

**EFFORTS OF BIFURCATION AND LIBERATION:
DECONSTRUCTING THE STORY OF A TURN-OF-THE-CENTURY LESBIAN,
PART TWO**

Jo A. Tyler
Assistant Professor of Education
Pennsylvania State University, Harrisburg

Abstract

This manuscript takes as its centerpiece fragments of the author's personal story of growing up as a closeted lesbian in school, in the Fortune 500, and in the community and of a number of years attempting to integrate her lesbian identity into her professional persona – outside of the closet. This manuscript makes an attempt at a “duality search” based on the work of Boje (2001), deconstructing the story as it examines the bifurcation between personal and public and, in this case more exactly, professional and sexual orientation identities. The tension between closeted outsider and the prevailing expectations for promising “insiders” in organizational settings is viewed in this manuscript through two related frames. The first draws from the concept of the Borderlands as articulated by Gloria Anzaldúa (1987), and Adrienne Rich's (1979) work and perspective on lying. The second peers into the story through the lens of Benita Luckmann's (1978) concept of the modern emergence of separate, small worlds.

The project I undertook, represented in *New Horizons in Adult Education and Human Resource Development* in two parts, was to experiment with the deconstruction of the text of my own story, an auto-deconstruction, using Boje's (2001) eight step process. This process was one of deconstructing not the dominant story, which is a typical focus of critical deconstruction, but the story of a marginalized actor – in this case me. The story, which I convey in Part One of this article (Tyler, 2009) is a series of fragments in which I am aware, either retrospectively or in the moment of being oppressed/suppressed/repressed on the basis of my sex – female - and primarily my sexual orientation - lesbian. Readers of Part One encountered a series of 17 story fragments. Each fragment is, on its own, a story, and together they comprise a story landscape. They are presented completely randomly, as if drawn from a hat (which in fact they were). They have no chronological or thematic order. This representation of the fragments was intended to convey to the reader a sense of how the deconstruction process, which is at the core of this research, was conducted: un-tethered from the shackles of chronology and, therefore, causality. Instead of a tidy beginning, middle, and end, they are “told” to the reader of Part One, as I tell them in my life, pulled from the atmosphere of my experience connected to some topic of conversation. The story fragments were selected on the basis that they are ones that I have been accustomed to telling in various conversational contexts, either upon invitation or when I judge them to be contextually relevant or in some way helpful.

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In Part One readers became familiar with the stories and accompanied me on the first three steps of Boje's (2001) deconstruction process: 1) making a duality search, locating binaries, 2) reinterpreting the hierarchy looking at how one term in the duality dominates the other, and (3) finding the rebel voice(s) by denying the authority of the one voice. What distinguishes these steps from the remaining steps is that in these early efforts of the examination, the deconstructive lens is focused on what is present in the text itself – the words that you read on the line, in the line, whereas, in the steps that follow, we'll be looking between the lines, behind them, bending them apart to see what the text tells us that is not expressed in its language.

At the close of Part One, in which we looked at the text that conveys the story fragments as well as the larger arc of the story landscape they comprise, I identified the issue of bifurcation linked to the keeping of secrets and the issue of separation of small worlds (Luckmann, 1978). In particular two small worlds, one on either side of the closet door, began to emerge. What we saw happening was that the small worlds I inhabit in the story *want* to collide. There is some centripetal force, something like a magnetic propulsion drawing them together, and in the story fragments we find my various efforts to keep one of the poles reversed so that the worlds will stay separate, will be propelled apart.

Here, in Part Two of the exploration, we move through the final five steps of Boje's (2001) process. These are, 4) telling the other side of the story by reversing it, 5) denying the plot by turning it around, 6) finding the exception, 7) tracing between the lines, and 8) resituating the story, restorying it. Steps 4 through 7 go beyond the text – between the lines, behind the lines, looking at those dimensions of the stories that the text implies but does not articulate. We will look for what is connected to the text, but not there, and make unanticipated discoveries. In the final step of the process, there is a re-situating, or a restorying (Rosile, 1998). Restorying, which is a distinguishing feature of Boje's deconstruction process, is not a retelling of the story *per se*, but a living into a new story that can emerge on the basis of insights from the deconstruction process. It is an imaginative, informed, and active recasting of living story (Boje, 2001; Tyler, 2007) based on a deeper understanding of the story than you could have possibly had prior to the seven deconstruction steps. This step emerges as the crux of the deconstruction process. The process serves not just as a way of determining and understanding more deeply, more critically, the underlying hegemony that girds the story, that shapes it, but does so in the interest of providing the story holder with a more informed way of living her own story as she goes forward. The following sections proceed through the remaining five steps of Boje's process, looking at my experience of the process as in Part One. These are followed by reflections on the implications of this work for human resource development (HRD), on the process itself, and on its outcomes.

The Other Side of the Story

As the next step in the process, step four, Boje (2001) recommends “subvert[ing] the original hierarchy between the central and marginal term of the duality by listing the variations and subtle difference and manifestations of each term” (p. 27). It is an effort to read what is in the text but not textual. First, it might be helpful to revisit the list of binaries identified in step one

- Closet/Public
- Girl/Boy
- He/She (pronouns)
- *Roommate/Lover*
- *Employee/Individual*
- *Executive/Lesbian*
- *Professional/Dyke*
- Safety/Risk
- Secret/Known
- Silence/Truth

What I see from working on the other side of the story is that the continuum that stretches from “in” the closet to be “out” in public, stretches *through* the closet. The closet is a lifeworld (Habermas, 1984). You can be in the closet completely in the dark, unaware of even your closet, intimate surroundings. You are unaware of what you do not know, of what you are missing. Alternatively, you can be in the closet with the light on, seeing clearly where you have situated yourself, consciously deciding to stay there based on the evidence around you, still not seeing everything. In between absolute dark and bright, articulating light, there is a middle duskiness, perhaps light provided from a dim bulb or cracks around the doorway. In this duskiness, there is sufficient illumination to inform your decision, but the shadows cast create darkened, un-explorable corners. You can crack the door open and peer out of the closet. You can even try to venture out, and to slip back in when the going seems too dangerous – being out *here*, but not *there*. However, too much of this in and out, this bi-directional movement, this bifurcation, is not sustainable. Spend too much time out and you may find that you enjoy the expanded territory, and find yourself feeling unsettled, cramped, upon your return. Also, word of your “outness,” stories of it, will travel. It will become increasingly difficult to return to the closet, even with the door left ajar. When you are out, you will learn that even when you were in, others had you “out” in their speculative conversations and in their gossip, fueled by the lusciousness of possibility that you are queer – either queer like them, or queer so that they, in their straightness, could feel superior to you.

