, start to become masculine attributes. So the modern bureaucratic organization... becomes characteristically masculine." (Ross-Smith and Kornberger, 2004, p. 288).

Research Design

We followed Bradshaw's (1996) example of deconstruction and examined texts to reveal how they create the category of *other* by using pronouns such as *we* or *them* to indicate exclusion of certain groups. The creation of the category of *other* often reflects the marginalization of women and other groups that are not white or male, and in the case of HRD texts, not management. Deconstruction also examines how the author engages in marginalization through footnotes, quotation marks, metaphors, parentheses, or asides (Bradshaw, 1996), as well as what words or phrases are privileged as central to the text (Calas & Smircich, 1999). Deconstruction also seeks to "dismantle hierarchical dichotomies" (Bradshaw, 1996) where false oppositions are created such as management/non-management, change/nonchange, female/male or good/bad. Dichotomies signal how an author 'splits' the world into understandable chunks. Deconstruction assumes that the chunks are not objective; rather, they represent the dominant way of perceiving reality. Dominance implies marginalization and/or silencing of 'other' ways to understand or explain up the world. We also read the texts to examine how they function to maintain harmony, rationality and unity (Bradshaw, 1996) through their projection of a solitary, homogenous, rational truth. Such textual attempts at harmony deny alternative or competing views. Deconstruction exposes and challenges

purported single truths and works to privilege othered views. Finally, we read the texts to examine how they use hyperbole and mockery to privilege the insider. We considered two texts for this study: the Roethlisberger text on “The Foreman,” and a contemporary HRD foundational text used for typical undergraduate and graduate courses.

Table 1. Deconstruction of Texts that Influence HRD

	Othering Creating the category of other to set up a power differential	Marginalizing Footnotes "quotations" Metaphors (parentheses) Privileged words	False Oppositions or Binaries	Maintenance of harmony, rationality, and unity Presentation of "single truth"	Use of Hyperbole and Mockery Privileging the insider
Roethlisberger (1949)	<p>We=management Them=supervisors or others such as women, people of color or non-managers</p> <p>ForeMAN=a white male administrator and MANager</p> <p>Worker culture and unions dangerous</p>	<p>Masculine pronouns throughout</p> <p>Women and minorities are complications of war the foreman is forced to manage.</p> <p>Foreman's roles bewilder</p> <p>References to power relations footnoted</p>	<p>Management versus non-management</p> <p>Foreman is a pathology in need of fixing by a healthy management</p> <p>Rationality is good, social skills illogical and devalued</p> <p>Non-union versus union</p>	<p>Management is objective and can fix the foreman.</p> <p>Masculinity equates with rationality, ambition and hard work.</p> <p>You should not doubt author, even with no citations or real examples</p>	<p>Management's chickens (foremen) have come home to roost</p> <p>Hydraheaded character</p> <p>Go-betweeners, forgotten men, stepchildren</p> <p>The cock of the walk no more</p> <p>Left holding the bag</p> <p>Straw bosses</p>
Swanson & Holton (2001)	<p>Views of performance as oppressive appear "<i>to be most closely aligned with critical theorists who wish HRD to challenge organizational power structures that seek to control performance outcomes</i>" (p. 133).</p>	<p>Allocates no space to topics such as diversity, managerialism, gendered practices, racism, sexuality, or social responsibility.</p> <p>Performance topics listed 49 times in the index.</p> <p>Women, race, class, sexuality, labor, unions, or workers are listed zero times.</p> <p>Critique of performance is listed twice and there is one on politics and 3 on oppression.</p>	<p>individual versus organization based HRD</p> <p>learning versus performance</p> <p>critical versus performance oriented paradigms</p> <p>oppressive versus humanistic HRD</p>	<p>Critiques views that challenge the performance paradigm of HRD as simply wrong, contending they contain "<i>gross errors and misunderstandings</i>" (p. 131), intimating they are "irrational" conceptions of the field. Such claims are flagrant expressions of masculine rationality.</p>	<p>resistance to change "<i>politically motivated insurrection and class struggle</i>" (p. 299-300)</p>

Findings and Conclusions

Due to space constraints, we have summarized our findings in Table 1. The texts have functioned to create certain discourses that have significant potential to influence thought and action in HRD. These findings are one possible way to understand text, and findings are ‘supported’ if readers individually believe that the interpretations are one plausible way of understanding.

Deconstruction of Roethlisberger, The Foreman, 1949”

The Foreman” presented this first-level supervisor as powerless; a pathology created by management that could only be fixed by management. The ForeMAN was a white male who eschewed the managerial complications of war that included women and people of color to supervise. In addition to the ForeMAN, the specialists, administrators and MANagers in the organization were white and male, which conferred upon them special privileges due to their gender and position. Roethlisberger’s writing about the challenges of management and the foreman are presented as truth; he offers no citations, nor does he give voice to the Foreman.

