I, Amy J Howton, hereby submit this original work as part of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in Counselor Education.

It is entitled:
Reform From Within: An Ecological Analysis of Institutionalized Feminism at our University

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Reform from Within:
An Ecological Analysis of Institutionalized Feminism at Our University

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In the Department of Counselor Education
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by

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Abstract

As an insider-action research project, there are really two projects at work in this study (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010)—the core project and the dissertation project. The aim of the core project is to promote organizational change for my organization, the Women’s Center, by facilitating the first iteration of a participatory evaluation with our partners, the department of Women, Gender and Sexuality Studies. The dissertation project aims to contribute to the counseling field by demonstrating the usefulness of an Ecological Counseling Perspective (EP) as a theoretical framework and action research as a methodology in promoting social justice. In order to facilitate a deep contextual analysis, the study focuses on one particular university, the University of Cincinnati, and examines the interrelationships of individuals, organizations, and the institution in making meaning of our specific institutional location in our efforts to create change.

Data were collected from my research journal, one-on-one interviews with staff and faculty, and a group reflection. To guide the data analysis, I used grounded theory and draw on the notion of “third space” to make sense of our paradoxical location—situated within the very system we (and here, I mean professional feminists, action researchers, and social justice counselors) seek to change. Using an EP framework, I demonstrate how this third space occupation plays out on individual, organizational, and collective levels and explore the unique implications of this process for our organizations and institution. Data suggest that in our third space location, we are both resistant to and complicit in perpetuating institutional status quo. I argue that all change agents necessarily occupy third space and that to be effective and strategic, this third space occupation must be continuously recognized and activated. This holds true for
individual change agents, organizations, and collectives/communities. Promising strategies are suggested for how to engage in such awareness and activation.
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Amy J. Howton
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Chapter One: Introduction

Living in a state of psychic unrest, in a Borderland, is what makes poets write and artists create. It is like a cactus needle embedded in the flesh. It worries itself deeper and deeper, and I keep aggravating it by poking at it. When it begins to fester I have to do something to put an end to the aggravation and to figure out why I have it. I get deep down into the place where it’s rooted in my skin and pluck away at it, playing it like a musical instrument—the fingers pressing, making the pain worse before it can get better. Then out it comes. No more discomfort, no more ambivalence. Until another needle pierces the skin. That’s what writing is for me, an endless cycle of making it worse, making it better, but always making meaning out of the experience, whatever it may be. (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 95).

Background:

In recent years, the commitment to social justice has been increasingly evidenced in the field of Counseling and Counselor Education. The American Counseling Association recently approved the new division of Counselors for Social Justice; advocacy competencies were developed (Lewis, Arnold, House, & Toporek, 2002); and the Council on the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Programs (CACREP) now explicitly includes social justice in accreditation standards. With this increased commitment to social justice, the field of counseling is faced with the challenge to develop, implement, and evaluate effective change strategies aimed at various levels beyond the individual and including organizational, institutional, community, and social systems. Addressing these multiple and intersecting levels is critical in working toward social justice (Bemak & Chung, 2008; D’Andrea & Heckman, 2008; Greenleaf & Williams, 2009; Martin-Baro, 1994; Prilleltensky, 1994, 1997; Vera & Speight, 2003).

Theoretically, social justice may be moving from the margins to the center of Counseling; however, practicing what we preach is another story. As noted by
Goodman et al. (2004), there has been limited discussion on the nature of social justice work. Arguably, the profession’s commitment to social justice remains aspirational in nature and has yet to translate into professional practice (Baluch, Pieterse, & Bolden, 2004; Greenleaf & Williams, 2009). Others argue that contemporary counseling fails to fully address the social, political, cultural and economic problems faced by our communities (Baluch, Pieterse, & Bolden, 2004; Bemak, 1998; Goodman et al., 2004; Pieterse, 2009; Prilleltensky, 2007; Vera & Speight, 2003). There has been a growing call for an expansion in counselors’ roles (Speight & Vera, 2008; Toporek et al., 2006; Vera & Speight, 2007) and increased attention to change strategies that focus on organizational/social transformation (Bemak & Chung, 2008; D’Andrea & Heckman, 2008; Evans, Hanlin, Prilleltensky, Dokecki, Frieden, & Wang, 2007; Greenleaf & Williams, 2009; Prilleltensky et al., 2007; Vera & Speight, 2003).

Unfortunately, new counselors are not likely to be fully prepared to meet these challenges. Despite the great strides that many Counselor Education programs have made to prepare and train future counselors in the promotion of social justice work, most still rely on the inclusion of a solitary course in “multicultural counseling”, falling short of adequately providing counselors the necessary tools to facilitate social change (Goodman et al., 2004; Piederse, 2009; Prilleltensky, et al., 2007). The question becomes: now that there is a general recognition in the field of counseling that human problems must be addressed on multiple, ecological levels in the promotion of social justice, what strategies might we employ in our counselor roles towards such ends? This dissertation was developed in direct response to this question.
The research question was also informed by my professional and activist agenda. As a social justice counselor and action researcher, it is important to me that my research promotes change within my own community. Therefore, my research questions are embedded in my organization’s work. It seems the stars aligned to present this action research opportunity for my dissertation study. Interestingly, the evolution of our organizational practice coincided perfectly with my search for a dissertation research question and an opportunity to facilitate an insider-action research project. Therefore, this study serves as a means to inform ecological counseling theory and practice, as well facilitate a process and generate data that might promote change within my organization. In this sense, there is a “core” project and the broader research (dissertation) project (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010).

I have worked for the University of Cincinnati’s Women’s Center (WC) for the past eight years and currently serve as the Assistant Director. Following an extensive strategic planning process, the WC agreed that we needed to develop and implement more meaningful evaluation for several reasons. First, it would enable staff to collectively make meaning of our work and its impact on those we serve. Second, it would allow us to strategically position our organization more securely in an environment of higher education that was undergoing substantial change resulting in serious budget cuts and restructuring. Third, the process itself could foster an organizational culture of participatory learning and inquiry. We recognize evaluation as political and therefore seek to engage evaluation from a feminist perspective, reflective of our mission and values. In the past, we have experienced a discrepancy between the externally (institutionally)-driven evaluation and the kinds of evaluation we believed
could be more meaningful to our own practice. Therefore, jobs were redesigned and as the Assistant Director, I was given the official charge to direct program evaluation. My dissertation research questions are related to but independent of our continued efforts to do meaningful, feminist evaluation. Therefore, I understand this study to be the first iteration of an insider action research project, and more specifically, of a participatory evaluation.

As a trained community mental health counselor with a background in Women’s Studies, I have been curious about various types of change strategies for some time. Working as an administrator in a campus-based Women’s Center—as a “professional” feminist for an institutionalized feminist organization—I have thought a lot about ways in which I, and we (my organization), work to create change within our institution. This curiosity extends to my professional identity as a counselor as I consider how to push the boundaries of the field to accommodate an expanded counselor role focusing on organizational and social change. So, in many ways, this study is about the larger issue of “reform from within”.

**Statement of the “Core” Problem**

Over the course of the past three decades, feminism has sought and to a large extent achieved legitimacy in the academy. Institutional legitimization of feminism is evidenced in the “disciplining” of Women’s Studies (Messer-Davidow, 2002) and in the prevalence of campus-based women’s centers. However, with legitimacy comes the risk of co-optation or the absorption into the dominant culture and ideology, making change and resistance efforts more challenging. Therefore, it has been argued that the institutionalization of feminism in the academy has resulted in a constrained ability to
effect institutional change and transformation (Greenwood, 2002; Hart, 2008; Robinson, 2002; Stacie 2000; Thorne, 2000; Wiegman, 2002). The location of campus-based Women’s Centers and Women’s Studies departments raises the question—how do institutionalized, feminist organizations transform the institution?

This question is important to me, as an administrator of a campus-based Women’s Center and a Women’s Studies graduate. In my experience as a professional feminist and activist, I have often reflected on the unique position that our Center is in—situated within the very institution which we simultaneously seek to change. Audre Lorde (1984) argued that it is impossible to “dismantle the master’s house with the master’s tools”. This declaration echoes in my mind as our Women’s Center struggles to find strategies of change and transformation—particularly in a climate that seems to be working against this change. These struggles, I know, are not unique to our center but are shared by all change agents working to create change within any system. In our institutional legitimization, are we automatically co-opted by the institution or is there a possibility that we might maintain a critical edge?

Undoubtedly, feminism has transformed the academy and improved campus climate. This institutional transformation is seen in the proliferation of Women’s Studies and gender courses, degree programs, professional associations, journals, and research centers, and in how feminism broadened the theoretical foundations of most disciplines (Boxer, 1999; Stewart & Stanton, 1995). Feminist pedagogies and research methodologies have influenced the way in which knowledge is constructed and how learning takes place in higher education. Policies and practices related to sexual harassment, anti-discrimination, family leave, stopping the tenure clock to
accommodate work/life balance, and domestic partner benefits—all demonstrate the positive impact that feminism has had on the institution and campus climate. Evidence of deeper, cultural transformation is harder to find.

But there’s another side to the story. First, the corporatization of higher education has resulted in the evolution of policies and practices that are in direct contrast to feminist principles: tenure criteria that devalue community service and activism; the commodification of knowledge as marketable product; the construction of student as consumer; performance-based budgeting and so on. This shift in higher education has resulted in the marginalization of feminist activism and the centering of marketable, revenue-generating research (Kanhai 2000; Krajewski, 1999; Safarik, 2003). The pressure to measure learning outcomes and programmatic impact is felt by both administrators of Women’s Studies departments and Women’s Centers and yet doing so proves difficult (Levin, 2007; McTighe-Musil, 1992). It is in this institutional context that feminist organizations such as Women’s Studies departments and campus-based Women’s Centers struggle to make meaning of their work, to demonstrate effectiveness and further, to justify their continued existence in ways that both are valued by the institution and relevant to the organizations.

Second, to evaluate cultural transformation at the institutional level proves challenging. Safarik (2003) notes that “transformative efforts aimed at creating more emancipatory institutions, i.e., in which multiple worldviews are recognized and valued (Lincoln, 1991), are likely to span several decades and involve complex interactions of internal and external forces; discourse and culture; power and resistance” (Safarik, 2003, p. 420). Gumport (1987) indicates that the process of feminist transformation is
very individualized, based on the context in which the transformation takes place. Despite the challenge in evaluating such transformation, it is critical for institutionalized feminist organizations to do so in order to better create and employ effective change strategies. This study joins in conversation with Safarik and others who are interested in exploring issues of institutional transformation and feminism’s role in this dynamic process.

There is an engaged discussion in the research on the implications of feminism in the academy (Hart, 2008; Safarik, 2003; Thorne, 2000). Interestingly though, the focus in the research is almost exclusively on feminist scholarship, the discipline of Women’s Studies and “academic feminism”; there is a very limited body of work related to the institutional impact of campus-based Women’s Centers (Davie, 2002). Even those works that examine activism employed by feminist scholars neglect the activism enacted by feminist staff or non-academics, insinuating that the only feminism valued in higher education is employed by feminist scholars and academics. This perpetual distinction in the research between “academic feminism” and “feminist activism”; between the work of Women’s Studies and Women’s Centers, further reinforces a central dichotomy that feminism itself has attempted to problematize and deconstruct. To continue to consider activist strategies employed by Women’s Centers and Women’s Studies departments (and therefore, feminist faculty and staff) separately and independently is to render invisible the whole lived experiences of professional feminists in higher education and to fail to recognize important ways in which their work overlaps and interrelates in their efforts to create change.
Purpose of the Study

The examination of these points of intersection and convergence in meaning-making among professional feminists in higher education focuses this research project for two primary reasons: 1) it promotes positive change for my organization, the UC Women’s Center, and 2) it facilitates an ecological analysis of how change processes work. The first goal is my insider-action research (IAR) goal. The IAR goal includes three objectives: 1) deepen UC WC staff and WGSS faculty’s understanding of the complex ways in which institutional change occurs at our institution; 2) set the stage for meaningful collaboration in the future development and implementation of change strategies; 3) inform ongoing attempts to make meaning of our organization’s work and impact on our university. The second goal is the broader social justice counselor’s goal: to provide a means to examine the ecological model and demonstrate how it serves as a useful tool in promoting change on multiple, systemic levels.

Therefore, to meet these research goals, this study examines the interrelationships among individuals, organizations, and the institution to make meaning of organizational and institutional context. In doing so, it will contribute to the field’s understanding of the ecological model and the ways in which personal, organizational, and community well-being are inextricably linked (Prilleltensky, 2006). It has been demonstrated that to make meaning of institutional context, it is helpful to analyze individuals’ life and work narratives, as representative of the interactional relationships between individual, organizational, and institutional meaning-making (Howe, 2000; Laslett & Thorne, 1997; Safarik, 2003). Consequently, this study explores feminist faculty and staff’s meaning-making of their professional role as feminists in an institution.
of higher education. The setting is my work community—a large, urban, public research university, the University of Cincinnati. My specific analytic focus is to understand how this particular institutional context shapes and is shaped by feminism over time.

Research Questions

To guide this ecological analysis, this study examines the implications of the institutionalization of feminism in higher education. Has feminism been co-opted by the institution? How are feminist individuals and organizations both constrained by and resist institutional practices that are anti-feminist? How are campus-based Women’s Centers and Women’s Studies departments similar and different in their meaning-making of their institutional context, and why? While all these questions frame this inquiry, the driving research questions of this study are:

- How does the institutional context shape the way professional feminists work to transform the institution?
- How do feminist faculty and staff in higher education make meaning of their professional, feminist identity?

Location and Positionality

In many ways, this inquiry is all about location: the location of feminism in higher education and my own location as researcher, activist, and social justice counselor. My own location has deeply informed my research questions and my methodologies, as well as the bodies of literature in which I situate my work. I draw from literature on ecological counseling; feminism in higher education; third space theory; organizational development; and participatory evaluation. The formation of the research questions, selection of research methodologies, analysis of data and my own meaning-making are
all informed by an ecological counseling orientation and a critical, feminist poststructuralist perspective on how organizations operate and change; therefore, I assume that there can never be one, complete, static organization but rather a multiplicity of ongoing, intersecting and counter-cultural organizational practices that inform and shape the overall organization. Examining the intersection of these bodies of literature through this theoretical lens will help to bring into focus the impact of the institutionalization of feminism within higher education and might suggest strategies for these feminist organizations to create and promote change within their organizations and institution.

**Significance of the Study**

First, this dissertation provided an opportunity for me to engage in an insider-action research project with my colleagues in the WC and the WGSS department. Serving as a “prestep” (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010) or first iteration of a participatory evaluation process, this project allowed us to create meaning of our individual and collective work and suggest strategies of organizational and institutional change. This dissertation provided the UC WC and the WGSS department an opportunity to engage in a process that is not typical among our organizational practices, which I hope might foster a new kind of dialogue among us.

While this evaluation focuses on a particular context, the University of Cincinnati, it will contribute to the very sparse literature on feminist evaluation of Women’s Studies and campus-based women’s centers. The effect of campus-based women’s centers and Women’s Studies departments on the institution as a whole is not known, with a general dearth of research on the evaluation of both organizations. Furthermore, there
has been no single examination of the ways in which both feminist staff and faculty make meaning of their professional location and employ strategies of change, reflecting a divide in the literature between the field of Women’s Studies and Women’s Centers. This study begins to bridge this divide and fill this gap in the research. The development and implementation of meaningful evaluation is the key to our continued survival. Additionally, the selection of a large, urban research university as a site for studying feminist transformation heeds the call by prior researchers who recognized the importance of shaping the future of academic feminism based on analyses of specific institutional contexts and histories (Safarik, 2003; Stewart & Stanton, 1995).

Finally, inspired by the challenge of contributing to the Counseling field, I focus my analysis on the multisystemic levels in hopes of helping to fill a significant gap in the literature (Bemak & Chung, 2008; D’Andrea & Heckman, 2008; Greenleaf & Williams, 2009; Prilleltensky, et al., 2007) and to engage in conversation with other, ecological counselors who similarly consider these multiple levels of change (Bess et al., 2009; Evans et al., 2007; Prilleltensky, 1997, 2006). Furthermore, I strongly believe the ecological model serves as a helpful and necessary tool for counselors to effectively consider and address problems. It is critical to understand how the ecological levels interrelate and intersect in contributing to the human condition; otherwise, effective change cannot occur. This dissertation will contribute to the understanding of the ecological model and suggest ways counselors and other helpers might use it in conceptualizing and addressing a problem.

Limitations
There are limitations to this study. The findings are not intended to be
generalizable to other institutions of higher education or to other Women’s Centers or
programs/departments of Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies. This study does not
seek to uncover the “Truth”. However, it is the goal of the research to provide a deep
contextual analysis of our particular institutional context, at this particular historical
moment. Lessons learned from the study can be transferable to other WC and WGSS
practitioners, as well as counselors who are considering issues of organizational and
institutional change.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

This study aims to examine the relationship between feminism and higher education, specifically as exemplified by the Department of Women, Gender and Sexuality Studies (WGSS) and the Women’s Center (WC) at the University of Cincinnati. I want to know what the implications for institutional transformation might be considering the institutional location of these organizations. In order to contextualize my research questions, I draw on literature of ecological counseling; feminism in higher education; third space theory; organizational development; and participatory evaluation. While the bodies of research on higher education and organizational change have informed my research questions themselves, ecological counseling, third space theory and participatory evaluation inform my research lens—framing my research agenda, my research methodology, and my overall meaning-making of the entire research process.

Ecological Counseling

Ecological counseling models provide a deep, complex way to understand human problems. Rather than conceptualize human problems as the result of intrapsychic forces, solely caused by the individuals, the ecological counseling perspective espouses the need to consider the bigger picture, the external forces that directly and indirectly influence human problems. Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model of human development (1979) greatly influenced the counseling field’s conceptualization of human problems and behaviors. The ecological model highlights the importance that environment plays in human development and identifies various, interconnecting systems that comprise this environment and consequently dynamically impact human behavior and lived experience. These levels operate as interconnected matrices that
intersect and mutually inform and influence one another. Therefore, in considering how to promote change on one level, the others must also be addressed. Otherwise, the proposed intervention will be undermined by larger, contextual forces working against such change. Prilleltensky et al. (2007) posit:

An Ecological Person-Process-Context model can account for social, cultural, and political systemic structures in which specific individual, community, and societal context and processes affecting the individual can be better understood (Bronfenbrenner, 1986).…this model allows for an examination of power dynamics affecting personal and community development (p. 33).

Consequently, to fully appreciate a problem, it is necessary for the ecological counselor to consider the broader context and how that context both shapes and is shaped by that particular “problem”.

Ecological models of conceptualizing human problems have been developed by various theorists and practitioners that do just this, providing us with conceptual frameworks by which to consider a presenting problem. For example, drawing on such frameworks as Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model, “ecologically-oriented” counseling approaches have been proposed. Conyne and Cook (2004) used Bronfenbrenner’s model to articulate an “ecological counseling perspective” (EP) which reconceptualized the helping relationship, client problem, and counseling interventions. The emphasis this perspective places on dynamic meaning-making centralizes the need to empower and give voice to those seeking help. According to this perspective, it is as much about the process as it is the product (or treatment outcome); as a result, much attention should be paid to the helping relationship (similar to empowerment models). Therefore,
the helping relationship is constituted more as a collaborative partnership than as a hierarchal counselor-client relationship. Similarly, Prilleltensky (1997) proposed an “emancipatory communitarian (EC) approach”, driven by values of caring and compassion; self-determination and empowerment; the promotion of respect and appreciation for diverse social identities; collaboration and participation through which individuals can influence decisions that affect their lives; and distributive justice (Prilleltensky, 1997). Moreover, Prilleltensky highlighted five aspects of practice in which these values are realized including problem definition; the role of the client; the role of the helper; type of intervention; and time of intervention (placing a strong emphasis on prevention).

Such ecological frameworks provide guidance in fully identifying and contextualizing a problem; developing a process through which that problem will be comprehensively addressed; planning and implementing meaningful change and effectively evaluating that change for impact and relevance. Importantly, the principles outlined by ecological perspectives emphasize the significance of the change process and how it is facilitated rather than focusing on the products or outcomes. Implied in this distinction is that the facilitation of an ecological process in and of itself carries the potential to promote social justice and positive social change. EP’s attention to the distribution of power within and throughout the change process has the potential to effect change by empowering those seeking help, valuing their knowledge and lived experience, and fostering participatory inquiry and action. These principles, applied to change processes on any systemic level can effect change and promote social justice.
In framing my research questions and in my data analysis, I draw on Prilleltensky and Prilleltensky’s (2006) ecological model in which personal, organizational, and community wellness are linked in an interlocking web. Prilleltensky et al. (2006) argue:

Personal, organizational, and community change influence each other in multiple ways. If we want to promote one, we need to know about the others. If we want to understand one, we need to understand how they all interact...personal, organizational, and community well-being are part of a web, a web of wellness. (p. 5).

Accordingly, there are three sites of well-being: personal, organizational, and collective. Each site’s well-being has specific signs or manifestations, sources or determinants, and strategies. This practical model is useful in examining the interrelationships of the ecological levels and how these relationships work dynamically to make meaning and is helpful in examining the institutional roles of WC and WGSS.

**Feminism in Higher Education: Women’s Centers and Women’s Studies**

In exploring the impact that feminism has had on higher education, it makes sense to examine how institutional transformation has been facilitated by institutionalized feminist organizations: namely, campus-based Women’s Centers and Women’s Studies departments and programs. While these two entities are quite distinct, they do share feminist guiding principles, and roots in the feminist movement and campus activism in the late 1960s and 1970s (Koikari & Hippensteele, 2000). Both organizations (Women’s Centers and Women’s Studies) share historical missions of institutional and social change (Davie, 2002) yet vary widely from each other in terms of institutional location and change strategies.
Today, there exist nearly 500 Women’s Centers, located in every state in the U.S. except Mississippi (NWSA, 2010). Interestingly, although centers are prevalent in the landscape of higher education, there is very little research on the history, development, and scope of Women’s Centers. Despite the lack of empirical research on the effectiveness of Women’s Centers, practitioners recently have begun to write about the nature of their work (Davie, 2002). This growing body of literature is generally descriptive in that it primarily documents the kinds of work these centers are undertaking; for example, there have been efforts to codify and define the work of Women’s Centers (Byrne, 2000; Clevenger, 1988;).