The girl/boy binary (which connects to the “he/she” duality) stretches across a continuum that includes “sugar and spice” at one end and “snails and puppy dog’s tails” at the other. In between, we have more shades of grey. Let’s take two common ones, recognizing of course the thousands of others they do not represent. “Tomboys” are one: girls who climb trees and play sports, often at the expense of playing dolls and dress up. The other is sensitive or “creative” boys who defy macho stereotypes by being studious or by preferring arts to sports. These variations are seldom depicted or explicated in a way that is value neutral. My own childhood (but not childish) worries over my qualifications for girl-ness were embedded in these values.

What of these other binaries? Roommates may begin as roommates and become lovers. Lovers may begin as lovers and become roommates. Roommates may be close friends who bond in a living space, or they may have a distant utilitarian relationship to one another. Employees are often hired for the characteristics that distinguish them as individuals, but equally, they may be hired in spite of these same characteristics. In contemporary organization development practice the individual is celebrated through employee involvement and participation programs

(Cummings & Worley, 2009), but these programs are typically bounded by rules and levels of influence that limit individual expression. Individualism is appreciated to the extent that it is aligned with and serves the goals of the organization.

The dualities of executive/lesbian and professional/dyke are related and overlapping. Lesbians often choose lines of work that allow them to be out, molding their career choices to accommodate or work around the hegemonic forces at play in organizations. These choices often place them in “blue collar” roles (where being a dyke sometimes has the leveling effect of becoming “one of the boys”) or in social services where their contribution to the “diversity” of the organization is recognized and sometimes seen as an asset – because these women are seen as having first-hand experience of two-fold marginalization – based on gender and sexual orientation. My own choice to see how far I could go in mainstream corporate work, in an executive environment where image matters as much as (sometimes more than) substance, is an example of the blended middle of this continuum, but it also represents, as the fragments illustrate, deep compromise at the level of spirit and even, I see now, soul.

Safety/risk is a complicated duality that, as has already been discussed in Part One, is bound up with context and a range of risk that extends from psychological to physical, a range of safety that moves from the interior - self-confidence and esteem – to the exterior – physical and social protection by and from others.

Secret/known is a continuum that is bound up with the notion of information as power. In this context we can consider this binary together with its companion in the list - silence and truth. Rich (1979) declares in no uncertain terms that “lying is done with words, and also with silence” (p. 186) and that “to lie habitually, as a way of life, is to lose contact with the unconscious” (p. 187). The connection between secret/silence and the known/truth is grounded here, we learn from Rich, because “the unconscious wants truth...this is why the effort to speak honestly is so important” (p. 187). “Truth,” Rich contends, “is not one thing, or even a system. It is an increasing complexity...Lies are usually an attempt to make everything simpler – for the liar – than it really is, or ought to be” (p. 187). In these fragments, there is something even more complex than this. There is the effort to make things simpler for me, absolutely, but also for others. I do not want to complicate Dxxx’s decision to hire me into an executive role or Mxxx’s decisions to endorse my work. I do not want to complicate the lives of my lovers by coming out at work, and I do not want to complicate my friendships in high school or college by defending the “girl who likes other girls” or the lesbian nursing students who are “horrible.”

My decision to lie about my sexual orientation created a web of lies so deep and pervasive that I vowed to tell the truth in *every other part* of my life. As I was keeping this vow a friend – one of the few to whom I am out at the time my conversation with him takes place – tells me that I am the most honest person he has ever met. He shocks me with this declaration. He shocks me because I know that my “lie from the closet” permeated everything I did, that it mediated the way I was experiencing the world, and in turn, mediated the world’s experience of me. During the deconstruction, I recall this conversation and see it as a turning point in my discontent, a nascent insurgency by my being upon my habits. I recall how much I tried to tamp it down, snuff it out. I am alarmed that though I have come far, I am angry at the energy consumed by the dominance of this plot in the context of my *whole* story – the whole one in

which I am an educator and a storyteller and a liberal and a writer and a friend. I want to say that none of these things have to do with being a lesbian. And I want to say that without being a lesbian, I might still be all of these things, but in a different way, for different reasons. I struggle at this point in the deconstruction between two irrational desires: to integrate all the plot lines, weaving it into an outrageous tapestry, and to race away from this plot line towards all or any of the others.

Deny the Plot

Boje (2001) suggests that we take time in this process to “deny the plot” (p. 21). Because of the fragmented nature of the narratives with which I was working, I found that I could not do this without first making some attempt to summarize the plot so that I would know what I was denying. So here is one way of summarizing the plot of the 17 fragments. (I rely on chronology here because it is in keeping with the conventional ways of thinking about plot.):

As a lesbian, I am always oppressed in some way. From kindergarten, through high school and college, through career changes in midlife, I have always been marginalized, always made to feel “other” (even by lovers who are also “other”) because I am homosexual. I am fearful of expressing myself fully. Socially I appear in fragments, fragmented not unlike the story itself. I cannot be genuine or whole. I edit myself constantly. I’m always at risk. If I’m in the closet, I’m at risk of being found out, with consequences. If I’m out of the closet I’m at risk physically and emotionally, resulting in limitations. When I make an effort to be out, forces emerge to nudge me back in, to reinstate the silent lie. “They” don’t want me in and “they” don’t want me out, because basically “they” don’t want *all* of who I am – only the “nice” parts. And by the way, it’s everyone’s loss – mine and theirs.