The Foreman faced multiple, uncontrollable forces that impinged on his ability to do the job, but it was clear that the Foreman’s loyalty was to management first: *“Thus the foreman, like each individual in the modern industrial structure, is in effect painfully tutored to focus his attention upward to his immediate superiors and the logics of evaluation they represent, rather than downward to his subordinates and the feelings they have”* (italics in original, p. 42). Roethlisberger’s publication told scholars and practitioners that Management was the authority in a logical and rational organization, and the Foreman had to straddle the logical world of management and the illogical world of the workers.

Productivity was an uncontested value suggested by the text. The text communicated hidden meanings placing Management in the inner circle making the Foreman the subject of mockery. Foremen were described as “monsters” and “hydraheaded characters” who were “management’s chickens...come home to roost” (p. 36). Foremen were also described as “go-betweeners,” “forgotten men,” and “the step-children of industry” (p. 36) who were no longer “the cock of the walk” (p. 38), but left “holding the bag” (p. 48) where management was laughing at them for trying to do this impossible job.

It was this text, plus the work of Roethlisberger and his colleagues at Harvard Business School, that generated the movement away from Tayloristic Scientific Management and towards the Human Relations Movement. This movement has been described in HRD texts as a movement towards more humane and human workplaces; however, our deconstruction suggests this interpretation is flawed. The underlying epistemological assumptions of performance, rationality, and efficiency remained in effect—what changed were management’s explicit attempts to ‘fix’ problem employees and prevent unionization.

Swanson and Holton, Foundations of Human Resource Development, 2001

To see if contemporary discourse had changed, and to see if the underlying epistemological assumptions of performance, rationality and efficiency remained, the lead author scoured contemporary HRD texts to see if anyone was writing about power

and gender in organizations, or if they were challenging managerialism and performativity. Based on an index analysis, findings suggest that the popular HRD textbook by Swanson and Holton (2001) shows a managerial and performative bent. Forty-nine of the index entries address the issue of performance. Twenty-three address management and leadership issues, although there are zero references to workers, labor, or unions. Critical theory is indexed twice (although not favorably discussed) and politics receives one entry and oppression receives three (although some of those discuss how even learning can be oppressive, not just performance). There are zero references to race, gender, class, or sexuality. Resistance to change is described “*as politically motivated insurrection and class struggle*” (p. 299-300). No space is allocated to topics that require an acknowledgement of asymmetrical power arrangements in organizations such as diversity, managerialism, gendered practices, racism, sexuality, or social responsibility. This text book also sets up binaries in the “Paradigms of HRD” chapter such as “individual versus organization based HRD,” “learning versus performance,” “critical versus performance oriented paradigms,” and “oppressive versus humanistic HRD.”

This same text book critiques views that challenge the performance paradigm of HRD as simply wrong, contending they contain “*gross errors and misunderstandings*” (p. 131), intimating they are “irrational” conceptions of the field. The authors of this traditional text go on to say that views of performance as oppressive appear “*to be most closely aligned with critical theorists who wish HRD to challenge organizational power structures that seek to control performance outcomes*” (p. 133). The authors seem to be suggesting that it is a bad idea to challenge management, yet the objective of a critical agenda is to interrogate taken-for-granted views of the world with the goal of fostering social change. Slamming the door on substantive debate about the social foundations underlying research and philosophical traditions in the field would be a tragedy. We wish to hold open that door for continued debate and dialogue for the advancement of the HRD field.

Conclusions

Based on our analysis of The Foreman and a foundational HRD text, we make the following conclusions. First, we contend that the dominance of a historical masculine perspective has created and perpetuated a rationalist, masculine HRD evident through its deference to performative frameworks for research and practice and discourse. Second, HRD’s masculine epistemology serves to preserve asymmetrical power relations through devaluing, ignoring, and silencing non-dominant groups, evident in research and practice. Third, the field is plagued with a dualistic perspective that does not mimic reality (i.e., learning v. performance, management v. worker) and serves to limit HRD’s analytical, conceptual and practical power. Finally, we contend that HRD’s masculine epistemology has a deleterious impact on learning and development in the workplace and make the following recommendations:

1. Develop new HRD theory using gender as a category or strategy.
2. Develop explicit HRD theory-building research methods. We suggest that as more HRD researchers study issues of power and gender, new and alternative research methods will be introduced to the HRD literature.
3. Explore and develop HRD’s theoretical foundations.
4. Publish more articles in HRD journals that illustrate the theory-building process and the theory itself.

Our intent for these recommendations and our continued research is to prevent the further disconnect between social and economic justice and HRD. One way to examine and uncover the disconnection has been to perform a feminist deconstruction on a seminal text, whose author is an acknowledged forefather to HRD. Our feminist perspective and research framework has also illuminated continued masculine rationality in a contemporary HRD course text book. We hope our research holds open the door for continued debate over the goals, purposes, values, and intentions for HRD research and practice.

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