Indeed, the existing literature on Women’s Centers makes one conclusion glaringly obvious: the way in which a particular Women’s Center operates is dependent on its particular context, that is, how it is structured and situated within the institution. As a result, centers vary greatly in terms of administration, resources, and organizational structure (Kasper, 2004). There have been several case studies which illustrate the relationship between Women’s Centers and their institutions (Davie, 2002; Kunkel, 2002; Willinger, 2002). Clearly, Women’s Centers are dynamic organizations, reflecting evolving institutional policies and practices, societal changes, as well as organizational members’ interests and strengths.

Generally, centers have been classified as either research or resource centers (Willinger, 2002). However, this dichotomous classification reflects an underlying tension in the work of Women’s Centers. The question of the nature of Women’s Centers’ work is an interesting one in that it highlights the multiple, sometimes conflicting, purposes of campus-based Women’s Centers. Historically, centers were
both created to meet the needs of individual women students and to address institutional inequality. For example, centers might provide individual support to victims of sexual harassment and discrimination, career counseling, activism and leadership development, and also advocate for a better institutional climate for women and underrepresented students by affecting policy and decision-making. Tensions between these dual-purposes are evident throughout the chapters in Davie’s (2002) seminal work on campus-based Women’s Centers, *University and College Women’s Centers: A Journey toward Equity*.

This tension is confounded by Women’s Centers’ institutional location. It is challenging to meet the needs of individual students and address institutional barriers to students’ success while simultaneously existing within institutional constraints. But this location simultaneously creates opportunities for resistance, as well. There has been a good amount of work written about the legitimization and location of feminism in higher education. While the vast majority of this literature speaks specifically to the discipline of Women’s Studies, it is also relevant to Women’s Centers. Some claim that the legitimization and location provide a critical opportunity for change, insuring that feminist ideals of fairness, justness, and equality translate into institutional policy and practice (Davie, 2002; Orr & Lichtenstein, 2004). For example, the National Women’s Centers Training Project’s report *Increasing the Effectiveness of Women’s Programs on College Campuses* identified “affecting policy and decision-making on campuses” (Bengiveno, 2001, p.44) as an area of concern for college and university Women’s Centers. This concern suggests a need and an opportunity for Women’s Centers to organize and affect campus policies that have gendered implications. Finally, feminist organizations,
including campus-based Women’s Centers, may be integral to “understanding and perpetuating the development and spread of feminism as an instrument of personal and collective change” (Martin, 1990, p. 23).

However, the majority of the literature on location reflects concerns regarding the implications of legitimization. Orr et al. (2004) concur, “the narrative is often about activist origins and a subsequent sellout to professional interests.” (p. 5). It has been argued that legitimacy was achieved at a devastating cost (Brown, 1997; Greenwood, 2004; Stacey, 2000; Thorne, 2000; Wiegman, 2002). Accordingly, legitimization resulted in an impotency, a limited ability to create the kind of change that might be associated with a feminist, activist organization Greenwood, Kaplan & Grewal, 2002; Robinson, 2002; Thorne, 2000). Thorne (2000) posits, “since the quest for mainstream legitimacy almost inevitably blunts the critical edge and political momentum of ideas…On balance, some of us have wondered, how much have feminists changed the academy and how much has it changed us?” (p. 1184). Robinson (2002) contends that “the professionalization of Women’s Studies has continued the erosion of the cultural themes of participation and community that were the foundations of early Women’s Studies…the culture that remains—at least in terms of structure, participation and decision-making—often seems little different from the culture in the larger university” (p. 208). Stacey (2001) notes, “for what was once the subversive, intellectual arm of a thriving grassroots movement has been institutionalized and professionalized, while the movement that launched our enterprise is far less activist, confident or popular” (p. 1190). The discipline that was once led by activists is now led by professional scholars (Krajewski, 1999), thereby “placing activism on the margins” (Kanhai 2000, p. 186).
The location of feminism within the institution of higher education establishes a mutual, interrelationship between feminist organizations and the institution itself, each informing the practices and behaviors of the other. In consideration of the role feminism plays in institutional transformation, it is necessary to consider the context in which feminist organizations exist and the nature of the institution. Higher education is changing. Many argue that it has evolved in a process of corporatization, in which it increasingly looks and acts like a corporation (Chomsky, 2000; Cooper et al, 2002; Giroux & Giroux, 2004; Lerner 2008; Martin, 2009; Mohanty, 2006; Ohmann, 2002). This argument is based on the fact that knowledge production has been commodified and learning is no longer valued in and of itself but as a product. The corporatization of higher education has shifted institutional policies and practices and resulted in newly articulated expectations of organizations and departments within it, often in direct opposition to feminist principles.

This growing discrepancy between institutional practice and organizational philosophy is of great concern to those who work in these organizations. For example, in a recent study of 75 women’s centers in the United States, many directors of campus-based women’s centers expressed concerns about the climate of budget cuts, scarce resources and the growing sentiments among university leaders that Women’s Centers are no longer needed or relevant to student success (Kasper, 2004). Such concerns have prompted many campus women’s centers to document the need for their resources and services as well as broaden their scope of work. For example, according to the 2006 Women Student Programs and Services Standards and Guidelines published by the Council on the Advancement of Standards (CAS) in Higher Education,
“Women’s Centers are examining ways to broaden their purview by partnering with academic areas to conduct research, providing undergraduate and advanced classes, creating internship and practicum opportunities for students, and supporting leadership opportunities” (p. 1). Additionally, many centers are looking for new models of organizing that push beyond the boundaries of a service orientation to a more feminist organizing approach (Stall & Stoecker, 1998).

Similarly, Women’s Studies departments face the same challenge of shifting practices to reflect institutional priorities. As a result, Women’s Studies, like all other academic departments, must now employ market-like behaviors that take time away from scholarship and activism to look for outside financial support and revenue generating opportunities. This shift further marginalizes activist, community-based and non-empirical work, often considered to be at the core of the discipline. Stacey (2001) warns,

Like Smith (1996), I too worry that ‘present technological and managerial transformations of the academy may subdue altogether the values of enlightenment and freedom in the academy which enabled feminism to struggle to the level of success we have achieved. This clear and present danger threatens the ultimate survival of academic feminism and other progressive knowledge projects, as well as most of the worldly dreams of the social movements that spawned them (p. 1191).

In fact, some institutions are abandoning women’s studies programs altogether in favor of creating a seemingly more palatable “gender studies” program or department, leaving a question as to where feminism fits in this new field (Hubbard, 2000; Mohanty, 2006).
In the current climate of higher education it has become increasingly important for feminist organizations to evidence the impact of their work. Under institutional demands to measure success in quantitative, empirical terms, these organizations continue to attempt to make meaning of their work in ways that are relevant and meaningful to them internally, while also valid externally. Unfortunately, such evaluation proves challenging for a number of reasons. First, traditional, positivist forms of evaluation often do not capture the impact or complexity of women’s centers’ work nor reflect feminist values (Goldsmith, 2002) and yet these forms are most valued by the institution. Second, feminist, participatory forms of evaluation are time intensive and often are not feasible given the culture of the institution. Third, the general notion of “evaluation” carries with it a deep history of marginalization and devaluing, making it difficult for feminist scholars and activists to embrace evaluative practices (Levin, 2007; McTigue & Goldsmith, 2002). Nevertheless, the development and implementation of feminist assessment and evaluation methods are critical to sustain the growth—and in actuality, survival itself—of both women’s centers and the discipline of women’s studies (Levin, 2007; McTigue et al., 2002).

Phenomenological experiences of feminism are negotiated through and across multiple levels of systems of meanings; the individual, the organization, the institution, and the broader culture. Each informs the other in a dynamic, meaning-making process. This research inquiry treats organizational structures and systems as an attribute of the institution and therefore focuses the unit of analysis on the organizational and institutional level, with participants’ views of their experiences as personalized reflections of organizational processes and structures (Welch, 2008). These individuals
employed in feminist organizations at one university will simultaneously shed light on organizational culture and development, thereby creating space to reflect on: 1) the role these organizations play in institutional change, and 2) possible strategies of change for the future. Therefore, it is helpful to draw on the research on organizational change and development.

**Organizational Change and Development**

There has been much written about organizational development and learning, dating back to Kurt Lewin’s work in the 1940s. Ultimately, his theories of organization and social change were adopted by the human relations and organizational development movement. Argyris and Schon (1978) introduced work on organizational learning into the management theory literature and the concept was further popularized by Peter Senge in 1996 by his book, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*. Since then, there has been a significant increase in research and work done on how and why organizations should be learning organizations. Central to the creation, facilitation, and maintenance of organizational learning and change is dialogue (Engelstad & Gustavsen, 1993; Gustavsen, 1992; Herr & Anderson, 2005).

Organizational learning has been defined in a number of ways but generally refers to how organizations increase and use shared knowledge to create positive action (Argyris & Schon, 1996; Marquardt, 1997; Marscik & Neaman, 1996; Watkins, 1996). According to one definition, “organizational learning represents the organization’s commitment to using all of its members’ capabilities…it is dependent on individuals and teams sharing their learning in an ongoing, systematic way.” (Preskill &
Evaluative inquiry for the purpose of promoting organizational learning is commonly grounded in a social constructivist theory of learning (Bandura, 1977, 1986). According to this understanding, learning takes place through the collective creation of meaning, action, development of new knowledge, an improvement in systemic processes, and the critique of tacit assumptions.

Measures intended to sustain and secure organizations need also to be flexible. The most effective way to meet organizational goals in the current “fluid, technological, knowledge-based, global environment” (Preskill & Torres, 1999, p. 13) is to reevaluate ways in which employees work and learn in organizations. Kuh (2003) notes that “organizational theory is a window through which to view the behavior of individuals and groups in the context of complex organizational structures” (p. 270). Kuh (2003) contrasts the conventional view of organizations which are “individualized, top down, and control focused on predictability” with post conventional organizations, which are “interdependent, unpredictable, less-structured, relationship centered, ever changing, and ambiguous’ (p. 270). Other authors concur with Kuh’s sentiment regarding the evolution and need for more post conventional organizations and call for institutions to broaden their scope to meet the changing needs of a 21st century world (Allen & Cherrey, 2000; Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen & Allen, 1999; Senge, 2006). This shift in paradigm recognizes learning as intentional, contextual, and relational, occurring through dialogue and collective reflection. Organizations, therefore, are called to develop and maintain structures and systems that facilitate such learning and subsequently develop “communities of practice”.
Lave and Wenger first coined the term “communities of practice” in their 1991 book, *Situated Learning*. Wenger (1997) argued that “learning is the engine of practice, and practice is the history of that learning. Consequently, communities of practice have life cycles that reflect such a process” (p. 39). Peck (1987) defined a learning community as “a group of individuals who have learned to communicate honestly with each other, whose relationships go deeper than their masks of composure…and who delight in each other, make others' conditions our own” (p. 59). Learning communities are fostered by organizations that value “democratic accountability, a reconception of the role of the individual in organizations, and an acceptance that change starts at the individual level, with individuals taking responsibility for the collective outcomes of their own and the organization’s practices” (Preskill & Torres, 1999, p. 15). Preskill and Torres (1999) further describe the behaviors of learning communities: pursue issues of common interest and practice; seek consensus in decision-making processes; are empowered to act; rely on one another for information and learning; see themselves as part of the larger whole (more than the sum of their individual relationships); support the sharing of divergent ideas; respect each other’s gifts; engage in self-examination; engage in critical reflection; provide opportunities to hear dissenting opinions; create a spirit of cooperation rather than competition (Preskill & Torres, 1999).

Specific to the institution of higher education, Kuh (2003) views “colleges and universities as complex, open systems, influenced by external events and changing environments….encouraging the sharing of information within, across, and beyond organizational boundaries” (p. 276). In order to understand how organizations within higher education might promote organizational learning and development, it is helpful to
return to Senge’s (2006) approach which focuses on five practices: personal mastery, mental models, shared vision, team learning, which coalesce into systems thinking approaches. Senge's approach offers tools for individual meaning making and community building that help organizations enhance caring and connectedness. According to Senge (2006), “systemic structure is concerned with key interrelationships over time” (p. 44). Taking this concept and applying it to higher education, one can argue that departments within colleges and universities should understand and leverage relationships to facilitate both individual and organizational, internal and external development.

In efforts to understand how this development occurs within higher education, Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, and Allen (1999) offer a conceptual framework that links organizational structural elements to systemic processes. They call for universities to consider enacting diverse learning environments by reviewing campus practices through a historical legacy of inclusion/ exclusion; looking at the compositional diversity of the campus (demographics); attending to the psychological dimensions of the campus (climate); and lastly reviewing the behavioral dimensions on campus (interaction, curriculum, etc.). Milem, Chang, and Antonio (2005) offer a fifth structural dimension, organizational structure, to the Hurtado et al. (1999) framework. With this addition to the model, questions of location can be addressed, such as the positioning of organizations or initiatives within the larger institutional structure. As stated in the introduction, Milem et al. (2005) comment that, “one can frequently identify educational innovations, but rarely can one detect structures that link them…the impact of these innovations is isolated rather than pervasive” (p. vii). Welsh (2009) notes the relevance
of this additional dimension given that diversity issues are often marginalized in terms of structure and priority.

To improve organizational effectiveness in higher education, Allen and Cherrey (2000) offer this mandate for organizational effectiveness in higher education: departments should foster trusting and learning environments, develop emotional intelligence, share information, boundary span, create relational charts, offer communities of solutions, learn to accept the complexities of the system, use new forms of cohesion that help organizations retain direction without control. One process that might facilitate this evolution is participatory evaluation.

**Participatory Evaluation: Strategy for Organizational Learning & Change**

In the past fifteen years, there has been a significant increase in the research on the unique role of participatory evaluation (PE) in fostering organizational learning and change. In considering how to create a culture that encourages and allows for such dialogue, researchers and practitioners have turned to the growing field of participatory evaluation as an effective methodology (Kalliola et al. 2006; Lick, 2006; Limerick et al., 1994; Lines, 2005; Robinson & Cousins, 2004; Smith, 2006; Springett, 2001b).

Participatory Evaluation (PE) is an umbrella term for a number of varying but philosophically aligned evaluative methodologies framing participation as the key to shared learning and transformation. Grounded in and drawing from action research methodologies, PE has been shown to generate many positive effects on learning (Bowen & Martens, 2006; Forss, Reuben & Carlsson, 2002; Taut, 2007); evaluation capacity building (Baker & Bruner, 2006; Bowen & Martens, 2006); participation over time (Bradley, Mayfield, Mehta & Rukonge, 2002) and the use of evaluation results
According to Suarez et al. (2009), “PE is understood as a learning approach in which reflection, negotiation, dialogue, decision-making, knowledge creation, and power dynamics are all intentionally changed through the permanent involvement of stakeholders in the creation of a learning environment” (p. 325). The authors further contend,

Therefore, participatory evaluation becomes a praxis in fostering the creation of an organizational learning process...this organizational learning is a process whereby different types of knowledge, created by a sustainable network of stakeholders working together through communicative actions and supportive partnerships, are used towards a political articulation of action (p. 322).

Significantly, PE recognizes evaluation as inherently political and as such provides opportunity for transformative institutional and social change. Underlying epistemological beliefs about whose knowledge is valid and the treatment of power dynamics within and among those participating in the evaluation provide evidence of the political nature of the practice of evaluation. Traditional forms of evaluation based in positivism use externally defined and driven evaluative measures to determine the “success” of a program or project. “Experts” are expected to use these value-free, quantified instruments and make meaning of them, a process that excludes those voices for whom the evaluation is most relevant: the participants. Generally, these forms of evaluation result in findings that are not used by the organizations and have little organizational impact (Plottu & Plottu, 2009). Moreover, the culture of the
organization is not affected and the research process often times leave members feeling isolated, dismissed and devalued.

In response to these limited evaluative methodologies, PE embraces the politics of evaluation and seeks to use evaluation as an opportunity for learning, change, and transformation (Greene, 2002; House & Howe, 1999). As Greene (2001) writes:

Evaluators should not be absolved from the moral and ethical responsibility for the practical choices we make, the knowledge claims we generate, and the values and interests we thereby promote. Our most urgent and important near-future challenge is indeed to claim this responsibility, to engage with one another about our civic responsibilities and more importantly, to position our work as not an observer of but rather a constitutive part of collective human struggles to improve our selves and our societies. (p. 400-401).

Others agree. “Evaluation processes and products are used to transform power relations through organizational learning and to promote social mobilization and intentional change” (Suarez-Herrara, et al. 2009, p. 329). PE, therefore, carefully and intentionally locates the inquiry process as inherently political through the way in which power is distributed and addressed via the positioning of its participants. Rather than merely aiming for objective truths in outcome measures, evaluation is understood as a process through which the presumed “objective truths” are questioned and explored, subsequently promoting a culture of learning and change.

Generally, a distinctive feature of PE is the creation of a dialogical process in which the focus is not only on the consensus between different and often conflicting stakeholder perspectives, but also on the development of a set of ongoing practices
based on mutual interaction, cooperation, dialogue, and negotiation (Garaway, 1995; Gregory, 2000; Rebien, 1996; Springett, 2001; Whitmore, 1998). In general, principles of PE include critical reflection, inclusivity, dialogue, and questioning about underlying assumptions. These principles promote the following outcomes: a greater external validity of the evaluation; a greater utilization of the results of an evaluation; a collaborative public engagement; a contribution to participatory and discursive democracy; and a process of empowerment. (House, 2005; Plottu & Plottu, 2009).

In considering the nature of the two organizations under question in this study—the WC and WGSS—it is critical to consider their context and how this context informs their work and identities. To do this, third space theory helps makes sense of their paradoxical situation.

**Third Space: Theory and Experience**

To fully examine the impact that context has on change, it is helpful to use the concept of third space to frame this ecological analysis of what it means for WGSS and WC to be located in this particular institution of higher education. The notion of third space is a familiar one in Cultural Studies and feminist literature and research. Many scholars draw on third space theory to illustrate the social positioning of an identity—be it social (Anzaldua, 1987; Collins, 1991; hooks, 1984), organizational (de la Pena, 2009); or national (Bhabha, 1994; Sakamoto, 1996). The concept of third space represents a space or state of being that transcends socially constructed dualistic systems of meaning, where one can be “both/and” *and more* rather than existing in an either/or paradigm. It is a negotiated site of fluidity and resistance where new categories of meaning are created and reconstructed from the space that is between
(Bolatagici, 2004; English, 2005). Bhabha (1994) argues that the boundary region between two spaces or dimensions is often a hybrid region. This “in-between” creates a third space that engages a changing combination of the characteristics found in each border region where new cultural forms or identities emerge. He contends that by exploring the third space, “we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the other of our selves” (p. 39).

Although third space theory took root in the area of cultural studies, it translates into other areas of research and scholarship. Many scholars who have written on third space location are those who occupy a marginalized social position. For example, Black Feminists have contributed significantly to third space theory. hooks (1984) describes a marginal space occupied by Black women which she calls a “special vantage point” as a space from which to critique dominant culture and create counter hegemony. Collins (1990) coined the term “outsider-within” to describe this positionality. Later, in reflecting on the term’s use and meaning, she wrote:

Over time, what began initially as a personal search to come to terms with my own individual experiences of disempowerment within intersecting power relations of race, gender, and social class led me to wonder whether African American women as a group occupied a comparable collective social location. (Collins, 1999, p. 85).

By bridging the personal to the political, third space theorists have illuminated a strategic way of being that comes from the need to straddle two, opposing worlds or socio-political positions.

**Implications of Third Space**
Occupying a third space location creates both means of regulation and opportunity for transformation. In other words, there are advantages and disadvantages to third space location, risks and promises. Anzaldúa (1987) writes of a new kind of consciousness or way of being:

Because the future depends on the breaking down of paradigms, it depends on the straddling of two or more cultures. By creating a new mythos—that is, a change in the way we perceive reality, the way we see ourselves, and the ways we behave—la mestiza creates a new consciousness. (p. 102).

English (2004) notes that “like marginal space, a third space can be central in itself and can be a strategic vantage point for women. Yet, the nomenclature of third space avoids the denotation of marginal as peripheral” (p. 102). This sense of third space as a new and negotiated space of resistance resonates throughout third space theory.

The concept of third space represents a space in which new systems of meaning and identity are constantly created and recreated, where opportunities for change and learning can occur (Bhabha, 1994; Gutierrez, Baquedano-Lopez & Tejada, 1999, Pile, 1994). Sakamoto (1996) elaborates on Bhabha’s notion of third space, claiming: “a borderline culture of hybridity is a powerful and creative third space through which newness enters the world, subverting the authority of the dominant discourse” (p. 116). Implicit in these third space theorists’ writings is the necessity of continual movement between the “either/or” categories. Todd (1997) suggests that the third space is not just an in-between space but one where there is continuous movement and interconnection between the two spaces. Rather than separate spheres, a third space is created that embraces both categories at the same time. This conceptualization supports
Sakamoto’s (1996) notion of hybrid space as one in which there is difference and
tension without assuming hierarchy of either sphere.

Third space theory has been used to make sense of the practical in various fields
and areas of research. For example, in her research on Drama Education, Greenwood
(2001) draws on the notion of third space to explore how drama and theater are used to
examine the interactions of Maori and Pakeha cultures in New Zealand. English (2005)
uses the concept of third space in international adult education to describe third space
practitioners who “challenge the existing boundaries of international adult education
work and, in so doing, resist polarization, binaries and labels” (p. 87). These
practitioners negotiate their fluid and shifting identities within a hybrid location between
being local and global workers, colonizers and co-workers, and religious and
iconoclastic. de la Pena (2009) uses third space theory to examine the work of the
University of California San Diego Women’s Center, illustrating how the work of the
Women’s Center transgresses the binary of public and private sphere work and in doing
so, creates a third sphere of work where activism, “domestic support” and leadership
coalesce and become interconnected into a new kind of feminist praxis. Her
conceptualization of UCSD’s Women’s Center as “third space” was helpful in my own
meaning making of this data and how I came to understand it.

