

Examining the Construct of Identity and Its Relevance for HRD Theory and Practice or Turning the Lens of Examining Identity Inward upon HR Professionals

INTRODUCTION

This conceptual chapter draws the construct of identity into the HRD discourse. It examines identity theory, which is a robust stream of research in Sociology and Organizational Studies, in order to offer ideas about how identity relates to HRD practice. Identity is a multi-level construct that includes individual identity, personal identity, self-concept, and social identity. Each one of these aspects of identity has the potential to enrich what and how we think about HRD practice. This chapter is novel because it interrogates identity from the perspective of the HRD practitioner, rather than identity (mostly considered in the form of demographics, which is one but certainly not all of the ways that this chapter considers identity) from the perspective of the trainee or employee. In other words, it examines identity of the trainer (or organizational development (OD) consultant, or executive coach, or mentor) rather than identity of the trainee (or employee, or mentee). The chapter presents a framework through which HRD practitioners and scholars can visualize the relationships among and between HRD practices, of HRD practice, modalities (types of delivery), and implications of identity.

This chapter explores the role that identity plays in HRD and it interweaves in a (hopefully) straightforward, inquisitive manner, sociological theory on identity, in order to address a question that has fascinated me for more than two decades. In particular, it interrogates the role that the

identity of a *trainer* plays in program design, delivery, and evaluation. The theoretical foundation of this chapter is identity theory, which includes a rather broad expanse of scholarship drawing on sociological and psychological frames of reference. This chapter fills a gap in the HRD literature about the role that identity plays in HRD and offers the suggestion this inquiry can create informative backdrop for practice and research. The dearth of scholarship into the role that identity of the trainer plays in HRD delivery and outcomes needs to be addressed because the lack of inquiry implies that people—particularly HRD practitioners—are homogenous and interchangeable. While it sounds possibly risky to explicate identity and HRD practitioner identity (including but not limited to demographics such as race, gender, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression), the intention of this interrogation is not to arrive at a set of recommendations for what type of demographic should delivery certain types of trainer. I hope, instead, that the ideas here are much more nuanced and deeply curious than that.

There is little guidance in the HRD research to provide information for HRD practice (competencies) in a systematic manner and there is little to no formal research that can help inform HRD practitioners to become skilled at negotiating their identities as they conduct HRD programs. By “negotiating identities,” I refer to decisions that HRD practitioners make, whether they are conscious of it or not, around self-disclosure, interaction (formal or informal, “strictly business” or exchanging personal information) and appearance. The field, at least in the United States, has grappled with the issue of creating a bridge between scholarship and practice evidenced in part by the references to the “bridge” of scholarship and practice. For example, there have been two entire issues of *Advances in Developing Human Resources* devoted to the issue of the relationship between HRD practice and research. See “Bridging the Gap: Scholar-Practitioners in Human Resource Development” (Short et al. 2009); and “A Scholar-Practitioner Case Approach: Implications for Advancing Theory and Research through Informed Practice, (Scully-Russ et al. 2013). One way that scholarship in HRD could help HRD practice, is to provide guidance around the competencies for HRD practitioners. Professional associations such as the Association for Talent Development, or ATD (US) and the Chartered Institute for Personnel and Development, or CIPD (UK) provide information around the competencies. The CIPD, at the time of the writing of this book, presents information about the recommended skill and competencies for those interested in the field, on their

“CIPD Profession Map” (located at <https://www.cipd.co.uk/learn/career/profession-map>). The ATD, at the time of the writing of this book, presents information around competencies their on site called The ATD Competency Model™ (located at <https://www.td.org/Certification/Competency-Model>). These models are helpful because they provide some form of instruction and information for those who want to enter the field, or acquire formal credentials, or further their careers in the field. These competencies necessarily and presently have a rather performative focus, and they are invaluable in helpful in explaining what the field is and what HRD practitioners do. Additionally, these types of models are wonderfully illustrative of the ways that career seekers can conduct their own research on potential career fields for themselves.

While there has been HRD research that has critically examined the purpose and focus of HRD interventions and while there has been some research into diversity and related issues of critical inquiry, there has been little examination of the role that *trainer identity* plays in considering program effectiveness. Identity is a construct that has been vigorously researched in management and organizational studies and my main contention in this chapter is that by drawing the scholarship of identity into HRD research and practice, our field can become enriched. By trainer identity, I mean the actual characteristics of a trainer such as demographics, educational level, position in the organization, and other related qualities of the trainer.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

This chapter takes a conceptual, exploratory approach. This means that I have begun with a question, and then identified literature in HRD (which is sparse and mostly limited to research and scholarship on minority identities) and in the related disciplines of psychology and sociology in order to inform, support, and offer a platform for discussion and interrogation. It proposes a framework to understand the relationship between characteristics of HRD professionals (specifically in the role of trainer or facilitator), and training effectiveness. The method of this chapter takes the approach recommended by Callahan (2010) and is guided by the following question:

How can drawing the construct of identity into HRD scholarship enrich HRD practice and research, and how can it create the conditions by which the field of HRD takes a more critical and active stance?

To date, there has been little to no research in HRD that examines characteristics of trainers or other forms of HRD practitioners. Sadler-Smith and Smith (2006) problematize the technical rationality that professional organizations or associations might represent; however, they do present concrete articulation of what trainers “do.” Sadler-Smith and Smith suggest that HRD practitioners “need to treat learning in organizations in more complex ways” (p. 272) and they need to be “more mindful of the selection and naming of problems, and the context in which they are to be solved—HRD practitioners need to be reflective in an on their practice” (p. 272). Examining identity and all of its complexities and implications for career development can serve in one way to respond to this call for mindful selection and articulation of problems, as called for by Sadler-Smith and Smith.

