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From Social Secretaries to HR Managers: An Analysis of Research on Women in Human Resource Management

Abstract

Based on a review of the empirical research on women in human resource management (HRM), I argue that collectively, the existing research neglects the role of organizations in contributing to unequal outcomes for women. Through an analysis of historical narratives on women in HRM, I illustrate how the persistent association of HRM with women's work impacts not only the status of individuals working in the field but the status of the field itself. I then propose a gendering organizations perspective that connects inequality to organizational practices in order to enrich the future research on women in HRM. Lastly, I propose a research agenda that takes a practice-based approach to analyzing the organizational mechanisms that create divisions of labor in HRM and distribute rewards unevenly.

Keywords: Human resource management, inequality, history of human resource management, women's work, sex segregation, occupational status, gendering organizations perspective
(JEL: M12, M14)

Articles in the field of human resource management (or HRM) have taken notice of the large representation of women working in the occupation (Cohen, 2015) and according to Ulrich, Younger, Brockbank, and Ulrich (2013), women account for about 62 percent of HRM employees worldwide. Due to being one of the few management functions that is dominated by women, empirical research on HRM as a career for women is increasingly common. However, this research concentrates mainly on comparing the salaries, roles, and career opportunities of women and men in the field, and neglects theorizing *why* similarities or differences between the sexes are observed. Although these studies are insightful for detailing whether HRM is considered a "good" or "bad" occupation for women, the theoretical assumptions they are based on concerning the operation of gender in organizations lead to dead-end outcomes that see little prospect for change both in women's career opportunities in HRM and the status of the occupation. These assumptions limit our understanding of how inequality is produced and maintained in the field as well as in organizations more broadly.

More specifically, the existing empirical studies on women in HRM view organizations as gender neutral and omit the historic gender hierarchy that impacts the div-

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ision of labor and distribution of rewards in organizations (Acker, 1990; Legge, 1987). By neglecting organizations and organizational-level theorizing, these studies fail to take organizations' role in producing and maintaining inequality within the occupation (Calas, Smircich, & Holvino, 2014; Stainback, Tomaskovic-Devey, & Skaggs, 2010) and in contributing to a perception of HRM as a peripheral function (Hammonds, 2005; Mundy, 2012). Alternatively, feminist research provides a foundational theoretical framework for comprehending why inequality persists and what consequences gender has on not only individuals' status but also the status of segregated occupations. By incorporating a feminist perspective, the unique impact of women's historically high representation in HRM on the status of the field is highlighted. The effects of this impact are what set HRM apart from other management occupations such as accounting that have only recently feminized (employed increasing more women) and have largely maintained prestige (Haynes, 2017).

So far, much of the HRM literature has not incorporated a feminist perspective when analyzing the field as being either an opportunity for women to achieve career equality in management or as "traditionally the female ghetto of the corporate world" (Ridgeway, 2011, p. 99). Integrating social construction feminism that specifically addresses organizational inequality in research on women in HRM would allow studies to transcend the "good"/"bad" debate and investigate the impact of gender on individuals as well as on the HR occupation. Additionally, organizational-level theorizing is vital for linking the individual processes, which have so far been the focus of the women in HRM literature, to the structural features of organizations that contribute to the maintenance of inequality (Alvesson & Billing, 2009). I argue that taking a gendering organizations perspective in future research would capture the complex interplay between gender, inequality, and the occupation, and provide an opportunity for HRM researchers to understand the status of both those working in the field and the field itself in a different way.

In this article, I review the empirical research on women in HRM in order to determine the theoretical assumptions that underlie the existing literature about gender and its operation in the field. Using the lens of social construction feminism, I illustrate how these assumptions are problematic for studying HRM as an occupation for women. I then summarize the historical journey of women in HRM with the aim to show the enduring interrelation of gender, power, and the status of the field. Lastly, I outline a gendering organizations perspective for informing future research and suggest a research agenda that emphasizes organizations and the practices within them as locusts of inequality.

Women in HRM

The foundation for this review is literature that was collected using manual and automated searches of academic journals and book chapters in the field of human resources. Automated searches were conducted with EBSCO Business Search Premier

and Google Scholar using the keyword terms "feminization human resources/personnel", "human resources/personnel equality", "women in human resources/personnel", "welfare supervision/secretary and women", and "social secretary and women" Manual searches were conducted using the citations from articles found with the automated searches and were necessary to find articles consistent with the research objective.

Contemporary empirical studies are the focus of the first section due to the insights they provide into HRM as a modern occupation for women. Contemporary is defined here as literature published after 1985 because the publication of research investigating HRM as an occupation for women accelerated from that point onward. The basis for the empirical literature in this section are articles published in HRM or management journals and included the journals Human Resource Management, Industrial Relations Journal, Industrial and Labor Relations Review, Women in Management Review, Gender in Management: An International Journal, Career Development International, The International Journal of Human Resource Management, Equal Opportunities International, Revue Management and Avenir, and Personnel Review.

These empirical studies are included because they all examine various facets of the question whether the HRM occupation is considered a career opportunity or a female ghetto for women since the (re)feminization of the field in the 1970s. This excludes research that, for example, focuses on the impact of HR practices on women in other occupations in organizations. To my knowledge, the empirical articles reviewed in the first section are all of the existing studies in English that investigate this question. The majority of literature in this section has a managerial or functionalist perspective with the exception of three papers that have an interpretive, institutionalist perspective (Brandl, Mayrhofer, & Reichel, 2008a; Brandl, Mayrhofer, & Reichel, 2008b; Crow, 1998).

Differently, the historical narratives that are included in the second section are drawn from a more diverse body of literature that includes functionalist, social constructivist, and post-structural perspectives. The history of women in HRM is important to highlight for two reasons. First, as early accounts of the occupation show, women were fundamental in the founding and development of what became known as HRM, thus HRM has not recently feminized but is foundationally associated with women's work. Second, the narratives make visible that sociocultural norms are not the only factors that define women's roles and career opportunities in HRM but that organizational practices actively encourage segregation (or separation of women or men in jobs or occupations) and reinforce barriers to equality. The historical narratives show how women's participation in the occupation is perceived at the time the pieces were written and are drawn from books, trade journals, and academic journals.