In summary, in order to deeply examine the role the Women’s Center and the
department of Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies play in effecting institutional
change, I use the ecological perspective and third space theory to guide an action
research project on feminism in higher education and organizational development to
provide the necessary context to inform the data collection and data analysis. Because
of the nature of this insider-action research project, it is important to note that these bodies of research inform the “core” project aimed at setting the stage for longer-term organizational change. The next chapter details more specifically with how this core project relates to the overall action research project and the methodology I employed.
CHAPTER 3: Methodology

My research agenda

In many ways, my research questions developed subsequent to my chosen research methodology. I knew from the very beginning that I wanted to engage an action research methodology and I was committed to doing this as an insider, with my organization. My commitment to this particular methodology was directly tied to my research agenda. From the outset, I sought to:

- Use the dissertation as an opportunity to demonstrate the usefulness of AR as a methodology in ecological counseling.
- Promote positive change in my organization by deeply examining the role our organization plays in creating institutional change.
- Consider ways my organization might develop as a learning organization and community of practice.

While it took nearly a year to develop a relevant and feasible line of inquiry, I always understood the project as part of a larger evaluative process, which was taking shape organically in our organization. Therefore, I framed this study as the first iterative cycle of an action research/participatory evaluation process, focusing on relationship and community building. By providing a process through which individual staff and faculty members could individually and collectively make meaning of their institutional location, I hoped that an opportunity for meaningful relationship building might be realized and with it, a potential for further collective action.

This first iteration of the action research cycle also serves as a case study, revealing the complex ways in which UC feminist organizations make meaning of their
institutional location and the strategies of change they subsequently employ based on this location. This case study develops a greater understanding of a particular phenomenon within a particular setting. While the primary focus of this project is organizational change in a very specific context, it is also important to me as a researcher to share and make relevant this research experience with others outside of this context so that we might make more far-reaching contributions to both the knowledge and the practice of organizational learning and change.

**Action Research**

Participatory evaluation is a form of action research. Reason and Bradbury’s (2001) definition of action research evidences the common theoretical framework that guides both action research in general and participatory evaluation in particular:

Action research is a participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, grounded in a participatory worldview which we believe is emerging at this historical moment. It seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities (p.1).

Principles such as democratic participation, connection of practice to theory, attention to and deconstruction of traditional power dynamics, and contextualization align with my own feminist background and ideology and that of the organizations with whom I work on this project (Brydon-Miller, Maguire, & McIntyre, 2004; Maguire, 1987). As Greenwood (2004) points out, “action research and feminism are mutually implicated

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because action research involves collaboration among all the legitimate stakeholders, the valuation of all knowledge, and the enhancement of fairness, justice, healthfulness, and sustainability—all values that underlie feminism” (p. 158). Additionally, the explicit research goal of promoting change resonates with my researcher identity and agenda. Therefore, for many reasons, this methodology is well suited for this inquiry.

Because I hold multiple roles within the Women’s Center, I am engaged in insider action research. First, my current position as an administrator of the UC Women’s Center has impacted the development of my research questions and my selected methodology and will continue to influence my research lens. Second, as a graduate of what was previously the UC Women’s Studies department, my undergraduate and graduate experiences as a women’s studies scholar inform the inquiry. As such, I recognize my own subjectivity as researcher and the ethical considerations that follow (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010). In doing insider action research, I am studying my own community in order to effect change. Brydon-Miller (2004) asserts that, “it is only by placing this ‘near environment in which researchers conduct their science, learn, teach, and judge the efforts of other scientists’ (Morawski, 1997, p. 677) under scrutiny that we can hope to create change in our own practice” (p. 6). Lastly, the emphasis that action research places on the iterative cycles of research and reflexivity creates a process that nicely parallels an important goal of this project: to create a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) centered on reflexivity, learning, and dialogue.

There has been a good deal of writing done by inside action researchers (IAR) on the many ethical considerations involved in doing research in one’s own community or organization (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010; Humphrey, 2007; Moore, 2007). I read
much of this literature and had deliberated long and hard about what such a project could mean for me and the people I work with as I was developing my dissertation proposal. I carefully framed my research question so that it was embedded in and informed by the work done by the Women’s Center but also “distant” enough from my job responsibilities as the assistant director to ensure that staff could authentically and voluntarily participate. I had also carefully contemplated how to develop a question that would be relevant to both the WC and the WGSS, since one of my goals was to deepen relationships both among and between these two entities.

**Research Context**

Research participants included staff and faculty of the UC Women’s Center (WC) and UC’s Department of Women, Gender and Sexuality Studies (WGSS). Before initiating the inquiry, I discussed this study with all of the WC staff and several WGSS faculty so that they expected the invitations to participate and were aware of the study. All full-time staff and core faculty from these two organizations were invited to engage in the research inquiry through email (See Appendix A). The study focuses on these particular participants because of their location within the two organizations under examination: the WC and WGSS.

**The Organizations**

The UC Women’s Center (WC) is an office in the Department of Student Life, in the Division of Student Affairs and Services at the University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, Ohio. Founded in 1978, the center currently consists of six full-time staff positions and one graduate assistant; it is the oldest and largest WC in the state of Ohio. The center is funded through student fees and serves university students, staff, and faculty. The
organization identifies as explicitly feminist and defines its mission as the following: “to create equitable and safe environments on campus for women and LGBTQ students through advocacy, research, and education”. This feminist identity and mission have evolved from an office that at one time functioned as “Women’s Programs and Services” (WPS), focused primarily on service provision. Now, its goals include:

- **Goal 1**: Increase and improve student safety in interpersonal relationships.
- **Goal 2**: Identify and help eliminate institutional barriers that impede/inhibit the full participation of women and LGBTQ persons in the university.
- **Goal 3**: Increase student activism in UC and beyond.

At the time of this study, the WC was undergoing significant transition. Just prior to the study, it was instrumental in launching a newly established, stand-alone LGBTQ Center. Because the WC had historically been responsible for all programming, support and advocacy for LGBTQ students on campus, the opening of this new Center meant that the WC was no longer solely responsible for this work. At this same time, the WC team itself underwent some transition with one staff member leaving the Center. Currently, there are now five full-time staff members.

The Department of Women, Gender and Sexuality Studies (WGSS) was founded in 1974, establishing one of the first Women’s Studies programs in the country. A department in the College of Arts and Science, it includes nearly 100 affiliate faculty and six core faculty, making it one of the largest in the country. The department’s mission is as follows:

The Department of Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies is the academic home for the study of women and gender at the University of Cincinnati. Through
interdisciplinary teaching, research and community outreach, it seeks to create a more inclusive and transformative understanding of women and men. The department explores the intersections of race, nationality, class, gender and sexuality. Informed by feminist perspectives, it nurtures the development of leaders, scholars and activists and builds scholarly community among core and affiliate faculty across the university. The department serves as a catalyst for curricular, institutional, societal and global change.

Like the Women’s Center, it too has evolved: from a program to a department and in fall 2010 was recognized as a Taft Department, securing increased academic legitimacy in the academy. As a result, WGSS students and faculty have access to funding that will support their interdisciplinary scholarship and research.

**The Institution**

The university as a whole was undergoing significant change at the time of this project. A new university president, a new provost, a new state governor and a difficult economic climate were contributing factors to a shifting landscape in this public institution. Just weeks prior to the data collection, staff and faculty received notice of university-wide budget cuts of 20%, which resulted in significant anxiety and stress among staff and faculty. This institutional climate is noteworthy because it undoubtedly shaped not only the data but the research process itself and participants’ willingness to share their honest feelings about what it means to be institutionally located.

**Individual Participants**

To categorize participants solely as either WC staff or WGSS faculty is oversimplifying, to a degree, our roles and relationships to each other and each
organization. Participants’ identities do not fall into dualistic, opposing categories of either WGSS or WS: two WC staff earned graduate degrees from WGSS; one other staff took several courses in the department. However, because this inquiry focuses on the organizational level of analysis, I focused on individuals’ organizational roles. In terms of professional roles, there is some overlap here as well. The director of the WC is a WGSS adjunct instructor. In my role as WC assistant director, I coordinate the WGSS internships. However, because both of us are currently fully funded through the WC and our WGSS responsibilities are not officially part of our WC job descriptions, it seemed fair to identify these two staff as solely WC staff.

Because this was an action research project, I hoped that participants would be comfortable identifying themselves in the process. Initially, to create a sense of safety and to build trust, I offered participants confidentiality, protecting their identities until they explicitly gave me permission to do otherwise. I explained this in the interview process. I offered each participant the opportunity to review their interview transcript and the draft data analysis chapters. Only one participant requested the transcript; another asked to read the chapters. I also asked all participants (both in person and in writing) if they were comfortable using their own names. All agreed. I felt this was critical, considering a goal of the research was to give voice to all participants and to begin building relationships within and between our organizations.

As an insider-action researcher, it is critical to acknowledge my relationships with the participants because these relationships so greatly influenced the data and the process itself. Being a small staff, I had worked with each WC staff closely over several years (the newest member of the team, Brandy, had been working at the WC for nearly
four years). I supervised two of the participants (Brandy and Kim), which presented several ethical dilemmas, as I discuss later. My relationship with WGSS faculty also varied; Lisa served as my MA thesis advisor, so my relationship with her until this point had been that of student/teacher. I had worked with Deb, the department head, over the past year to develop a collaborative program that is set to launch fall 2012. The third faculty member interviewed, Amy, I had never worked with and because she came to the department after I graduated, I had not known her previously in her capacity as a WGSS faculty and graduate director.

**Data Collection: An Overview**

Data were collected from three sources—my research journal; participant interviews; and a group reflection meeting. Archival data such as mission statements were also used. These forms of data collection were chosen because together they provide data that shed light on the relationships between and among individuals, organizations, and the institution and the way in which each is impacted by the other. The approach to understanding organizational transformation through the stories of individuals whose lives intersect in a specific, institutional context, has been referred to as **prosopography** (Weick, 1995). With its emphasis on the lived experiences and stories of individuals who share a common institutional culture, prosopography is concerned with the role of meaning-making in organizational life (Weick, 1995). This narrative inquiry approach has been used to examine the complex, dynamic relationship between individuals, organizations, and institutions. Similarly, career biography has been used to understand the dialectical relationship between the construction of identities and the construction of institutions (Anderson, Armitage, Jack & Wittner, 1990;
Conle 2000). Several of these studies have been done within the context of higher education and the academy (Howe, 2000; Laslett & Thorne, 1997); and more specifically, used in examining feminism in higher education (Josselson & Lieblich, 1995; Personal, 1989; Riessman, 1993; Safarik, 2003). These approaches share a social constructivist, theoretical framework for understanding organizational meaning-making and closely align with my ultimate research goal: to set the stage for ongoing practices that will promote organizational learning and change.

Despite all of my planning and research, there was no way for me to be fully prepared as an inside action researcher. This uncertainty both holds the promise and the challenge in conducting such research. Although I carefully considered what I anticipated to be all the potential ethical issues, the implications for doing insider action research were not real to me until my dissertation proposal was approved and I was set to collect data.

Thinking about how to collect data—-it’s real now! Always different when faced with putting into practice. Thinking about others and how they will feel when asked to participate…will this really be voluntary? And yet I’m struck by the comment Mary made about relationships and friendships and why might it deepen the inquiry to involve those close to us. After all, aren’t I doing AR? It’s like I’m constantly having to remind myself of this—-jolting myself out of the traditional mindset of what constitutes research. (personal research journal, 8/6/10)

What is “data”?
One question that continued to come up for me throughout the process was, “what is data?”. In action research specifically (and I would argue in almost all forms of inquiry), a much larger context informs the inquiry than merely the identified methods of data collection for that particular study. Because of my personal connection to the research questions, the participants, the organization and the institution, this study began much earlier than this formal dissertation and will continue much beyond its completion. It was helpful to remind myself of the need to recognize this and to reject the long-standing positivist tradition of trying to keep separate and objective this set of data from other “stuff”. I could get messy. I could draw from other experiences with participants, from shared memories, from life to inform the whole process. And yet, while helpful, this recognition was also overwhelming. Where should I draw the line? Where are the boundaries? And because I am the researcher in this process, no doubt, I do need to have lines. Otherwise, I would be neglecting the power differential which is undeniably there in any research, even in the most feminist, participatory action research model. I am the researcher. This is my dissertation. What I understand now to be data as the researcher was not understood as data at the time—either by the participant or by myself. There is power in that and negotiating that power throughout the process was complicated.

For example, in wrestling with the question of what constitutes data, I wondered: could I take into consideration other conversations I had had with participants, shared experiences that occurred outside the context of the interview and/or group reflection? Although I had thought through this as I researched and came to understand action research, I experienced it differently as I was doing it. For example, following my first
interview, I turned off my tape recorder to then engage in a very relevant and insightful conversation about what constitutes as “legitimately academic” with a participant. This experience prompted me to write in my journal: “Best stuff comes after recorder is off!” (personal research journal, 9/7/10). Upon further reflection, I challenged the idea that as an action researcher, I couldn’t count this conversation—after all, I had a relationship with this person! And bringing those relationships into the research uniquely defines AR.

**Phase I: Interviews**

Based on faculty feedback as to when they would be most available to participate, I sent emails in early September 2010 inviting WC and WGSS staff and faculty to participate in the study. The email invitation also included an attachment of an informational sheet/consent form describing the project in greater detail, with guiding interview questions (See Appendix A). Of the six core WGSS faculty, four responded and three were interviewed. All four WC staff members were interviewed. Interestingly, the first respondents were the department head and the director—the two leaders of the organizations. Over the next eight weeks, 1.5 hour interviews were scheduled with seven of my colleagues. I used an interview guide to ensure I consistently communicated issues regarding the nature of action research, rationale for the study, my own research agenda, confidentiality as well as covering the necessary data collection questions (See Appendix B). Interviewees selected the location of the interview. All WC interviews occurred in my office whereas WGSS interviews took place in faculty members’ offices; all interviews were tape recorded.
After the first interview, I realized that in order to foster relationship building among participants, it was important for me to consider how to create opportunities for participants to engage in dialogue with one another in addition to the planned group reflection meeting. I hoped that following the private conversation with me, participants might want to share their thoughts and hear others’ views on this topic. Therefore, I created an online Blackboard organization, “Feminism at UC” and planned to post my follow-up questions to participants who agreed to join, on this online discussion board. Other participants who joined would then be able to see the responses and engage each other.

Following each interview, I transcribed the conversation and followed up with each participant thanking her for being interviewed, inviting her to join the Blackboard organization, and to read over the transcript. Of those interviewed, three agreed to join the online organization; one requested a copy of the transcript. For those that joined Blackboard, I posted my follow-up questions on the online discussion board so that others might engage in their responses. Although my intent in creating the Blackboard organization was to promote cross-talk among participants, this did not occur. Of the three participants that joined Blackboard, only one responded to my follow-up questions; there were no responses from other participants to the one participant who posted responses.

IAR Reflections of the Interview Process

The significance of my own positionality became increasingly clear as I began to make sense of the data. The relationships with each participant greatly influenced my meaning-making process. For example, the interviews themselves yielded varying
narratives within the unique context of the relationship between researcher/participant. I found that for those with whom I had a closer relationship, the interview itself seemed to thwart what would be a more natural conversation between myself and the interviewee. For example, both Barb and Kim—the two staff I’ve worked most closely with while at the WC—this discomfort was expressed explicitly during the interview.

Me: Alright. Ooh. This feels different, doesn't it?

Kim: Yeah. (both laugh)

Me: Ok. Alright...Well, so...let me just talk to you a little bit, give you some introduction. Why I'm doing this, how I understand it. Confidentiality stuff. Because that's really important to me—that we at least talk about it so that we're both on the same page. A lot of this is not going to be new to you because I feel like I talk to you about it all the time but...ummm. Ok, so...

Kim: And the research class we took together, the sequence.

Me: Ok. Exactly. Thanks for saying that. Let’s keep talking like it’s just normal. (both laugh) (K. Fulbright, personal communication, 9/21/10).

But it wasn’t normal and this was unsettling to both of us. Barb and I also experienced this discomfort in her interview.

Barb: It's weird for me to talk like this. I'm not used to...

Me: It really is odd. I will say that it's been so different with each person... but it's interesting... things will come up or come out differently that would never come otherwise...

Because I have a closer working relationship with both Barb and Kim and our relationship dynamic is more established, introducing a new narrative resulted in discomfort for all of us but also yielded new meaning that would otherwise not have been realized, had we not engaged in this interview process.

In contrast, others seemed very comfortable talking in the context of an interview. Brandy, a WC colleague, but one with whom I have only worked on a limited basis in the past, noted that the interview was “just a conversation”. Ann, another WC colleague, also seemed very comfortable being interviewed. Interestingly, Ann initially shared that she was reluctant to participate in the process because she was not confident that she had anything “to say”. She also commented to me before the interview that the email invitation to participate “didn’t even sound like Amy”. Therefore, going into the interview, I was acutely aware of the language I used, aware that by speaking differently than she hears me normally, might make her uncomfortable. I was surprised at how she opened up in the interview. Her body language reflected that she was relaxed; she became very expressive, and was very assured in what she communicated. It became clear early on in the interview that the interview framework really provided an opportunity for Ann to express her voice in a way that was meaningful to her. She teared up several times and right before I turned the recorder off, she pointed out that she really appreciated the chance to be interviewed. “As you know, I was reluctant at first to be interviewed but I really appreciate that you value my voice.”
The next morning, she said she had more thoughts to share and asked me to continue the interview, even asking for me to turn on the recorder again.

As an insider-action researcher, I realize that the specific nature of my relationship with each participant greatly impacted the interviewing process and the interview itself. It seems that for those relationships more established in a particular context, the more uncomfortable it became to raise the interview questions.

**Phase II: Group Reflection**

After the last interview was conducted, I sent out a second electronic invitation to all WGSS and WC staff and faculty to participate in Phase II of data collection: the 1.5 hour group reflection meeting (See Appendix C). Again, based on feedback from faculty and my own insider knowledge of WC staff availability, I scheduled the group reflection during exam week, when most of us could be available. This second invitation included the first invitation and the attached information sheet/consent form, to jog their memory of the overall project (See Appendix D). Seven people responded to this invitation, including one person that had not yet been interviewed who then asked to be interviewed. Ultimately, four participants attended the group reflection: two WGSS faculty and two WC staff. The group reflection meeting took place in a conference room in the WGSS department and was tape recorded; refreshments were provided. This space was suggested by the head of the department and although I initially planned a more neutral space, agreed on this for convenience, hoping it might result in increased faculty participation. The group reflection meeting was scheduled three months after the first interview and one month after the last.
In the reminder email sent to the invited participants, I asked that participants bring with them some form of art that represented how they conceived of their role as feminist staff/faculty. After participants settled in, I started the conversation by thanking them for attending and laying out my proposed agenda for our time together. Participants shared their artwork and spoke about how they understood their work and what it meant to them; participants engaged with each other, asking questions and relating similar personal experiences. I went last, sharing my representation, which I explained spoke not only of my own personal understanding of my work self but also reflected how I was making meaning of our collective data from the interviews.

This segued into the next portion of the group reflection: my meaning-making of the collected data from the interviews. After identifying themes from the interviews, I selected quotations from all of the interviewees that represented each theme, within each area and posted those quotations on the walls of the meeting room. This allowed for all voices of the interviewees to be expressed in the group meeting. I asked the participants of the group reflection to walk around the room and find quotations from each category that resonated with them and reflect on why that particular quotation spoke to them. We then shared those reflections with each other. Interestingly, participants claimed their voices if they recognized a quotation as their own and there was active dialogue among participants as they reflected on each quotation. Some quotations represented interviewees not present at the group reflection and this created opportunity for wonder and further curiosity among participants. Following the meeting, I shared with the interviewees not present at the meeting that their quotations had sparked engaged conversation and both interviewees were interested and expressed
sentiments of validation that although they were not at the meeting in person, their experiences and thoughts were still represented.

**IAR Reflections on the Group Reflection**

As I prepared for this group reflection, I felt it necessary to continue to remind myself that the primary purpose of this group reflection was to build relationships within and among us. I fought to prioritize this objective over “reporting out” (or member-checking) my own analysis. This struggle reflects the distinction between the two, parallel projects at work in any IAR: the “core” project and the “dissertation” project (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005, 2010). While working to promote the “core” project—setting the stage for sustained dialogue—I sensed that at least some participants might be confused by the overall project and its purpose. However, because of our particular context, I felt compelled to focus solely on the “core” project with the participants.

For me, this ongoing critique of the process in part constituted the project as an action research project. In other words, as an inside-action researcher, a key component to conducting the research is always being “in it” and “outside it” at the same time, asking the “why” and “how” questions. While immersed in the data, I also had to distant myself from it in order to facilitate the process as an action research project, empowering others to engage, promoting dialogue among participants, building relationships; otherwise, I understood that this project ran the risk of becoming solely a qualitative research project in which I, as researcher, collected and analyzed data as a lone researcher. I sensed that if this project was to be a successful action research project, I must position myself as both participant and researcher, simultaneously.
The interviews were conducted in order to set the stage for this larger, collective conversation and were done to ensure that all voices could be heard and expressed in a group setting. Therefore, while I spent a lot of time reading over and coding the transcripts, I did not want to use our entire time in the meeting to solely present “my findings”. My intention was to use the interview themes as a springboard for conversation, to use our time together to respond to each other’s reflections (as expressed in the interviews) and to collectively reflect on some of what I was recognizing to be the emerging themes. I struggled with how to do this in such a short amount of time, given the purpose and my own place as researcher. To help me do this, I enlisted the help of Kim just prior to the group reflection. I shared with her my concerns about how to facilitate the conversation and she helped me think through strategies that might achieve the desired outcome. Interestingly, she noted that my asking for her help alleviated some of her own anxiety in attending the meeting. I noted that for her, being empowered as co-researcher significantly helped to engage her in the process and helped me to distance myself from the researcher/expert location in order to more authentically engage my colleagues as co-participants in this project.

In setting up the group reflection, I also felt compelled to make explicit the AR-nature of the study—to set the stage for further inquiry upon completion of the dissertation and to introduce my various, related identities as an insider-action researcher. I explained this in the beginning of the group reflection:

Me: The idea is to get a conversation going today. The idea is for today for us to bring that conversation from the one on one, from the conversation I've had with each of you, to a conversation we can have together. So first, for us to get to
know each other outside the context of our day-to-day business with each other and to have a dialogue around this question.