THE ROLE OF CRITICAL THEORY IN IDENTITY AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT

This chapter is crucial HRD scholarship because it brings to light an aspect of HRD that has been unexamined; the role that identity plays in HRD practice (and by extension, research). Identity has a broad yet tacit influence; some identities are privileged, others are stigmatized, some are somewhere in between. Demographics such as race, ethnicity, age, gender identity, sex, sexual orientation, and age are aspects of identity; however, they are arguably obvious categories of identity that are treated in ways that reflect a compliance focus within the fields of Human Resource Management and Human Resource Development. Identity is a much more expansive notion than the categories that are indicated as demographic dimensions about which discrimination is prohibited. Humans are complex, and the human experience is dynamic. Therefore, it is an over-simplification to think of identity as equivalent or limited to demographics.

Sambrook (2014, p. 147) explains that “attributes of critical HRD include: accepting multiple truths gained through different forms of knowledge construction...questioning tradition and challenging contemporary practices; exposing assumptions, revealing illusions and debunking icons; and facilitating emancipation.” Sambrook’s comprehensive articulation of critical HRD provides the backdrop for the interrogation presented here. Sambrook notes, “The term ‘critical’ can refer to

marking a transition from one state to another, and such debate might mark the transition from a taken-for-granted acceptance of HRD as orthodoxy toward a new, critical approach, as evidenced by a crucial mass of researchers and practitioners” (p. 146). In the spirit and manifestation of Sambrook’s description of critical HRD as accepting truths through different forms of knowledge construction, this chapter is not a comprehensive, systematic, literature review. It is not a conceptual chapter in the sense that it takes a particular stance on a topic and then identifies research to support it. Rather, the methodology of this chapter is framed by my practical and persistent curiosity around addressing a question that has not been asked, and yet arguably plays such an obvious part of HRD practice (and, by extension, HRD research that informs practice). I began with a cursory search using the terms “traits and qualities of successful HRD professionals” in Google Scholar. This yielded few results. I then conducted searches using multiple scholarly databases including ProQuest, EbscoHost, Eric, and ABI/Inform. Using search terms “successful trainer characteristics” and “trainer identity” and “organizational development and identity” yielded few if any results in HRD related scholarly journals.

The work of Holladay and Quinones (2008) was one result that related to the search. This study “examined the influence of training focus . . . and trainer characteristics (race and sex) on the effectiveness of a diversity training program” (p. 343). Holladay and Quinones note, “Given the obvious significance of a trainer’s race and sex within a diversity training context, it is surprising that no studies to date have examined their effects” (p. 345). Indeed, as Holladay and Quinones observe, few studies have examined the role that trainer identity plays in a training context; in their case, the role that trainer identity plays in a diversity training program context. This is representative of a larger gap in the HRD literature around the role that trainer identity plays in HRD interventions. There are several ways that exploring this issue can help guide HRD research and practice and will be presented later in this chapter.

Critical HRD has emerged as a recognized, legitimate, visible stream of research with the field, as evidenced by an issue of *Advances in Developing Human Resources* (Gedro et al. 2014) dedicated to the subject or Critical HRD, as well as a relatively steady stream of critical HRD scholarship in the Academy of Human Resource Development (AHRD) conference and in related journals. What remains unexplored in the HRD literature is the role that the identity of the HRD practitioner (the trainer) plays in HRD

practice. This claim is offered by the perspective of an HRD practitioner (me) who has served in roles of technical training in financial software, to LGBT diversity training, to career development coaching, to workplace civility training, and presently, to change management training. To date, HRD scholars have interrogated the “what” of HRD and the “why” of HRD. Gold and Bratton (2014) offered a proposition of critical HRD education (CHRDE) that focuses not on the “what” or “how” of HRD, but the “why” of HRD. They intended to connect personal social problems to HRD, and to “explain the beneficial learning to be gained from teaching and learning about HRD that is sensitive to context, power and inequality” (p. 400). I propose that we extend these questions farther, to examine the “who” of HRD. Just as Sadler-Smith and Smith (2006) problematize the functions (the “what”) of HRD, I seek to problematize the roles (the “who”) of HRD. People are not homogenous, interchangeable, translucent templates upon which we can overlay HRD scripts and routines such as training workshops, career development coaching, or executive leadership development programs. Rather, trainers and other types of HRD practitioners show up to the location of the HRD initiative in their full human form. This means that they bring their humanity with them. It is a worthy endeavor to examine the role that identity plays in HRD, with identity broadly and expansively defined and examined.

Since 2004 (Gedro et al.), there has been an examination of sexual minority, or LGBT issues, in HRD, with a stream of research that has followed. This stream inherently involves an examination of identity in particular, sexual minority identity development— in HRD related journal articles (Gedro et al. 2004; Collins 2012), as well as an entire issue of *Advances in Developing Human Resources* (Rocco et al. 2009). Sexual minority identity is, in a sense, the portal through which my interest in drawing a broader and deeper exploration of identity theory into HRD scholarship.

THE ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY IN CAREER DEVELOPMENT

To what extent does technology mitigate any challenges related to the identity of the trainer, and the relationship between trainer and trainee? In a digital world, it is possible that disclosure of trainer characteristics becomes more necessary in order to establish a relationship. Also, the richness or thinness of the training medium along the two dimensions of time (synchronous or asynchronous) and distance (virtual or face to face)

plays a role in the extent to which trainer identity is relevant. Short (2010) explained that “HRD practice used to mean designing and running in-person training courses and OD interventions . . . that world still exists, but it is experienced less often since the advent of virtual technologies, which have different textures and modes of interaction” (p. 619). For example, the presentation, appearance, affect, gender, gender expression, type of dress (formal, informal), and type of speech (accent and level of formality) of a trainer is much more apparent in a face-to-face, synchronous training context. A podcast or webinar can be manipulated to a greater extent, to control for the role that the personal characteristics of a trainer play. This sub-topic—of technology and trainer identity—presents material for a separate chapter. For purposes of this chapter, it is important to mention and wonder about this relationship because of the ubiquity of technology as a mechanism for training delivery, and the impact that the modality of a training program has on the dynamic between trainer and trainees.