Okay. So to deny this, to turn it on its head is to notice that everyone is different from everyone, and it is likely (though I cannot be entirely certain of this) that everyone wants on some level to be accepted by others. At the level of plot my tale is no different from any story of oppression based on belief, heritage, genetics, or any variety of social choices. The oppressed “victims” in so many of these stories find ways, as I did, to become successful, to do a good job, to contribute in meaningful ways. Denying the plot leaves us with the suggestion that maybe it is appropriate for people to keep their personal and professional lives separate. Maybe this is the right choice for all of us to make, and even those who are not classically oppressed would do the organization a service by making the same sort of bifurcation undertaken by homosexuals. I do not find this denial of the plot satisfactory in any way and can only wonder that it is a direct result of my choice to deconstruct a marginal, rather than dominant, narrative, and the plot follows. So I look for another way to summarize the plot that might yield different, more satisfying results.

Another way to summarize the plot in these fragments is as a tale of lesbian oppression and the attendant struggle for a certain form of liberation, of freedom from that oppression. But there is another dimension in this summary that is buried until we unearth it by expressing it as another plot alternative. It is the dimension of me as a White woman of certain privilege. This is an alternative way of telling the story: It is a story of the rise of a woman from a rural, working

class family. Keeping her secret is the price of admission to a world of higher education, handsome six-figure salaries, bonuses, fine homes, fast cars and exotic, first-class travel on the company dime. It is a trade, a part of the deal, and for 20 years the woman believes it is a deal in her favor. She has fun. And because she is a skilled keeper of secrets because she has spent so much time choosing her own words, and carefully listening to herself, she has refined the skill of also listening to others.

This is a positive outcome. As Rich (1979) points out, “the liar learns more than she tells” (p. 187). Listening is a key competency for an organizational development practitioner – my field - followed closely by empathy. The lesbian has developed these competencies not in spite of being a lesbian, but because of it, not in spite of her decision to remain ensconced in the closet, but as a direct result of it. As one who is oppressed, the closeted lesbian executive understands the oppressed. She notices them in a way that straight White managers do not, so they become her allies. She is more successful than any one anticipates. No one can put their finger on the cause of her results, so they categorize her as “quirky but effective.” Raises and bonuses and promotions follow. To the woman, there are many times that it feels worth the sacrifice of truth, of wholeness. But here is something else Rich (1979) points out: “The liar lives in fear of losing control...to be vulnerable to another person means for her the loss of control” (p. 187). So this is where the alternative plot ends. It ends with Rich (1979) telling us that the complications that arise from keeping the secret, a thread which eventually works its way into every knot, is “why the effort to speak honestly is so important” (p. 187). It ends with the woman in the story realizing that she can no longer afford to live with the secret. It ends with a promise to a dying partner. It ends with a Pushmi-pullyu (Lofting, 1920) struggle to be out, to construct an alternative ending to the “original” tale.

And here is another important version of the plot that springs, in our deconstruction conversation, from the one just above. I am a White woman of privilege who is in the role of oppressor. I have joined the club. I run the succession plan for the firm. I can make or break people’s careers. I have power that I will never get as a lesbian, and yet I am a lesbian while I have it. More of “the joke is on them.” There is a level at which “they” have put me “in charge” of their careers, their futures. What would they do if they knew? And how would the story unfold if I used this power to retaliate for my time “lost” in the closet, to “get payback” for the system they have created that denies this truth about me? Neither story would be funny, at best a dark tragicomedy, ending with a feeling of hopelessness.

Here is another denial of the plot, following Boje’s (2001) suggestion to shift from one classic plot type to another. Here we will take the fragments as tragic and recast them (inspired by Boje) in the style of Doonesbury or Dilbert, as ironic or even comedic.

We can imagine a group of executives considering, in the first two or three panels of the cartoon, the raft of candidates who have applied for a current job opening in human resources. They are discussing the various attributes of the candidates they have interviewed, despairing, bemoaning the lack of candidates who possess the key qualities of a good HRD practitioner. In the last panel one of the executives declares, “The problem is, none of these candidates are queer. We need someone who’s got experience being in the closet. Let’s get a new headhunter. We have to keep interviewing.” Eventually I could not keep going with this denial of the plot. I

remembered that I have lived a fair portion of my life denying who I am. So I made a joke about it to my listener colleague, and we shift gears hopefully, to the next step in Boje's (2001) process.

Find the Exception

Boje (2001) suggests that "stories contain rules, scripts, recipes and morals." He recommends in step six that we find the exception (at least one) that breaks the rule. So first, I went looking for the rule. The main rule here, and it seems an overarching one, comes to us best articulated by the Clinton administration: "Don't ask, don't tell." It is a rule that says, "be heterosexual, and if you are not heterosexual, at least act as if you are heterosexual, and if you can't, then deny any sexuality." This rule assumes that sexuality is a private matter. It supposes that heterosexuality has anything to do with the goals of the business (or in the context of the Clintonian expression of it – military service). In practice, however, we know that these ideas are not absolutely true.

Heterosexuals generally make little to no effort to keep their own sexuality in the closet because fundamentally there is no heterosexual closet. In fact, sexuality is very public, a factor in political races and demonstrations and policymaking. So we hear about it routinely in both casual and formal conversation, from our friends, our colleagues, and those in positions of authority. Our society and institutions have a whole lot to say about it even as they publicly declare, over and over, that it is a private matter. The fact of the matter is that we devote significant time and energy, even in homogenously heterosexual groups, to figuring out who is having sex with whom. "It is an important, highly charged, almost ubiquitous issue" (Burrell & Hearn, 1990, p. 13). In considering organizations as repositories for sexual discourse, Burrell and Hearn also apply, among other strategies, the metaphor of production to explore the sexuality of the organizations themselves. If we accept this metaphor, which I do, then we might conclude that it may be as a result of this sexuality of organizations that our institutions seem to have a huge stake in the sexuality of the individuals who comprise them.