The narratives were primarily identified manually through their citation in books on human resource management and articles that discuss the history of the occupation (such as Legge, 2005; Roos & Manley, 1996; Storey, 1989; Tyson & Fell, 1986). As a result of the inclusion of historical narratives, the literature included in this section of the review covers a time period spanning from 1906 to 2016. The criteria for analysis were accounts that explicitly reference women, women's roles, or the feminization of HRM in the United States and United Kingdom. Therefore, the literature is further limited to material published in English.

The literature in both sections on women in HRM is reviewed through the lens of social construction feminism. I employ this perspective to critique the underlying assumptions of the existing literature because rather than viewing gender and sex as static, binary attributes or variables as much of the existing literature does, social construction feminism understands gender and sex as social processes that are constructed by actors in society (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Gender and sex therefore are not "natural" attributes individuals have, but individuals' gender/sex are given meaning and determined by social agreement (West & Zimmerman, 1987). In this way, gender and sex are thought of as "simultaneously enacted social processes contributing to the production of institutional contexts as gendered spaces" (Calas et al., 2014, p. 26). Definitions of femininity and masculinity are consequently changing over time because of their ongoing social construction. Because of the deep roots of gendered norms in society, gendering, or the act of doing gender, is often taken for granted. However, gendering is a strong process that guides individuals' behavior, self-image, and ways of thinking and acting throughout their lives (Lorber, 1994). As Berger and Luckmann (1966, p. 67) state, "while it is possible to say that man has a nature, it is more significant to say that man constructs his own nature, or more simply, that man produces himself."

Review of the Contemporary Empirical Literature

In the following, the empirical research published since 1985 on women in HRM is reviewed. I organized the existing literature into two sub-sections based on the theoretical assumptions that the articles have about gender in the workplace. The first sub-section contains articles that overall lack theory for understanding the role of gender in the workplace, and the second sub-section contains articles that theorize unequal outcomes between women and men in HRM as the result of non-organizational processes in society. The empirical articles were all analyzed according to the same criteria, namely the research question or objective of the study, the methods employed, whether HRM was considered to be a "good" or "bad" field for women's careers, and details on the findings relevant to women's roles, career opportunities, or status in the field.

By highlighting the assumptions that the existing research makes regarding gender, the lack of organizational-level theorizing on women in HRM becomes exceedingly

clear (Ely & Padavic, 2007). The articles reviewed here are motivated by the effects of differential treatment on individuals' salaries, roles, or career paths and view the practices involved with such treatment (salary negotiation, performance reviews, or management training, for example) as unbiased and gender neutral. Interestingly, HR departments are responsible for many of the practices associated with these effects that impact not only others working in the organization, but those working in HR as well, an aspect that literature in this area overlooks (Dickens, 1998).

The categorization of articles by their theoretical assumptions concerning gender also illustrates the impact women's representation has on how HRM is considered as an occupation for women. In studies that lack theory and operationalize gender as a sex category, HRM is primarily framed as detrimental to women's career progression due to unequal wages, women's concentration in administrative roles, and the lack of women in upper management (Costa & Gianecchini, 2007; Hardin, 1991; MacKay, 1986; Monks, 1993). Studies that theorize gender as a sociocultural process argue that although HRM fits well with dominant stereotypes of women's skills and values, it is those same social stereotypes and values that prevent their vertical career mobility (Ackah & Heaton, 2003; Brandl et al., 2008a; Brandl et al., 2008b; Crow, 1998; Gooch, 1994; Pichler, Simpson, & Stroh, 2008; Simpson & Lenoir, 2003).

Assumption 1: Gender as a sex category. The studies that make this assumption use the terms gender and sex interchangeably. Due to this, gender in these studies is viewed as an individual characteristic that is separate from the workplace (Alvesson & Billing, 2009; Calas et al., 2014). Studies making this assumption are primarily quantitative surveys that operationalize gender as a variable using sex categories, female or male, which are assigned to study participants.

Research in this area measures differences in the salaries, roles, and career opportunities between the sexes in HRM. Work on women's relative earnings in HRM shows that although the wage gap among personnel specialists lessens from 68 percent in 1986 to 76 percent 1989, the wage gap among personnel managers widens from 62 percent to 57 percent over the same time period (Hardin, 1991). In his analysis, Hardin (1991) states that two-thirds of the gender wage gap in HRM can be traced to gender differences due to traits such as age, education, and part-time or full-time work being controlled for. However, the third of the gender wage gap that remains, Hardin (1991) argues, indicates earnings discrimination against women in HRM. Monks (1993) survey of Irish HR employees also finds evidence of inequality in earnings and career mobility in HRM. According to the survey, men are stereotyped into traditional manager positions and earn more than women who are confined to administrative support positions in HRM (Monks, 1993).

Table 1: Summary of literature theorizing gender as a sex category (male or female)

Study	Research question or objective	Method	HRM as "good" or "bad" field for women's careers	Relevant findings
Costa, G., & Gianecchini, M. (2007). Career diversity. Men's and women's careers in Human Resource Management. *Revue Management et Avenir* (14), 169-186.	To verify if women and men follow different career paths in HRM and understanding what factors influence mobility	Quantitative survey of HR managers in Italy	Bad: women more horizontally mobile than men in HRM and move among organizations more but existence of glass ceiling in HRM prevents vertical mobility	Women have more mobile careers in HRM due to the glass ceiling although they are more highly educated than men in the field
Hardin, E. (1991). The integration of women into professional personnel and labor relations work. *Industrial and Labor Relations Review, 44*(2), 229.	How have women integrated into the work force of industrial relations and human resource workers?	Quantitative analysis of US census data	Bad: women's earnings continue to lag behind men's in field; women not in upper management	Concentrations of men in industrial relations and women in personnel may explain why women earning less than men; the more women in a specific industry, the more women in personnel of those industries
Long, P. (1985). The unequal opportunities in personnel management. *Equal Opportunities International, 4*(2), 5–9.	What are the differences in the career development between men and women in personnel?	Mixed methods: quantitative survey and qualitative interviews with members of the Institute of Personnel Management	Bad: women mostly in administrative roles; glass ceiling – women in personnel equally disadvantaged compared to other women managers; less career mobility and training for women compared to men	Men concentrated in industrial relations, women in administrative roles within personnel management; stereotypes guide job roles for women and men in personnel; women less likely to move between positions and organizations than men