THE IMPACT OF TRAINER IDENTIFICATION WITH ORGANIZATION AND ORGANIZATIONAL MESSAGE

A trainer’s identification with the “message” of a training program such as an ethics program or diversity program or other type of compliance-based program plays a role, however tacit, in the training environment. The sincerity of the trainer’s belief in the value of a program, and the extent to which the trainer identifies with the organization’s approach to handling an issue, seems crucial to the overall effectiveness of a program. However, despite my efforts to locate some scholarship that focuses on these questions and issues, it seems that such research is thin. Given the importance of training, particularly on topics that have a compliance motivation to them, and given the relationship between trainer identity (both personal and organizational), it invites scholarship in this area. Therefore, this chapter provides a discussion of personal and organizational identity research in order to make explicit some ideas for research on these relationships. On the surface, it might seem risky to interrogate the role that identity plays because of the possibility of ethical issues that could arise. For example, if it were determined that a certain demographic were preferable than another when it comes to a specific type of HRD practice, might that be perceived as discriminatory? This is, however, neither my focus nor my intention. Rather, through examining the construct of

identity and examining the construct of social cognition, I intend to present a framework to consider the role that trainer identity plays in HRD programs. In no way do I seek to suggest that there is an algorithm that we HRD scholars can create, that answers the question: “Who is the best person or group of people to design and/or conduct this training?” It seeks, instead, to draw the construct of identity which has a rich and robust body of scholarship in sociology and related disciplines, in order to, as Sambrook (2014) suggests, dismantle the assumption that, by default, trainers are interchangeable (assuming a certain level of appropriate skill and capacity to design and/or conduct a training program). Holladay and Quinones (2008) explain that despite the significance of studying trainer characteristics with respect to diversity training, there is a dearth of research in this area. They use, as proximal backdrop, the studies that have been conducted in educational settings. For example, Holladay and Quinones explain that in studies that examine professor effectiveness, that race and sex impact the student ratings of educator performance. Black professors were rated more negatively than whites. However, when course content had ethnic components (p. 345), black professors were seen as more credible. With respect to sex, male educators had more favorable ratings than females. Gedro (2014) determined that lesbians who were in leadership positions enjoyed benefits that accrued to them because of their gender minority and sexuality minority status. In an active shooter training workshop, might it not be advantageous for the trainer to be someone “on the front lines” of law enforcement, or otherwise, someone in a position of authority on the subject? Would it matter if the trainer in a mandatory ethics training webinar were the attorney with the office that had to comply with the training program? Alvesson et al. (2008) note that personal identities are negotiated in an ongoing process of creation, threat, reproduction, and overhaul. This occurs, according to Alvesson et al. as an ongoing and embodied interaction and that “personal identities necessarily draw on available social discourses or narratives about who one can be and how one should act, some of which may enjoy stronger institutional and material support than others” (p. 11).

PRACTICAL ILLUSTRATIONS AND EXAMPLES

How does a trainer’s personal identity impact the choices that the trainer makes, for example, when conducting a training class? What kinds of messages does a trainer electively and non-electively send during a training

class, that indicate the personal identity and social identity that the trainer has? Several examples present themselves here such as technical training, change management training, skills based training, diversity programs, supervisory training, new hire orientation, leadership development training, and the list continues. An HRD practitioner has an *identity*. To pin the theoretical abstractions necessary to frame this chapter down to the practical, day-to-day, operational level so that the intention becomes concrete and clear, I wonder what the role of trainer identity plays with respect to new hire orientation, supervisory, technical, or skills based training, leadership development, career development, and organizational development? Sadler-Smith and Smith (2006, p. 272) provide an elegant and compelling rationale for the field of Human Resources to think more deeply about the context of the world and organizations in which we work, suggesting that there exists an array of considerations for practitioners:

Through exercising professionalism and artistry these indeterminate situations may be better framed in terms of a multiplicity of different dimensions that characterize practice (including local and global, individual and collective, freedom and control, analytical and synthetic, rational and intuitive), the interpretation of which becomes the object of a judgement grounded in experience and expertise. In order to be able to formulate problems in ways that are commensurate with dynamic, uncertain and fast-moving business environments HRD practice needs to go beyond determinacy, predictability and consistency and confront indeterminacy, complexity and reflection. (Sadler-Smith and Smith 2006, p. 272)

This discussion raises questions related to the very design of a training or organizational development initiative, down to its very “roots” manifested through the decision about who conducts a training or organizational development initiative. For example, the question that might seem to go unacknowledged on the surface, such as the decision around whether to have an internal or external training professional conduct organizational development or change management, versus someone from outside the company, can play a crucial role in the effectiveness of a program.

Social psychology and Sociology can give HRD practitioners and scholars with a more sensitive lens through which to view HRD initiatives. It does not mean to imply that people of certain demographic identities should be identified in specific, while others excluded, from engaging in

HRD initiatives. Rather, it suggests that having an *awareness* of the role that organizational role and personal identity play in these HRD interventions could help inform the way that programs are designed and introduced; they could help with the way that programs are proposed.

