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PUSHING BOUNDARIES AND MAKING MEANING IN THE THIRD SPACE

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ABSTRACT

Using a Scholarly Personal Narrative approach, the authors examine their own lived experiences negotiating and navigating the third space as student support professionals. They highlight the feminization of student support roles and the gendered metaphors that permeate discussion of academic labor. Through sharing and responding to each other's personal narratives that include explorations of their upbringings and professional journeys, they discuss definitions of academic labor, examine the idea of expertise and the relationship between them. Drawing on their individual institutional contexts and literature on academic work, they argue that collaboration and community can help individuals navigate the third space as educators working in staff positions at small, liberal arts colleges. They call for faculty and staff to push their institutions to rethink who participates in the practices of teaching and shared governance, going beyond current boundaries to find new meaning in shared work.

Keywords: third space, academic labor, faculty labor, higher education, scholarly personal narrative, faculty/staff relations

PUSHING BOUNDARIES AND MAKING MEANING IN THE THIRD SPACE

Whitchurch (2008, 2013) has brought to light the increasing commonality of professional staff at colleges and universities who hold academic credentials and backgrounds on par with faculty members. She argues these staff members often take part in project work that provides opportunities to interact with faculty in ways that unbound their contributions from the traditional rigid organizational structures of this environment, creating a third space for creativity but also risk and tension. In our particular roles, that tension is characterized by both the space we occupy between administration and faculty and the feminized, "maternal" world of service-work (Boquet, 2002).

As dean of retention and the director of the writing center and peer tutoring, our lived experiences of the third space include negotiating faculty resistance to policy changes and programming often passed down to us from the college administration. The challenge of defining and legitimizing our roles among this resistance motivated us to not only connect with each other but share our stories more broadly. It is our contention that the very act of sharing lived experiences and reflecting on that with colleagues is an important practice in understanding the third space. In doing so we found that new definitions and metaphors continue to be elusive. We argue, however, that those new definitions and metaphors are unnecessary to change the ways we interact with each other in the third space.

METHODOLOGY

As researchers, we chose to deploy the use of Scholarly Personal Narrative (Nash & Viray, 2013) for this project. This methodological choice amplifies the experience of the individual in creating meaning out of our own narratives. In particular, Scholarly Personal Narrative (SPN) serves to illuminate and interrogate the individual scholar's experience as worthy of academic exploration. Nash and Viray (2013) defined SPN as:

The best SPN "interview" is the scholar's self-interrogation. The best analysis and prescription come out of the scholar's efforts to make narrative sense of personal and cultural experience. . . The ultimate intellectual responsibility

of the SPN scholar is to find a way to use the personal insights gained in order to draw larger conclusions for readers, possibly even to challenge and reconstruct older political or educational narratives, if this is an important goal for the researcher. (p. 4)

For many scholars, the choice to use your own experience to examine and understand a social phenomenon or experience may be viewed as outside the bounds of "good" scholarship. However, Scholarly Personal Narrative centers the individual's narrative or story as equally important as external data. Ingersoll (2018) noted the SPN approach is made difficult by the need to create knowledge "from within" (p. 196). SPN also questions a traditional scholarly approach which emphasizes the objectivity of the researcher and hierarchical approaches to knowing (Nash & Viray, 2013). In its place, SPN helps researchers to create meaning out of their own stories using a constructivist approach. In addition, it amplifies and emphasizes the experiences of those who have been traditionally marginalized and under- represented in scholarly research (Nash & Viray, 2013).

The authors, Carroll and Burwell, share our individual stories of experiencing the third space, both when it has been productive and when it has not been. In doing so, we construct meaning by telling stories to one another and inviting the other to read their narrative, comment, and note important points, to create saliency and shared meaning. In doing so, we create an individual narrative that together becomes one story of the third space. This process helped us to uncover commonalities and differences along with possible strategies and recommendations for how to labor in the third space going forward. It also allowed us to amplify the voice of women, a group continually underrepresented and marginalized in traditional academic spaces.

Through the critical examination of our shared experiences, we contribute to the understanding of third space as experienced by female higher education professionals working in student support roles, a category often understood as service workers rather than discipline experts and producers of knowledge and scholarship. We highlight the challenges and limitations of that positionality, the importance of our relationship with each other while negotiating for space, and the ways that conversations and relationships with others in less ambiguous roles have supported our ability to push rigid borders and make meaning together.