Lastly for our discussion here, this rule demonstrates that honesty is not valued, for we have already established through Rich that "don't tell," or silence, is the form of a lie. Honesty is an espoused value. We teach our children that they should not lie, and we uphold it as an ethical standard, an ideal. What we really seem to mean here is that we would very much like to hear the truth if the truth you have is the truth we would like to hear. Otherwise, we would in fact prefer a carefully articulated lie, or the "don't tell" silent version of it. We can see that in practice the rule is ridiculous. Foucault (1988) posits that "sexual interdictions are constantly connected with the obligation to tell the truth about oneself" (p. 16), but honesty is exactly the value *discouraged* by the rule in play here – don't ask, don't tell.

So, the exception to the rule that Boje (2001) prompts us to discover is in this case the possibilities inherent in refusing to participate in deception, in rejecting the lie. I find this exception in my story when I move to academia and choose to leave the closet, choose to be out in my teaching, in my research, and in my service to the university.

Trace What is Between the Lines

Boje (2001) suggests that in the seventh step you “trace what is not said...to borrow from the heritage of other stories” (p. 28). This step entails an exploration of the absent: When I tell you the story in this way, in these fragments, what am I *not* telling you? What details am I skipping? What do I assume we hold in common? What am I asking you to fill in from your imagination or experience?

Here, in these fragments, I see myself attempting to position my experience at the center of the story by making me the protagonist, by showing you my experience, by taking you, as one listener has said, “on a tour of what is like to be a lesbian” (E. Ellis, personal communication, January 2007). Here are some of the things I see that are not included in these fragments, that are borrowed:

It is dangerous to be homosexual.

You should be ashamed or at least embarrassed to be homosexual.

You should not *want* anyone to know that you are a homosexual.

There is something wrong with you. It is evil, wrong, sinful to be homosexual.

These are some of the things that I do not say when I tell my story in this way you have “heard” it here. I assume you know the first one, either because you are aware of the danger from public discourse, have experienced it, or (and of course I especially hope this last is not the case) have participated in perpetrating it.

I cannot know your position on the next three, but I do assume you have one. You may agree or disagree with all of them. You may agree with one or more, but not with the others. You may verbalize and move through the world as if you agree or disagree, but secretly harbor the opposite point of view. (Witness the social pressure for liberals to support rights bills for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) people regardless of their personal position on this particular “issue,” and the penchant for closeted LGBT politicians to take public, indeed highly visible, stands against these bills so that their own sexual proclivities do not become the subject of scrutiny.) The actors in these fragments may hold these beliefs privately, but publicly deny them in the spirit of... “some of my best friends are lesbians.” For an example, we can turn to the fragments. My colleagues at Columbia who advised me to “stay in” while I was at graduate school would likely assert that they were “looking out for me” because they liked me, cared about me, wanted me to succeed. I choose to think this is the case because it happens that I like them too. I know they would protest the suggestion that they were in any way homophobic and I know I would want to believe them. I know, too, that despite my fondness for them, when push came to shove, this would not always be a safe assumption.

How do I know this, that there is unspoken and sometimes latent homophobia caught up inside well meaning straight people? How does this end up between the lines of my fragments? It is lodged there because I know of something else that is between the lines here, that I leave unsaid: I do not speak of my own internalized homophobia. As a product of the compulsory heterosexuality, explicated by Rich (1994), I do harbor homophobia. How could I not? Although

I support human, civil, and equal rights for all citizens of the world, I confess that there have been times I have been uncomfortable in certain settings dominated by people who are situated at vastly different points along the GLBT continuum from me, for example, around theatrically flamboyant men and women with deeply masculine personae. Though I sometimes attend them, I confess to you that I am not totally comfortable at events like Gay Pride festivals where people demonstrate their sexual orientation publicly, where they come together primarily on the basis that they have non-heterosexual orientation in common – and often little else. (This discomfort, this feeling of once again not “fitting in” even to this “community” that purports to be mine, is in addition to the adoption of word “Gay”, which excludes lesbians, bisexuals, and transgendered people, rather than Queer, which while more political is more inclusive.)

Finally, the way I can be sure that the homophobia is between the lines and inside people is simple. If it weren't the dominant belief system in my cultural milieu, then none of my work here would be necessary. Indeed, none of it would make sense.

Resituate

In this final step, Boje (2001) suggests that we “renarrate the narrative” (p. 29) with an eye toward showing how “the narrative can become or sometimes is a free play of the binary opposites *beyond hierarchy* [italics added]” (p. 29). This step gets at the initial appeal that Boje's guidelines for deconstruction held for me: it lay in the confluence of familiarizing myself with Boje's processes for story analysis with my deepening interest in the concept of borderlands primarily as it is expressed and explored by Gloria Anzaldúa (1987). Between them, I saw a way of unfolding my living story going forward.

In the preface to *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Anzaldúa (1987) explains that there are both physical borderlands, such as her homeland along the Mexico/US border in Texas, and psychological borderlands, such as the sexual borderlands and spiritual borderlands that are not linked to geography. She defines the borderlands as a place where “the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy” (Preface).