Study	Research question or objective	Method	HRM as "good" or "bad" field for women's careers	Relevant findings
MacKay, L. (1986). Personnel management in the public and private sectors. *Industrial Relations Journal, 17*(4), 304–320.	What are the differences and similarities between personnel management practices in the public and private sectors?	Quantitative survey of senior personnel employees in public and private companies	Bad: glass ceiling – women excluded from male dominated industries (railways, water) and not in top positions in both public and private sectors; position of women within personnel departments not improved by equal opportunity programs	Women found in HR at lower levels (advanced from secretaries) and concentrated in smaller companies in both public and private sectors; expected hypothesis that more women would be in public sector due to more flexibility not supported
Monks, K. (1993). Careers in personnel management. *Personnel Review, 22*(1), 55–66.	What kinds of careers do HR managers have and are there differences in the career patterns of women and men in the field?	Mixed methods: quantitative survey and qualitative interviews of HR professionals in Ireland	Bad: women generally not among top earners in HR; women remain in low level administrative positions	52% of men and only 17% of women in HR earn more than £20,000 per year; HR becoming 2-tiered occupation with women in administrative positions in lower tier and men in management positions in top tier

Long (1985) finds that men tend to progress more quickly through the lower levels of personnel than women. Men are also twice as more likely to receive senior management development education than women. Long (1985) argues that this is due to women's lower level of entry into personnel and prolonged non-management experience compared to men's. The differential access to management training and experience within organizations, however, is not addressed. Similarly, MacKay (1986) states that many women's start in HRM is as a secretary or personal assistant and that the overall lack of women in senior positions shows that only a small number of women are able to move up within HRM. Evidence of a glass ceiling in HRM is also found in Costa and Gianecchini (2007) but women's forced mobility between organizations in an effort to be promoted is understood as an example of boundaryless career patterns.

All of the studies of this type view HRM as a "bad" occupation for women. This is due to the measurable inequalities between women's and men's salaries, roles, and career opportunities in the field. While these studies well document these inequalities, they also have limitations. A common feature of all these studies is that difference and unequal outcomes are attributed to stereotypes about women and men. Much of the literature on gender stereotypes is essentialist as it theorizes femininity and masculinity as static, binary attributes of individuals that persist through time (Cejka & Eagly, 1999; Eagly & Steffen, 1984; Rudman & Glick, 2001). Using the circular argument that difference between women and men in HRM exists because women and men are different is redundant and focuses research in this area on "numbers problems" instead of on the organizational practices that contribute to these disparate outcomes (Calas et al., 2014). The table below summarizes the literature on women in HRM that theorizes gender as a sex category.

Assumption 2: Gender as a sociocultural process. These studies assume that gender is primarily a sociocultural process that occurs outside of organizations and that differences between women and men are a result of social influence based on norms of female and male behavior. Therefore all of the studies in this sub-section view the organization as gender neutral. One of the theories used by articles with this assumption is social role theory (Eagly, 1997, 2013; Eagly, Wood, & Diekman, 2000). Under this theory, the different roles of women and men in the workplace and the gendered division of labor are the result of society's stereotypical beliefs about gender that are imposed and enacted by individuals from childhood onwards (Eagly et al., 2000).

Ackah and Heaton (2003) argue that women in HRM earn less than men because women lack confidence and career aspirations and thus do not demand higher wages. Similarly, the articles that discuss women's roles in HRM commonly find that work deemed appropriate for women is in lower status, support positions (Gooch, 1994; Pichler et al., 2008). One of the reasons given for this is that support positions demand emotional labor. Emotional labor can be defined as "the pro-

cess of regulating emotions at work for purposes of achieving organizational goals" (Simpson & Lenoir, 2003, p. 192). Sex-role stereotypes are argued to correspond with the emotional division of labor given that women are viewed as being better able to handle service-oriented jobs that demand both a positive, sympathetic attitude and the suppression of negative emotions (Simpson & Lenoir, 2003). In her survey of female HR employees, Gooch (1994) also finds that (male dominated) line management views (female dominated) HR managers as facilitators and better able than themselves to provide emotional support to employees. These studies are thus supporting the argument that inequality in organizations is the result of women's and men's socialization processes prior to working life and again ignores the role of organizations in creating and maintaining gendered divisions of labor.

Another example of research in this area is Pichler et al. (2008). This article's analysis of organizations that emphasize employee involvement finds that women are significantly more likely to stay in low-level managerial positions because of the think manager— think male sex typing in top management recruitment. The authors find that men are twice as more likely to be in upper management positions in HRM than women and that women's career climb usually ends in middle management (Pichler et al., 2008). Crow (1998) reinforces this argument as her Polish study notes the inability of women to progress in HRM is also connected to senior management's demand for workers with masculine traits and characteristics. Additionally, Gooch (1994) finds that the influence of motherhood and the domestic responsibilities of women are one reason women have not reached the upper levels of management in HRM in the same numbers as men.

While think manager – think male sex typing stems from societal gender essentialism, meaning the attribution of different traits and characteristics or essences to women and men, it is important to note that organizations have institutionalized the practice of attributing leadership capabilities primarily to men. This therefore influences who organizations deem as most qualified for management positions. In this way, the social norm that men are "natural" leaders becomes accepted and taken for granted by organizations whose practices reinforce a broader, gendered social system (Ridgeway, 2011).

Countries cultural contexts are also argued to be a major influence on women's roles and career mobility in HRM. In their study of the status of HR managers, Brandl et al. (2008a) find that in countries with strong national gender-egalitarian values, female managers are more equally integrated into strategic decisions and have comparable functional responsibilities to male HR managers. Although task differences between women and men vary depending on national context, the authors find that in approximately half of the countries studied, female HR managers have more responsibilities in industrial relations and salary setting than male managers (Brandl et al., 2008a). This article suggests that the spread of gender egalitarian values could work to increase equality in the status and tasks of HR managers due to the work-

ers' rejection of traditional sex-role stereotypes (Brandl et al., 2008a). With the focus of this article being on the national values related to women, the organizational context is again overlooked. By generalizing gender values on a national level and treating HR managers as disembedded from their organizations, research in this vein again relies on societal sex-role stereotypes to explain difference and is unable to account for meso-level variation (Alvesson & Billing, 2009).