CARROLL'S NARRATIVE: DEFINING ACADEMIC LABOR

Academic labor is often defined in terms of faculty activity and especially in terms of adjunct faculty and juxtaposing that labor against management, where management is academic administration (Johnson et al., 2003; Parson, 2011). Setting up this division of roles appears to be essential for forming labor unions and improving the working conditions of adjunct instructors. The plight of the overworked, underpaid adjunct instructor has been centralized in the discourse on academic labor in recent years. By and large, this attention is a good thing. However, it also highlights a major gap in how labor in academic contexts is understood.

In the current literature, faculty, and especially adjuncts, are understood as providing labor mainly because they are understood as mistreated by administration. Bousquet and Nelson (2008) share a vignette of an anonymous instructor who claims, "Teaching here is like being in a bad marriage that looks good to outsiders. I'm the wife whose husband slaps her around but who, nonetheless, smiles gamely, maintaining the relationship 'for the sake of the kids'" (p. 90). I don't think it is a mistake that this description evokes a feminized version of the battered professor supporting her students at the cost of her own livelihood and mental health. One can easily imagine the opposing masculine role of the overbearing, demanding college administration as spouse. The role of staff positions, roles that are neither faculty nor administration, do not fit easily into this metaphor, however.

Let me share some personal history in the interest of making sense of these categories and their importance. I (Carroll) am from a long line of "working class" people on both my mother's and father's sides. The men were house painters, drywallers, and line cooks. The women were secretaries, gas station cashiers, and mailroom clerks. While that would change later, when I was growing up, neither of my parents had graduated high school. At that time, the closest anyone in my family had gotten to a college degree was when my mother's brother began a program in architecture but dropped out to join the Air Force to become an airplane mechanic after one professor critiqued his designs rather harshly. College was not understood as a force of upward mobility in my family. It was seen as a completely different way of life.

My mother, in stark contrast to the rest of the family (who had rejected the intellectual way of life as snobbery) dreamed of a college education both for herself and for her children. She hoped that a college degree would mean an easier life: a life where we worked less, made more money, and garnered greater respect. She wanted this so badly, as a matter of fact, that she went back to our local community college to complete her final high school credit and enrolled in college the same year I did. She graduated with an undergraduate degree the year after I earned mine. While she

stopped there, I had so thoroughly bought into the notion that more education meant more success that I continued until I had, as Richard Gere's character in Pretty Woman describes his education "gone all the way". I imagined myself asking interesting questions, reading, writing, and discussing ideas with interested students and colleagues.

Academics nostalgically refer to these activities as the "life of the mind". The image of the professor (always a man) in a tweed jacket and a messy office is generally conjured up as someone who is afforded the right to these activities because he is both gifted and singularly focused on his research. He does not have to be good with students or colleagues, and he takes risks and breaks rules all in the name of advancing knowledge, consequences be damned. The romanticism of the archetype is well displayed in Indiana Jones, Jurassic Park, and the Da Vinci Code, to name a few Hollywood films that maintain the type in our collective imagination even beyond the ivory tower. Robin (2003) argues that academics are fighting to hold on to this image as they lose tenure track positions, take on more committee work, teach more classes, have greater pressure to secure grants and publish, and generally suffer from challenges that are painted as originating in the decisions of the administration. The alternative to fighting to hold onto the noble professor image, it seems, would be to allow the battered professor to replace it. The problem with this, Robin (2003) implies, is that the loss of the illusion that they are a part of "high culture" and the fantasy that tenure track positions are vocations rather than work would be too great a loss to allow for that shift. I will emphasize his point here by highlighting that professors, in an attempt to preserve their own status, view the scholarly activities they engage in as not just different from work but *more* than work, *better* than work.

I should be clear that I do not fault faculty for these thoughts. I held them myself until very recently. Heavily influenced by my mother's narrative that a college education changes lives, I entered my doctoral program and even my first adjunct position teaching first-year and developmental composition that followed, thinking of myself as an educator and scholar rather than a worker, or laborer. My thoughts at that time matched closely with how Mattson (2003) describes work as the activities of the "working class" as distinct from the activities of intellectuals. In my experience, "working class" people did not sit at computers or stand in classrooms. There was a physicality, and a tangible dirtiness, to work. If someone worked hard, they finished sweaty. It is not a mistake that by this definition, the work the men in my family did was more likely to be considered "real work" than the work the women in my family did. The work my mother (who became a special needs teacher's aide after graduating college) and I did was not even considered the "real world" let alone "real work".