This chapter is significant because it addresses a gap heretofore lacking in HRD research regarding the extent to which the identity of the HRD practitioner impacts the overall effectiveness of a training program. For example, when I conducted workplace civility trainings at my own institution, I have a strong sense that I was welcomed as a trainer in that role, because of my identity as “one of them.” I was not external; I was not managerial or administrative (at the time). I had also been invited to conduct a change management workshop for our professional employees. I have a strong sense, again, that I was welcomed into that space because I was one of them. I was not an outsider, and I was not a manager or administrator. My identity impacted the extent to which I was welcomed. Admittedly, these are speculative observations on my part. However, they are my strong sense.

Examining the construct of identity is crucial to enriching our understanding of effective HRD interventions because of the increasingly dynamic, post-structural nature of the world of work. There are aspects of identity that are visually discernible; there are other aspects of identity that would only be apparent were the trainer to share them. How and why does a trainer make a decision to share personal information about identity, with a training group? The extent to which a trainer shares personal identifying information also depends upon the subject matter content, the training participants, and the focus of the training session. Is transparency a prerequisite for training effectiveness or should there be a boundary?

IDENTITY

The scholarship on identity is comprised of different levels: individual, personal, and social (Alvesson et al. 2008; Ashforth and Male 1989; Stets and Burke 2000). Stets and Burke (2000) distinguish these levels as a hierarchy. Stets and Burke explain that social identity theory considers identities in a “relative way because different identities are organized in a hierarchy of inclusiveness. Three levels are generically involved: a super-ordinate level such as ‘human,’ an intermediate level such as ‘American,’ and a subordinate level such as ‘southerner’” (p. 231).

Individual identity is concerned with the self; personal identity is concerned with the extent to which one person relates or identifies with another person; and social identity refers to the way that an individual perceives membership in a group or organization (Alvesson et al. 2008; Ashforth and Male, 1989). Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003) noted that “identity is one of the more popular topics in contemporary organization studies . . . Identity themes are addressed on a multitude of levels: organizational, professional, social and individual” (p. 1163).

If we can integrate these different identity bases and show how they operate simultaneously in a situation, we can address the degree to which individuals are constrained by structural expectations (tied to group and role identities) or have some choice in their enactment (through person identities). Further, we can examine how individuals resolve the distress that occurs when the meanings tied to different identities (group, role, or person) interfere with or contradict one another. Finally, we can investigate the degree to which some identities are more malleable than others: for example, people may be more likely to adjust their person identities to adapt to situations than to modify more structurally constrained role or group identities. We also can explore the direction of influence of the different identities. For example, person identities may influence role and group identities when they are first taken on. Once a role or group identity becomes established, however, person identities may have little impact. (Stets and Burke 2000, p. 229)

Identity can be an explicit construct, illuminated during mundane transactions such as completing an employment application, or signing up for healthcare benefits and other perquisites offered by an employer. Identity, in these cases, is relegated to demographics such as name, race, age, ethnicity, family relationships, educational levels, and employment history. It is in these moments that one’s identities become necessarily fixed and categorized, because they are ways in which human resource professionals create their employee files for purposes of managing, storing, retrieving, and reporting on their employee bases. In modern, times, even these “fixed” categories have presented themselves as contested terrain. For example, whereas under the “gender” question there was once (and in many cases, remains) two choices: male and female, there are now applications that might signal greater gender identity inclusivity because they include responses for male, female, transgender, and other. For example, the State University of New York, in its college applications illustrates the possibilities for how an application can signal inclusion:

State University of New York (SUNY) system: allows students to identify their gender identity (choices: man, woman, trans man, trans woman, genderqueer/gender-fluid, questioning, and unsure or write in) and sexual orientation (choices: straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, queer, and questioning, and unsure or write in) on admissions forms for all SUNY schools (<https://www.campuspride.org/tpc/identity-questions-as-an-option/>).

This act of signaling is a trope, which has a significance that it is difficult to overstate. When an organization intentionally creates signs or includes language or symbols that send the message that those of particular identities are not only welcomed but included; that organization is creating, establishing, and maintaining an identity; and it is creating the conditions by which career seekers and employees who recognize or see themselves as having that identity or appreciating that identity, feel visible, and respected. For example, a gay pride (rainbow) flag hung in a visible location on a church entrance sends a signal that LGBT people are acknowledged in that particular church. This is an example from my own particular context as an Episcopalian, whose recent church in Syracuse, New York, did just that. As one more example drawing upon LGBT identity, the presence of particular organizations in identity-related events such as Gay Pride, send a signal that the organization acknowledges and values LGBT people. The same is likely true for other demographics; I use this example because it is in handy “reach” for me and it tangible and experiential on my part. Hopefully, it effectively illustrates this point about organizations signaling that identity matters to them and that they intentionally and sincerely have an expansive reach of inclusion for all, but in particular, for marginalized people.

INDIVIDUAL IDENTITY

Stets and Burke (2000) explain that the personal identity is the lowest level of self-categorization and that the “individual acts in terms of his or her own goals and desires rather than as a member of a group or category” (p. 228). Alvesson et al. (2008, p. 10) describe personal identity this way:

[P]ersonal identity typically refers to unique personal attributes—those assumed as not being shared with other people, or not seen as a mark of group belonging.

Alvesson et al. (2008, p. 6) offer a helpful definition of individual identity as one that is individual and subjective:

One's personal identity implies certain forms of (often positive) subjectivity and thereby entwines feelings, values and behavior and points them in particular (sometimes conflicting) directions. From this vantage point, collective visions of self, such as group and organizational identities, become not so much the "main show" as important resources in the formation of personal notions of self.

In general, one's identities are composed of the self-views that emerge from the reflexive activity of self-categorization or identification in terms of membership in particular groups or roles (Stets and Burke 2000, pp. 225–226).