The studies assuming that gender is a sociocultural process generally find that HRM is a "good" occupation for women in that it fits well with women's traditional social roles in society. However, these same social roles prevent women's mobility and lead to mixed findings as to whether HRM is considered a career opportunity or a career ghetto for women. Many of these studies argue that because women are more sensitive to others needs than men (Gooch, 1994) and are detail oriented (Crow, 1998) but lack confidence (Ackah & Heaton, 2003) and domestic support (Gooch, 1994), they are able to enter HRM easily, but do not ascend to upper management positions. The gender essentialist underpinnings of such arguments are not problematized in these articles and the assignment of characteristics to women and men is viewed as "natural" or deriving from biological differences between the sexes, not as socially constructed and reinforced. By focusing solely on gender as a sociocultural process, the studies highlight barriers to women's equal employment in HRM that are not unique to the field but are the same barriers women in other occupations encounter as well. In viewing inequalities as stemming from largely unchanging patriarchal norms and values, these studies leave little room for solutions (without women risking social backlash or without substantial systemic changes to social norms) and do not take women's agency into account. As Calas et al. (2014) and Kolb (2009) point out, the conclusion of research in this area is "too bad for the women"!

The analysis of these empirical studies on women in HRM and the critique on their theoretical approaches is not to done to slight the contributions of this work to our understanding of HRM as an occupation for women. On the contrary, it is done to highlight the need for future research to include both an organizational perspective and address the limitations of how gender and the causes of inequality have so far been conceptualized. While the outcomes related to the different social and cultural expectations that women and men face both in private and public spheres are well researched, the organizational contexts in which resources are unequally distributed to individuals remain neglected. Organizational-level theorizing is vital for understanding the ways in which gender is built into the social structure of institutions in society and would make the causal processes that underpin unequal outcomes visible (Lorber, 2010; Risman, 2004). By identifying the causal processes of inequality in organizations, the opportunity to change those processes becomes possible and does not necessarily depend on societal or cultural level change (Calas et al., 2014).

Table 2: Summary of literature theorizing gender as a sociocultural process

Study	Research question or objective	Method	HRM as "good" or "bad" field for women's careers	Relevant findings
Ackah, C., & Heaton, N. (2003). Human resource management careers: different paths for men and women? *Career Development International, 8*(3), 134–142.	Does the recent acquisition of a professional qualification have a similar or different impact upon the career progression of men and women working in HRM?	Quantitative survey of female and male university graduates of HR programs and current HR employees	Mixed: women earn less than men in HR regardless of qualifications; more men than women achieve senior management positions but more women than men achieved directorships; evidence for glass ceiling in HR – men receive more internal promotions but women more likely to leave company for promotion	Women lack confidence and career aspirations in male dominated environments thus they may not demand higher pay; few female role models and execution from networks could contribute to women being concentrated in lower levels of HR
Brandl, J., Mayrhofer, W., & Reichel, A. (2008). Equal, but different?: The impact of gender egalitarianism on the integration of female/male HR directors. *Gender in Management: An International Journal, 23*(1), 67–80.	How do values impact the integration of HR directors?	Quantitative analysis of cross-national, longitudinal CRANET survey of HR professionals	Good: women and men have similar responsibilities; national gender egalitarian values decrease vertical segregation; women directors active in formally male dominated responsibilities i.e., industrial relations	Women equally integrated in strategic and functional HR roles but cross-national variation remains; sex-role differences in status and tasks lessen in countries with more gender egalitarian values; HR directors' role is an indicator for total workload of directors not only gender stereotypes
Brandl, J., Mayrhofer, W., & Reichel, A. (2008). The influence of social policy practices and gender egalitarianism on strategic integration of female HR directors. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management, 19*(11), 2113-2131.	Do gender-egalitarian attitudes at the societal level strengthen or weaken the effects of social policy practices on the strategic integration of female HR directors?	Quantitative analysis of cross-national, longitudinal CRANET survey of HR professionals	Mixed: enabling societal factors like the availability of childcare and paid maternity leave support likelihood female HR directors are highly strategically integrated but many countries do not have such programs	Female HR directors living and working in countries that have enabling social policies are more involved with strategic work, thus national context of HR departments impacts authority of female HR directors; existence of equal opportunity programs in organizations did not significantly affect strategic integration of female HR directors

Study	Research question or objective	Method	HRM as "good" or "bad" field for women's careers	Relevant findings
Crow, M. (1998). Personnel in transition: the case of Polish women personnel managers. *Personnel Review, 27*(3), 243–261.	Has the process of political and economic reform in Poland provided an opportunity to improve the employment status of women working in personnel in that country?	Qualitative, semi-structured interviews with female HR managers in Poland	Mixed: good for women because of ease of access to the occupation, more training available for women to develop; bad for women because of the pervasive think-manager think-male stereotype; difficult to achieve work-life balance but HR no worse for women than general management	Gendered image of manager includes HR managers; pressure from society to conform to gender stereotypes; isomorphic tendency for Eastern companies to imitate (discriminatory) Western HR practices
Gooch, L. (1994). The career experiences of women in personnel. *Women in Management Review, 9*(1), 17–20.	What are the career experiences of women in personnel and what is the extent to which women in personnel were able to break through the glass ceiling?	Quantitative survey of female graduates of the Institute of Personnel Management in UK	Bad: women concentrated in administrative roles, sex-role stereotypes frame work activities; glass ceiling – women unable to achieve goals of promotion due to home demands	Having children difficult for re-entry into HR after break due to norm of traditional motherhood; women's career aspirations low, reaching top would affect home life or general lack of opportunity to move up
Pichler, S., Simpson, P. A., & Stroh, L. K. (2008). The glass ceiling in human resources: Exploring the link between women's representation in management and the practices of strategic human resource management and employee involvement. *Human Resource Management, 47*(3), 463–479.	How are employee involvement and strategic HRM related to women's representation in HR management?	Quantitative survey of HR professionals belonging to Illinois (USA) human resource organization	Mixed: women favored for jobs sex-typed as feminine and have advantage to enter HR because it's historically feminine, however, presence of glass ceiling means women are stuck in middle- and lower-management levels in HR	Women concentrated in lower levels of HR due to emphasis on employee involvement; gender representation in particular job type affected by gendered features of jobs; women not excluded from top management due to strategic integration of HR but because top jobs stereotyped as masculine
Simpson, P. A., & Lenoir, D. (2003). Win some, lose some: Women's status in the field of human resources in the 1990s. *Women in Management Review, 18*(4), 191–198.	How does gender segregation within the field of HR coincide with a gender division in the emotional labor content of work?	Quantitative survey of university graduated, American HR professionals over 20 year period	Mixed: women earning same as men but are performing more emotional labor in HR than men	Although no wage differences observed, women more often required to suppress negative emotions and display positive ones; jobs of women in HR affect requirements of emotional suppression and display