Like many academics, this definition of work was hard for me to let go of even as I struggled to hobble together enough composition classes to make my student loan payments and graded papers until the wee hours, a task Mattson (2003) reminds us is far from intellectually stimulating. I do want to be careful, though, not to define labor by claiming it is necessarily connected to low wages or inconsistent opportunities or with only the tasks we enjoy less. It is, however, useful to attempt to think about academic labor as more than the contrast between physical and intellectual activities, the dichotomy of the noble and the battered professor, or the conflict between administration and faculty. If we can look beyond those contrasts, we might find a complex definition of work that includes all of academic labor, including the often-invisible tasks that staff and administrators undertake.

EXPERIENCING THE THIRD SPACE

In the summer of 2019, I left a satellite campus of a large, R1 institution where I held a hybrid (adjunct) faculty and staff position and took a fully staff position as the director of the writing center at a small, liberal arts college in the Midwest. It is not uncommon for writing center directors to be faculty members, but it is equally common for the role to be a staff position, which is the case at this institution. During my first academic year here, several faculty members stopped by my office to welcome me, share their frustrations with the underdeveloped writing on campus, and tell me how badly needed I was. That spring, months before COVID-19 sent us all off campus, I was able to complete my first round of recruitment and selection of new writing tutors. There seemed to be full support from faculty in the process. I received three times as many applications as there were openings, and faculty sent well- written, professional, letters of recommendation equivalent to what they might send to support an internship application off-campus. Everything about my experience supported the notion that the writing center and my staff position were well respected.

In that first year, if I received any complaints from faculty about the direction I was taking the writing center, they were not memorable. Having worked in writing centers since graduate school, I knew of misconceptions held by students and faculty. I knew that professors often felt, as Blake Smith (2023) recently complained in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, that teaching writing should not be their problem, that despite being a skill that is developed over years of practice, sophomores should somehow be writing at the same level of those teaching their classes. Smith admits using the writing center to manage his own workload, sending students there when their papers are "disasters".

Essentially, Smith (and others who hold his views) expect someone else on campus to fix in a one-hour writing center session what they cannot even be bothered with; he expects others to do work that he sees as beneath him.

In an attempt to set expectations, I was going to faculty events and sharing examples of how a paragraph might change after a writing center session and how it probably would not. I was describing how concerns are prioritized and that a tutor might not touch on grammatical issues in a writing consultation if there were more important elements of the writing to discuss, that the higher-order concerns of writing were as much the domain of the writing center as they were of course instructors. Sometimes in these meetings, faculty would express surprise. They did not know a writing center did more than grammar, more than help students improve the style of individual sentences, to use Smith's (2023) priorities. While the assumption that writing support would be limited to grammatical editing is problematic and speaks to the assumptions faculty make about the role of support services and the staff who run them, I met little resistance in my attempt to change those assumptions and felt mainly positive about my interactions with faculty.

During Fall 2020, following COVID-19-related budget cuts, I absorbed peer tutoring into my responsibilities and became, unofficially and without announcement or fanfare, the director of the writing center and peer tutoring. Until that point, the two offices had functioned as distinct units with different directors and without overlap or collaboration. While I had been excited to leave behind a position that necessitated constant adjustment to change and where I had similarly begun managing a writing center only to be asked also to manage peer tutoring, I also knew those experiences equipped me with the knowledge I needed to take on similar responsibilities here. I was aware of best practices in the field and knew we were not following most of them. Tutors were hired without process. The training was minimal. The student-employee structure was flat, with no room for development or growth.

Wanting to improve all of these aspects of tutoring and also develop systems that would allow me to develop what had been two full-time staff positions into one, I began the very real work of raising expectations so that the course-based peer tutoring jobs on campus would more closely align with those in the writing center.

This is where I think it is relevant to point out that writing center directors are at least sometimes faculty positions and sometimes have an academic home in the English department, complete with for-credit courses on the theory and practice of writing center work. The academic positionality of those directors elevates the entire field so that writing center studies is often understood as a scholarly subject of inquiry, and it is not unusual, even for those of us in staff positions, to be treated as scholars both on and off campus. This scholarly ethos is, I would argue, what I experienced in my first year, when my position was fully a writing center position. The professional conversations and collaborations I took part in at that time are what I imagine Whitchurch (2008, 2013) witnessed when she described the third space of academic work as contributions unbound from traditional rigid organizational structures. Even if faculty did not always agree with me, they treated me as a professional and engaged in meaningful conversations about our collective work of teaching students.