Amy: Amy, are you doing a total of seven interviews or are you doing more?
Me: That's it. So for the dissertation—the way I'm understanding this whole process—is that today is it. After today's conversation, my dissertation hat will be off. I hope that maybe something will come out of the conversation today or some of the work that has been done but if that happens, that will be with my WC hat. Because AR can go on and on and on, so as far as I understand my data collection for the dissertation, is that today is it (Group reflection, 12/6/10).

I felt it necessary to remind participants that I am engaged in and committed to this work, not only as a doctoral student and researcher but as an insider, a WC staff member.

Data Analysis

I used grounded theory in my data analysis so that the research questions drove the research. As a result, there was a dialectical relationship between my observations and interpretations and what others have written and understood about similar questions or contexts. For example, when the theme of “borderland” or “outsider-within” appeared in the data, I turned to this literature to inform my own continued meaning-making. I was thrilled to find in the literature echoes of themes present in the data—and even more validated to find research on women’s centers themselves as locations of “third space” (Pena, 2009; Sakarik, 2003). Ultimately, the data analysis was informed by relevant literature in hopes of contributing to the broader bodies of knowledge and practice. Most important though, a grounded theoretical approach to data analysis
allowed the project to be as organic and meaningful as possible, which is of foremost concern to me, particularly as an inside action researcher.

After collecting data, I then created a system of coding the data to help identify “what is happening in the data” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 46). Coding is an opportunity to look for actions and emerging themes in the data. These codes were developed as the data collection phases progressed and began with my own interpretation, then later informed by the literature (particularly on third space) and other data. In my analysis of the data, I engaged in iterative cycles of making meaning, moving from the data to the literature, back to the data. I listened/read each interview a minimum of five times each. I made notes in the margins of the transcripts or in my research journal as I made sense of emerging themes. My next step was a variant on “memo writing” in which I engaged in a kind of imagined conversation with each participant based on my readings. In my written conversations, I brought in the voices of other writers that spoke of these ideas or themes, as well. This exercise gave me a deeper sense of the emerging themes. As a result, conceptual categories emerged.

Member-checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) occurred both immediately following each interview and in the group reflection, serving as an exercise to promote collaboration, critical reflection, dialogue, and organizational learning. One way I attempted to do member-checking following each individual interview was to pose my follow-up questions on the Blackboard discussion board so that other participants could also engage in the dialogue. The group reflection provided ample opportunity for clarification, which was done by both myself as researcher and others as co-participants. Following the group reflection meeting, I transcribed the meeting and
coded that as well, returning once again to the interview data in order to further identify themes and underlying theories.

Validity

Action research calls for a different approach to the question of validity than positivist research. Because there are no objective measures for subjective qualitative analysis, Stringer (2003) has outlined ways that one can establish trustworthiness in place of validity. These include “credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability.” Practices which demonstrate trustworthiness are: giving participants opportunities to provide feedback on raw data and developed themes; collecting and reviewing a variety of data (including participant data and my own insider knowledge); participant and researcher interview notes; and using language grounded in participants’ experiences (Stringer, 2003).

Tandon, Kelly, and Mock (2001) draw on Bronfenbrenner (1979) and use the term “ecological validity” to describe the degree to which the constructs and lessons learned from the research are relevant to the participating group. This particular notion of validity is particularly meaningful to this research project insofar as the project itself is constructed according to an Ecological Counseling Perspective, based in large part on the work of Bronfenbrenner (1979). My positionality in the research, as an insider—both to the Women’s Center and with a background from this particular WGSS department—helped me to work toward this ecological validity. Based on this insider knowledge, I knew implicitly and explicitly (through conversations both within and beyond the dissertation project) how this project might contribute in practical ways to our organizations.
CHAPTER 4

“I cried when I got tenure. They bought me.”: Individual Third Space

As participants share their experiences as WGSS faculty and WC staff, I came to understand what they described to be reflective of occupying a “third space location”, as was discussed in the literature review. It is helpful to use the concept of third space to frame this ecological analysis of what it means for WGSS and WC to be located in this particular institution of higher education and the subsequent implications for change. The various ways third space location plays out on the individual, organizational, and collective will be fleshed out in the next chapters.

This experience of “third space location” permeated all interviews and the group reflection meeting, through shared personal accounts of individual, organizational, and institutional roles. Although the focus of this study is to examine the relationship between WGSS and WC and to the institution itself, it is impossible to do this without considering ways in which all these ecological levels mutually and dynamically inform each other. Therefore, it is helpful to begin with an examination of internal, individual notions of third space.

Signs of Individual Third Space

At times, the participants’ discussions focused on internalized struggles with third space location—reconciling for themselves their own personal identities. For example, when asked whether she identifies as activist, Barb responded, “I’m not always comfortable bearing or subscribing or claiming that title, if you will, or that name. But that is the way I believe that I try to live my life. This is a conundrum for me.” (B. Rinto,
personal communication, 11/9/10). Such reflections demonstrate that to embrace an identity requires a certain internal reconciliation for third space occupants.

In addition to personal third space, participants also shared experiences with third space in terms of their professional role. They spoke of having to reconcile their personal ideologies with organizational mission and practices. At times, participants spoke of actual emotional pain:

Deb: I’ve always had a very ambivalent relationship toward the university, toward the institution, being institutionalized. I cried when I got tenure. Because I mean, of course I had worked for tenure. Had done all these things to get tenure. But when I got it, I cried and what made me cry was, and I said this at the time. “They bought me. They now own me. I’ve done what they said. I jumped through their hoops.” And so the question then is, does working at a big institution undermine our ability to do activism? What is the relationship between activism to this big non-feminist institution? I would like to think that my tears notwithstanding, that there are some opportunities for activism (D. Meem, personal communication, 9/7/10).

During the group reflection, other participants were particularly struck by Deb’s comment.

Amy: This tenure comment is very interesting to me because...

Deb: That was me.

Amy: Was it?

Kim: That was the one that spoke to me.

Amy: I didn’t know that was you.
Deb: I still do. Every single day. Every single day when I get out of bed and I come here and work in an academic department in a big boys' university, I have that feeling. That doesn't mean I can't do my work and I enjoy my work but the idea of tenure, right? You know, tenure comes from the Latin word tenir, "to grasp". And so when you get tenure...

Amy: I think the only reason I don't feel that way is because...and I did once feel that way and I left that...I made the very radical decision and left before going up for tenure because I had that feeling and a lot of my colleagues and close friends didn't understand that and I think people really sometimes almost feel betrayed when a colleague leaves, especially when you don't conform to the rules of the game. It's really stressful. So I do get that. But then I felt somewhat liberated when I got it (tenure).

Deb: And I never felt that, liberated, frankly. (Group reflection, 12/6/10)

Deb’s “crying at tenure” comment resonated with other participants and exemplifies a shared sense of pain at having to personally reconcile deep, conflicting values. In fact, earlier in the group reflection, as participants introduced themselves, pain and struggle were commonly expressed as they discussed how they understood their role in the institution. I pointed this out at the time:

We obviously—at the Women’s Center and WGSS—come from the same social movement. I think everyone commented and recognized that. And that social movement really started in response to deep pain and deep personal pain and I think that pain and struggle is apparent in how we’re situated and that tension we still feel. You know, that came up actually as we were talking just now, I noted
lots of that. We’ve literally said ‘pain’ and are cursing and you know, it’s this intense...and I think to be aware of that as part of why we are where we are and why we’re situated as such. It is difficult to always be feeling that but it’s part of the work. I think we wouldn’t be doing the real work if we weren’t still feeling that.

(Group reflection, 12/6/10)

Most often, however, staff and faculty discuss what third space location means in more subtle terms, as tension or conflict. For example, Kim reflects on philosophical differences between herself and her organization which she has to negotiate:

I think the office is feminist. But not necessarily the type of feminist that I would describe myself as. (K. Fulbright, personal communication, 9/21/10)

Similarly, Lisa reflects on what it means to her to be a feminist teacher:

As a feminist, I believe in undoing some kinds of hierarchies, being a certain kind of egalitarian, kind of advocacy for women and for people on the down side of power, which axis of domination we’re talking about...when I teach Intro to Women’s Studies, I tell my students that my commitments are to move students to think intersectionally and be able to act from coalition, move through pluralistic to both/and ways of thinking and being in the world. So that sits uneasily with my pedagogy which is very old fashioned and has a lot to do with my training and the era in which I was educated but it also has a lot to do with how much I know at this stage in my career. I feel that contradiction, that set of contradictions all the time. (L. Hogeland; personal communication, 10/1/10).

Lisa demonstrates how third space gets played out intrapsychically and goes on to reflect on what this means in her role as WGSS faculty.
Lisa: We have feminism that’s cross cut by sometimes deeply academic or institutional values. I feel like I negotiate that set of contradictions all the time.

Me: How do you negotiate those?

Lisa: Probably badly. Differently at different times. You know, there are times, there are certainly situations or courses where I feel that my academic values sort of outweigh my feminist values. So I am more...punitive and there are other situations where my values are much more in the service of feminism...so sometimes that’s easier. It varies from situation to situation. It’s a constant set of negotiations that are situation-specific...We all sort of struggle with the same problem of you know, how to have integrity and our burning desire to proselytize. That’s the fun place where the rubber meets the road for most of us, most of the time. We want to tell the students, ‘This is what is right’. But that's subjective, disrespectful, not fair to students. And you know, just this dance—that’s what it is to be a feminist teacher, always. (L. Hogeland, personal communication, 10/1/10).

Amy echoes this tension in a different example of teaching WGSS and its practices:

I also just think that it would, if we think that where various ideas about inequality and oppression and liberation and feminism come from, they come from activist experiences. Unfortunately a lot of them are just ...the hegemonic voices that we hear in Women’s Studies. That's what's so fascinating to me with students that have been taught that, they've been taught this one, mainstream, hegemonic view of what feminism is. If you go back to Sojourner Truth as an example of an
activist, I don’t know... she probably wouldn’t have called herself that but... it’s not like she was publishing high theory and yet she was oh-so-theoretical. So I that’s the way I teach theory. (A. Lind, personal communication, 11/17/10).

Amy’s comments underscore all conditions of third space insofar as she acknowledges her own conflict (or tension) related to the identity of WGSS and its legitimization of who counts and why. Amy speaks to the hegemony of WGSS, suggesting that in seeking its own legitimacy, it has excluded other critical voices. She makes sense of this in her role as a WGSS faculty member by actively creating WGSS counter-hegemony in her teaching and scholarship.

This “dance” to which Lisa refers—a constant, ongoing negotiation of contradicting role expectations, philosophies, identities—is discussed by each participant as they respond to questions about what it means to them, personally, to work as WGSS faculty and WC staff. For them, identity is a process rather than a static label. Kim speaks to her own struggle to make sense of how she understands herself:

I go through phases where there are times, especially in my work, where I kind of forget. And so I have to like, “No! I’m a feminist!”. Our office calls itself feminist. Like, so I have to kind of constantly in that time period, remind myself that we’re doing feminist activism, not just activism (K. Fulbright, personal communication, 9/21/10).

Kim suggests that she is both inside and outside of these identities simultaneously and speaks to the process/movement inherent in third space identity politics in her comment, “I have to constantly, in that time period, remind myself”, suggesting that she is both inside and outside of these identities simultaneously. Significantly, what allows
for this realization and thereby serves as a catalyst to the process is engaging an internal tension, evidenced in her ‘No!’. In this moment, Kim engages her inner conflict and allows herself to move in and out of her conflicting identities.

Working it out individually: Third space identity politics

Kim’s comments exemplify one strategy that participants often referenced in making sense of their conflicting identities, a process I term: “owning it” or “actively occupying the third space”. Otherwise, the ambivalent identity that characterizes third space location results in an identity crisis. As Anzaldua suggests, “turning this ambivalence into something else” (1987, p. 101) is what potentially transforms this condition of third space into a strategy for change. By enacting an active identity politic, WGSS faculty and WC staff articulate ways in which they are able to perform various—even contradictory or opposing—identities from their third space location. For example, Brandy points out that actively occupying this paradoxical location as activist within the institution can, in and of itself, be a transformational act, a form of activism. She shares an example of a conversation she had with a student about the implications of her professional location:

Me: Do you see those conversations with students, even when you’re like, ‘I can’t do it’, do you see that as a form of or a strategy that we can use? How do those conversations play into our role in creating transformation in the institution, or do they?

Brandy: I think they do play a role because they teach students about strategy and what they’re trying to achieve, how they want to achieve it, making sure they’ve done some goal setting so they’re not just screaming…I think having
those conversations really focuses them: ‘We’re adults now, there are adult consequences and some consequences are worth it, some aren’t’. So being able to judge that and make better choices. I think those conversations go a lot better than we might think they do.

Me: As you’re talking, especially about your personal experiences as a college student, learning those lessons, it’s really clear that we’re helping students learn the lessons that you learned as a student activist and that’s all part of developing them as activists, so that even the conversations where we’re saying ‘no’, can still be one of those lessons.

Brandy: Very teachable moment. And those aren’t necessarily conversations I had with staff or faculty while I was in school. Those were just things we learned the hard way or by reading about someone else’s experience so I think it’s important to not..I wouldn’t say give them all the answers but I think it’s important to have that conversation so they can see, strategy needs to happen. This is how we advocate to get changes made on our end, so that they understand it’s not going to be overnight. There are things happening even when it looks like nothing’s happening. I think that translates to wherever they’re going to go or if they’re solely just trying to make their own moves out in the world. (B. Turnbow, personal communication, 9/30/10).

Brandy acknowledges that saying “no”—engaging the tension—enables her to activate her third space location and be honest about her role—to herself and to others. This process facilitates meaningful dialogue and serves as a “very teachable moment”. As a result, these are moments she feels empowered in her role. Kim recalls a similar
experience in which she felt empowered by acknowledging to herself and to a student the precarious position she occupies as professional feminist and activist:

Then we sat down and talked about where I was located. I'm a paid staff member. You know...there are different philosophies in making change and where I am and what our relationship is in this project is that I'm a staff member within the institution and I felt like there was no push back or judgment (from the student). So I think that just being clear about who we are and our roles in the institution was, that was really helpful. For myself included. (K. Fulbright, personal communication, 9/21/10).

As Kim and Brandy both point out, one critical way in which to actively occupy our location is to speak it aloud to others. Often, this requires engaging some conflict (or tension) to increase awareness. As both Brandy and Kim express, if we own our position—and the limits that result from it—we might realize opportunities for personal empowerment and transformation.

**Power and privilege**

Lisa acknowledges the significance of how she identifies as a feminist teacher, to her students:

I don’t want to make a larger claim for that but I think that too, saying as I do with mind numbing frequency, ‘as a feminist, I; as a feminist, I; as a feminist, I’ also for some students is mind-blowing and a kind of activism in my advocacy and my willingness to speak out—my willingness to identify as a feminist. Especially if they haven’t seen it before. (L. Hogeland, personal communication, 10/1/10).
Lisa’s comment, “my willingness to…” implies a degree of risk-taking. These acts require a willingness (to use Lisa’s term) to take the risk, face potential conflict and identify (or “come out”) in order to create “teachable moments”. Upon reflection, Brandy also recognizes the political implications of embracing certain identities:

Me: Do you see claiming the feminist identity as an act of activism, as a political act for you?

Brandy: I think I haven’t but if I reflect upon it, I could see how it might be. Especially in the African American community to come and speak out and say you know not only do I support my community and I advocate on the part of it but I do so as a feminist. I think that can be an extremely political statement to make. (B. Turnbow, personal communication, 9/30/10).

Lisa and Brandy articulate ways in which choosing how to identify in a particular context can be a very political, subversive act and as such, a powerful change strategy in and of itself.

Several participants spoke of privilege as they discussed identity politics: both privilege that accompanies certain identities and privilege inherent in the opportunity to choose an identity. Both the act of identifying and the act of being identified shape and are shaped by socially constructed norms of who counts and why. In this way, identity politics is inextricably linked to notions of legitimacy. As Lisa shares the relevance of her activist experience to her academic role and how much she learned from her days as a community activist, these ideas related to privilege and identity politics emerge:

Lisa: I couldn't begin to even speak to how incredibly valuable that activist experience has meant to me, as an academic.
Me: How so?

Lisa: Well, you get a sense of how to negotiate power. And how to work in coalition. And how to present yourself in varied circumstances. And how to, you know, not be afraid or be afraid and do it anyway. I remember any number of things that I did as an organizer, you know, having to face off with angry people who had an awful lot of power that I did not have, you know. Being frightened and literally afraid and doing it anyway. And that's incredibly powerful experience to, you know, manage to appear that you're not frightened and be calm and suck back into your nonviolence training or lose your temper or swear and just gut it out. And you know, I'm a privileged White girl. Where the hell would I have gotten that experience if I hadn't chosen to take it on? And a lot of privileged White girls like me can't speak truth to power because they don't know how. (L. Hogeland, personal communication, 10/1/10).

Implicit in Lisa's comments is the notion that activists or change agents in general necessarily occupy a sort of third space location. An activist assumes power and privilege in positioning herself to create change. At the same time, the position an activist assumes is necessarily that of Other. Therefore, an activist is privileged and marginalized, simultaneously. Lisa speaks of this paradox as she reflects on her own privileged status, as “a White girl” who, in her activism, struggles to find voice and power to create change.

In her interview, Deb talks about the individual privilege she assumes by serving as a leader of a department that has achieved a certain degree of institutional
legitimacy. She argues that although institutional legitimacy “limits our freedom”, it also affords opportunities.

So, the question is... does that limit our freedom? Yeah, it does in a way.

Because now we have a major so we have to offer this set of courses, you know, we can't just offer any old thing that somebody is going to teach... So it does limit your wild and crazy ability to offer any old thing. But it doesn't limit, I mean, you know, given those constraints, I really, as department head, want the faculty to teach what interests them to teach in their areas of specialty when they can.

(D. Meem, personal communication, 9/7/10).

Deb elucidates ways in which she, as department head, attempts to negotiate the constraints that accompany legitimacy to provide additional opportunities for the faculty, such as teaching freedom and valuing certain kinds of research and scholarship. She has found ways to use her third space location to legitimize feminist work that might otherwise be marginalized. In this way, Deb is able to resist the constraints from within and indeed, her “tears notwithstanding”, has created opportunities for activism in her individual role as WGSS department head.

Summary

In summary, as participants discussed what it means to them to work for WGSS and WC, they spoke of making sense of their third space locations. For these participants, that means constantly negotiating and reconciling conflicting individual and organizational values. All spoke of this process as active and continual, acknowledging an engagement of inner pain, tension, and conflict. Participants also acknowledge that
speaking to this tension—thereby owning their third space identity—both requires and results in individual legitimacy and empowerment. The context then both shapes and is shaped by this process of individual identity politics. If done strategically, the process can lead to opportunities of transformation—for both the individual and others. On the other hand, there is the risk that we might perpetuate the very oppressive structures we seek to resist—that of being defined (and defining) ourselves and others by the same old, stereotypical terms.

Individuals’ experiences in third space cut across the organizational and collective ecological levels, as well. Therefore, the narrative for the subsequent chapters is similar to the narrative of individual third space. There is tension and conflict in the organizational and collective struggles with and for legitimacy, for once secured, the tools available are both potentially transformative and oppressive. To be transformative, privilege must be disrupted through critical, self-reflexive questioning of underlying assumptions upon which we are positioned. While participants spoke of how they practice this everyday in their professional roles, this practice faces barriers on the organizational and collective levels, as participants reflect on the institutional roles of WGSS and WC.
Signs of Organizational Third Space

All participants discussed organizational third space conditions in terms of the institutional roles WC and WGSS play. Similar to their articulations of individual third space, themes of legitimacy, tension, and identity emerged at the organizational level. Significantly, the ways these third space identities play out organizationally is both shaped by and shapes the individual and institutional levels. Because each is located in a unique institutional location, one in Student Affairs (WC) and one in Academic Affairs, as an academic department (WGSS), each assumes different degrees of power and privilege—or, varying degrees of institutional legitimacy. Consequently, while the WGSS and WC share certain common signs of third space location, the two organizations also experience third space differently.

Common signs of third space

One common sign of third space location is the simultaneous, institutional legitimization and marginalization that each organization experiences. This paradoxical condition is exemplified in Ann’s comment regarding the WC:

I think we have a presence even in the Ohio community that people recognize as someone to emulate…people see us as a force. We are not going away. And I think that’s why people call us all the time. We’ll go down with a fight (A. Brown, personal communication, 9/22/10).
Just a few moments later in the conversation, however, she goes on to say, “I’d like to see that the WC is recognized by this administration. It just doesn’t seem like it recognizes us at all. I don’t see that at all.” (A. Brown, personal communication, 9/22/10). For Ann, the WC is at once “a force”, a “presence” and also “not recognized at all”.

In direct response to Ann’s comments, as quoted during the group reflection, participants discussed how they relate, particularly considering the current institutional climate:

Amy: Yeah, I would just, to add to that, I guess when push comes to shove, we aren’t taken seriously and on one hand, I feel like we have a really strong Women’s Center and department and then on the other hand, boy, when we’re in these moments of crisis you realize how utterly fragile our situations are.

Barb: Uh-huh.

Amy: It (Ann’s quotation) speaks to me right now.

Barb: I think that both of our organizations are recognized, I really do, by many people as really competent, smart, mature as opposed to just..., individually as well as organizationally and yet you’re right, when it comes to recognition or to being at the table sometimes to craft something new, we’re not there. I’m puzzled about that lack of inclusion and I...so that’s what means to me (Group reflection, 12/6/10).

During her interview, Deb echoed these conflicting sentiments in her discussion of the department: “As a department becomes more institutionally visible and its reputation increases and improves and it becomes one of the basic departments on a
campus, which we’re not really there yet…” (D. Meem, personal communication, 9/7/10). On one hand, she understands that WGSS is not yet “a basic department”; on the other hand, she later notes that “people do assume that well, we’re mathematics”, suggesting that there is a general institutional perception of legitimacy. Both WC staff and WGSS faculty acknowledge that while the organizations have achieved some level of institutional legitimacy, they both also continue to work to maintain/secure it.