In my reading of Anzaldúa (1987), I have come to see the psycho-social space I inhabit as borderlands territory. It is an in-betweenness. I felt it first as a child when I questioned what I was – girl/boy, neither this nor that, so what lay between or outside of these dualities? I could not imagine it at the age of 7 or 17 or 37, so I could not imagine that it would be good. I had no language for it, so I could not judge it or place a value on it. But there was language for it - outside of the borderlands – and it was a language of dualities, of polar extremes. But by 47 I had come to see the borderlands as neither described by, nor served by, the dualities, the binaries, that I have explored in this process of deconstruction. From Anzaldúa and from this deconstruction work, I have come to see that this is because the nature of the borderlands *dissolves* dualities. Anzaldúa asserts, for example, that “most societies try to get rid of their deviants. Most cultures have burned and beaten their homosexuals....the queer are the mirror reflecting the heterosexual tribe's fear” (p. 18). She tells the story of a creature who “for six months was a woman with a vagina that bled once a month, and that for the other six months she was a man, had a penis and she peed standing up” (p. 19), explaining that from a borderlands

perspective, “there is something compelling about being both male and female, about having an entry into both worlds” (p. 19). Outside of the borderlands there is a sense that

half and halves [are] suffering from a confusion of sexual identity or even from a confusion of gender [but] what we are suffering from is an absolute despot duality that says we are able to be only one or the other. It claims that human nature is limited and cannot evolve into something better. (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 19)

There is not the recognition that queer people may be “the embodiment of the *heiros gamos*: the coming together of opposite qualities within” (p. 19). In the borderlands, in this “interface” (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 38), and then in Boje’s (2001) guidelines, I find permission to restory myself in the mottled space of the borderlands, to accept that between deep darkness and bright light is the play of shadow, and soft hues. For me the borderlands take on the qualities of dawn, when there is half-light and possibility of anything happening, and dusk, when there is a hush that brings a promise of, if not peace, at least rest.

It is in this space – in the borderlands – that I can resituate my story. It becomes a story where my experiences are valued for the way they have sculpted me, informed my sensibilities. In my resituated story, I am valued for my “*facultad*” which Anzaldúa (1987) describes as

an instant ‘sensing,’ a quick perception arrived at without conscious reasoning...an acute awareness mediated by the part of the psyche that does not speak, that communicates in images and symbols which are the faces of feelings, that is, behind which feelings reside/hide....Those who are pounced on the most have it the strongest- the females, the homosexuals of all races, the darkskinned, the outcast, the persecuted, the marginalized, the foreign. (p. 38)

In my resituated story, the borderlands consciousness that Anzaldúa (1987) posits, *la mestiza*, the mixed one, is not the only one who “has discovered that she can’t hold concepts or ideas in rigid boundaries” (p. 79). In my resituated story, *everyone* is discovering this. This ambiguity spurs more inquiry, more dialogue, more critical reflection, out the sheer necessity of making sense of who is around us, what they have to offer, and dare I say it, what one might offer to them. In my new story it is not just “*la mestiza* [who] undergoes a struggle of flesh, a struggle of borders, an inner war” (p. 78). Everyone undergoes the struggle, and so theoretically and eventually, the struggle ceases, transforming in to a way of being, becoming a dance rather than a wrestling match. Anzaldúa suggests that “it is not enough to stand on the opposite river bank, shouting questions” (p. 78). My parallel to this metaphor is that it is not enough to don my protective armor. “At some point,” Anzaldúa submits, “on our way to a new consciousness, we will have to leave the opposite bank, the split...somehow healed so that we are on both shores at once” (p. 78). In my resituated story, I find that we are not on both shores, but swimming in the river, buoyed up by the water, floating, diving deep, and then leaping like dolphins, but always coming back to rest on the surface. In the river, there is no opposite, so there is not a question of balance or compromise between opposites. The binary, two-shore debate is replaced by buoyancy, by flow.

My resituated story is an ideal story. It is not only about me as a swimmer. It is about a fuller breakdown in duality that dissolves its ability to press anyone into the margins, silencing their story. In my new story, I play a role in this dissolution by persisting in the direction I have already chosen: To move deeper into the real story, despite the lack of “success” depicted in the fragments here. So I will tell my stories in public forums, and resist forces that would shove me back into the closet, forces that object to my coming out, or that see it as inconsequential because it is unattractive, unimaginable (or too attractive, too imaginable), or because I represent the wrong kind of minority that is not protected by federal policy and therefore not eligible for funding or other forms of protection. In my new story, I incorporate my *mestiza* consciousness into my university classes even though I do not yet have tenure because my consciousness cannot wait for the time when it is finally “safe.” In my new story, I recognized the illusion of safety, and I am paradoxically braver, because I see that no time will be any better or worse than now. I am stepping away from the bank, into the river, and demonstrating to people around me, and inviting them to experience with me, the cross-lateral goodness of swimming.

Finally, as I work out my new story, as I imagine it into being as my living story, I unearth a “hidden” binary in my fragments. It is connected to the notion of choice. Boje (2001) suggests that we search for binaries in which one half of the binary may be missing. But I missed “choice” in the early part of this process. I only see it now, at the end. So I go hunting for the opposite of choice and I find that in English at least, there is no antonym for this word. The opposite is just the absence of choice, the lack of it. Why is there not a word for lack of choice? Why have we so lacked creativity in this matter? Do I take this to mean that the opposite of choice is only “no choice?”

But there is a form of tyranny in choice that renders both choice and no choice unacceptable. When I was in the closet, I was constantly making choices about staying in. Later, I made choices about being out of the closet. As a lesbian, I routinely, regularly, and frequently (daily and in each moment) decide to be “out.” As Rich (1994) points out in her discussion of “compulsory heterosexuality”, heterosexuals don’t have to make that sort of choice. Homosexuality requires choices. Heterosexuality liberates people from the need to choose. My experience and Rich’s wisdom finally combine in a sort of interim binary, until I figure this out. The interim binary I construct is of categorical choice versus situational choice. Categorical choice is choice in the absence of particulars. It is the choice of principle, but also of ignorance of particularity. Categorical choices may be linked to fear. Mine was: I made a categorical choice to stay in the closet for over four decades because I was afraid of what would happen if I stepped out. But bad things happened anyway, despite my best efforts to stay in. Now I am out of the closet, and I have encountered categorical choices of others about me – to hate me perhaps, or to pray for my soul on the basis of heterosexist principle. Others make these categorical choices without taking even, by way of example, the time you have taken to learn the story fragments I have included in this paper. Knowing the fragments (or knowing me as a loving daughter, or a dedicated teacher, or a literacy volunteer, or a lover of animals) would put people in the position of making a situational choice about how to react to me, a choice based on the particulars. And, now that I am out of the closet, I am faced with my own situational choices. Every day I make choices based on what I have come to think of as one aspect of my *facultad*, my perception of the particulars in any situation, to assess for danger. I am categorically out of the closet, and sometimes, more and more rarely, I am situationally in it. I am out more often than not (and I

like to think I am out whenever it matters), but I have reserved for myself the option of situational choice, of responding to situations where I feel most threatened, with my old ally, silence. These choices are not easy ones, and I try to stay vigilant and brave, but it is exhausting, and I long for a third option beyond any duality of choice.