The professional consideration afforded to that role did not, however, extend to the conversations I began having with faculty about course-based peer tutoring. I will acknowledge that centralized tutoring programs, by design, do not live in departmental homes, and directors, like me, do not have expert knowledge in most of the disciplines the programming supports. The responsibility of hiring, training, and supervising undergraduate peer tutors who support classes in every college division necessitates strong partnerships with faculty. I rely on them to provide honest recommendations of students who will make strong peer tutors and to encourage students in their classes to see the tutors. I hope they rely on me to teach the tutors general pedagogical techniques that can be impactful across several disciplines and also to create a job that will be a high-impact educational experience. At some institutions, the training programs for both writing and content-based tutors are delivered as for-credit courses; here, they are offered as required, paid training. While there are advantages to providing this training outside of the curriculum, the method seems to foster an environment that minimizes the value of the training and has allowed faculty to view it as something entirely different from what is done in their classrooms. The resistance is particularly strong when it comes to course-based tutoring. As I began to make even small changes, such as the requirement of a weekly one-hour meeting, some vocal faculty complained that the burden was too great for student employees and questioned the value of training undergraduate tutors to work with other students. As part of this resistance, more than one professor set up tutoring sessions with students who had not been hired or trained and encouraged them to work "off the books". When confronted about their approach, one professor claimed that the student who needed help could not wait for a tutor to be trained and another that the student they wanted to tutor was already working too many hours in other on-campus jobs so could not log more hours. Both instances suggest faculty view the tutoring role as a necessary service but not one worthy of status, compensation, or development.

Balancing Risk and Tension

In these cases and others, my experience of the third space has been mainly marred with the risk and tension that Whitchurch (2015) describes through what she calls the edgy narratives of those in staff positions but with faculty credentials. She argues that third spaces contain risk, the need for significant negotiation, and feelings of isolation. She also argues that, paradoxically, third spaces are safe because they provide opportunities to experiment and work with new people and construct knowledge about the institution and its practices. However, in order for knowledge to be created and institutional norms to evolve, there needs to be mutual respect for the goals of the third space and the professionals who occupy them. I do not think it is coincidental that it has been when the feminized space of academic support conflicted with the masculinized space of faculty work that the third space has been, for me, the least productive.

Some vocal faculty have been frustrated because I want some authority over who I hire and the ability to train them before they begin working with students. Those faculty likely understand the academic domain as a defined space with singular ownership. Through that lens, other roles on campus exist only to support that domain, not to influence it. Bernhagen and Gravett (2017) point out that the educational support work in higher education is a highly feminized role and can be understood as "pink collar" in that it is marginalized and undervalued primarily because it is seen as women's work. Bouquet (2002) refers to it as "maternal" work and problematizes the idealizing of writing centers, in particular, as homey spaces with caring matriarchs who unquestioningly help students meet the demands of the patriarchal university at the head.

Problematically, this argument brings us back to the metaphor of the battered wife that was first presented to acknowledge the challenges of working as a faculty member in a system that demands more of everyone's time. That metaphor could simply be extended to academic staff, but it is more useful to develop a new way of thinking about our work. We need a metaphor that takes into account the reality that institutions of higher education need administrators, faculty, and staff to labor collaboratively (and collectively) to meet the needs of students, one that normalizes third spaces where we come together to do our work in a way that honors the contributions we can all make to a shared mission.

BURWELL'S NARRATIVE: TOXIC RESISTANCE

In contrast to Carroll's experience, I (Burwell) grew up in a home where education was central to our family's way of life. Both of my parents were faculty members and college administrators. We lived in an off-campus residence hall for the first ten years of my life. My earliest memories are of being surrounded by a community of students, staff, and faculty who cared about and for our family and one another. Both of my parents were first-generation college students whose parents deeply valued education and gave them the support to attend a small private college in the Midwest. Because my experience of university life was positive, when I came up against resistance or challenges as a non-faculty member later in life, I was surprised and confused. Didn't they inherently know better? Weren't we all in this together to educate students?