**Differences in WGSS and WC signs of third space**

While there are shared notions of third space legitimacy among all participants, there are also significant differences between WC staff and WGSS faculty. Staff at the WC, located in Student Affairs and Services (SAS), spoke of a lesser degree of legitimacy. This sentiment was particularly apparent in Barb’s comments, possibly because as director, she interacts with many people outside the WC. For example, she questioned the institutional perception of why the WC exists:

> I don’t think that most people even in the academy see gender equity and gender issues as very important. I really don’t. I don’t think they recognize that there is still enormous sexism. I think that’s one issue. I think they just see this as a form of whining. “Women are doing great. Why are you upset?” (B. Rinto; personal communication, 11/9/10).

Barb acknowledged that this ongoing struggle for legitimacy is in part due to the institutional structure and the WC’s location in SAS, as opposed to Academic Affairs.

> Being in Student Affairs…I think that we’re seen as truly ancillary. I think some of our work is too fluffy for them (faculty in general). They don’t really care about it. That’s a challenge, making it relevant to the academy and valued in the
academy, particularly among academics, so those are some problems. (B.
Rinto, personal communication, 11/9/10).

Later, she continued to reflect on the implications of the WC’s institutional location:

Why are we doing these status reports? Why isn’t institutional research doing
them? So we’re these little appendages, with not much clout and we’re doing
these and they take fucking forever to do and they’re incorrect and they get done
and do they make any difference? And how much difference do they make? (B.
Rinto, personal communication, 11/9/10).

Barb expressed her anger at feeling marginal and argues that such marginalization
demands increased resources (read WC staff time and energy) to achieve
organizational goals and objectives and then to “center” that work institutionally.

Generally, WGSS faculty perceive the department to have established
institutional legitimacy. Even now, in a time of budgetary crisis, while all faculty members
expressed concern and anxiety about the value of WGSS to the college, it was also
acknowledged that with recent University Taft recognition, the department has been
validated and additionally legitimized. As Deb points out,

One of the things the Taft membership does is it validates us as it--validates our
interdisciplinary methodology in ways that have never been before—certainly not
when the Taft funds were first envisioned and so forth. So that's an amazing
validation of what we do, of interdisciplinary methodology across the board. So,

it seems to me that that is an institutional change (D. Meem, personal
communication, 9/7/10).
In contrast with the WC, WGSS faculty members did not express strong concerns with a lack of institutional legitimacy. Rather, they articulated concern related to the implications of institutional legitimacy. In the group reflection, Amy and Deb raise this question explicitly and in doing so, Deb draws a parallel between her comments about her internal struggle with getting tenure and her feelings about the department:

   Deb: Is it better, in the long run—how do you feel about being included and excluded? Nobody likes being excluded. On the other hand, inclusion, I think is often a kind of oppression. What are the requirements of being included? And that’s exactly the thing when we were just—we danced in the hall last year when WGSS became a Taft department, ok? And this is just absolutely emblematic of the conflicts I feel about this. I wanted us to be a Taft department. It gives us tangible resources that we did not have ever to continue to do the work we do, which I admire, ok? So all of that is positive. On the other hand, we go to #3 (slide of quotation: “I cried when I got tenure. They bought me.”), right?. They bought us! Now they own us, you know? Can we, within the context of doing what the academy asks...

Deb trails off but not without suggesting the challenge (and further, the impossibility) of creating change from within, in the terms of the institution.

**Working it out: Organizational Identity Politics**

The difference in staff and faculty’s experiences related to institutional legitimacy significantly shapes each organization’s identity politic. Strikingly, participants commonly discussed the identity of the WC as ambivalent, more inclusive—an identity
that is less clearly defined than WGSS. Both WGSS faculty and WC staff noted this more fluid identity of the WC. For example, according to Amy:

I also think the fact that we play really different roles is so important because it seems to me that the Women’s Center, you want to service as much of the community as possible, right? In some ways, we’re (WGSS) doing that. But it also, there's a lot of self-selection in the process, especially after the intro level classes. And I don't know...I don't feel like...maybe it's because we're just, seems like we're in the business of teaching classes so it's not necessarily reaching out to this broader community and it becomes specialized (A. Lind, personal communication, 11/17/10).

Deb also speaks to the broader constituency of the WC and what this means in terms of the Center’s identity:

One of the things that you get when you have women's centers, I think, is you get the constituency that grows and as the constituency grows, the...it isn't just feminist women that walk into the Women's Center, whereas it is pretty much feminist women who come to be majors here. Not just to take our classes, that's different. But people who come, nobody applies to our graduate program who isn't feminist, virtually. Well, there may be one or two but almost nobody. The students who choose this as an undergrad major, they're all feminists. That doesn't mean we don't have plenty of other people in our classes. But people who use the Women's Center might not be feminists. They might simply want some way to connect around their personal issues: trying to go to school and have children; trying to go to college and be a Black female; older students;
trying to go to school and be a sexual minority. There might be issues that they are facing that are not the issues that are sort of tightly defined as feminist issues. So, I think that the Women's Center has a responsibility to cover a wider constituency, to deal with a wider constituency (D. Meem, personal communication, 9/7/10).

Deb argues that because of location—for WGSS, in an academic department—WGSS’ identity is more defined and therefore more exclusive than the WC. On the other hand, because of the WC’s specific institutional role, it has a “responsibility to cover a wider constituency” in order to decrease barriers to accessing support and services. It is also noteworthy that in contrast to the more inclusive WC identity, both Amy and Deb explicitly point out the exclusivity of WGSS.

The relationship between identity and legitimacy is apparent as WC staff struggle to make sense of their organizational identity—for themselves and for others. For example, Barb reflects on what it is like for her to tell people about her work:

When we tell people, they say ‘Oh’. They have no fucking clue. And then we don’t have an elevator speech so how do we explain it to them? I’m still not any good at that...I’m not clear on what our role is in the institution. I don’t know who we are to the institution. (B. Rinto, personal communication, 11/9/10).

In my conversation with Kim, this lack of clarity around our organizational identity also comes up:

Me: On one hand, people do see us as activist or at least a place to create change or advocacy, something political. But at the same time, they don’t, too. Or, what do they see us as? Because we get people all over the place. Because
I think that you know, we're really here to serve all women and whatever that might mean. It could mean, as safe, apolitical as you want it or it can also be as political, in-your-face as you want it, too.

Kim: Yeah... Well, we've struggled with that as a center. Who are we serving when someone is like, you don't serve men. And we're like, yeah we do. So all women and all men. And that's not helpful. Yeah. So trying to narrow but also not be exclusive is really hard. Impossible...Or, it shouldn't be impossible but that's how it ends up in practice. (K. Fulbright, personal communication, 9/21/10)

It is apparent that the ambivalence of the WC's identity creates a degree of unease—or tension—within the organization and among its members because of the implications related to legitimacy. The more difficult it is to name oneself, the less legitimacy is assumed. As Barb’s and Kim’s comments suggest, neglecting to effectively address or engage the tension results in an unresolved, organizational identity crisis of sorts. Kim further speaks to the consequences of not engaging the organizational tension and the negative impact that neglect has on the organization's potential to create change:

I don’t feel like a liberal feminist and that’s what our office is able to be in this institution. We can push for women. We can talk about mentoring and talk about women’s leadership and higher ed and you know, it’s easy to fight for women when you have less faculty that are women, who are tenured. Make less money....and yeah, it’s easy to do that, I think...as long as we have (identity politics) as central, it’s going to keep it more liberal focused...I think that’s where you start getting into …a lot more complicated ways to make change and activism. And even, I feel like, you started from a location in the women’s center,
if you started to argue other ways, it comes off to people who are liberal feminist as anti-feminist, even within our own conversations…the ways I understand to make change are most viable or at least as viable as other options, other people don’t and they might consider it damaging or not helpful (K. Fulbright, personal communication, 9/21/10).

Kim makes two critical points: 1) the practice of raising and exploring these underlying assumptions can be risky and difficult for an organization to engage, and 2) without careful dialogue and thoughtful challenging of underlying assumptions that ground the WC’s identity politics, what potentially could be employed as a change strategy falls flat and instead, regulates who and what the WC can be. Her statement, “that’s what our office is able to be in this institution” speaks directly to a form of institutional regulation of who the WC can be in its institutional location.

Barb goes further:

I think that sometimes we’re not at tables where we should be. Come on! You know? I will raise it. Because I want people, I want to say, maybe they just don’t get it. And that’s okay. Maybe if I raise it, they will get it. It does feel like appeasement or placating or and sometimes with good intentions, it may just be that they don’t quite know how to use it (B. Rinto, personal communication, 11/9/10).

In Barb’s comment it is clear: if we can’t name ourselves, we will be named. If we can’t articulate the role of the WC in creating substantive change in systems of power within the institution, we become a tokenized version of ourselves.

**Power & Privilege: Both Means and End to Legitimacy**
Naming ourselves demands organizational dialogue. Both WC staff and WGSS faculty speak to the issue of not engaging in this practice. Kim states:

It’s so hard when we don’t have a healthy dialogue within feminism because we’re…we have our focus on the institution. We’re here, let’s focus on making change the way we know we can make change. Which we have, over the years. So, it’s hard to argue like we should be doing other ways, too…We never have those conversations. So, and you know, it might come across as repetitive if every Friday, like, ‘let’s have a conversation about what feminism is’ but we don’t agree. So, when we’re trying to get work done, accomplished, I think it would be interesting to have those conversations and figure out, if we don’t agree, what then? How do you make change? Is it unified, institutional, departmental?

Me: Yeah. I think it’s interesting because a lot of those questions come really, as you were saying it, I don’t know if this is what you meant but I was hearing it as: it’s somewhat threatening and risky to ask those questions from a Women’s Center because if we ask them too hard, then we’re in a way questioning our very existence and in this climate, we feel under pressure all the time, and you know, budget cuts and all that good stuff…and if other people are asking those questions, then what does it mean when we start?

Kim: For sure. And I think if we don't have those conversations then we don't know how to answer them when people ask us (K. Fulbright, personal communication, 9/7/10).

Kim and I discuss how “risky” it is for the WC to engage in organizational practices that promote critical dialogue; however, as Kim points out, it is arguably more risky to not
engage in these practices. An excerpt from this exchange prompted further discussion at the group reflection.

Deb: I want to ask a question. The one that jumped out at me was the one where it talks about how it might be risky to ask certain questions from a Women's Center point of view. And I want to know who said that or what that might mean to you? I wondered if you could...

Me: I actually said it but it was in a conversation with you (Kim). Yeah, I think that for me, how I'm understanding it, if we're here, come out of this place of pain and tension, if our job in this Borderland to stir things up and create tension, then we should be doing this among ourselves. And I find that really hard to do. I feel that everyone, externally, the university—particularly in times of crisis— is looking at us, questioning what it is that we do, and so sometimes I think that it's scary for us to ask those questions ourselves: What kind of difference are we making? What is our role? Are we making any kind of impact? Sometimes it doesn't feel like we are, to be honest. And that's one of the things that was interesting—how we all understand change. We really didn't have time to talk about it (during the group reflection). Change happens even when it doesn't look like it is—domestic partner benefits, the LGBTQ Center. One of the important things about change is that things are happening but yet also, so slowly, sometimes unintentionally, it's not like things were planned so sometimes it feels like—questioning what kind of difference are we able to make from this Borderland? And I think that those are important, it feels important to answer or at least explore, but it's scary too.
Kim: And going off of that, referring back to ‘academic work to change the world’, challenging our own basic assumptions about ourselves as an institutional organization, then makes it really, the foundation of your organization...

Me: Unstable.

Kim: Unstable. I think that in our conversation about that, in the WC, are we needed? It's scary to ask that in an institution that might not value us but to not ask ourselves that question when others ask us, why is there a Women's Center?

Barb: It goes back to when people outside the university, they have no idea of who we are. And then part of me doesn't know what to say. So you think, you can't even articulate it and I'm the person doing it. And trying to condense all of human history in a ten word sound bite, which is often what you're expected to do.

As discussed in this exchange, to question underlying, organizational assumptions that ground our work—particularly in the context of budgetary crisis and overall uncertainty—demands a level of legitimacy, power, and privilege. Otherwise, these questions are “too risky”, calling into question our very existence, resulting in an unstable organizational foundation.

Similarly, WGSS faculty find it challenging to engage in this practice of participatory evaluation as well. Lisa speaks to this:

I think we would need to sit down and make a list of what the specific changes are that we want to see and we don't do that. You know? We don't do that over here, either. That kind of, you know, vision-quest conversation is really not something that happens very often. When we talk about the kind of change we
want to see as a department, it's about who we're going to hire, what fields we need to bring, things under our control. We don't talk about you know, ‘What's the priority? What's our change priority?’ because I don't think we have one. I mean, we spent a lot of faculty energy in support of the LGBTQ Center, right? I know that a lot of our faculty were pretty involved in that…but I don't know that we could, that we've ever sat down and made a list of what we'd like to change at UC, what we'd like to change about our campus, other than in the ways that you know—faculty hiring, resources, things like that. So, that would be a very interesting conversation to have (L. Hogeland, personal communication, 10/1/10).

As a result, neither the WC nor WGSS engages in organizational practices that facilitate “vision-quest conversations”. However, the reasons for each are notably different. For the WC, it seems this practice involves risk (both internally, with power differentials among staff and externally with further institutional de-legitimization). For the WGSS, the neglect seems to be mostly about time, priority, and routine—all of which are directly informed by the institutional context and the demands placed on faculty in terms of what constitutes valued, legitimate “academic work”. In this difference, the power and privilege that are assumed in WGSS’ institutional legitimacy are evidenced.

Organizational Tools for Change

WGSS

With legitimacy comes the ability to take risks. Therefore, the more legitimacy (hence power and privilege), the riskier one can be. Deb argues this explicitly: “Probably it’s the case if we weren’t so well respected on campus as we are and so well
supported on campus we would be less willing to take risks or to make something that could be risky be risky.” (D. Meem, personal communication, 9/7/10). Lisa speaks to how she benefits from what could be perceived to be an organizational “risk”:

Well, we've had sort of directors struggle to work it out--department heads now. I think that since I've been here, we have always had a director or head who would not devalue or would in fact reward and value the sometimes rather unorthodox work that I do. For instance, when I did publish that essay in *Ms*, everybody in Women’s Studies, you know, wrote about it, noted it, passed out copies in their classes. It was treated in Women’s Studies as a legitimate piece of work in a way that English didn’t. My three of four books have been published by a nonprofit, feminist, independent press rather than either a commercial house or a university press. There are a lot of institutions that would have not rewarded that because it’s not refereed. But then, both my departments have not even looked aside at that, which is kind of fabulous, ok? And in fact, in my last one, no in my last two, annual reviews Deb has made a big point of talking about the importance of publishing with the feminist press (L. Hogeland; personal communication, 10/1/10).

Deb, in her position of leadership in the WGSS department, is able to legitimize Lisa’s work in ways that would likely not be legitimized otherwise.

Deb shares other examples of how WGSS creates change from within the institution:

Me: How do we do that? Make change from within?
Deb: Often, making people very uncomfortable. I’m sure you’ve made plenty of people uncomfortable in your time. It happens all the time. We hear people talk to us. We hear them from all over campus—that our students are making their professors squirm by just asking questions, undermining certain assumptions in class. And so there’s an academic activism that’s at work there. That you know, we try to do that. We try to teach that...But that...that we can send students out or we can go out ourselves into the rest of the university and challenge assumptions. So, I think that’s where our activism is: within that, in this academic area, which not everything has to be rigidly academic but we are an academic department so it’s incumbent upon us to make sure that other people on campus know that that’s what we do. That our work is of an academic nature but it is of the nature of academic work that might change the world. That implies we wish to change the world. Not everybody buys that, of course...If you think that this work, the work of applying feminist analysis to the world is useless and that people that do it are deadheads, then you can dismiss it but we do it because we believe on some very basic level that that’s not true. That it’s not useless. That it’s work that we need to do, that needs to be done in the world. That we need to send people out of here into the world equipped to fight the good fight. Not necessarily to change it. The forces of inertia may be too strong but we have to send people out with a view toward changing it. That’s the goal. (D. Meem, personal communication, 9/7/10).

For Deb, asking these critical questions defines the work of Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies as political, as activist—as legitimate. As she discusses this change
strategy, she highlights the importance of securing academic legitimacy for WGSS: “So, it's incumbent on us to make sure that other people on campus know that's what we do.” Deb’s comments illustrate how legitimacy is both the means and the end in enacting feminist politics in the institution.

As Lisa reflects on how the WGSS department creates institutional change, she shares an example of when raising a question and initiating a dialogue created an opportunity for change.

Sometimes organizing is, you know, when you try to talk a dean into …somebody had run into the provost in a social function and had mentioned to him, are you going to fund the new Women’s Studies director? And he said, ‘You know, nobody's asked me’. And I spoke to the dean, who said, ‘Well, [he] said no’. So, we actually put the two of them in a room together with every senior faculty woman who was an affiliate that I could get and watched them cave. And that's what happened. And it was totally awesome. That's organizing. It's not a march on Washington and it's not organizing for social change except in indirect ways. Organizing on behalf of the department, for women's resources (L. Hogeland, personal communication, 10/1/10).

The central strategic moment in Lisa’s example of “organizing” was the “face off” itself—an “organized” opportunity when questions were raised and various administrators were required to listen and respond. Interestingly, the question raised was directly related to WGSS’ legitimacy (i.e. funding a new director position). Here, literally, legitimacy served as means (Lisa empowered to call this meeting with high-level university administrators) and the end (securing funding for a WC director).
The Women’s Center

As the WC participants discuss how the WC works toward institutional change, they speak of more indirect strategies and how these strategies are carefully employed due to the potential “risk” involved for the WC, in its third space location. Brandy cautions: “It's definitely a risk. Especially in this age.” (B. Turnbow, personal communication, 9/30/10). She goes on to share an example of how the WC might strategically employ a third space identity politic:

I expect the WC not just to be present…but to actually have a voice and be speaking and say, “This is what we're working to do” so we…see what the WC clearly supports… I'd expect them to step forward and say something (B. Turnbow, personal communication, 9/30/10).

She suggests that a strategic identity politic involves not only “showing up” but doing so actively—clearly naming one’s identity and what one stands for. Interestingly, Brandy later shares another, conflicting perspective. Speaking of a campus protest of the elimination of graduate and family housing that staff attended, she reflects on the importance of WC’s mere presence at the rally:

It’s enough to show up and be present and be uncomfortable in that moment to validate your experience. So while it is uncomfortable sometimes I think it's very necessary and I don't think it's anything that would put the center in jeopardy. We weren't in front of the mic, but we were standing up with the students… We might not be speaking on this but we’re aware and we’re taking it to heart and we’re listening. (B. Turnbow, personal communication, 9/30/10).
As Brandy argues, the WC’s mere presence at that protest demanded an active occupation of the organization’s third space location—the WC as both part of the administration and critical voices of it—and an active occupation of that location at that moment. Brandy’s comment, “so while it was uncomfortable” references the experience of being present to support the students while also being very careful—as staff—about what actions might cross the line.

Ann shares another, similar example as she reflected on the WC’s role in developing the first campus-based LGBTQ center:

We actively advocated to the administration in our limited capacity that we were allowed to for our LGBT center and actually achieved that through helping our students, rallying our students, helping them, teaching them, how to…um reach the administration, how to write letters if they wanted change…I don’t think that if we hadn’t been there, you know, as much as there is sometimes a tug and pull, you know, really frustrating--I think that was needed to reach the administration, so that the students could really be heard. And yet, we couldn’t personally do it but for five years we worked and that was a huge activism role. (A. Brown, personal communication, 9/22/10)

Brandy and Ann both argue that often times, the WC—because of its third space location—cannot directly advocate for institutional change because of the risk but nonetheless, finds ways to use its location to promote that change in more indirect ways. As both Brandy and Ann point out, often times the mere presence of the WC is enough to promote or facilitate institutional change; the WC’s activism may be “indirect”;
we might not be “in front of the mic”; maybe we can’t do it “personally” but our institutional presence can be effective in and of itself in creating institutional change.

**Summary**

The more institutional legitimacy—and therefore institutional power and privilege—the more the organization is able and willing to take risks in creating change. This is evidenced in the varying change strategies employed by the WC and WGSS. The WC, positioned with less institutional legitimacy than the department, uses their presence as a key change strategy. By contrast, WGSS faculty shared more direct strategies, such as Lisa’s example of “organizing” a direct “face-off” in advocating for departmental and institutional change. Interestingly, no participant raised the issue of tenure as representative of legitimacy, although as WGSS faculty discussed ways they create change, the power of tenure was implicit in that without the privilege that tenure secures, some of the tactics employed by WGSS would undoubtedly be much more risky. For WC staff, without tenure and non-unionized, it makes sense that the organization must be more careful in how they work to create change.

Furthermore, because organizations internalize the values and norms of their institutional context, it becomes “risky” to activate these third space conditions and strategies as organizational practices. In other words, it is challenging to engage in these tactics together, within an organization. As a result, the WC finds it difficult to examine assumptions, engage conflict, and raise questions due to existing power differentials and its perceived “tenuous” institutional position. Similarly, WGSS does not regularly engage in these kinds of organizational practices either. By contrast, the department’s reasons are primarily due to a lack of perceived need based on
institutional expectations and priorities. Faculty are overwhelmed with their academic jobs—anything not understood as “academic” cannot be prioritized. For WC and WGSS to maintain their institutional legitimacy, they must “play the part” (A. Lind, group reflection, 12/6/10); otherwise, they call into question their very institutional existence. For participants, at the time of this study, this risk was very real and threatening.
Chapter 6

“\textit{That’s a broken system}”: Collective third space

Signs of Collective Third Space

Third space also characterizes the relationship between the WC and WGSS, their collective identity. This collective third space is caused by the need for each organization to reconcile an institutionally imposed, dichotomous structure in which one (WC) is located in Student Affairs and one (WGSS) in Academic Affairs. The most prominent theme in terms of collective third space is that of being both distinct from yet connected to each other.