The self . . . is essentially a social structure, and it arises in social experience. After a self has arisen, it in a certain sense for itself provides for itself its social experiences, and so we can conceive of an absolutely solitary self. But it is impossible to conceive of a self arising outside of social experience. (Mead 1967 p. 140)

PERSONAL IDENTITY

Personal identity is a crucial aspect of career development because it represents the relationship, as the term implies, between and among people. Ashforth et al. (2016) explain that personal identity is "perceived oneness with another individual" (p. 30). Examining the interweave of individual identity and personal identity is, implicitly, a significant part of the backdrop of diversity scholarship and diversity training efforts. When someone, such as a Human Resource professional, interacts with another, such as a member of a minority, or a member of the disabled community, there is an implicit opportunity for understanding, empathy, growth, and learning. To the extent that the Human Resource professional demonstrates understanding and awareness of the individual's identity, needs, hopes, and intentions, there is an opportunity for deep and meaningful work to get done. Imagine, for example, that a person who is a minority, has gone back to school, or acquired additional credentials, or has done other work that has qualified him or her for a position of advancement.

That person has, in other words, taken the initiative to prepare for a bigger, or broader, position in the organization. If the positions for which the person qualifies, represent challenges with respect to identity, such as a culture that does not welcome, for example, racial minorities, or females, or LGBT people, the person may experience discouragement or even trepidation about applying. However, if the Human Resource professional is one with whom the person can trust, and if the Human Resource professional can establish some identification (which is different than identical) with that person, there is an opportunity for the person to grow. Personal identification represents, in other words, the seeds by which relationships can grow, and people can grow, and careers can develop. Remember that one of the basic premises of this book is that people have identities that are constructed, fluid, and matrixed and that career success is subjective. Ashforth et al. (2016, p. 29) explain the dynamic nature of personal identity:

PI as a crucial process through which their respective phenomena unfold—namely, mentoring, role modeling, and leadership. In the absence of theory articulating the nature and dynamics of PI, it is difficult to appreciate how mentors and proteges reciprocally influence each other, how an individual “becomes like” a close peer or role model, and how and why leadership affects subordinates’ sense of self. Further, as we will argue, one path to PI unfolds in close relationships, which are apt to be positive in nature.

Personal identification can help create the context for which minorities and others, who are not majoritarians, can “see” themselves in new opportunities. Human Resource professionals who are involved in career development endeavors benefit, of course, by having technical knowledge and skills around career aptitude assessments, resume and cover letter composition, and interpersonal skills such as the ability to conduct interviews and to provide coaching. They benefit further, by having the capacity to understand the specific challenges and opportunities presented by the person they serve in a career development context. In subsequent chapters, specifics around identity will be explored. For now, the point of examining each construct of identity is presented to lay a foundation. Furthermore, it is helpful and important to understand the interdependencies of identity and to realize that Human Resource professionals have identities: the interweave of the Human Resource professional’s identity with the employee or prospective employee with whom they work can

potentially be a unique dynamic. Each relationship is potentially special and fertile for growth and development. This is, after all, the purpose of Human Resource Development.

SOCIAL IDENTITY

Fiske and Taylor (1991) indicate that social identity theory is a theory of social categorization and that, for example, “one’s nationality, ethnicity, religion, gender, occupation, and the like, all help to define one’s identity” (p. 165). Alvesson et al. (2008) distinguish social identity from personal identity:

SIT examines how people understand and position themselves and others in terms of social group categories (i.e. in-group/out-group), whereas SCT investigates what leads people to view themselves as unique individuals in some circumstances and, in others, to define self through group membership, thereby depersonalizing aspects of identity. (Alvesson et al. 2008, p. 13)

“The person identity is the set of meanings that are tied to and sustain the self as an individual; these self-meanings operate across various roles and situations . . . ” (Stets and Burke 2000, p. 229).

PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY

A professional identity is a socially constructed internalization of one’s occupational status and role. Ibarra and Barbalescu (2010) observed that “[t]he practices and strategies by which people craft and negotiate work identities are at the heart of a burgeoning stream of research. In recent years scholars have paid increasing attention to the diverse means people use to craft and negotiate work identities” (p. 135). Ibarra and Barbalescu further note that professional identity is signaled through the means through which people present themselves in the workplace, including dress, appearance, office décor, and style (p. 135).

Professional identity manifests when someone, to be quite practical about this point, wears clothing that signals formality (such as a suit with a tie), or when a person places academic diplomas or professional certification documents on the walls of an office. In the digital world, although it is beyond the scope of this chapter to delve deeply into the

topic of personal branding (although that is a worthy topic for a chapter on career development and HRD), social media such as LinkedIn provide users with the opportunity to transmit information about their identity by including professional and industry credentials in their profile.

Defining ourselves as secretaries, middle managers, or professors, for instance, does not entail simply stepping into pre-packaged selves, but always involves negotiating intersections with other simultaneously held identities (e.g. Black male professor and parent) and making individualized meaning in interaction with the people and systems around us (e.g. competent, high-status secretary). Hence, even when people refer to a seemingly shared “we,” they imbue this depersonalized collective with diverse and personalized meanings. (Alvesson et al. 2008, p. 10)

IDENTITY AND SELF-CONCEPT

Fiske and Taylor (1991) note that the aspect of the self that “influences thought and behavior depends in a large part on which aspects of the self have been accessed. This aspect of the chronic self-concept that is accessed for a particular situation is termed the working self-concept” (p. 182). Sim et al. (2014) note that the self-concept is not a static, unitary representation but rather, people define themselves through their personal traits, through their “dyadic relationships” (p. 271). The research in the HRD literature that has explored sexual minority issues has provided some foreground for the larger construct of identity and implications set forth by this work. Because sexual minorities (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender, or LGBT) have historically been stigmatized in the macro-environment of the larger society and in the micro-environment of the workplace, issues of identity and disclosure present a very real and practical concern. Hill indicates:

For sexual minorities, sexual orientation disclosure (coming out) is a complex process that occurs at multiple levels and is never fully complete. That is, in each new encounter or event, we have the option to come out or cover, pass, or deny. (2009, p. 40)

Coming out, although a risk-laden action, has the potential to create relationships and interactions that are characterized by a sense of trust and respect (as established in Gedro et al. 2004, and in Gedro 2014).