So, in my new story, I advance with choices still troubled with the notion of choice. People are stripped of choice, it seems to me, either hegemonically, through overarching social structures, or forcefully, through threats or coercion. So now I wonder –in a borderlands of disintegrating binaries where does this leave me? Where is the grey, the shadow, the blurring of the choice/no choice binary? What is the concept of choice once it is dissolved in the river? Do you see it, hear it, feel it, know it? At the moment in my story, I cannot feel its pulse at all.

A Reflection on Implications for Organizations and HRD

For a practitioner, a reading of the story fragments at only the surface level of the text may prompt a well-intentioned leap to thinking about tasks related to the development of certain kinds of policies, or changes to policy. A practitioner may begin to consider how interventions like sexual harassment seminars and policies on anti-discrimination and domestic partnership benefits can address the problem of LGBT employees who are somewhere on the continuum from the closet to being out in their organizations. The problem is that it is too easy for these well-intentioned policies to get sucked into the political vortex of the dominant narrative that allows organizations to advertise that they have such policies in place – “look at us: we’re progressive!” – which provides false comfort that there is some reliable course of action a marginalized and persecuted individual can pursue. The situation is more complicated than that. The complex nature of the organizational issues covered just in these fragments starts way before policy because the marginalized individual has to be prepared to “come out.” Before that, she needs to make herself somehow “ready” for the process of coming out, prepare herself in some way for the particular uncertainty, which lies on the other side of the closet’s threshold. So the HRD/organizational development (OD) and adult education (as well as the individual/personal) implications for organizations begins with a practice of creating space.

When we go deeper, beyond the text, as we do here in Part Two of this deconstruction, we learn that cheap and cheerful assumptions about people “staying in” or “coming out” rob the organization in a nearly incalculable way. (A university administrator told me that she was quite certain that LGBT people were happier staying in the closet, that they wanted it that way, and that our job as educators was to respect that. A human resources vice president told me that they had spent a long time drafting partnership benefits, so now “they have everything we have. That should make them happy.”) In my story fragments, I consume tremendous energy inside my organizations by trying to keep my Luckmannian (1978) worlds separate. We have the ideas of the closet as a safe place, and coming out as liberation. We have seen that both of these ideas are true and that neither is accurate. From the closet I was consuming significant energy trying to build false safety. This is energy – perhaps measurable not only in the loss of creativity focused on work, but also in time – that could be allocated other places for the greater good of the organization, and the greater good of me. Further, channeling this energy into preserving my status in the closet prevented me from authentically supporting other marginalized groups in the organization. I can support them as an ally, but not by standing on my own ground, on the terra

firma of my own experience, as an empathizer. If I cannot tell my own story authentically, how can I authentically respond to theirs?

What this deconstruction drives me to is not an *answer* to the question of how to reallocate this energy from the maintenance of the closet to increasing the vitality of the relationship between individuals and their work. I am left understanding my own experience better, but still with no recipe to offer organizations. The directional compass for navigating the borderlands between the closet and the dominant culture lies, in my experience, in the spirit and consciousness of individuals, and not within the organization's structures or policies. I in no way mean to let organizations off the hook: Even for the traveler accompanied by an excellent compass (or GPS navigation), the journey will be aided by the presence of signposts, landmarks, and lay-bys where she can weather out treacherous storms.

So, we can locate pieces of answers, angles practitioners can pursue. Deconstructing my story drives me only to this "answer:" that there is a need for experimentation inside organizations, experimentation with shifting cultures in ways that free people up to let Luckmann's "small worlds" overlap, to collide, knowing that the territory is not *totally* uncharted, and that there are safe houses along even the rockiest, windswept paths, safe houses marked by single candle burning in the window, safe houses with fires in the hearth, warm food on the table, and friends who care enough to really listen to the story of the journey, and to the traveler's hopes for the destination. For me, I am now haunted by the missing voices in my story, the voices of people who would have been my allies, had I given them even the smallest sign, the most subtle invitation. I never gave any of them an opportunity to support me, and my own unwillingness to take any risk left them powerless to help me move onto more authentic ground. I am not entirely accountable for this failing in the story. I had no signposts. There was no way to discern supporters. There was no candle burning in any window.

There are two levels of action that have a recursive relationship. The first is at the level of HRD practitioners, people who are responsible for culture – the guardians/keepers of the culture, who at the same time that are responsible for changing it, growing it. The drive here is for them to begin to think practically about what they can do to free up the energy in individuals that is right now allocated to maintaining the closet. The second is at the individual level, those who are in closets in their organizations. For them the drive is to reflect deeply about the implications of staying in the closet. For me, it was only upon learning processes of reflective skepticism (Brookfield, 1987) that I was able to make any progress in my mind's imaginative eye. Imaginings of what was made *not* possible by "staying in" receive little attention in my story because they are clouded by what *was* made possible by staying in, and by the fear of losing it.