Naturally, the relationship between the WC and WGSS has evolved over the more than thirty years that each has existed at UC. More “tenured” participants spoke of this evolution. For example, Lisa shares that since she became a faculty member, the relationship between the developing Women’s Center (then, “Women’s Programs and Services”) and the growing Women’s Studies Program has evolved significantly over the years. She reflects on the process of legitimization and its impact on the relationship between the WC and WGSS:

Lisa: Back in the day when it was Women’s Programs and Services, years ago, we had almost no relationships with the center, or with Women’s Programs and Services. We didn’t…we had nothing to do with them.

Me: And why is that? What were they doing at the time?

Lisa: As I recall, it was not political. And I also think that those things were also governed by personal relationships. And we were defensive. A lot of being mistaken for programs and services. We were defending our, especially in the
early years with the MA program, we were defending the program against all that. We’re this and not that, we’re this and not that.

Me: The legitimacy stuff.

Lisa: And the intellectualism of, we have our own grad students. We are not that, we are not that, we are not that. Because we were in defense mode. That the relationship was really troubled for you know, in retrospect, troubling for being so nonexistent. But when [subsequent WC director] came in, because perhaps in part because she had a Ph.D. and because she was a Women’s Studies person rather than being you know, a counselor person, I think she came to us and I should say to me because I was head at the time and we liked each other so well that we wanted to build these institutional relationships. And that's, I mean that's overdetermined. But it was time to quit being so defensive. (L. Hogeland, personal communication, 10/1/10).

In the early years of the department and the center, as each was developing its own identity in attempts to secure institutional legitimacy, the boundaries defining each were rigid and static. Without established legitimacy, less defined organizational identities ran the risk of destabilization and therefore, further de-legitimization. Lisa suggests that as the identities became more established, the legitimacy increased and the organizational boundaries became less rigid. It seems that with increased legitimacy, participants’ collective experiences might reflect this strengthened relationship between the WC and WGSS. This was not the case. Kim speaks to this:
I was just day dreaming about the feminist movement and how Women’s Centers and academic sides would like sprout out of the same movement and go into these different directions so I was visualizing this plant with leaves that go into different directions then have no contact. (K. Fulbright, personal communication, 9/21/10).

Deb also comments:

We work toward change in the institution primarily academically and this is where I see the difference between us and you, for instance, in the Women’s Center…We are the academic piece of feminism on this campus…So that there’s a feminist sort of academic entity and a feminist social political activist entity, that connect. And of course, there is connection. There’s connection across the courses that are taught and so forth. There is this sense that the two are linked and I think that they should be linked. With the understanding that the department especially, since we became a department we are more constrained in the direction of academics—which is not a bad thing. I don’t think it is a bad thing as long as the Women’s Center exists. I think that there is a difference, a clear difference but the…I think both the center and the department should…and I think you try to do this, you personally try to do this, I know, try to establish connections between the sort of social and activist arm of feminism and the academic and how can they…bring those two together. (D. Meem, personal communication, 9/7/10).

Deb reiterates the complementary relationship the WC and WGSS share and yet the simultaneous disconnect experienced in their institutional relationship. She points out
that this distinction between the two is not necessarily a bad thing; rather, it allows us to do things differently. She also argues for the need to find ways to “establish connections” between the two organizations.

Brandy shares how she imagined the relationship between the WC and WGSS might operate prior to working at the WC and the discrepancy she found after she started.

I'd like to see more collaboration. When I came in, I thought clearly they're united and work together all the time and that's not necessarily the case, so I'd like to see just more unity there. More coming together. If they're having a lecture series, maybe have it in the Women's Center. If the WC is doing programming, their students are invited to come, like it's a very intentional kind of, “This is happening, let's make sure they're there, they know it's going on and can promote”. I feel like we should be working together to tackle some of these issues. They bring research and just the whole, I guess the theory piece to it and then we have the hands-on-the-ground strict practice going on and it seems odd sometimes that they are so, there's this space between almost and I don't understand that but I think it's mimicked out in the world of activism, as well. You have studying on campus and you have folks actually out doing things and they're kind of at odds with each other and I think that they could do some informed programming together, informing each others' research and work if we just get on the same page. So I definitely want to see that come closer together on this campus and just in general. I feel like it doesn't have to be this division
and I'm not sure there is but...that's a little disconcerting. (B, Turnbow, personal communication, 9/30/10).

Brandy perceives there to be a distinct division between the department and the center, even noting that there is a “space in between” yet also recognizes that this is a perception and later adds, “I feel like it doesn’t have to be this division and I’m not sure there is”. Her comments underscore the importance of the institutional context in determining the work of both organizations. Like Deb, Brandy also argues for the need for the two, complementary organizations to find ways to “connect”.

For example, Brandy shares this sentiment:

I think they lend the scholarship so I'm looking to them to be writing about the experiences, be validating the experience, be doing to the research, and saying, “Look, this is what’s happening, this is what’s going on, this is what it means from a scholarship point of view.” Whereas we can come in and say, “Look at this scholarship, look at what they've produced. This is what that scholarship means, and this is how it translates to our developing students and this is what it would mean to change”. So that's how I understand them working together... We need them to really look at what's going on, to understand it, to be able to teach it to other people so that we can then develop programming that is accurate and is reflective of what's really happening and to disseminate that programming to other people. So integral, I think it's integral. But at the same time, if the research is developed but you don't speak to the people who are allowed to practice the implications of it, then that's a broken system. You wouldn't research a heart
Brandy argues that each organization relies on the other to do our work effectively. Implicit in her argument is that WGSS and WC are complementary—one doing the theory and research, the other doing the practice.

**Working it out: Collective Third Space Identity Politics**

For WGSS and WC to be institutionally located requires each to define itself—organizationally and collectively—in the terms of the institution. As a result, one can only be either “academic” or “activist” but can’t be both, simultaneously. To do otherwise risks one’s institutional security. This either/or binary influences the WGSS/WC relationship insofar as it becomes necessary to “other” one another. This act of other-ing was illustrated in nearly all of the participants’ discussions. For example, Barb notes:

> They're (WGSS) really not interested in the activism. They're interested in still, now that they're a Taft Center, that's a big deal because it gives them credibility and they get access to that money and the Taft scholars and so on. They're interested in building the discipline. Purely intellectual. (B. Rinto; personal communication, 11/9/10).

Ann reiterates these sentiments. For example, in discussing the relationship between the WC and the WGSS, Ann shares the following:

> The Women’s Center is…they take the theory and they bring it to life…they take the theory and they practice it. Where Women’s Studies is the studying of it but I don’t necessarily see the results…but you need all that to make change. I’m not
dismissing that. Because unless you know the theory, you can’t change it. I mean, you have to know why people are doing things… If you want to change the way politics is for any underrepresented population, you have to take the theory and not just teach it but you have to actively go out and change that. And I see them as separate entities. I’m glad to see some collaboration but I think that we see that pull like they don’t really see us as relevant a lot of times, ‘Oh, well, they’re just the Women’s Center’ and yet, how much change that has that section of academia really changed the way women are responded to on campus? Have they actively networked to put more people in administration, have they helped LGBT get a center? You know, I don’t see that. I see the Women’s Center doing that. And that’s unfortunate that there’s not more collaboration. (A. Brown, personal communication, 9/22/10).

Ann’s honest reflection demonstrates the consequences of not finding ways to “connect”. Based on these WC staff discussions, it is apparent that the WC cannot “see” (or value) the role of WGSS as activism. The WGSS is strictly understood in terms of “academic”, as defined by the institution.

Similarly, the WC is constructed in “nonacademic” or “activist” terms by both the WC itself and WGSS. Perhaps, as WGSS faculty members referred to “nonacademic” feminists, their comments were intended to speak of feminists outside of higher education, as a whole. However, these arguments resonated with me, as a WC staff member and in these moments, I conceptualized myself and the WC as non-academic. This became increasingly true the deeper into the data collection I got.
For example, Amy notes, “To say Women’s Studies, most people think it’s a really militant thing or they don’t get what it is…when I’m talking to people on planes and they ask what I do and I’m like, ‘God, do I have to go through this again?’” (A. Lind, personal communication, 11/17/10). Lisa also shares her anger at not feeling legitimate to those outside the academy, to community members and activists:

And it seems to me that people outside of the academy, feminists outside the academy think that we don’t do anything that is of any political value. There are still plenty of—that dismissal that nothing housed in the university can possibly have much feminist traction, you know? And what I think about the kind of work that I and my colleagues do on the Feminist Recovery Project literature, those girls wouldn’t have a book to read if it wasn’t for us. Shut up! (L. Hogeland, personal communication, 10/1/10)

Lisa goes on to discuss the implications of this dismissal of WGSS by nonacademics:

If you read the third wave…nonacademic third wavers…it’s pretty actively dismissive in the same way I think a lot of journalists dismiss Women’s Studies and don’t try to bridge…So they don’t know what we do on campus and they don’t know what our research is because we don’t write it about it in accessible ways and they don’t ask us anymore, right? They literally don’t ask us. And that seems to me to be kind of a shame because we have things to tell them. And they have things to tell us. But I think we do a better job of paying attention to them than they do paying attention to us because we read their work but they don’t read ours. (L. Hogeland; personal communication, 10/1/10).
While validated by the academy, Lisa is troubled by a lack of recognition or value by nonacademic feminists because work she feels is politically important and inherently feminist and activist—bringing new, previously silenced voices forward—is being again silenced by those “outside the academy”. I suggest that the WC is arguably “outside the academy”.

Based on participant discussions, the institutional location of WGSS and WC positions each in an either/or paradigm in which WC becomes strictly “activist” and WGSS becomes strictly “academic”. Consequently, there is an inherent other-ing that occurs in the collective identity politics. These two distinct locations assume varying degrees of power and privilege which impacts the possibility of collective partnership.

**Power & Privilege: Both Means and End to Legitimacy**

Interestingly, WGSS faculty generally perceive the relationship between WGSS and WC to be more positive than WC staff. For example, Amy states:

> I’ve always felt, since I’ve been here, that we’ve had a fabulous relationship with the WC and that we’re kind of doing different things but that I feel like we’re on the same page in terms of just..how we think about women’s issues and rights, to put it in the most fundamental terms. (A. Lind; personal communication, 11/17/10).

Juxtaposing this faculty perspective to the staff’s perspective, a common difference between the two groups emerges, highlighting the importance of one’s organizational location and what that location means in terms of assumed power and privilege. Because the WC is less valued institutionally than academic units, staff feel more
threatened than WGSS faculty. As a result, they express greater need/desire for a stronger relationship with the department.

Barb comments on the ways in which the institutional structure and the climate of higher education make it difficult to truly build relationship across divisional lines.

I do think we are, one of the things that excited me is to think of us as a true partner with WGSS because I think that what we do is as important as the theoretical and academic and I will not accept a second-class citizen status because I think the practice of feminism is critical to understanding feminism and part of its genesis, you know? But I think that so much of what we do is still done too much in isolation and particularly because we’re in Student Affairs. We’re just not valued the way academic units are. (B. Rinto, personal communication, 11/9/10).

Barb points out the implications of diametrically opposed locations in which one (Academic Affairs) is more valued and legitimate than the other (Student Affairs). Given this positioning, it is difficult to feel like “true partners”. Notably, as Lisa and Amy discuss earlier, the department has more to lose in collaborating. In this way, it makes sense that Lisa and Amy discuss the barriers they face as faculty in doing so, despite their desire. The institution does not value this kind of “academic activism”; therefore, the work of WGSS faculty—and arguably, all faculty—is defined in strictly “academic” terms. Again, because the WC has yet to achieve the degree of institutional legitimacy and privilege that WGSS has, they seek these collaborations with WGSS as a way of legitimizing themselves. Similarly, in pursuing Taft department recognition, WGSS also seeks to associate itself with more powerful, legitimate academic units in order to
increase its own legitimacy. WGSS’ pursuit for increased legitimacy contributes tension between the organizations in the sense that WGSS wants to associate with WC because of shared values but to do so, runs the risk of decreasing their own academic legitimacy.

On the other hand, Ann also points out the benefit to WGSS in partnering with the WC, highlighting the importance of gaining practical skill to complement the academic, more theoretical learning gained from WGSS coursework.

I see them as teaching all the theory and I do see the relationship now that you have ACT (Activists Coming Together) and we are partnering with them to do the internships, I think that will help the communication gap between the two. I think that WILL (Women in Leadership and Learning) is really going to help those two (WC & WGSS) see each other in a better light and more understanding and will get more communication. They’re going to see that we have added to their department so much and they will spread the word (A. Brown, personal communication, 9/22/10).

Ann’s comments highlight two key points regarding collective third space: 1) conceptualizing the relationship as complementary results in an inability “to see” the other (thereby other-ing) of WGSS’ work, 2) consequently, Ann proposes the development of partnerships. All participants agree that there needs to be a stronger relationship between WGSS and WC. The question is: do we have the tools necessary to foster such relationship building?

**Collective Third Space Tools (for Change?)**
Our collective behavior is articulated in terms of our collective identity. If the organizations see their relationship as complementary, framed by an either/or paradigm, then their behavior reflects this paradigm. Participants reflected on the implications of this during the group reflection.

Amy: Bringing it back to the paradox of institutionalization, in a way, we’re a success story but it’s like successes bring with it all kinds of contradictions. We really do live in the borderlands—that sense of always being a place of resistance and yet having to perform in particular ways that make us a part of the problem, so to speak.

A bit later, Deb gives a practical example:

Deb: We worked for ten years to get domestic partner benefits. This goes right to my inclusion philosophy: yes, of course, everybody should have health insurance! Of course, they should. And if that means you get it through domestic partners, of course you should get it. Do I believe that only partners should be able to have get partner benefits, that you have to be a ‘two’, be like..I have the same feelings around the right to marry that I have the same feeling about the military—no one should go into the military! Equal is not the answer. That’s a whole different thing but the idea that domestic partner benefits—yes, it is of course a benefit and of course everybody should have it but I’m not just you know, there are things about it that imply that you can be bought into a set of values that I don’t necessarily buy into (Group reflection, 12/6/10).
These comments reflect a notion of WGSS and WC as tokenized. This notion was made more explicit as the participants discussed recent institutional “diversity” initiatives.

Amy: It is interesting to think about—maybe this is only in the college but they're pushing that we need to do more diversity at the same time that it's a specific kind of diversity work and I can't figure out what that means exactly and we're losing funding and before this, we were partially restructured because of our staff spread across these units so that was...in other universities, there are protests over that kind of thing.

Barb: I've been following that. That concerns me because it may be well-meaning to push this diversity but the lack of understanding of complexity, nuanced...Integration worries me because it hurts the real—not real—actors to achieve real diversity, inclusion.

Deb: It captures...whatever ‘diversity’ is, whatever that term, it captures it within traditional forms: you know, this grant that looks like every other grant that just puts in words like minority or diversity just in a word or two to get that in...that there's money out there for that. So we gotta do that. It's in finding that neo-liberal view of... (Group reflection, 12/6/10).

Participants acknowledge that some of the changes which are advocated for by the two organizations, themselves reinforce what some might feel to be anti-feminist values.

How does one resist complicity? Participants commonly spoke of engaging in dialogue as one key strategy. Interestingly, as participants argued for the need for
collective dialogue, they remarked on the shared need to engage in dialogue with others in their own area or division. For example,

Barb: We need to do it both as a microcosm, in student life—between the WC, LGBT—as a unit first. Because we need to address these issues, in reconciliation. I'm scared to death with these budget cuts because out of the diversity task force...we've been told 20% generally to think about it but nothing specific. I said to [administrator], can't we finally talk as a group, as a collective? As you said, WC is smaller than AACRC (African American Cultural and Resource Center) and EPS (Ethnic Programs and Services) and yet we're bigger than LGBT, so can't we talk together about this? So that's the hope I have. [Administrator] says yeah, maybe we will but we're still hearing 20%.

Deb: I like [administrator]. I hope [administrator] can manage that.

Barb: What he's got to do is not be afraid of the conflict and manage that and really follow it through. And that's the hard thing.

Me: Were you going to say something, Kim?

Barb: Just nodding.

Amy: It's interesting to hear what you're saying. It is so similar to what we (WGSS) experience, always being clumped together. It's not necessarily a bad thing. We come together with Judiac and Africana Studies and the weirdness that creates sometimes because we do have walls around us. And we're being told by the administration to promote our diversity—as if we don't do that all the time!—but so, it's like...it's this kind of “diversity” that pits us against each other.
Earlier during the group reflection, in response to Barb’s introduction and her selected self-representation of an image of a “tunnel, with walls around it”, Deb paralleled Barb’s self-representation to the institutional phenomenon of “silo-ing”.

Deb: I think that I related to that. I remember this from way back when I was a grad student, so I know that UC is not the only place where you experience this. UC is known for that silo mentality. Every department or unit has a wall around it and every discipline has a wall around it and what is interesting about that to me is that I think you can come here, be here and after a while, you have built a wall around yourself. It's a way, it's not a coincidence that departments are in competition with each other for funding...one of the things that made me very uncomfortable these past couple of weeks, is that the college has a huge budget cut and we want to take as little a cut as we can in our department which means that if we got our way, other departments would have a greater cut. We are pitted against other departments by the very nature of the process. And I hate that!

Amy: I agree with that and I also recognize that other departments will experience the cut much more than others because of size and scale. I’m not trying to defend on that basis but...

Barb: I think part of it for me, is...we have the same thing. Before you started saying it, I was thinking how in terms in the identity centers, how we have this with the Women’s Center, LGBT, AACRC, EPS, we have different funding, how many staff. It feels somewhat parallel. One of the things we have asked for in the WC are conversations that are safe where we can talk together about how
we move forward, what is our common agenda? How we do that without worrying about protecting our own, do you know what I mean?

Amy: Yeah, yeah.

Barb: I know it’s idealistic but if we have common values and goals then we can. And yeah, there will be some pain but it’s pain that we can justify, do you know what I’m saying? That’s what frustrates me. (Group reflection, 12/6/10).

The institutional context presents barriers to engaging in collective dialogue. Within each unit’s department/division, similar identity-based units are “pitted against” one another, in “silos”, “isolated” by “walls”. To play the game—and to survive institutionally—we reinforce these walls and silos ourselves. Consequently, to engage in these conversations is threatening to our own legitimacy. This relational dynamic is perpetuated in the WGSS/WC relationship, as well.

Lisa pointed out that one barrier to creating collective dialogue (and in doing so, questioning these assumptions) is the Women’s Studies-speak. In fact, nearly all participants—WGSS faculty and WC staff—acknowledged the Women’s Studies discourse as a barrier to engaging in cross-dialogue. Although as Lisa points out, the language barrier (or, difference) is necessary to speak WGSS’ own truth and to critically engage other WGSS scholars.

I would not like us to only ever write in accessible language because there’s some kind of thinking that you can only do in your argot, right? In your jargon, to use the pejorative term, in your discourse. There are some kinds of work that do require your own language…we do have some specialized conversations and things like that. There are appropriate places and venues. I don’t expect some
kinds of thinkers to write in current language. It’s not what Donna Haraway does. It’s not what Judith Butler does. Nor should they, given the kinds of things they’re working out. But there should be some academic value to translating from the impenetrable or the difficult to a more popularized audience and that’s what I think Women’s Studies faculty like me who are not primarily theorists really pretty much do…perform that kind of translation for our students. And we should have more venues outside the academy to do that more, it seems to me, than we have. (L. Hogeland, personal communication, 10/1/10).

Lisa understands the role of WGSS faculty to “perform that kind of translation” for our students, noting that that there is a “specialized” language that academic feminists can speak—a language that can also exclude non-academic feminists, including WC staff. She recognized this implication, and she reflected on this and goes on to say,

So many feminist magazines have folded and you know, you don’t earn any credit for an academic blog. It doesn’t count as publication…right? So, we should find ways to value that kind of work and if we could institutionally reward it, more of us would do it. But that’s the thing, is that you know, the publish or perish is in such high…we’re not the most prestigious university…and if you want merit based pay, it’s in our contract, you know, how do you institutionally, fairly institutionally reward such different kinds of work? The only place that’s going to care to work that out is Women’s Studies, it seems to me. But we have this cross to bear of having to prove ourselves all the time that we really are academic. (L. Hogeland, personal communication, 10/1/10).
Due to current institutional practices and structures, for WGSS to engage in a collective dialogue with the WC—and in doing so, act as both activist and academic simultaneously—is to run the risk of de-legitimizing the (academic) work of WGSS.

Amy speaks to this directly:

I get that when people feel like certain kinds of language is not accessible or even that, among Women’s Studies, right, that when they read Spivak or something, what is she saying? Or Donna Haraway? At the time, we’re pushed to do scholarship and this is where the scholarship is going. It’s the same for grad students. I think they experience it especially if they are teaching because they are pushed to be as critical as possible as part of their training then they have to teach first years, you know? They are two very different skill sets, to be able to teach an intro class and have those kinds of, much broader kinds of conversations and difficult because you never know who’s going to be there and where the conversation is going to go. (A. Lind; personal communication, 11/17/10).

Implicit in Amy’s comments is the notion that in the process of legitimization—being pushed to do scholarship and therefore doing it—necessarily means moving away from the practical and toward the “critical”. Here again, the activist/academic or practical/theoretical binary is highlighted.

Amy further reflects on institutional barriers to engaging one another collectively:

That’s the biggest problem here at UC, having been at another university where my service load was not as high as here. Part of it is that I’m a little bit further along so that I’m directing grad studies but even for first year faculty, the service
load is higher and I think that that’s true for everyone, it’s true for every faculty member in this university but I guess because I came from a larger university, I don’t mind, I guess. But...so...I do see that as an obstacle. There’s a point at which we can all only do so much (A. Lind, personal communication, 11/7/10).

Amy emphasizes the institutional climate and subsequent demands on faculty as posing barriers to meaningful collaboration with the WC.

Kim references the larger, institutional context as well, as she questions whether these barriers are unique to the WC and WGSS or present for the whole department of Student Life (in the division of Student Affairs) in general.