Jehn et al. (2014) provide a sociological explanation for why benefits can accrue to an individual as a result of identity disclosure. Jehn et al. note that it is important for individuals to have their authentic selves—their true identities—recognized, and that alignment between one’s self-view and the views of others (p. 488), provide those individuals with a sense of control and predictability. Jehn et al. posit that asymmetry between an individual’s self-view and the views held of others, creates discomfort for the individual. Moreover, such asymmetry can result in negative consequences such as stress, anxiety, strained interpersonal relationships, and lack of well-being (Jehn et al., p. 489). Gedro (2014) explained how this type of stress—of the misalignment between who one is, and the views of others, have tangible, negative manifestations. For example, lesbians have disproportionately high (relative to the general population) rates of alcohol abuse due in part to the stress of their sexual minority status and the resulting shame secrecy, and isolation related to that identity.

PERFORMANCE, OR IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT, VERSUS ESSENTIALISM

People have a natural, implicit curiosity about each other. The HRD context provides a micro-environment for the social interactions and exchanges that social psychologists examine and describe. When an HRD practitioner conducts an HRD program, there are two or more people involved in an exchange of information. Fiske and Taylor (1991, p. 230) observe that:

Behavior is the vehicle through which impressions are usually enacted, and as such, impression management is much like acting. One cannot simply do it without preparation, at least not well. To create a successful impression requires the right setting, correct props, and costumes, a good deal of skill, and often some rehearsal.

Whether the HRD practitioner is aware of it or not, he or she is performing. This does not imply that that practitioner is being disingenuous. It does mean to imply that HRD practice is a performance. Goffman notes that “when an individual enters the presence of others, they commonly seek to acquire information about him . . . They will be interested in his general socioeconomic status, his conception of self, his attitude toward them, his competence, his trustworthiness . . .” (1959, p. 1). Trainer

identity is a dimension of training programs that is significant, and under-explored. The paper considers specific types of HRD initiatives such as mentoring programs, leader-led and classroom training, on the job training and job shadowing, and it highlights the gap in identity research within the field.

It is ironic that my own sense of identity within the (United States and, by intentional extension, the United Kingdom) HRD field is that I do not, in the strictest sense, “belong” to the Academy of Human Resource Development. That is to say that I am not a faculty member at a college or university that has an HRD department, or anything that could be said to resemble such. Rather, I am an administrator and professor in an institution that was founded to dismantle the practical, tangible, material barriers to access to higher education for re-entry or first-time adult students. Therefore, I problematize the sense of social identity by virtue of my very “showing up” for these types of conferences, and considering myself part of this community, which is my own professional home. Social identity can and should be a fluid construct.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE PRACTICE

One of the practical implications arising from this chapter is that when designing training programs, HRD practitioners should be mindful of the impact that their own identity plays within the training context. As such, a trainer should have the skills and competencies to understand how to leverage identity as an asset and how to minimize potential shortcomings. One example of this is LGBT diversity training. Might a person who is a member of the LGBT community be more persuasive, or credible, or effective, conducting LGBT diversity awareness training, versus a heterosexual trainer? This chapter implicates these and other types of considerations for training program design, delivery, and evaluation.

HRD practitioners can benefit from programs that are informed by deeper insight about the human condition. Again what is unique about this chapter is that the lens of inquiry is turned around, to consider the identity of the trainer. HRD is a *performance*. This is different proposition than performative. By performance, I mean that trainers seek—whether they are conscious of it or not—to manage the impression that they make. Their identity—their self-concept, their identification with another person or persons, their attachments and affiliations to the organization, and their

attachment or affiliation (identification) with a profession—all play vital roles in their performance.

Table 2.1 presents a representation of the relationships between the type of HRD program or intervention, its potential modalities, trainer identity, and role that trainer identity plays. This table does not presume to be comprehensive; rather, it is illustrative of the fundamental ideas.

Table 2.1 A typology of the role of HRD programs, modalities, identity, and HRD program focus

<i>Type of HRD program</i>	<i>Modalities</i>	<i>Identity: Self-concept Demographics Professional identity Organizational affiliation</i>	<i>Focus of HRD program and role that trainer identity plays</i>
Skills based training	Face to face, synchronous Virtual, synchronous Virtual, asynchronous	Some aspects are visible, discernible. Some aspects are “invisible” and would involve disclosure.	Skills based. Identity is likely a peripheral aspect.
Coaching and mentoring	Face to face, synchronous Virtual, synchronous Virtual, asynchronous	Some aspects are visible, discernible. Some aspects are “invisible” and would involve disclosure.	Interpersonal skills, career skills. Identity can be a directly related aspect.
“Soft skills” training such as civility or diversity training	Face to face, synchronous Virtual, synchronous Virtual, asynchronous	Some aspects are visible, discernible. Some aspects are “invisible” and would involve disclosure.	Communication and trust; understanding of dimensions of diversity. Conflict management capacity. Identity can be a directly related aspect.
Compliance training such as ethics	Face to face, synchronous Virtual, synchronous Virtual, asynchronous	Some aspects are visible, discernible. Some aspects are “invisible” and would involve disclosure.	Specific information that is organization, location, or industry specific. Identity is likely a peripheral aspect.