For my parents (and myself), educating college students was quite literally a labor of love, born out of a desire to nurture and instill in students the same opportunities they had had. I had the lived experience of institutions that valued the curricular and co-curricular side of the educational enterprise. It took my own experience of being dismissed and disrespected as an educator, to be othered because of my position within the hierarchy of an institution for me to begin to understand academic labor in a new, more problematic way. As Martin (1997) noted, the evolution of academic labor has shifted to viewing higher education as an economic tool (as Carroll's experience highlights) rather than something inherently good in and of itself, which was my experience.

During the first summer of the COVID-19 pandemic I started a new job as a director of student success at the same institution as Carroll. I interviewed and moved from Minnesota to Wisconsin without visiting campus or meeting my colleagues in person. It was a leap of faith but one I was excited to make. I was working on my doctorate and knee deep in data collection for my dissertation. The position was exactly what I was looking for: a mix of academic and student affairs work with an emphasis on retention. I believed in my bones that where those align makes for the most interesting and rich work with students; it concerns the whole student experience. And my role was meant to make a real, tangible difference for students and, by extension, the institution. It was an exciting opportunity.

As I settled into my role, I tried to understand the larger institutional context and how it influenced my job's main reason for being: improving retention and graduation rates for all students.

That was why I was hired and was the focus of my team's work. However, that fall, I was dumbfounded when more than one faculty member, upon learning the center was now all about retention, scoffed, "Retention?! Haven't we talked about that enough already?" As if leaving behind 40% of our students was something to be proud of or not their concern. I would come to realize that previous presidents had tried to energize a conservative (little c, not big C) institution to tackle this issue. The current president saw the need to address retention because of the financial benefit of keeping the students you have (rather than try and bring in new ones). In order for us to be financially viable as an institution, we needed to graduate more students. This was viewed as suspect by faculty and, by extension, my role and my enthusiasm for this task.

For a small liberal arts institution, the encouragement to look at and understand student data was viewed as a violation of the liberal arts ideal. It was either the student's fault for not being prepared for college or the institution's fault for not giving more funding to add faculty (even with a relatively low 11:1 student/faculty ratio). Faculty became defensive when looking at disaggregated data that showed clear equity gaps. The fact that I would raise the question of what might be going on in the classroom that attributed to those gaps was seen as a violation of my role. As Carroll noted, faculty were used to being unquestioned experts in this space and resisted my invitation to make meaning of the data. Rather than being open to discourse, examination and reflective practice (skills we hope the liberal arts fosters in our students), faculty reminded me I had no right to question their practice because I was not a faculty member. Even with the credential and experience to meet them as co-educators, it was clearly communicated to me that using data to inform our collective practice was none of my business. After all, what could someone with a doctorate in education possibly know about teaching and learning?

Throughout my first year, my focus centered on bringing my team up to speed on our new roles. It meant an overhaul of how we frame and work with students. In the midst of this organizational change, the team experienced turnover as folks retired or moved on, not wanting to have a retention-focused role. I spent more time simply trying to identify and understand an institution where very few policies or procedures were written down. When I asked for the why or history of how things were done, the answer was often, "we have always done it that way".

Over time, it became clear that asking the why question was met with resistance or confusion about what was problematic. It became hard for me to find a diplomatic way of pointing out how a policy or practice marginalized students, or that making decisions based solely on one story could be dangerous. Or that our institution was (un)intentionally failing its students by the things we (faculty and staff) do, as if we did not all have an equal stake in ensuring student success.

The belief that faculty have more to do with student success than anyone else and were the best equipped to help students succeed illuminates my experience of the third space and the challenge of broadening the definition of academic labor. The third space is defined by Whitchurch (2008) as "the blurring of boundaries between, for instance, functional areas, professional and academic activity, and internal and external constituencies" (p. 3). It highlights the way in which important work to support and serve students and the institution is done by those who are not technically faculty. The third space interrogates and troubles the idea that "academic work" only applies to faculty members. It describes individuals with significant educational credentials (often equivalent to faculty colleagues) and experience who do not neatly fit into an "academic" role (Akerman, 2020; Whitchurch, 2008, 2013). Their work often extends and expands to support institutional life beyond the classroom.

For professionals in student affairs roles, living in the third space has historically been our norm. We help students make meaning of their curricular and co-curricular experience. However, few institutions also name us as educators or recognize the highly trained expertise we bring to educating students holistically. Our work is often behind the scenes or through conversation, knowing what questions to ask to help students make meaning for themselves. My experience of the third space came through being dismissed as an educator, having my work and my competence questioned by faculty, and being forced to "prove" that what I do matters. My habitus bridges the curricular and the co-curricular and even extra-curricular; life inside and outside the classroom, internal and external to campus, personal and interpersonal parts of the college experience, the individual student and the campus community.

