Gender Hegemony and its impact on HRD Research and Practice

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This Special Issue of *Human Resource Development International* (HRDI) was inspired by the keynote delivered by Professor Laura Bierema at the 2018 European HRD conference, hosted by Northumbria University. In her keynote, Bierema called upon the Human Resource Development field to become bolder in promoting diversity, equity and inclusion. She challenged us to think more deeply about the ways in which gender is hegemonized into roles of femininity and masculinity and how we might resist this binarist dominant rationality. Although the field of HRD is rooted in humanistic values with an identity as a "field founded on employee advocacy" (Bierema, 2009, p. 68), the field has historically been dominated by a performative paradigm that privileges masculinist work cultures and employment practices (Bierema, 2009).

As a result, HRD scholars have not committed collectively to the scrutinization of the influence of gender on workplace roles and relationships. We contend that HRD's unwillingness to undertake critical examinations of managerialist structures founded upon sexism and racism risks damaging HRD claims to fulfil one of its key goals, the facilitation of development and change for all. The emergence of Critical HRD (CHRD) has been a response that challenges the dominance of the performance paradigm within HRD.

Theory and practice underpinned by a masculinist rationality adheres to a value base that identifies with attributes traditionally defined as masculine, including being strong, assertive, mechanical, objective and controlled (Bierema, 2009). CHRD scholars have been consistent in their calls to diversify HRD scholarship (Williams and Mavin, 2014), and learn from wider movements in management and organisation studies that demand greater voice for all organisational stakeholders (Callahan, 2007; 2013a, 2013b, 2013c). Bierema and Cseh (2003) noted that studies focussing on gender as an analytic category were mostly absent from HRD research. Seven years later, Bierema's 2010 study, which examined where diversity as an analytic category had been applied in HRD research, noted that studies linking HRD and diversity, equity and inclusion are rare. Studies on power and positionality meanwhile are negligible. In the 2008-2018 period, across the four major HRD journals, there were only 29 articles that used a feminist lens, two which addressed issues of implicit bias, one that examined microaggression, 18 which studied gender identity and intersectionality, and 19 that considered transgender issues (Bierema, 2018). HRDI published the majority of these articles and continues to lead the field in consistently encouraging papers that challenge performative epistemologies and artificial disciplinary boundaries (Elliott, 2016). This special issue is an extension of this plurality, and one which is focussed on challenging gender hegemony in HRD.

A focus on gender hegemony opens up spaces that allow for challenges to traditional gender binary distinctions, and the reductionism of femininity = women, masculinity = male. According to Connell (2000), gender hegemony operates not only through the subordination of femininity by hegemonic masculinity, but also through the subordination of other masculinities (Schippers, 2007; Collins & Callahan, 2012). Connell (1995) defines hegemonic masculinity as "the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (p. 77).

While there are hegemonic and marginalized masculinities, there are no forms of femininity that are hegemonic (Connell, 1987). This does not discount the possibility of negative intra-gender relations between women at work, which can limit women's progress (Mavin, 2006a, 2006b, 2008) and contribute to the maintenance of the gendered status quo and hegemonic masculinity (Mavin, Williams and Grandy, 2016). This privileging of one end of a presumed spectrum of a gendered continuum constrains our understanding not just of women, but also those who do not identify within a rigidly normative binary (O'Shea, 2018). Awareness of the complexity of gender and gender hegemony places an onus on HRD to recognise the significance of gender and diversity in organizations, and to question HRD's role in perpetuating or misrecognising gendered power relations in theory and practice. The articles in this special issue catalyse that recognition process for HRD scholars.

We received many outstanding papers to consider for inclusion in this special issue. Our strategic goal in constructing this issue was to demonstrate that discussions of gender and gender hegemony do not default to cisgender heterosexual women. We wanted this issue to tell a story of how masculinities and femininities are constructed in different spaces and places, and to offer challenges for how people might resist the dominant narratives of gender hegemony that constrain us. Our special issue begins with a revisit to Laura Bierema's keynote, followed by five curated articles that tell the story of gender hegemony.

The opening article by Cheung and colleagues (2020) set the stage for how difficult it is to break gender hegemonic perspectives. Their meta-analytic review speculates on how the presence of women in male-dominated workplaces and the role of communal characteristics ascribed to femininity influence men. This quantitative work shows how traditional masculinity continues to be privileged in the workplace. They ask that HRD practice be mindful of gender distributions in the training environment, particularly in the context of diversity training, as this can affect training outcomes including receptiveness to change.

Worst and O'Shea (2020) then challenge the binarism of masculinity and femininity. Using metaphors of game and play, they critique representational and socially constructed norms of performing gender that privilege cis-gender, heterosexual, white men and women. Such heteronormative and gender hegemonic assumptions marginalize LGBTQ* people; they explore this phenomenon from the perspective of lesbian women and offer queergaming as a means to disrupt gender hegemony. Their paper's conceptual challenge to heteronormativity's embeddedness prepares a foundation for HRD to reflect on how we can develop more non-binary organizational structures.

The next article in this issue (Sheerin, Hughes, & Garavan, 2020) looks at the way contextual masculinities constrain agency around knowledge sharing from women's perspectives. Their qualitative study provides insights into the ways in which our systems and structures are socially constructed to manufacture gender hegemonic ideas about how knowledge is shared, with whom it is shared, and what value is ascribed to shared knowledge. As with the Cheung and colleagues' (2020) article, Sheerin, Hughes and Garavan are exploring factors for more information on how gender hegemony manifests. In alerting us to the gendered nature of knowledge sharing, Sheerin and colleagues argue HRD has a vital role to play in deconstructing gendered knowledge to provide a platform for development practices that 'call out' sexism and misogyny.

Gatto (2020) challenges masculine and feminine roles and, like Worst and O'Shea (2020), presents a mechanism to disrupt gender hegemony. He critiques hegemonic masculinity, the patriarchal dividend, and assumptions that women are caregivers. Gatto takes this critique a step further by structuring the manuscript in such a way that the challenge to the dominant rationality is not just in

content, but in the 'writing differently' approach he takes. Using the concept of manifestos from dystopian fiction, Gatto's writing is resistance to the masculine, linear, and rational forms of writing that reify gender hegemonies. His manifesto offers a provocative call for ways in which HRD can reflect on and begin to dismantle hegemonic masculinity by revisioning fathers' roles in parenting.

We close the special issue with a reminder that, despite any progress made toward gender equality, we must be consistently vigilant against genderwashing (Fox-Kirk, Gardiner, Finn, & Chisholm, 2020). Using non-disclosure agreements (NDA's) as a micro-aggressive action of genderwashing, Fox-Kirk and her colleagues provide theoretical context for the concept of genderwashing. They explain how it is a mechanism for organizations to appear to be sensitive to gender equality despite persistent and institutionalized gender discrimination. Their work challenges HRD professionals to resist the pressure to be complicit in organizational rhetoric that marginalizes through hegemonic practices. As we conclude this issue about raising our voices regarding gender hegemony, we are reminded by the authors of this article of how women, and the issues that affect them, are silenced.

We are encouraged by the ways in which the articles comprising this special issue provoke HRD to create theories and practices that refuse to reproduce gender inequity. Our hope is that the articles we share here serve as catalysts for rethinking hegemonic notions of what constitute masculine or feminine roles and behaviors in workplaces. The field of HRD has immense potential to facilitate the drive towards creating communities, organizations and societies that recognise, value and develop deliberative practices that nurture gender diversity. Will you join us on that drive?

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