(continued)

Table 2.1 (continued)

<i>Type of HRD program</i>	<i>Modalities</i>	<i>Identity: Self-concept Demographics Professional identity Organizational affiliation</i>	<i>Focus of HRD program and role that trainer identity plays</i>
Organizational development	Face to face, synchronous Virtual, synchronous Virtual, asynchronous	Some aspects are visible, discernible. Some aspects are “invisible” and would involve disclosure.	Communication and trust; understanding of dimensions of diversity. Conflict management capacity. Specific information that is organization, location, or industry specific. Identity is likely a peripheral aspect.
Leadership development	Face to face, synchronous Virtual, synchronous Virtual, asynchronous	Some aspects are visible, discernible. Some aspects are “invisible” and would involve disclosure.	Interpersonal skills, career skills. Identity could be directly related or peripheral.
Career development	Face to face, synchronous Virtual, synchronous Virtual, asynchronous	Some aspects are visible, discernible. Some aspects are “invisible” and would involve disclosure	Interpersonal skills, career skills. Identity could be directly related or peripheral.

The first column presents a categorization of types of HRD programs that I envision when considering identity. The second column lists the types of ways that the program can be delivered. This is significant because the dimensions of time (synchronous or asynchronous) and space (virtual or face-to-face) impact the ways that identity gets communicated (or not communicated). The next column lists, and then describes, identity, which includes self-concept, demographics, professional identity and organizational affiliation. This is significant because it provides the interweaving of HRD programs, and the main focus of the chapter. The fourth and final column depicts the focus of the HRD program in the corresponding

first column. It provides illustration of the extent to which the program is focused on “hard” content (such as skills, or information that needs to be conveyed or instructed) versus “soft” content (such as coaching, mentoring, or career development).

Career development, presented in the table, is one facet of Human Resource Development; this means that the identity of the Human Resource Professional should be a consideration. When working with employees, or when serving in positions of career counseling or related types of endeavors, the identity of the Human Resource professional plays a role in the dynamic of the relationship. It is heretofore tacit in Human Resource practice, because of the dearth of scholarship that turns the lens of inquiry around, to consider the role that the identity of the career developer plays. For example, how do gender dynamics impact a career development relationship? When working with a single mother with a high school education, who is re-entering the workforce, to what extent does the identity of the career developer impact the effectiveness of the relationship? If the career developer is a majoritarian (white, heterosexual male, college educated, middle or upper class), it bears consideration that that practitioner acquire awareness and sensitivity around issues of access to higher education, gender, resume writing (to account for gaps in employment), and generally, to develop empathy for those who are materially “different.” If a career developer is heterosexual, it is a worthy investment of time and effort to acquire knowledge about the challenges and opportunities that lesbian, bisexual, gay, transgender, queer and questioning clients or employees face. With respect to sexual minorities, it is a useful practice for career developers to create welcoming spaces that send signals of inclusion and awareness. Turned the other way around, a career developer who is a member of a minority (whether it be racial, gender, sexual, ethnic, or religious), it is helpful and important to have a strong sense of self, and self-confidence, and to acquire skill and ability in working with a variety of employees or clients. This likely occurs naturally for minorities, because they have had to traverse majoritarian-dominated contexts in their careers by default. However, in the interest of exploring the dynamics of relationships in career development in either direction, it is important to note that the majoritarian/minority dyad can go in either direction. The main premise in this chapter is to establish the fact that HRD practitioner identity is under-examined, and that it is a crucial consideration in HRD practice because of the role that identity plays.

There are questions that can help further guide the insights intended by this chapter. These are questions that I have pondered for as long as I have been in this field. For example, who makes a better trainer: one who has the skills or abilities that are admired, such as a world class athlete, or one who is able to convey the information in a confident and credible and effective manner? Granted, this is a false or at least constructed dichotomy but it is intended to highlight the issue of identities, both personal and social. The answer is, of course, it depends. For HRD initiatives that rely more heavily upon behavior modeling, perhaps it is preferable to point to highly skilled professionals as examples or role models, and have an HRD professional (who may or may not have the particular functional skill set) facilitate the learning and development experience. This is where role identity becomes relevant.

The matrixed and hierarchical nature of identity is a major reason that it is not a dangerous or ethical proposition to interrogate the role of trainer identity. In fact, by drawing social psychology theory into HRD practice and research, we can benefit from the insights and awareness that stem from such understanding. The personal is political,¹ after all. To ignore identity, to pretend it does not exist or to shy away from discussing it, perpetuates a tacit mythology that the world of work is based upon merit, and that it is not impacted by dominant paradigms, populations, and identities. People are complex, and individuals have a variety of identities. Some identities become activated in certain situations, as salience hierarchy explains.

“Salience hierarchy addresses which role a person will enact in a situation when more than one more than one role may be appropriate” (Stets and Burke 2000, p. 231). Salience hierarchy provides a theoretical explanation for how or why a trainer might rely upon or emphasize one aspect of his or her identity more than other aspects.

To date, there has been little formal interrogation of the role that the identity of a trainer plays in training program effectiveness. This chapter critically interrogates the role that identity plays in HRD interventions. The construct of identity has relevance for our HRD professional associations; as new members come into these organizations, they may or may not identify with the mission, purpose, scope, conference experience, and people in the organization. Or they may. The extent to which an organization can attract and retain members plays a significant role in its effectiveness. The Academy of Human Resource Development’s conference, for example, generates and shares new knowledge, and serves as a conduit of networking, social capital, ideas, collaborations, ideas for journals and books, and for job opportunities.