A small example, unnoticed by me until the resituated story, is that one of the things being out means for me in real time, is that I get to write this article, an act made possible by the discovery that I have allies who will support me. And that despite politics, and heterosexist attitudes that persist regardless of my relationship to the closet, I believe I have evidence of sufficient support in my institution to be able to explore the issues raised in this article, and to submit this article for publication as a legitimate piece of scholarship without jeopardizing my status on the tenure track or my legitimacy as an external HRD/OD consultant. From the closet, my ability to develop these kinds of publications would be inconceivable. Outside the closet, I

get to put my energy into this, this work that I see as having value – although you, dear readers, will be the far more informed judge of this. A second example, also part of the resituated story is my participation on the Commission for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Equity that serves the President of my University. Staying in the closet would mean that I would never get nominated for this role. The story of me being in the closet does not include being able to inform policy at the system level of the organization of which I'm a part – in this case my university. In the story, the energy that could inform this large-world work is consumed by the small-world work of keeping my closet intact, by keeping the door shut. In the re-situated story in Boje's (2001) eighth step, that energy is freed-up, and made available for focusing on creative work for educational equity.

Luckmann (1978) talks about indigenous communities being single communities – not multiple small worlds - “predicting the right actions – approved by the gods and should not be disturbed, and should not be destroyed. Traditional man moved within his lifeworld with a certain ease and safety – being cast out would be like death” (p. 276). The separate small worlds are, according to Luckmann, an effect of contemporary society. This deconstruction supports the aim of mirroring in some way the single world of traditional man. The move out of the closet is a move toward *no* small worlds, to an integrated rather than bifurcated life. Organizations and HRD practitioners have the capacity to experiment with ways of helping people to bring these small worlds together without calamity. The beginning is to make the small worlds porous, overlapping, integrating. My story doesn't point to particular structures, and a structure that works in one organization is not likely to work as well, if at all, in another organization because the structures are responsive to the unique fingerprint of the culture of the organization as a small world. Still, the extent to which we do not begin to experiment is the extent to which we will continue to have this energy drain away from full creativity, away from innovation, away from full collaboration where people can speak freely about ideas that are drawn from their most intimate experiences of their worlds – all of them. Organizations hunger for this, and they are not likely to tap this vein if their people constantly censor their ideas because the experiences in which they are grounded would be dangerously exposed in their full-bodied expression of the idea. So the full-bodied, intuitive expression of the idea is surgically altered, reduced down. In shifting the expression of the idea, the idea itself suffers. Revelatory elements are pulled out. They are pulled out judiciously, like the sticks of a Jenga tower. Every effort is made to preserve the structural integrity of the idea, leaving in the sticks providing the structural tension that allows the tower to stay standing. As sticks are pulled away, and the tower, still standing, becomes less and less complete, and there is a moment in which there is no other stick to pull out without affecting the collapse of the tower. This bare bones architecture, just barely reminiscent of the depth and detail of the original version, is the safest version of an idea, the version that gets communicated to the organization. Because it is a shadow of its own self, it runs the risk of being rejected on the basis that it is not rich enough, or compelling enough - and it is not, because it is a safely skeletal version of itself formerly fleshed-out self.

How can organizations make it safe to articulate ideas against the full-backdrop of their context? How can organizations change in ways that help them to return to the best of Luckmann's (1978) traditional man's small world, where safety was an element of the lifeworld? These are big questions that have implications transcending the details of my story. Consider for a moment, that this story could be anyone's story. There is a way of reading this paper, of

considering the closet very literally as the homosexual closet. My story happens to be about oppression of a sexual minority, the closet of a sexual minority, but it doesn't have to be. It could be the story of any kind of secret that is linked to the ways in which the holder interprets the world, any secret that provides a particular lens. I am suggesting that the way we interpret the world is in turn linked to the ideas that we generate. So there is another reading that is at least as important, maybe more so, and that is the idea of the homosexual closet as a metaphor for any closet – the closet of mental illness, substance abuse, of a socially unacceptable wrinkle in a family, a wrinkle that requires the inhabitant of that closet to navigate with a compass of secrets, a map of silence. Any of these kinds of closets pull energy out of the organization, because they are these structures that we build, and they require maintenance, because there is always pressure exerted on the closet. It comes in the form of curiosity, and speculation, and gossip, and even concern, or a desire for a stronger social connection. It comes like the wolf in the folktale of the three pigs, persistently threatening to huff and to puff and to blow the closet down, to blow it open. In the absence of options, residents of the closet look for stronger materials, turning from straw to brick, and invest time in learning new methods of construction. Practitioners who create open, non-coercive spaces where people can authentically tell their own stories and powerfully listen to those of others are, I believe, on their way to creating important, new sorts of structures, spaces that liberate energy and open up ideas. Beyond the threshold of the closet, practitioners can create inviting spaces that the wolf simply cannot blow down.

A Reflection on Process: The Choice to Deconstruct My Own Story

Deconstruction is a process with its own perils. There was, to begin with, the question of who had the right to deconstruct my story. I agree with Boje (2001) that the stories are deconstructing all the time, but this natural phenomenon is different from an individual wielding a purposefully deconstructive lens. Who, I wondered, could set about this task with ethical intention and undertake it with ethical means? There is something that feels to me to be almost surgical about the process. Like a surgeon cutting through tissue, both strong and tender, I wanted the scalpel to be sharp, the surgeon's hands to be steady. I wanted the procedure to be completed in a way that would leave both me and my story whole, and in some way healthier. I wanted the scars to be slight.

There is a Chinese story of an Emperor who visits his kitchens and watches a butcher cut up an ox. At the butcher's slightest touch, the knife slithers in rhythm, like an effortless dance. At the exclamation of the Emperor on the cook's skill, the cook explains, "I care about the Way, which goes beyond skill. A mediocre cook changes his knife once a month, a good one once a year. I've had this knife for 19 years. When I come to a complicated place, I watch carefully, moving the knife with subtlety, looking for the spaces between the joints. The blade has no thickness. If you insert what has no thickness into such spaces, there is plenty of room and all resistance dissolves away. The whole ox comes apart like the crumbling of a clod of earth. I am satisfied. I wipe off the knife and put it away." "Excellent!" replies the Emperor. "That is how to care for life!" This, I suggest, is how to care for stories we want to explore through a process of deconstruction, or any other form of analysis.