Consequently, the following section views gender as social embedded and intertwined with complex and historical power relationships that effect both individuals' status and the status of the occupation. In order to highlight these relationships in occupational context of HRM, I trace the history of women in the field.

Historical Roots of Women in HRM

The majority of the current empirical research views the presence of women in HRM as a relatively recent trend that developed after the 1970s. As I will show in this section, the unique history of HRM as an occupation largely founded and developed by women contributes to our understanding of the field's status in relation to other management functions by revealing how the status of the field has been impacted by women's representation. Organizational practices and policies as well as sociocultural gender values have played a vital role in reinforcing and maintaining gender norms that shape both the content of the work and the status of female dominated occupations.

Women as social secretaries and welfare workers. Some of the first accounts of the field that later developed into HRM point out the pivotal role women played in the founding and early development of the occupation. In an article published in a trade journal, Cranston (1906) states that at the turn of the 20th century, there were a total of 27 social secretaries (the heads of welfare departments and the precursors to personnel or HR managers) in the United States, half of which were women. Women's high representation in the emerging field is surprising considering that in the early 1900s women made up only 20 percent of the total American labor force (Goldin, 1977). At the time, social secretaries were responsible for the well-being of employees in large companies, acted as communication bridges between companies and their workforces, and handled compensation decisions. (Cranston, 1906). The role of social secretaries included administrative tasks such as keeping employee records but also providing personal service and advice to employees, a skill women were viewed as particularly well suited for as illustrated in the following quote:

> "The secretary establishes luncheon rooms, restrooms, mutual aid associations, thrift funds and penny provident banks; if asked to do so, she is ready to give suggestions about the proper way to dress, the most becoming colors for a girl to wear, […] and all sorts of other personal matters which perplex the ordinary mortal. In short, the social secretary is to be the employees' guide, philosopher and friend." (Cranston, 1906, p. 491)

Unmarried women from the middle and upper middle classes were the sought after candidates for social secretary positions because they not only had skills that were consistent with female gender stereotypes (a kind yet firm and virtuous nature) but the gendered division of labor at the time stipulated that women were the best supervisors for other women (Downs, 1995). Thus the first welfare departments were created in female dominated industries. Interestingly, it was not governmental regulation that contributed to the founding and growth of welfare departments at this time but organizations and labor market demand. The advent of World War I fur-

ther spread welfare supervision as women entered industries such as munitions that were formerly occupied by men that left to fight in the war (Downs, 1995).

The first occupational associations for social secretaries were also founded and membered by primarily women. The Institute of Personnel Management in Great Britain, founded in 1913, and the Personnel Club of New York, founded in 1918, provided forums for members to voice ideas and share experiences from working in the emerging occupation of personnel (Lynch, 1956; Niven, 1967). Although membership in both the Personnel Club and the Institute was not restricted and only required that members be employed in personnel or human relations work, both institutions were almost exclusively female in both membership and leadership until the 1950s (Lindsay, 1963; Niven, 1967).

At the end of World War I, men returning from the front took back many of positions in the manufacturing industry that had been filled by women during the war and lessened the need for social secretaries to ensure the health, safety, and general moral order of the female workforce. Consequently, the survival of many industrial welfare departments was under threat (Niven, 1967). A shift from promoting welfare work to emphasizing efficient processes that utilize the techniques of scientific management in industry also limited the role of those in welfare work. The association of welfare workers with administrative tasks and for being "agony aunts" or those responsible for solving the personal problems of employees was a lasting impression that further effected women's integration into management within organizations (Canniffe, 1985; Monks, 1997). The mostly female welfare workers were considered peripheral to the vital business and management operations of most organizations therefore compounding their uncertain status within organizations:

> "The welfare worker was thus not recognized as a full member of the factory staff and had to struggle to get a foothold inside the factory and to be identified with management. It was doubly difficult when welfare workers were accepted as being people to whom employees went with their troubles rather than those who helped to prevent trouble." (Niven, 1967, p. 57)

In the United States, the rise of the American Plan, or the policy of refusing to negotiate with trade unions, further separated welfare work from union relations (Miller & Coghill, 1964). The emphasis on efficiency in welfare work in the late 1920s as well as the rising concern about unionization in the mid-1930s led to the emergence of labor management and more men entered the field. By the late-1930s, welfare or labor departments were often split into two divisions, one for women, which focused on employee welfare aspects, and one for men, which focused on labor management (Niven, 1967). This division of labor continued into the new era of welfare work: personnel management.

Women as personnel specialists and men as industrial relations managers. With the advent of the World War II, government regulations concerning working conditions, standards of employment, and minimum wages encouraged the growth of labor management (Niven, 1967). According to Miller and Coghill (1964), most all

organizations of larger size were forced to establish formalized personnel and industrial relations functions in order to respond to increases in regulation and the intensification of unionization. However, regulation did not stipulate that the functions be segregated by the sex of employees. The segregation of women into the personnel function and men into the industrial relations function occurred through organizational practices such as recruitment and selection that assigned individuals to work considered congruent with gender stereotypes (Bielby & Baron, 1986). Whereas the role of the industrial relations manager focused on collective bargaining, the role of the personnel manager and specialist was more diffused and included training, remuneration, employee services, and the settlement of non-union disputes between employer and employees (Niven, 1967). As a two pronged department, personnel and industrial relations were divided not only by gender and tasks but also hierarchically with industrial relations managers being higher in status than personnel managers and specialists (Miller & Coghill, 1964).