Exploring identity, and identification, contributes significantly not only as an examination that can help to inform or enrich scholarship and practice, but also as a means to foster vibrancy of our field. Ideas for future research include: the newcomer experience at a University Forum for Human Resource Development (UFHRD, at <http://www.ufhrd.co.uk/wordpress/>) conference, or the Academy of Human Resource Development (AHRD, at <http://www.ahrd.org/?>) conference; the experienced attendee at a conference, a senior scholar, and an experienced leader (perhaps past Presidents or Chairs). This way, we can formally, and with intentionality, acquire knowledge about the process of identity formation in our own field. We welcome, of course, authors outside of the discipline because the heterogeneity of scholarship, just like the diversity of any ecosystem, can help it to become stronger, more interesting, and richer. However, in order for organizations to thrive, there must be some core group of those who identify with the mission, purpose, scope of the organization and are committed to serving in volunteer roles. Therefore, this chapter has pragmatic implications for our own organizations and by extension, our field. Drawing identity theory into the HRD research provides the opportunity for enhanced understanding about the ways that individuals, groups, and organizations respond to HRD initiatives. In particular, this chapter focuses on the *trainer* characteristics, rather than *trainee* characteristics.

Note that the presence of a theoretical description of this phenomenon does not imply that the trainer is aware of what he or she is doing when emphasizing industry credentials, or educational background, or even, perhaps the region of a particular country where he or she was born and raised, or their industry experience in order to perhaps create a condition of credibility, versus activating an identity that might be stigmatized. Let us say, for example, that a white lesbian is conducting a technical software training class. She has an MBA in Information Systems, and has served in customer support for years. She has her education and experience upon which to establish her credibility. That same person is a volunteer trainer for an LGBT diversity nonprofit, and she conducts workplace LGBT diversity training. She activates her industry background, to be sure, but she more directly activates her identity as a lesbian. Depending on the training context, this trainer likely enacts roles that position her in a credible and effective light. For example, she may emphasize her technical background, training, and experience as she designs and conducts a technical training session. When she conducts diversity training, she likely

emphasizes her lesbian identity and her various roles of LGBT research and activism.

An implication for practice is the extent to which a trainer is skilled at disclosing appropriate types of information that are related to identity (individual, personal, or organizational). To what extent, for example, does it matter what the role of the trainer is, with respect to the organization? When a trainer shares his or her credentials with the class, he or she is demonstrating a facet of his or her professional identity. When a trainer sends signals that demonstrate industry experience and knowledge, the trainer is sending a message of social identity, of collective “in-group” identity.

The construct of identity provides the tapestry, in so many ways, to our lives wherever we live, whatever career we occupy, whatever our role in society. As such, its central (although often times tacit) role that it plays in shaping our day to day lives, as well as our life courses, bears an intentional, focused examination.

I have always been interested in the distinction between the identity that one has about the self, and the relationship between the identity of the “home” self and the “work” self. There are insights from role theory (see Ashforth et al. 2016) and social identity theory that inform these questions. However, I am still left with the problem or question of, why are those identities so different? Do they need to be? Where does the question of personal disclosure come into play? Why does disclosure need to be legislated on a form, such as an EEO form? There can be subtle changes in identity, such as one’s aspiration to, for example, obtain a “bigger” job once the person obtains a college degree, or that one develops an interest and a capacity to move into supervision or management, because they have done work on themselves on a personal level, to be able to acquire an interest in leading and managing others. There are places in which people seek identity changes that are not scripted or routine, or the “formal” work of HRD practitioners or career counselors. For example, someone may seek counseling to deal with a family issue, or an addiction issue, or a trauma issue. This may strongly yet invisibly affect one’s ability to function in a career space. These actions represent material investments in that person’s ability to “succeed” in a career because that person can now devote mental or emotional resources to intentional pursuits, rather than have to focus on survival. Here is an analogy. If someone lives (as many people do) in an underdeveloped country in which water is scarce and the day begins with the question or problem of “how will we get water today?,” that person or

family has that primary interest—survival, water, not thirsting to death. However, in a situation in which water is plentiful—plentiful to the extent that it is taken for granted and available whenever the tap is turned on—that person or persons can focus on other quests. The person could, for example, acquire an interest in running, not for the sake of basic transportation, but for the sake of personal growth and development (exercise, competing in formalized races). That person can move from a focus on basics, to a focus on thriving. In this way, personal development can have an effect and in some cases, a profound effect, on one’s ability to invest in career related pursuits that lead one to having a happy and fulfilling career.

What is the relationship between someone’s identification with a group? There are groups that have more privilege than others. For example, what if a person were a Pagan, and was employed by an organization that had senior leaders who were fundamentalist Christians? Should that employee disclose anything about his or her identity? Even though religious freedom is protected in the United States, there are likely other ways that the person might experience discomfort or even covert discrimination. Even though, for example, race and gender have been protected classes for over 50 years, the pace of change—meaning, the pace of the acquisition of equality, or proportionality, of women (see Onley 2016) and minorities into well paying, and senior leadership positions lags behind majoritarians. Therefore, issues of identity are material and they can serve as facilitation (people hiring people who are “like them”), as well as obstacles (people are less inclined to hire people who are “different”). Therefore, identity can serve in a variety of ways with respect to career. Gender expression, for example, is a subtle aspect of identity. It is not studied extensively. Gedro (2010) explored the leadership roles of lesbians, and she wondered about dress, appearance, hair, mannerisms. Collins (2014), for example, explored the experiences of gay men in masculinized industries. The matrices of identity provide fertile and important ground for much more work.

NOTE

1. This is a phrase widely used in Women’s Studies texts and resources, and to the best of my knowledge, Carol Hanisch first used the phrase. See <http://www.carolhanisch.org/CHwritings/PIP.html>