During my tenure, I was often reminded of how little power I held when I spoke with faculty. They critiqued and complained about decisions made by others which impacted us both. They spoke to concerns raised to people who long ago left the institution, while ignoring me in the present. In no other work environment had I ever experienced that it was simply "okay" to not respond to a colleague's email or question, to publicly call into question someone else's work, or to assume that they must know better. This power dynamic meant I was always behind, begging to be heard or acknowledged as a colleague and a peer who might actually be an acknowledged, informed expert in her field.

This experience of the toxicity that comes with cultivating a culture where faculty voice drowns out all other contributions meant I chose to leave for somewhere where my worth and my labor would be valued. I now inhabit a new space – that of enrollment management at another institution. And while faculty voice still counts, the complexity and size of the institution and the folks who lead different divisions are more aligned. At times I find myself troubling the notion of what counts as being an educator (or an academic laborer) when much of our work is driven by numbers, predictive analytics and tactics to immediately impact retention and yields rather than simply what is learned or produced by and with students. The context in which I do my work matters, and being part of a culture that does not question the legitimacy of co-curricular labor is felt. I am seen and valued in a way I had not experienced before. At the same time, I have observed the third space at work even in my new environment. Recently, I sat in a meeting with colleagues from student affairs and academic affairs to discuss a possible collaboration between our three areas for new students. The discussion became heated after my student affairs colleague expressed anger at not being consulted by our academic affairs colleague in an area of her expertise. As he (the faculty member) explained his perspective, it became clear it had not crossed his mind to consult our other colleague even though he was drifting over into her area of expertise. He clearly viewed her "labor" as less meaningful than his, even though he lacked the training or practical knowledge of the issue.

Institutionally, it was a given that the faculty member's point of view and decision would win the argument. It left my student affairs colleague in tears, frustrated at not being heard, and dismissed. An important subtext of this exchange was the gender and age of each colleague: faculty (30+ years of teaching experience) and student affairs (20 years of experience and a former student). These dynamics influence how faculty and staff interact and whether or not they find a space to come together - the third space. In this instance, watching from the outside, all I could do was extend sympathy to my student affairs colleague and commit to speaking up the next time I saw it happen.

While my own experience of moving between institutions has resulted in less of a divide between academic laborers, the experience of the third space was illuminated when I found a colleague in Carroll. Our stories of run-ins with faculty and administrators became a bonding exercise until we got to the point where we realized it was not so funny anymore. Once we started talking, it helped to know this experience was not just about me. That someone else felt (unfortunately) as frustrated and discouraged when talking with faculty: dismissed and diminished. In sharing our experience, we built community, the collegiality we hoped for from across campus. I have taken that experience with me to my new institution and am working to find colleagues who also experience the third space.

It is to this point we began to wonder: how does gender and power play into our experience? And what would it mean to transform our experience so that faculty and others can see our roles as mutually beneficial to what they do in the classroom? How do we help them do their work better? Part of it comes from sharing with the wider campus community how we engage in scholarship similar to their own, such as presenting at conferences or engaging in research projects. Part of it comes from simply being in collective learning environments.

FROM ISOLATION AND OPPORTUNITY

Sharing our experiences with each other helped to break the isolation of working in a state of negotiation and tension and has been central to managing the burnout that Whitchurch (2015) warns is high in third space positions. Burwell's departure to a different institution has left a significant gap in my (Carroll's) personal support network on campus. It also highlights the need to find others on campus who work within liminal spaces. Recently, on my campus, that means maintaining awareness of a frequently changing landscape.

Shortly after my own position was significantly expanded and I began experiencing the third space as a place of tension rather than collaboration, Burwell's supervisor, the vice president of student affairs and dean of students, left for another institution. Rather than filling this position, the administration divided the duties among Burwell and two of her student affairs colleagues. I mention this even though she did not because it highlights the level of understaffing we are currently experiencing. It should be noted that when Burwell left, they also did not replace her position, again asking others to absorb her responsibilities. Faculty may or may not be aware of the increased workload staff are experiencing. If they are aware of it, that awareness appears to be overshadowed by their concerns about their own workload.