The demographics of personnel management in the 1960s reflected the new direction of welfare work with women making up about 28 percent of the management-level personnel workers in the United States (Roos & Manley, 1996). In the UK, the amount of women in the Institute of Personnel Management also dropped and men accounted for 75 percent of its membership in 1961 (Niven, 1967). At the time, this shift was attributed to the new emphasis on the managerial aspects of the occupation, the rising status of the field, and on women's more numerous employment opportunities elsewhere (Niven, 1967). However, the image of personnel managers as the "handmaidens" (Storey, 1992) of organizations remained unshakable.

Although there were fewer women in personnel management as a whole and even less in industrial relations, the stereotypes about personnel work were still strongly linked to welfare and thus "women's natural abilities" in the field were still prized. In an article published in 1963, Merkel (1963, p. 121) states:

> "One of the professions that has provided a comparatively broad range for the talents of women is personnel administration. The personnel woman is a good example of the educated girl who has channeled her energies and abilities into the business community, in a job well above the rank-and-file level."

As this quote illustrates, the remnants of welfare work and its supposed suitability to women endured even at a time when men dominated the occupation. Similarly, this feminine association effected the men working in the field as well. An excerpt from an article entitled "Squaw-Man in the Personnel Department" highlights the devaluation of men working in personnel:

> "Thus, the personnel man is not shown as one who contributes to the essential functioning of the organization, but one who involves himself with less essential 'trinkets' such as employee service awards, recreation programs and other administrative or service-type programs." (Sweeney, 1972 cited in Roos & Manley, 1996, p. 254)

Therefore it is not surprising that in the 1970s and 80s, the demographics of personnel changed again leading to what some refer to as the feminization of personnel management (Roos & Manley, 1996). As unions lost much of their power and government regulation of organizational requirements and programs expanded, the need for collective bargaining lessened and the demand for personnel workers to cope with regulation increased (Dobbin & Sutton, 1998; Roos & Manley, 1996). During this time, the real earnings among personnel managers dropped and the mostly male managers sought out other management functions that were considered better paying and more prestigious (Roos & Manley, 1996). Women were increasingly graduating from university programs in the social sciences and management as well as entering the labor market in higher numbers than ever before. This made them a seemingly logical solution to the demand for labor in personnel. From 1970 to 1990, the percentage of female personnel and labor relations managers more than doubled, rising from 21.2 to 48.7 according to census data from the United States (Roos & Manley, 1996).

An additional transformation occurring in the 1980s is that "personnel management" developed into "human resource management". The exact differences and similarities between personnel management and HRM have been long debated elsewhere (see, for example, Guest, 1987; Hendry & Pettigrew, 1990; Keenoy, 1990; Keenoy & Schwan, 1990; Storey, 1989; Storey, 1992; Torrington, 1989), however, this debate is beyond the scope of this article. Alternatively, I focus on what effects women's social status together with the feminine history of HRM currently have on the occupation.

The legacy of a female dominated occupation. A limited number of articles have not ignored women's early contributions nor the continuing impact of their participation in the field. Instead, these articles argue that the intertwined relationship between gender, power, and the occupation continues to impact the role and status of HRM and HR managers in organizations today. In her feminist analysis of the history of HRM, Legge (1987) points to the role of control myths, or internalized gender stereotypes that regulate behavior, in shaping the personnel occupation from its early years to recent times. Based on gender essentialism, control myths are normalized concepts that are generally accepted in society without question. According to Legge (1987), the myths that women are childlike and depend on men for protection relate to the passage of legislation (from male dominated government) in the late 1890s that led organizations to appoint female social secretaries in factories to care for working women and children. Other myths relating to women's superior moral characters or their innate need to nurture others have continued to associate the occupation with female stereotypes and downgraded the status of the field in relation to other, male-dominated management functions. When women have power within an occupation, she argues, then the occupation is of low status, but when men dominate an occupation, women are pushed to lower-level positions and their contribution to the field goes unrecognized (Legge, 1987, 2005).

Similar to Legge, Lupton (2000) argues that the complex relationship between gender, power, and the HRM occupation contributes to a weak role for HR managers in organizations. In his study of medical staff recruitment, Lupton (2000) develops a model of weak personnel management roles based on interviews and survey data from predominantly female recruiters and HR managers working in hospitals. The model illustrates how segregation by gender, a predominantly administrative role definition, and a lower power position relative to other management functions all contribute to a weak role for all HR recruiters and managers, regardless of the gender of the individuals. Likened to the "clerk of works" description of personnel management (Tyson & Fell, 1986), the role of HR is thus directly influenced by women occupying the majority of positions, the clerical responsibilities that they are limited to performing, and their unequal interactions with male dominated line management (Lupton, 2000).

Similarly, Roos and Manley (1996) argue that the social status of women is closely linked to the role and occupational status of HRM. The authors determine that changes in government regulation in the 1970s and 1980s increased the demand for positions in HRM that were filled with women by organizations under pressure from Equal Opportunity Employment regulation to balance demographics (Roos & Manley, 1996). At the same time, the work being done in personnel shifted from being heavily related to industrial relations to focusing on compliance with regulation (Roos & Manley, 1996). Because of women's lower social status, the prestige of the occupation consequently sank as more women were hired and quickly began to dominate the field (Roos & Manley, 1996).