It's been limited. I don't know if that's just that Student Life is not academics and academics is not Student Life and we can't figure out how they intertwine because they obviously do or if it's a prestige thing or if it's a...yeah, I don't really know exactly why. If it's just faculty are so overwhelmed and so busy with all their roles. So it's the last thing you want to do is to collaborate with a program. I don't think it's like, that any other Student Life office has a really strong academic, strong relationship with an academic department, so it's not like we're the only ones without a pair and in fact, we're probably one of the only ones that coincides which is probably a little bit unusual. It's not like [Student Activities and Leadership Development] has an academic department that they partner with, frequently, consistently, so...” (K. Fulbright, personal communication, 9/21/10).

Kim questions if the lack of collaboration is a “prestige thing” and comments that “faculty are so overwhelmed and busy with all their roles so it’s the last thing you want to do is collaborate.”
Despite institutional constraints, WGSS faculty do want to collaborate. For example, Lisa argues:

I think that we should consider doing more programming together so that we sort of can more effectively facilitate a relationship between the kinds of work that you do and the kinds of work that we do, right? So that we could co-program, sort of the translation between theory and activism, between intensely academic and making change. (L. Hogeland, personal communication, 10/1/10)

Lisa suggests that theory and activism mutually inform each other and that finding ways to translate our work to each other will enhance our mutual work. Amy further shares that she would like to “collaborate”, despite the challenges in doing so.

I really feel that there could be more ways that we could collaborate. And um...there have been different efforts but like...when I heard these discussions at NWSA (National Women’s Studies Association), what I kept hearing over and over again was how Women’s Centers had speakers series that the department, faculty would be part of, or that somehow there was some kind of collaboration. That I think would be a really good idea. Like we have a speakers series but um...I think that some of those, I think that you know, people are invited to all of them but they’re not at all as accessible. They are, I do think, there’s some like different levels at which to pitch talks. And so, if I were to go to the Women’s Center to give the talk, I'd pitch it differently than if I was giving my usual paper. And anyway, I agree. I think it would be interesting to do that kind of thing and I think that particularly in light of this budget crisis. (A. Lind, personal communication, 11/7/10).
Amy’s comments reinforce some of Lisa’s points regarding the need to “translate” to each other and underscores both the difficulty in finding ways to do this and the increased necessity to do so given the institutional climate, when both WC and WGSS—like most others—are feeling increasingly vulnerable.

Interestingly, Ann suggests that a moment of collective vulnerability might promote opportunities for such dialogue and coalition building among the collective. To have a meaningful dialogue, to have the Women’s Center and the Women’s Studies come together and be recognized equally is going to take a lot of not only enlightenment but I think it’s going to have to be the right combination of people. And it may be that it’s a good time to try to bring them together... It might be a good time to really have those conversations to see if there can be more connectivity between the two areas. (A. Brown, personal communication, 9/22/10).

If there are ways to have these conversations—both within and between the organizations, as a collective—there might be opportunities for transformation. However, finding ways to do this is challenging, considering the tools available to each organization, based on their institutional location. As participants point out, this is even more reason why such dialogues are critical now, given the institutional climate.

Summary
Collective third space is evidenced as the participants discussed the collective role WGSS and WC play in creating institutional change. Participants recognized this role to be paradoxical: the organizations are collectively resistant to and complicit in the perpetuation of institutionalized oppression. Further traces of third space identity are
seen in the organizations’ identities. Organizations assume identities based on their institutional role. As a result, WGSS and WC define themselves as the institution defines them: strictly “academic” and “activist”, respectively. Framing these identities is an either/or paradigm that does not allow for these organizations to fully embody their third space identities as “both/and”: academic and activist. Consequently, WGSS and WC necessarily “others” the other. The WC cannot recognize the work of WGSS as activism and WGSS constructs WC as “nonacademic”.

While all participants agreed that there needed to be a stronger relationship between WC and WGSS, participants consistently envisioned this relationship as complementary—further reinforcing an either/or paradigm. In considering how to strengthen the collective relationship, participants spoke of institutional barriers to doing so and the critical need to do it, nonetheless. Institutional barriers included: a “silo” mentality and structure in which organizations are pitted against one another; a climate of crisis in which threats of budget cuts and restructuring are imminent; institutional norms and values which inform organizational priorities and practices. At the same time, these very barriers also contribute to the urgency to build relationship in this context. Participants discussed the importance of building coalition in order to be effective, strategic, and supported in their collective, organizational roles, as well in their individual work lives. Finding ways to work together meaningfully offers opportunities to fully activate third space occupation and be both/and: academic/activist—as individuals, organizations, and collectively.
Chapter 7: Summary

“The heart of justice is truth telling, seeing ourselves and the world the way it is rather the way we want it to be.” (hooks, 2000; p. 23)

As an action researcher, I was committed to using my dissertation as an opportunity to create change for my community. In this context, “my community” includes other counselors, WGSS faculty, and campus-based women’s center practitioners—most of all, my own WC colleagues at UC. Therefore, as an insider-action research project (IAR), there are two separate but related projects at hand: the core project aimed at creating local knowledge and promoting change in the WC and the WGSS and the broader dissertation research meant to produce more public knowledge (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010). Because both projects examine strategies of change, the lessons learned from each translate to the other. What follows is a summary of the core project; reflections on the broader implications for counselors; and major conclusions that relate to both.

Background

As an ecological counselor, I used action research methodology to conceptualize and explore an organizational “problem”: how the UC Women’s Center might be more effective in creating substantive institutional change. To do this, I engaged my colleagues from the Women’s Center and the WGSS department to consider the role the two feminist organizations play in creating institutional change at our university, the University of Cincinnati. My research question assumes that we do, in fact, create change—or at least have a role in doing so. This is not, by any means, a new question. Interestingly, the question is raised in the literature as focused (nearly completely) on
the discipline of Women’s Studies; there is very little research on the role campus-based Women’s Centers play in creating institutional change. However, as I argue later, many of the same arguments/concerns hold true for women’s centers—though not in academic terms. Regardless of where on the continuum one falls—that feminism has been co-opted by the institution (Brown, 2000; Martin, 2000; Messer-Davidow, 2002; Patai & Koertge, 1994; Robinson, 2002; Stacey, 2001; Thorne, 2000) or that feminism continues to transform the institution in new and substantive ways (Hart, 2008; Orr & Lichtenstein, 2004; Safarik, 2003)—most all agree it is in fact a continuum and that institutionalized feminism is both complicit in and resistant to oppressive systems (Mohanty, 2006; Wiegman, 2002). The particular role institutionalized feminism has in transforming an institution is based on the specific location of those sites of feminism.

This is precisely what I took up in this study: to better understand our particular location at UC and in doing so, suggest potential transformational opportunities—not only in creating institutional change but organizational change within the WC and WGSS. Such an undertaking is complicated considering that location is deeply contextual and ever-changing. However, in order to fully appreciate both our current reality as WC and WGSS and to envision our future, this self-examination is necessary. Martin (2009) puts it nicely:

The crisis of activism (in the academy) is not that it belongs to a lost past but that we fail to recognize, value, and know what to make of the activism in our midst so as to make more of it. Unlike scanning the horizon for a practice adequate to a given critique, knowing what to make of what we are and what we can do requires theoretical elaboration (p. 842).
In some ways, it was challenging to examine both the WC and WGSS at once in this study, considering our distinct locations—one in academic affairs and one in student affairs—and subsequent varying degrees of assumed power and privilege. However, because an important aim of the study was to join our two organizations in conversation, I was so compelled. Furthermore, to continue to perpetuate an ongoing practice of conceptualizing the two as downright incommensurable in practice, we fail to interrogate institutional (as well as individual and organizational) constraints which literally keep us in our place. I reject the notion that campus-based women’s centers and Women’s Studies departments cannot and should not learn from each other in our mutual attempts to create positive change.

Drawing on an ecological counseling theoretical framework allowed me to deeply examine the dynamic interrelationships of individuals, organizations, and institutions and how they mutually inform one another. An ecological perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; 1986) posits the dynamic interrelatedness of personal, organizational, and collective dimensions and therefore provides the necessary lens through which to better understand the context of the WC. (Since I am interested in the relationship between the WC and WGSS, I use Prilleltensky’s (2006) term “collective” because of its explicit attention to the interrelationships between organizations). It was my contention at the outset of this project that my organization could be a stronger change agent if we developed and employed sustained participatory practices; further, I believed in order to do this, we must include WGSS as an important and critical partner in this change-making. I knew, from my insider-experience at the WC, that there were barriers to doing this. I suspected that these barriers were not just external but were internal, as
well—deeply rooted in the construction of our own organizational identities and cultures—and so I have attempted to tease these out through individual and group narrative. To address the problem, we must know the problem.

**Synthesis of the “core project” data**

All the participants acknowledged the paradox of institutionalization. To make sense of how this paradox plays out in the individual, organizational, and collective lived experiences at UC, I draw on the notion of “third space”. As discussed earlier, third space denotes an identity that straddles the either/or binary, so that one constitutes both/and categories of meaning. Notions of third space emerge across many disciplines as a way of understanding social (Anzaldúa, 1987; Collins, 1991; hooks, 1984), organizational (de la Pena, 2009), and national (Bhabha, 1994; Sakamoto, 1996) position. As institutional change agents, we occupy a third space location in which we are simultaneously insiders and outsiders to the institution. Brandy’s comments clearly evidence this phenomenon:

Most of our (WC) work is just that—that check, that making sure that someone’s looking and someone’s asking, constantly: that vigilance. We have to constantly be vigilant. We really need to be watching. Does the institution make good on the promises it makes women? Are they affording the opportunities we say we’re affording? (B. Turnbow; personal communication, 9/30/10).

Brandy’s shift in pronoun usage demonstrates the WC’s third space occupation and the depth to which we are insiders/outsiders to the institution: literally, we/they. As a result, the WC and WGSS both are part of the problem and part of the solution.
Working to create institutional reform from within the institution requires continuous compromise on the part of the organizations—a reconciliation of often-times conflicting identities and values. Such compromise calls for the questioning of how substantive the change-making is? Does the “change” perpetuate the dominant (institutional) ideology? Participants expressed varying levels of frustration as they processed these questions. Deb speaks of how she understands change from within and how she experiences it.

So, the question is, how do big institutions—like nations, and then on a smaller scale, like universities—how do they manage to resist change while apparently changing? So that is what I mean when I say, okay, maybe the university has changed a little bit but how has it changed? So, let’s say we have a LGBT center or we have a diversity council but has any change taken place? Will any profound change take place? And the answer is, if I’m feeling cynical today, the answer is, no—that large institutions resist change… On my good days, I believe it can happen from within. That’s the only place it can happen—from within. On my cynical days, I think it’s just an exercise in futility. We keep working and working and working for certain kinds of change and the university creeps along and makes some small alteration in its practice. Taken all together, is there change? Well, maybe. Maybe there’s been some change… And of course, I participate in that system. Drives me crazy but I participate. (D. Meem, personal communication, 9/7/10).

Deb expresses anger and frustration in how, in our institutional roles, we are both complicit in and resistant to the institutional policies that are anti-feminist.
As others also reflect on the implications of their paradoxical location, three prominent and interconnected themes emerged among the data—tension, identity politics, and legitimacy. The negotiation of multiple (third space) positionalities results in ongoing, internal tension on the individual, organizational, and collective levels. The ability and willingness to engage this tension significantly impacts one’s behavior and identity politics and is significantly determined by the ever-shifting power relations at play. The more power, the less risky it is to engage the tension and secure legitimacy. As this study shows, degrees of power and privilege are very much relative to one’s specific location or context and therefore inform if and how this third space is activated. For example, Moallem argues that the “peculiar history and location of...Women’s Studies [puts it] in a defensive mode, delaying critical engagement with its own problematic status...because it is always ‘under attack’” (2002, p. 374). Interestingly, in this context, WC participants assume much more of a “defensive mode” than WGSS participants, reflecting their unique positioning—one as a Student Affairs unit and one as an academic unit, respectively—and varying degrees of assumed power and privilege. As a result, the WC’s organizational identity is ambivalent and precarious. Reflecting and perpetuating this power differential is an underlying identity politic resulting in organizational identities constructed according to an institutionally imposed either/or binary: us/them, activist/academic. To maintain institutional legitimacy, both organizations must “play the part” and therefore, to question or destabilize our organizational identities is risky. This has major implications for the independent organizations and the collective relationship between the two, as well.

Implications for WC and WGSS
All participants agree that there needs to be a stronger relationship between the WC and WGSS. Currently, we do not know each other or fully appreciate the kinds of work each does. Unfortunately, the shared hope is a relationship that is complementary. Such a relationship will further reinforce an us/them construct, thereby leaving uninterrupted the existing power dynamics at play. In order to disrupt the power dynamic, we must question our individual, organizational, and collective assumptions; challenge the institutional terms with which we define ourselves; and engage our inner conflict. In doing so, we will activate our third space occupation and make possible the redefinition of our work in terms of both/and: both academic and activist.

If the tension inherent in third space occupation is not engaged, the third space occupation cannot be fully activated and consequently, opportunities for transformation become instead means of regulation. Rather than naming ourselves, we are named. We must find ways to embrace our inner conflicts (on the individual, organizational, and collective dimensions) if we intend to continue being a force of change in our evolving institutions. Otherwise, we will become tokenized versions of ourselves.

The act of actively engaging and negotiating this inner tension has been termed “critical consciousness” by Latin American liberation scholars (Freire, 1971; Gutierrez, 1990; Martin-Baro, 1994) and refers to an “individual’s ability to examine themselves within their life contexts, to critically analyze the dynamics of those contexts and to see themselves as actors in these contexts rather than merely as individuals who are acted on.” (McWhirter & McWhirter, 2007; p. 423). Not only should individuals build critical consciousness but so should organizations and communities (Evans, et al., 2007; Prilleltensky, et al., 2006).
This is easier said than done. To do so, requires power and legitimacy. However, if we can find ways to do this, then we—and here, I mean the WC—might resist a “defensive mode” and rather, assert ourselves in a more proactive stance. I am inspired by Orr and Lichtenstein’s (2004) examples of ways to do this:

Because we do not function as if we are under siege, we feel free to ‘teach the conflicts’ of Women’s Studies. The power to police our disciplinary objects, the authority upon which our claims are made, the conflicts and inconsistencies that characterize our disciplinary narratives, the power politics within feminist practices that both give voice and silence constituencies our theories claim to represent—all these limitations and qualifying factors become part of the curriculum (p. 11).

Although the authors speak from a Women’s Studies perspective, the example (and implication) relates to women’s centers, as well. As the authors point out, their department assumes power and legitimacy by embracing the inherent tensions within the discipline and by engaging these tensions further empowers and legitimizes their work. Of course, as they argue explicitly, the way in which power might be assumed in the first place greatly depends on one’s particular location or context.

These days, it is increasingly difficult for the WC to assume anything other than a “siege mentality” (Orr et al., 2004), in our location. Our institutional context is the University of Cincinnati, a Research I institution, with values and practices that increasingly reflect corporatized, market-driven ideology. UC is situated in Ohio, a state that recently passed legislation that significantly reduces the power of unions, with
serious cuts to education in general and higher education specifically. With performance-based budgeting, merit-based pay, growing course loads, emphasis on revenue-generating productivity, and pressure to “publish or perish”, faculty are not encouraged in any way to find ways to do academia in any other terms other than strictly defined by the institution. The WC, even more marginalized than WGSS, attempts to justify our continued existence through evaluation that does not fully capture our work nor reflect our organizational values. We count the meager number of students attending our events, track reports of sexual violence, and referrals made to other campus and community resources. While this is our reality, this reality also intensifies our need to resist it. As Chomsky (2000) poignantly argues:

Of all groups, university and college educators should be the most vocal and militant in challenging the corporatization of education by making clear that at the heart of any form of inclusive democracy is the assumption that learning should be used to expand the public good, create a culture of questioning, and promote democratic social change. Individual and social agency becomes meaningful as part of the willingness to imagine otherwise, in order to help us find our way to a more human future (p. 34).

It is up to us, as individuals working in organizations in higher education to “imagine otherwise” and create organizational cultures that foster the behaviors to which Chomsky refers, if we hope to continue to transform our institutions.

Therefore, it is imperative that we assume a different, more active stance. As Mohanty (2006) warns,
So feminists have some profound challenges ahead…in terms of generating adequate responses that disrupt business as usual…Feminist practice at many levels (daily life, collective movements and organizing, knowledge production, etc.) needs to do the necessary work that disrupts and does not reproduce the terms of domination (p. 17).

How might we do this? We must evolve as learning organizations, creating participatory practices that will sustain our own ongoing organizational development so that we might be more effective doing what we do. This involves a commitment to engaging in ongoing organizational critical consciousness building—the hard work of questioning underlying assumptions that ground our organizational ideologies and practices (Allen & Cherrey, 2000). WC participants, in particular, all spoke to the need and/or desire to engage such practices and the barriers involved in doing so. For example, this comes up in Kim’s and my conversation:

Me: What barriers exist to doing that kind of deep reflection?
Kim: Probably a lot of it is schedules and routines. It’s disruptive. Knowing that we have a set theoretical discussion time, I think is probably not something we’d all look forward to. Um…and yeah, it’s dangerous. Those are hard conversations. And we’re not set up as an academic space. And so, you know, it’s hard enough in the classroom but you know, coming together as co-workers, I think that that’s really challenging to have those discussions…

Me: You say we’re not an academic space. Do you feel like to have these kinds of discussions, it needs to be an academic space? What about an academic space makes it feel comfortable? What does that mean for us?
Kim: Well, I think that we understand ourselves to be here for students, to like grow and learn…But, inevitably we do ourselves, from the work and from each other. But at the same time, that’s not the purpose of us being here. And so, to challenge somebody in our space means something different than if you’re sitting in the classroom after all reading the same theory and that’s what we’re discussing. Obviously, personal implications come up and all that comes up in the classroom but you’re also there for a title of the course, title of the session, with the subject matter. I mean it’s all set up for that. Here, it would be yeah, just a really different atmosphere and environment. (K. Fulbright, personal communication, 9/21/10).

Interestingly, Kim equates engaging in “deep reflection” as “academic” and points out that doing so outside of an “academic space” is difficult because of the existing power dynamics. This insight both underscores the depth to which the either/or paradigm defines our organizational identities and also a critical reason we should attempt to disrupt it.

I strongly agree with Safarik’s (2003) keen assertion that “theoretical links between the sense-making that occurs in learning organizations and the consciousness-making processes used in feminist transformation of higher education…have not been fully developed.” (p. 424). In organizational efforts to create change, it is all too easy to be distracted with creating change “out there”—in the institution—while neglecting our own organizational needs. As a result, we are missing vital opportunities to transform ourselves, our organizations, and our institutions.
One strategy that will support the development of our organization as a learning organization is participatory evaluation (Kalliola et al. 2006; Lick, 2006; Limerick et al., 1994; Lines, 2005; Robinson & Cousins, 2004; Smith, 2006; Springett, 2001b).

However, recognizing the value of PE is one thing; doing it is another. Key ingredients include trust; mindfulness and deliberation; structural processes and organizational practices; commitment to taking action; and investment by organizational leaders (Gardner & Nunan, 2007; Plottu & Plottu, 2009; Preskill & Torres, 1999; Tsang, 2004). Current institutional priorities do not place great value on this sort of practice nor promote these required ingredients. Nevertheless, we must find ways to do this for ourselves—as individuals, organizations, and collectively.

In order to support the development of participatory practices aimed at promoting the WC’s evolution as a learning organization and a community of practice with WGSS (Lave and Wenger, 1991), I have created a document specifically for our organizational use. The document summarizes the findings from the research and suggests practical next steps. While the document directly addresses the unique nature of the WC, it also includes the WGSS as a critical partner in our organizational development. This is my gift to the WC and therefore, is only for us, not part of a public dissertation. At the time of this writing, I have yet to share this document with my colleagues but plan to do this before my dissertation defense, to which they all are invited.

**Broader implications for Counselors**

Why should counselors care about this project and the lessons learned? Throughout the research process, I came to conceptualize my researcher/counselor identity as similar to that of the participants—also occupying a third space. On one
hand, I was a participant, a WC staff member. On another, I was the researcher. The
themes (“tension”, “legitimacy”, “identity politics”) that emerged in the core project with
WGSS faculty and WC staff resonated with my own experience as an IAR as I
negotiated these two simultaneous, sometimes conflicting identities and the strategies I
employed in doing so. I am not alone in this experience. For example, according to
Herr and Anderson (2005),

We suggest that our obligation as researchers is to interrogate our multiple
positionalities in relationship to the question under study. Our sense is that in
making explicit the tensions we experience as researchers in our varying roles
and statuses, we have the possibility of crafting uniquely complex
understandings of the research question. In addition, we hope to avoid the blind
spots that come with unexamined beliefs (p. 44).

The authors suggest that action research demands an active third space occupation in
which the researcher intentionally and consciously enacts multiple, often-times
conflicting positionalities.

**Signs of Third Space in the Counseling Field**

This argument extends to change agents in general and counselors, more
specifically. As counselors, we occupy third space. Counselors occupy third space on
individual, organizational, and collective levels. Because of counselors’ third space
occupation, this project yields direct implications for the field of counseling. I generalize
lessons learned from both the action research process itself and the core project to the
field of counseling at individual, organizational, and collective levels.

**Individual Counselors in Third Space**
Action research (AR) emphasizes that to be effective as researchers/change agents, we must activate multiple positionalities through constant self-reflection and examination of how existing power relations impact the research/change process. The inquiry itself is concerned with process and building critical consciousness. The means becomes the end. I learned this first-hand as I facilitated this IAR.

For me, practicing my third space location was exhausting, overwhelming, and at times, paralyzing. Caring about the relationships with and among the participants as I attempted to facilitate a participatory process of inquiry impacted every imaginable decision in the research process. My research journal displays the numerous times I intentionally questioned my positioning in the project and how to proceed. For example,

*Wondering what email account I will use in my research. Should I distance my research from my work at the WC? At first, I thought yes. Now, I see using my work email account as important to my status as IAR. My research questions are embedded in my organization so why not recognize this explicitly in the way I approach it? Sending the invitation to participants from my work email grounds it as IAR, acknowledging my existing relationships with folks and the connection to my organizational work* (personal research journal, 8/6/10).