Our institution eliminated multiple faculty positions and a small number of departments at about the same time my colleague in peer tutoring and other staff members were let go. These faculty layoffs have meant that there are approximately 20% fewer faculty members to teach classes and participate in committee work. In response to the increased workload, they have recently requested that committees require fewer faculty members. For example, if a committee currently requires five faculty members, they are asking that it now require four. Their concerns are, of

course, not unique to my institution. Parson (2011) points out that faculty nationwide have a growing concern that the administrative work they do is "uncompensated". The challenge with viewing committee work or other service to the campus community as uncompensated work is, of course, that tenure applications include an evaluation of service to the campus, and adjunct faculty are paid less for teaching the same classes as tenure track faculty precisely because they are not required to produce scholarship or participate in service.

Not only does their request ignore the reality of their adjunct counterparts, but it also ignores the workload of their colleagues on the other side of the metaphorical wall that separates faculty and staff, who also continue to be asked to do more work with fewer people. That critique withstanding, we (both as individual institutions and as a field) have an opportunity to develop a greater number of third space opportunities in response to challenges facing higher education, including understaffing, budget shortages, and burnout. If faculty and staff can begin to rely on each other more often and more significantly, we can add stories of success and cooperation to Whitchurch's (2015) edgy narratives of tension and risk. We have an opportunity to re-think what actually needs to get done in a university and who really has the skills for it rather than chipping away at the staff/faculty divide.

DISCUSSION

We have each shared narratives of experiences working as third space professionals because we believe there is power in the sharing and in the knowing that our experiences are not solitary. Before we started this project and throughout our writing, we benefited from having structured space to tell our story, ask one another questions, and apply our experience to the theory of third space and academic labor. It was not simply about being a support system but wrestling with what to do to solve the problem of the faculty-staff divide that has become professionally and personally fruitful. The challenges we have managed over the last several years are not unique to our institutions, which means the solution is also unlikely to be. It is essential that we understand the labor of both faculty and staff within and as part of a broader field of work.

The relationship between labor and expertise is perhaps where our two narratives best converge. The core frustration many of us in staff positions feel is that despite knowing that we are as well-educated, experienced, and knowledgeable as faculty, we are too often treated as less capable of making decisions that impact the context of our collective labor. We argue that both faculty and staff labor in the interest of student success and have expertise, knowledge, and skill to determine how that labor is arranged and assessed.

In order for institutions to confront the structural and cultural issues that challenge the ability of faculty and staff to work together more effectively, we need also to reexamine the metaphors we use to discuss our labor. The family metaphor, whether of a happy family or the abusive one used by the professor discussed in Carroll's narrative who felt like an abused wife, is problematic for higher education since we are generally resistant to change within the family and often experience anxiety about those in the family being disloyal (Tomelleri, et al., 2015). Within this context, stability and positive emotional connections are of primary importance. The resistance to change the family metaphor promotes will likely stunt the evolution of higher education, a field already slow to change. Viewing our work environment as a family to either love or escape also leaves us with few options for improving our situation.

At the same time, for all of our conversation, we (Carroll and Burwell) have not come to a place where we can offer a third option or a new metaphor. We have, however, realized that the most productive way forward for us has been to increase the number and depth of conversations across campus. Siloed environments and high turnover can make it difficult to even identify those interested in having those conversations, and momentum built during those conversations is easy to lose. The third spaces those conversations potentially open create a synergy that could, quite possibly, propel institutions forward and address some of our biggest challenges (employee and student retention). It means re-organizing and re-envisioning who has what power and in what ways. It means spending time together on meaningful work that crosses boundaries (like committees or cross-institutional workgroups). It means recognizing that committee and other service work is not "extra" to teaching and scholarship but central to the educational purpose of our institutions.

In our experiences, faculty and staff have largely been left on their own to blur the boundaries that divide us. Institutional organization clearly establishes separate cultures through distinct governance structures, employee handbooks, and committee memberships. At most institutions, third spaces are currently liminal and even rebellious in nature. Rather than continuing policies that necessitate our existing in different spheres, with competing (conflicting?) agendas that sometimes overlap, we should call on our institutions to sanction third spaces where we engage in the work of teaching and learning in mutually beneficial, respected ways where everyone's contribution is seen and valued. The whole powerfully becomes greater than the sum of its parts. Imagining anew who has the

authority to contribute to self-governance, whose expertise is meaningful, and whose labor contributes to that mission will allow higher education professionals to work together on projects that do more than cross boundaries, but question and change them.

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