HRM is not the sole occupation to experience low occupational status as a result of women's high representation. Occupations such as academic sociology (Roos & Jones, 1993), teaching (Kelleher et al., 2011), and psychology (Ostertag & McNamara, 1991) have experienced similar effects of feminization. Female dominated occupations (and the work done by individuals in those occupations) are associated with being "feminine". Being "feminine" has little relation in modern society to being an ideal worker or manager, but is more closely tied to a domestic association outside the realm of the workplace (Acker, 1990). This association makes positions in feminized occupations more difficult to legitimize as valuable, high-status careers (Gmür, 2006). When an occupation becomes associated with women's work due to feminization, the perception of the occupation changes to reflect gender essentialist norms that stipulate that aspects of women's nature have become a part of the work they perform (Ashcraft, 2013). Even if women rise into the ranks of top management, they commonly do so through HRM and leave the traditional divisions of labor in place (Reichel, Brandl, & Mayrhofer, 2010).

Throughout the history of HRM, it is clear how welfare and personnel work has been defined as women's work and how the association with women's lower status effects not only the women working in the field but also the status of the occupa-

tion in organizations. In this way, gender, power, and the status of the HRM occupation are entangled. The legacy of personnel as a female-dominated field must then be taken into account when theorizing contemporary outcomes for not only the women working in HRM but for what this means for the field. Another aspect that the historical analysis makes clear is the role of organizations in maintaining the gender segregation and low status of HRM. The social and cultural contexts that inform gender stereotypes and traditional divisions of labor between women and men also inform the structures and practices within organizations (Acker, 1990). Therefore, understanding these structures and practices is vital to answer why and how inequality persists in HRM.

Using a Gendering Organizations Perspective to Inform Future Research on Women in HRM

This section is devoted to developing an alternative perspective to address the lack of organizational-level theorizing, namely by introducing a gendering organizations perspective. This approach seeks to enrich the research on women in HRM as well as address the limitations of previous assumptions about observed inequality in the field.

Organizations as Gendered Spaces

The existing women in HRM literature views gender inequality as the differences observed between women's and men's wages, roles, and career opportunities in HRM. Alternatively, the gendering organizations perspective argues that gender inequality lies in the different values society attributes to the characteristics of women and men due to the disparity in power between the groups. Using such a definition, we see that roles and competencies associated with attributed masculine characteristics (i.e., leadership ability) are given more worth than attributed feminine characteristics (i.e., caring ability) and that the men in possession of these characteristics are historically concentrated in positions of power (Acker, 2006). This focus on difference between women and men supports the unequal treatment and divisions of labor that persist in society (Lorber, 1994). Gender thus acts as a hierarchical system that is continually produced and reproduced by individuals and institutions (Acker, 1990). By focusing on gendering processes that lead to unequal outcomes for women and men rather than the unequal outcomes themselves, the gendering organizations perspective seeks to investigate how difference is produced and maintained through social and organizational practices and processes (Calas et al., 2014).

As critiqued in the review of the empirical research on women in HRM, the majority of the research done so far views organizations as gender neutral containers of women and men at work. The gendering organizations perspective, on the other hand, views organizations as "inequality regimes" that reinforce and enhance gendered outcomes and thus inequality. The term inequality regime refers to the nu-

merous interrelated practices and processes that lead to unequal outcomes for subordinate groups, including women (Acker, 2006). These practices and processes in organizations contribute to "the gender patterning of jobs, wages, and hierarchies, power, and subordination" (Acker, 1992, p. 252). For example, recruiting and selecting primarily women for support positions and primarily men for leadership positions continues in most organizations around the world, thus sustaining gender segregation, the gender wage gap, and the glass ceiling (Bielby & Baron, 1986; Blau, Brummund, & Liu, 2013; Perales, 2013). Using this understanding of gender, it becomes clear that inequality emerges not only from social and cultural norms but is actively maintained by the actions of organizations.

HRM and Gendering Practices

The picture that begins to surface from applying the theoretical lens of gendering organizations is that many of the formal policies and practices that influence inequality in organizations (and HR departments) are produced by recruitment, evaluation, training, and retention practices (Stainback et al., 2010). Because HRM is, in many organizations, responsible for the execution of these practices, the narrative becomes one of the dragon eating its own tail with HRM maintaining gendered practices at the expense of its most numerous members. So what role does HRM play in altering these practices and preventing the gendered outcomes we see in the existing empirical literature on women in HRM?

The implementation of gender-conscious, formalized HRM practices may decrease inequality in the field as well as in organizations more broadly. The difference between formalized, gender-conscious practices and gendered practices is that the historic disparity between women and men is taken into account when developing and implementing the practices (Reskin & McBrier, 2000). Formalized, gender-conscious HRM practices seek to provide oversight and compare the outcomes of decisions in areas such as selection, wage setting, and performance evaluation in order to support the career equality of women. Without formalized practices, managers are more likely to revert back to biases and base their decisions on stereotypes and in-group preferences (Gmür, 2006). For example, Reskin and McBrier (2000), Konrad and Linnehan (1995), and Dobbin, Schrage, and Kalev (2015) find that when HRM practices are formalized, gender-conscious, and are supported by accountability (internal or external monitoring) and transparency in practice, outcomes for women generally improve in organizations.

This research suggests that the women working in HRM potentially have a great deal of influence on the modification of gendered practices within organizations and their own departments. As Dobbin (2009) shows in his extensive, historical analysis, those in HRM in the United States have worked for the establishment and corporate acceptance of equal opportunity employment and diversity programs since the (re)feminization of the occupation in the 1970s. Dobbin (2009) argues

that while legal regulation motivated early changes to recruitment, promotion, and remuneration practices, HR managers, first as equal opportunity representatives and later as diversity consultants, gradually redefined equality measures in organizations that went beyond the legal requirements for equal opportunity employment compliancy. Consequently, HRM was an active agent in creating a framework of formalized, gender-conscious practices by interpreting compliancy and integrating elements of the civil rights and feminist social movements from the 1970s (Dobbin, 2009).

Other authors have noted the potential impact HRM practices can have on the barriers women (and other minorities) face in organizations. Kossek, Lobel, and Brown (2005) argue that measuring gender or diversity conscious practices is the first step in developing a HRM framework for tackling inequality in organizations. Creating benchmarks or targets for hiring women for upper management positions as well as regular audits on how well the organization is (or is not) meeting the benchmarks may be necessary to increase or maintain the number of women in the upper echelons of HRM (Shen, Chanda, D'Netto, & Monga, 2009). Many of the career development programs that HRM establishes and offers to employees from other departments, such as mentoring, should be available to those in HR departments as well (Ragins, Cotton, & Miller, 2000).