If we accept, as it happens that I do, that stories have an aliveness, have souls (Tyler, in press), then we have an obligation to respect that soul, and the container (i.e., the story itself, in

which it has chosen to reside, no matter how temporal its residence). No more than we, here in the paradigm of Western medicine, would think to destroy an animal body such as a human to release its soul, so must we proceed with story deconstruction in a way that preserves the story body as the vessel for the story soul.

In my case, despite my curiosity at what would emerge, I was not prepared at the point at which I began this process to hand my story over for deconstruction by another, by an objective, if caring surgeon. The downside of my unwillingness was that I was destined to be caught in the web of my story even as I deconstructed it. The strands would cross over my eyes, clouding my senses, tangling in my fingers, constraining me. Left to only my own devices, when I would encounter pain, I had a tendency to back off rather than to breathe into the space where the pain was, and move through it toward its source. Left to my own devices it was too easy to simply support the story, rather than press through it.

What began as a compromise developed into the two-pronged approach I described in Part One. What I refer to at the outset of this article as a “messy split” of recorded dialogue and solitary introspection became, in retrospect, a powerful and at times perplexing experience. These dimensions are, I hope, both evident in the writing that has preceded this section of the paper. In any event, it seems appropriate to make a few points about this messy approach for the interested reader.

My partner in the dialogue-based prong was a storyteller and story facilitator whose approach to storytelling is grounded in what I have come to think of as powerful listening (Tyler, in press). She listens, as she did in service to this project, in a way that acknowledges judgment and then passes through it in a way that is gentle, fearless and, at times, playful. This is my own characterization of how it feels to work with her, so I will unpack these adjectives just a little. Her listening is gentle because it relies on inquiry grounded in authentic curiosity, and in delight at the variety of experience that are possible for humans to have. Her listening is fearless because she is more objective than the teller – in this case me – and can ask questions which, if self-generated might dull my blade. Her listening is playful on the basis of her profound trust that both the text of the story and the story itself have sufficient tensile strength to move through a series of deconstructive gymnastics without strain or injury, like a series of yoga asanas that increase flexibility, increase awareness and ultimately, simply feel good (or at least better). Together my listener and I went on a journey with and through my story fragments. Her fluency increased my confidence as we traveled through some territory that, despite its almost all too familiar origins, felt at times rather foreign.

At each step of Boje’s (2001) process, we went back through each fragment. We considered them in many constellations: randomly, as they appear here, and as they are most often told, themed by the organizational context in which they occurred (e.g., educational settings, for-profit organizations, social organizations), by the type of dominating or liberating forces which drove the basic arc or “plot line” of the fragments, or chronologically. We interpreted Boje’s guidelines as we went, turning the fragments over and over, stepping back, moving closer, holding them up to the light and then casting them in shadow. We found that it was sometimes difficult to distinguish between the steps in the guidelines based on the results,

and we noticed that there were times that patterns and outliers were astonishingly clear by virtue of the same overlapping nature of the process.

My listener's persistence in not being satisfied with the first observations I articulated (despite my conviction that they were reasonably brilliant insights) and her willingness to play "devil's advocate" were essential elements of the process, making it not just a reflective process, but a critically reflective process (Brookfield, 1987; Mezirow, 1991). They helped to reveal not so much layers as dimensions, as in the cutting away of a gem. As the dimensions were exposed, we looked at both the new facet that was forming and the chip that had fallen away from that place.

It was collaborating with a listener that made me sufficiently brave to also work alone: To listen closely to the recording of our work together, to what Taptiklis (2007) would refer to as our "utterances," and then to revisit the fragments in quiet, deeply personal reflection.

Reflections on Outcomes

I thought I knew this story – the inside story and the outside story (Stein, 1935). It is, after all, my story. I have lived it, and it has lived me. I have felt sorry for myself for having this story, and I have felt sorry for the story. At the same time, I had come to celebrate this story, to be proud of what I had come to think of as living through it to beyond it. I was certain that I had learned, finally, to rise above the forces of oppression that I experienced as constraining – as limiting and damaging. I was proud to hold this story, these fragments, at the same time that I was living in what felt like a "new" story.

This process has made clear to me in a very concrete way at least one aspect of dialogism. I really *feel* the intertextuality of story, to see how any story experienced in the moment relies on other fragments, those which happen alongside it and those that occur before and after. The story integrates other stories rather than leaving them behind, rather than moving beyond or rising above them. In the manner of Boje's (1991) concept of systemicity, an interweaving of stories that transcends place, space and time, I am connected to the stories of all the people who appear in these stories, advocates and oppressors alike. Moreover, possibly (probably) without them knowing it, and whether or not they would find the notion agreeable, their stories are connected to/influenced by/integrated with mine. Like the shadows in Plato's cave, in a way that is more significant than being a simple extension of the story fragments here, more influential than being a product of the story, my emerging story does not simply "rest on the shoulders" of the fragments here. This process of deconstruction has personalized the concept of intertextuality for me, deepening my sensitivity to the way I move through my own emerging story. Already it feels as though this process is likely to make life more complicated for me, and simpler, in that I will be more astute, more understanding about the complications. These fragments are shot through a complex multi-helix, a compounded and compounding strand of story DNA that warps and weaves as new fragments emerge, and as stories of those around me flow/merge/jigsaw/chase/nudge/collide with mine to form a kaleidoscope (a collid-e-scope) of story/telling that is driven by centripetal and centrifugal forces of, at least, time, fear, and openness.

Not only have I seen the resiliency in heart and soul of this story, but the steps have revealed to me new elements of its architecture – detailed filigree, mosaics, and supporting pillars – that matter. I want to know more about this story, to know it better, differently. I am left curious about its relationship to other stories that have collided with it. And I am curious about those other stories, and whatever is hiding beneath, behind, and between their lines. This process has not left me fearless, but it has left me braver. It is for having done the cutting that my knife is sharper now.

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