However, for any of these practices to be successful in creating more equality, the culture of organizations must be one of inclusion that encourages and values the participation and contribution of women (Dwyer, Richard, & Chadwick, 2003). Organizations are thus recommended to align gender-conscious practices with the business strategy and organizational culture of the firm to ensure the effectiveness of the introduced practices (Konrad, Yang, & Maurer, 2016). The significant variation in the implementation of formalized, gender-conscious HRM practices may be due to the variation in the environments and cultures of organizations (Burgess, Henderson, & Strachan, 2005; Stainback et al., 2010). This variation highlights the opportunity for future research to look more deeply into these issues by focusing studies on the organizational level.

Future Research Directions and Conclusion

As the review of the empirical literature in this articles shows, the existing literature is limited in its explanations of the observed differences between women and men in the field of HRM. When HRM is viewed as a historically female-dominated occupation, the need for integrating a feminist perspective to understand the power relations that impact both women's status within HRM and the status of HRM within organizations becomes clear. In the previous section, I proposed integrating a gendering organizations perspective to research on women in HRM, however, this calls for fundamentally different questions to guide research as well as different methods in investigating them.

By viewing gender as socially constructed, a renewed emphasis is placed on *how* gender and difference are enacted in HRM departments (Calas et al., 2014). This means taking a practice-based approach to analyzing the organizational mechanisms that create divisions of labor in HRM and distribute rewards unevenly (Stainback et al., 2010). Focusing on HRM practices in the area of recruitment, for example, could include analyses of the creation of HR job advertisements, the job candidate identification process, or the selection process for HR employees. Within these practices, important questions would be: how are these practices accomplished and what effects do they have on women and men in HRM? Do these practices and their outcomes differ in other management fields? How does the context or environment of the organization impact these practices?

Research in this vein demands closeness between the researcher and the events in organizations. Direct observation methods such as ethnographies are better suited to addressing research questions pertaining to the enactment of gender in HRM as opposed to the commonly used survey methods that distance the researcher from the organizational practices they are studying (Calas et al., 2014). Because many of the practices that reproduce differential power relations between women and men are taken for granted in organizations, in-depth investigation that does not take explanations for action at face value is needed to make the often invisible gender hierarchies visible (Acker, 1990, 2006). Once practices that contribute to unequal outcomes for women in HR departments have been identified and explored, action research projects can be undertaken to enact change in organizations.

One of the advantages of taking a gendering organizations perspective is that there is the opportunity for change within organizations (Acker, 2006). Due to the majority of organizational practices being created by and for men, the practices mirror social inequalities based on gender. This means that change to gendered practices would involve significant restructuring of organizations through multiple, long-term interventions (Ely & Meyerson, 2000). However, if a limited number of practices are targeted for change and change is supported by leaders internal and external to the organizations, it is more likely that the efforts will succeed (Acker, 2006; Ely & Meyerson, 2000). Although limited in number, examples of action research as an intervention strategy for changing gendering practices include Benschop and Verloo (2006) in the area of gender mainstreaming, and Meyerson and Kolb (2000) and their development of a theory-to-practice framework.

Additionally, this review, like all research undertakings, has limitations that warrant remark. First, the review has a distinct Anglo-American focus. With the exception of four empirical studies (Brandl et al., 2008a; Brandl et al., 2008b; Costa & Gianecchini, 2007; Crow, 1998), the empirical articles are from contexts of the United States (US) or the United Kingdom and Ireland. This is most likely due to the journals from which the articles were selected being based primarily in the US and the UK and my dependence on English language research. For this reason, some

empirical studies may have been inadvertently overlooked. The historical narratives, however, are purposefully limited to the US and UK because the HRM occupation developed similarly in both contexts and other contexts (such as Germany or Japan) may have experienced a different occupational history. Further research on the history of women in HRM in other contexts is needed as there is currently little information on this topic.

The lack of research that focuses on the HRM practices that support the unequal outcomes already discussed in the existing literature presents a chance for future studies to build nuanced theory as to why these inequalities persist and what can be done to "disrupt" these practices (Ely & Padavic, 2007). HRM researchers in particular are well positioned to take up these ideas due to their understanding of current HRM practices and interest in the legitimacy and status of the field (Guest & Woodrow, 2012; Kochan, 2004, 2007). In this way, this review provides an alternative understanding of HRM's status as an occupation by illustrating the lesser status of its most numerous members and the difficulty fields regarded as women's work have in gaining power.

The high representation of women in HRM has spurned arguments that HRM is a "good" occupation for women (Brandl et al., 2008a; Simpson & Lenoir, 2003) and have led to HRM being considered one of the top careers for women in research and popular media (Forbes, 2016; Ulrich & Dulebohn, 2015; Ulrich et al., 2013). However, the majority of empirical research on women in HRM finds that inequalities between women and men in the field still exist. Support in the literature for HRM as a women's ghetto finds that compared to men working in HRM, women earn less (Ackah & Heaton, 2003; Roos & Manley, 1996), have more limited roles (Long, 1985; Lupton, 2000), and are located in the lower rungs of organizational hierarchy within the field (Gooch, 1994; Legge, 1987; Monks, 1993, 1997).

These inconsistent and contradictory viewpoints call attention to the lack of organizational-level research that investigates contextual factors influencing findings of either similarities or differences between women's and men's careers in HRM. In order to prevent what Woodall (1996, p. 349) referred to as the "gender-blind" nature of HRM and to shift the discussion away from simply citing statistics on women's representation and unequal outcomes for women and men in the field, it is vital to advance our theoretical understanding of how HRM, in its organizational context, *does* gender (West & Zimmerman, 1987). In other words, "inequality at work does not just happen; it occurs through the acts and failures to act by the people who run and work for organizations" (Reskin, 2000, p. 707).This means refocusing future research on women in HRM to include a gendering organizations approach that acknowledges the historical context of difference in HRM. By doing this, we may enable the possibility for gender equality to be realized.

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