And then again, a few days later:

*Consent form: should it include my objectives for the study under the purpose? Have decided against it—concerned about lack of transparency but also see these ‘objectives’ as fluid and therefore don’t want them to define the project. This is where I’m at in the process and in my conceptualization of it—maybe not where the data is or where it will go. Want to trust the process. Should I include*
the questions in advance? Yes. Only to those interested? No, to all in case it might be deciding factor for them to participate (personal research journal, 8/17/10).

Engaging in the ongoing practice of self-reflection reminded me of my third space location and the power dynamics at play in this position. Just because AR (and EP counseling models) actively seeks to trouble the traditional relationship between researcher and participant, does not mean that those power differentials are ever eliminated—they can only be complicated and hopefully better understood by all. It is this process of complicating power relations which can in and of itself be transformative. That is, in recognizing how, as change agents, we are both complicit in and resistant to change, we make change possible. Otherwise, we perpetuate the same old patterns of behavior, without disrupting the paradigm.

For example, through ongoing critical self-reflection, I found that my position as IAR assumed both power and disempowerment, due to the context in which I worked. This realization allowed me to conceptualize the “problem” (creating and implementing participatory evaluation in my organization) in unique ways and to understand my role as change agent more fully. The privilege did not surprise me, although I continuously struggled with how to manage it ethically. I was surprised by the disempowerment I experienced in my role as IAR. I often felt silenced as a participant and although my voice was implicit throughout the research process, I did not feel like it was “loud enough” in the data. (In order to represent myself as both participant and researcher, I attempted to bring in my participant voice). Furthermore, I experienced both privilege and disempowerment as I searched for meaningful ways to integrate the research
process/participatory evaluation into the everyday practice of my organization. As an inside-action researcher, I could not figure out how to share my research with my colleagues. I attribute this difficulty to both internal and external factors. First, I struggled with my privilege and in my careful efforts to negotiate ethical considerations related to my multiple positionalities (researcher, supervisor, supervisee, colleague, friend), I realize I might have missed opportunities to work differently with participants and I take personal responsibility for the decisions I made regarding this. On the other hand, I felt frustrated and disempowered as I searched for existing opportunities or structures within my organization that might facilitate or support my sharing of the project.

Engaging an action research methodology challenged me to intentionally position myself in third space occupation and to embrace this location as I attempted to facilitate a change process with my organization. I found this challenge to be not only personally rewarding (in that I grew so much as a counselor, scholar, researcher!) but also helpful in my meaning-making of our organizational and collective condition.

**Counseling Organizations in Third Space**

Counselor Education programs that espouse an EP orientation serve as an example of organizations in the counseling field that occupy third space. There is a growing body of literature on the infusion of curricular standards and professional commitments to social justice into educational practice. For example, the expanding literature provides guiding principles (Goodman et al, 2004); suggested skills for creating multisystemic change (McWhirter et al, 2007; Prilleltensky & Nelson, 2002); practical examples (Vera & Speight, 2003; 2007), and personal reflections of counselor
educators as they attempt to infuse social justice values into their training programs and pedagogy (Goodman et al, 2004). However, while the framework is there, supported by ethical guidelines, curriculum standards, and to some degree, professional legitimacy, counseling training programs still struggle to fully translate social justice and EP theory into educational practice.

Instead, the field’s renewed commitment to addressing larger, social issues has been limited to attempts to integrate multiculturalism into training curricula by teaching students to be culturally sensitive in therapeutic and testing contexts (Pieterse, et. al, 2009; Vera & Speight, 2003, 2007). Unfortunately, these attempts are insufficient in effectively addressing social inequalities and oppression and perhaps, are even detrimental in preparing future helpers. Multiculturalism, as it has been positioned in the field, is problematic in that it is essentialist and narrowly defined (Horne & Mathews, 2007). Training programs generally offer one course in order to meet accreditation standards yet fail to fully integrate its principles into all core courses and the overall curriculum, not to mention the pedagogy (Piederse, 2009). Moreover, this one course tends to be the one in which social systems as a whole are addressed and discussed, so that social justice work is further marginalized and thereby dismissed.

This struggle (or tension!) in the field of Counselor Education is a sign of third space occupation. As EP programs seek to adopt EP orientations, they are faced with the challenge of having to reconcile often times conflicting institutional and social priorities. For example, institutions impact the ability of programs to practice EP through the institutional mission, hiring practices, tenure processes (and requirements) and student recruitment (Goodman et al, 2004; McWhirter & McWhirter, 2007). State and
federal legislation also affect educational practices and training through funding and financial aid regulations. Training and educational curricula are determined in part by the accreditation boards which dictate curricular standards and the faculty who help to create internship and practicum opportunities. Other noted challenges shared by those committed to effectively teaching EP include: 1) effectively power-sharing with students that are ultimately responsible to and accountable to faculty, 2) faculty positioning themselves as vulnerable to students while also knowledgeable and therefore respected, and 3) evaluating training effectiveness (Goodman, et. al, 2004; Kiselica, 2004; McWhirter & McWhirter, 2007). These challenges—on various levels—serve as signs of third space occupation.

**A Counseling Collective in Third Space**

Collectively, social justice counselors also occupy third space. In many ways, social justice counseling has secured some degree of professional legitimacy in the field; in other ways, it still exists in the margins. For example, recently, Counselors for Social Justice (CSJ), a division of the American Counseling Association, collectively agreed to reject the proposed definition of counseling due to the exclusion of explicit commitment to social justice and advocacy. The fact that there is a disagreement within the field as to the very definition of what constitutes counseling demonstrates a third space occupation—social justice counselors are both working within the field and are also outsiders to it.

Interestingly, just as I was wrapping up the data analysis portion of the dissertation, there was an interesting and thought-provoking exchange on the Counselors for Social Justice (CSJ) electronic mailing list about this very topic.
Hunsaker (2011) argued “there has been a gaping lack of critical feedback. As a community of members devoted to social justice, I would like to encourage and challenge you to begin soliciting critical feedback in upcoming publications and as part of events.” This suggestion sparked much debate on the listserv, much of which centered on the fact that the movement experiences significant critique already, from the larger counseling field. As a member of this collective, I drew immediate parallels between that debate and my dissertation research. I understand the resistance to the call for critical analysis since in many ways, social justice counseling is still on the margins of the field, attempting to secure professional legitimacy. At the same time, as suggested by this project, if we collectively fail to build critical consciousness, we will fail in our efforts to promote social justice, at any level.

This defensive stance and fear of engaging critical analysis is a sign of third space occupation, but one that has not been fully activated or embraced. To be effective as social justice counselors, I agree with Hunsaker (2011) that we must be willing and committed to engage in critical reflection.

**Working it Out: Third Space Strategies for Counselors**

How might counselors and counselor educators work for change from a third space occupation? First, as the core project illustrates, there needs to be an awareness of third space occupation. To gain this awareness, drawing on EP as a theoretical framework is critical. The usefulness of EP for counselors is in its elucidation of ways in which we occupy third space. By emphasizing the dynamic ways that ecological dimensions interact to create meaning, there is an assumed appreciation for the complex ways in which power operates in these relationships. It is the nature of power
that forges third space, so to pay attention to power is to pay attention to third space. Action Research is one strategy or methodology that translates EP into practice in a way that activates our third space location. There are three key areas of emphasis to note in translating EP into practice: process-orientation; contextualization; and critical consciousness.

**Process-orientation**

According to EP, it is as much about the process as it is the product (or treatment outcome); as a result, much attention should be paid to the helping relationship. Traditionally, the helper is positioned as authority, expert, treatment provider. Instead, according to this perspective, the participant is valued as powerful and full of agency. As such, the helping relationship is constituted more as a collaborative partnership than as a hierarchal counselor-client relationship in order to facilitate a participatory process. It is recognized, from this perspective, that such a participatory process—in and of itself—is potentially transformative.

As an ecological counselor working to promote organizational change, I gained invaluable lessons about creating and implementing participatory processes of change. In many ways, what was intended to be a participatory evaluation was limited in its participatory nature. Indeed, from the outset, the project was meant to serve as a “pre-step” (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010) to an iterative participatory evaluative cycle, setting the stage for sustained participation. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy to point out the level of “participation”. My colleagues’ participation was solely limited to the two clearly-identified stages of data collection—the interviews and the group reflection. Even these limited opportunities for participation did not yield overwhelming participation: there
were seven interviews (four out of four WC staff and three of six WGSS faculty) and four participants (two WC staff and two WGSS faculty) in attendance at the group reflection. In considering how to effectively facilitate a participatory change process, the implications for this research speak directly to counselors and change agents, in general. In their discussion of “token participation”, Bess et al. (2009) suggest:

To move beyond tokenism, we need to understand better how to enter into and maintain collaborative partnerships making visible the effective (what [we] know) and the affective (the experience and feelings) environments by building a reflective environment (Prilleltensky & Prilleltensky, 2006) in which values—such as participation, helping, caring, social justice, and empowerment—are explicitly rather than implicitly promoted and linked to both process and outcome goals for personal, relational, and community wellness (p.147).

Following the authors’ call, how might we “understand better how to enter into and maintain collaborative partnerships”?

I argue, as I learned from facilitating this IAR, that to gain such understanding it is essential to fully contextualize the problem so that the intersecting ecological levels that inform it might be appreciated; otherwise, the problem identification falls short, as does the planned intervention and intended partnerships. Moreover, in the process of contextualization, it is necessary to place ourselves, as helpers, in this context as well. Action research demonstrates the need to reposition ourselves as helpers and change agents in order to facilitate processes that foster transformation.

**Contextualization**
Understanding the ecological perspective and the way in which specific ecological dimensions intersect allows for the contextualization of a problem. Contextualization is the necessary first step in problem identification. We must know what we’re up against. Otherwise, we’re just band-aiding the problem and in doing so, perpetuating it through our own complicity (Toporek & Reza, 2001). Drawing on the ecological perspective, I was able to gain a deeper understanding of what it means (to individual participants, organizations, and the institution) for WGSS and WC to be located within the institution, as change agents. As an inside-action researcher, I was committed to remaining aware of my own position within this context and how this position reflected and perpetuated the status quo and the implications this had on the research/change process.

Because I engaged in ongoing self-reflection, I came to a deeper understanding of our context. Prilleltensky, et al.’s (2007) comment resonated with me as I made sense of my ecological counseling and insider-action research: “all of a sudden, it is no longer the sanctity of the relationship between counselor and client that is the sole refractor of ethical concerns, but the very context within which that relationship is situated” (p. 20). In other words, in studying the personal, one gains a perspective on the political. If we, as social justice counselors, are going to effectively bring about multisystemic change, we must be aware of how our own positioning (as counselor, researcher, educator) in the counseling relationship (with individuals, organizations, communities) both shapes and is shaped by the context. Reconceptualizing our role as change agents in relationship with those we serve demands an imperative step in the counseling or change process: building critical consciousness. Engaging in the practice
of critical consciousness exposes our blind spots and illuminates the problem—in all its contextual complexities—in new ways. This was certainly true for me, as I facilitated this IAR project.

**Critical Consciousness**

Critical consciousness plays a central role in change making processes. In order to effect change, one must engage in ongoing power analysis and critical self-reflection, which together promote action. This set of intentional, active, and participatory practices constitutes critical consciousness. McWhirter et al. (2007), agree:

Critical consciousness requires an ongoing commitment on the part of the therapist (or the faculty supervisor, instructor, or researcher), to better understand the causes, dynamics, and consequences of oppression, privilege, power and the context in which the clients (or the student or the research participants) actually carry out their lives, as well as a commitment to act on that awareness… critical consciousness changes the way a person views the world, the person’s sense of self in the world and the person’s agency for transforming the reality in which he or she lives (p. 423).

Building critical consciousness demands taking a hard look at oneself and ways in which one both supports and resists change. If we fail to work towards critical consciousness, we will fail in our change-making attempts.

As an individual counselor/inside-action researcher facilitating this project, I learned first-hand the importance of engaging in constant power analysis and critical self-reflection. When I neglected these practices, I came to realize that I failed to facilitate the kind of change process I intended, instead perpetuating the very power
dynamics I sought to dismantle (positioning myself as expert/researcher and my colleagues as research subjects).

This holds true for individuals, organizations, communities (McWhirter et al., 2007; Prilleltensky, 2006). For organizations and collectives to be effective institutional change agents, it is necessary to evolve as learning communities (Senge, 1996) and communities of practice (Lave et al., 1991). Central to this evolution is developing organizational and collective critical consciousness. Participatory evaluation provides one strategy that directly builds critical consciousness and moreover, promotes more strategic and effective organizational practice.

Conclusion

Change agents occupy third space. Our third space occupation results from intentionally positioning ourselves to create change within a system. Whether as professional feminists, action researchers, or social justice counselors, we are all working for change from a position of both insider and outsider due to the complex ways in which ecological dimensions shape our particular position. In our efforts to create change, it is imperative that we continuously disrupt the power dynamics at play so that we don’t, in our complicity, perpetuate the problem or injustice we intend to work against. Through critical consciousness, change agents in general potentially evolve as individual change agents, learning organizations, and communities of practice, thereby facilitating change processes that are, in and of themselves, truly transformative.

Participatory evaluation, a form of action research, provides one promising strategy in fostering organizational critical consciousness and supports the evolution of
organizations as learning communities (Senge, 1996) and communities of practice (Lave et al., 1991). In order for organizations to thrive as productive, transformative, active change agents, it is necessary to embrace and continuously reflect on their third space location and the conflicts and paradoxes that result from that location. It is this process of continual critique that promises transformation. I return once again to Anzaldua (1987) who so beautifully captures the essence of what I mean, as she writes from her own third space, the Borderland:

*The work of mestiza consciousness is to break down the subject-object duality that keeps her a prisoner and to show in the flesh and through the images in her work how duality is transcended. The answer to the problem between the white race and the colored, between males and females, lies in healing the split that originates in the very foundation of our lives, our culture, our language, our thoughts. A massive uprooting of dualistic thinking in the individual and collective consciousness is the beginning of a long struggle but one that could, in our best hopes, bring us to the end of rape, of violence, of war* (p. 101-102).


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253-272.


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Appendix A

Invitation to Participate in a Research Study
Department of Women, Gender and Sexuality Studies and the Women’s Center
Principal Investigator: Amy Howton
Dissertation Advisor: Ellen Cook, PhD; Counselor Education

(Working) Title of Study: Institutionalization of Feminism in Higher Education: A Case Study

Introduction: You are invited to participate in an action research study. Before agreeing to participate, it is important that the following explanation of the proposed procedures be read and understood. It describes the purpose, procedures, risks, and benefits of the study. It also describes the right to withdraw from the study at any time. It is important to understand that no guarantee or assurance can be made as to the results of the study.

Purpose: I am curious about the implications of the institutionalization of feminism in higher education. Has it been co-opted by the institution? How are feminist individuals and organizations both constrained by and resist the institutional practices that are anti-feminist? Central research questions of this inquiry include:

- How do feminist faculty and staff in higher education make meaning of their professional, feminist identity?
  - Do you see yourself as a feminist? An activist?
  - What does it mean to you to work for WGSS/WC? Do you consider this a feminist/activist organization? Why/why not?

- How does the institutional context shape the way professional feminists work to transform the institution?
  - What role does WGSS/WC have in creating change at UC? What role, if any, should it/they have?
  - In what ways, if any, is WGSS/WC constrained and/or empowered by their location at UC?

As an action research project, the purpose of the study is to: 1) deepen our understanding of the complex ways in which institutional change occurs at our institution; 2) set the stage for meaningful collaboration in the future development and implementation of change strategies; 3) inform ongoing attempts to make meaning of our organizations’ work and impact on our university.

Project Overview: Staff and faculty that work in the WC and WGSS will be asked to participate in individual interviews. Interviews will be semi-structured and will last approximately one hour. The interviews will occur in a space identified by the interviewee and all interviews will be recorded.

Following compilation of interview results, research participants will be invited to participate in a 1.5 hour group reflection meeting. This meeting will provide an opportunity for participants to react to findings and themes; share experiences; and discuss any other concerns or ideas that participants feel are relevant to the discussion. The group meeting will be recorded.
**Duration:** Your participation in this research study will last for approximately one to three hours depending on whether you choose to participate in only the interview, only the group meeting, or both the interview and the group meeting.

**Procedures:**
1. If you agree to participate in an interview, please contact Amy Howton at [Amy.Howton@uc.edu](mailto:Amy.Howton@uc.edu) or 556-0173 to set up a time and location.
2. By agreeing to participate in an interview, you are not agreeing to participate in the group reflection, although you will be invited to it.
3. Invitations to the group reflection will be sent out through email, regardless if you participated in an interview.

**Risks/Discomforts:** Risks or discomfort from participating in this research study are not anticipated. Some individuals participating in any component of the research project may experience minimal emotional discomfort as it relates to the sharing of personal experiences. This discomfort should not exceed what is expected under normal daily conditions.

**Benefits:** There are no direct personal benefits to participants; however, it is the explicit aim of the research to generate changes in practice that benefit both individual participants, organizations, and the university as a whole.

**Payment:** You will not receive any payment for your participation in any portion of this study.

**Confidentiality:** Every effort will be made to maintain the confidentiality of your personal reflections, during both the interview and/or the group meeting. You will not be identified by name in any publication related to this research study, unless you choose otherwise. All data (digital audio, transcripts) will be kept on a password-protected computer in Amy Howton’s computer for 3 years. Any paper documents regarding the research data will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the investigator’s office. Only the investigator will have access to your data.

**Questions:** If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact me directly at [Amy.Howton@uc.edu](mailto:Amy.Howton@uc.edu) or 556-0173. You may also contact my dissertation advisor, Ellen Cook, PhD at [Ellen.Cook@uc.edu](mailto:Ellen.Cook@uc.edu).

**Voluntary participation:** Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are free to stop at any time. Your willingness to participate in an interview and/or the group meeting indicates your consent to participate in this research study. Please keep a copy of this Information Sheet for your records.
Appendix B  Interview Guide

Interview Guide: How the institution is shaped by and shapes feminist activism.

This study will bring together feminist staff and faculty to collaboratively examine our experience of feminism in our professional roles at the university in order to: 1) deepen our understanding of the complex ways in which institutional changes occurs at our institution; 2) set the stage for meaningful collaboration in the future development and implementation of change strategies; 3) inform ongoing attempts to make meaning of our (the Women’s Center’s) work and impact on our university.

To make meaning of institutional context, it is helpful to analyze individuals’ life and work narratives, as representative of the interactional relationships between individual, organization and institutional meaning-making (Safarik, 2003; Howe, 2000; Laslett & Thorne, 1997). Therefore, this study will use narrative inquiry to explore feminist faculty and staff’s meaning-making of their professional role as feminists in an institution of higher education.

Research Questions

I am curious about the implications of the institutionalized legitimization of feminism. Has it been co-opted by the institution? How are feminist individuals and organizations both constrained by and resist the institutional practices that are anti-feminist? How are WCs and WGSS similar and different in their meaning-making of their institutional location? While all these questions frame this inquiry, the research questions of this inquiry are:

- Informed consent:
  - Introduction and description of the study: Why?
    - Personal reasons:
      - bridging my worlds
      - insider action research
    - Professional: directly informs my work at WC
  - Confidentiality
    - Limits of confidentiality in action research: purpose of AR and how it impacts “confidentiality”
    - Research process: Interview; group reflection; Blackboard discussion group
    - Participant Identity: how do you wish to be identified?
      - To the group/each other?
        - Outlook calendar
        - Blackboard participation
        - Group reflection acknowledgements
      - To the world? In publication, etc.
- Don’t have to make a final decision about identification NOW—at any point, can change your mind. We just have to make sure we are communicating clearly about this. I will check in with you at every step of data collection/analysis about this.
- Introduce yourself:
What is your relationship to the department/center and your relationship to the university?
  - How many years have you been here?
  - What is your role?

How do feminist faculty and staff in higher education make meaning of their professional, feminist identity?
  - Do you see yourself as a feminist? An activist?
  - What does it mean to you to work for WGSS/WC? Do you consider this a feminist organization? Why/why not?
  - In what ways, if any, are you constrained and/or empowered by the boundaries of your professional work?

How does the institutional context shape the way professional feminists work to transform the institution?
  - What role does WGSS/WC have in creating change at UC? What role, if any, should it/they have?
  - What does WGSS/WC mean to UC? What would be missing if it/they did not exist?
  - In what ways, if any, is WGSS/WC constrained and/or empowered by their location at UC?

Any afterthoughts, feel free to email me or post them to Blackboard, if you decide to join.
Appendix C: Group Reflection Invitation

Dear WGSS staff and faculty,

As you may know, I am working on my dissertation on the topic of institutionalized feminism. I have completed the individual interviews and now invite each of you to attend a group reflection meeting, during which I will share some emerging themes from these interviews, in hopes of facilitating a larger conversation among participants. To best accommodate those of you who might be interested in attending this 1.5 hour meeting, I ask that you let me know which time works best for you, from the times listed below by Friday. I’ve attached an informational sheet to provide more detail about my project. If you have any questions at all, please let me know.

I sincerely hope that you can make it—the interviews were really interesting and I hope that this meeting will provide interview participants with an opportunity to engage with each other and with other WGSS and WC staff and faculty on this topic. Lisa and Deb participated in the interviews and have given me permission to “out” them, so please feel free to talk with them about the project, too. All the current WC staff participated, as well. It promises to be a great conversation, with coffee and refreshments provided.

Monday, December 6: 10-11:30; 12-1:30; 2-3:30

Tuesday, December 7: 10-11:30; 12:1:30; 2:3:30

Sincerely,

Amy Howton
Appendix D

Group Reflection Reminders

Hello, WGSS & WC!

I'm writing to remind you that we'll be meeting on Monday from 12-1:30 in 4614 French to reflect on our feminist work at UC. Snacks and coffee will be provided.

Please bring some kind of artwork that represents how you understand yourself as a WGSS/WC staff/faculty. It can be anything: a textile, an image or photograph, a drawing, a poem, a metaphor. "Artwork" can be as broad as you need it to be.

I really look forward to our time together.

Sincerely,
Amy

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Hello, all.

It looks like **Monday, December 6 from 12-1:30** works best for those that have responded to the invitation. The meeting is open, so please feel free to come, even if you haven’t responded. Since it is scheduled over lunchtime, I’ll have some snacks and coffee. I’ll get back to you with a location a little closer to time.

I really look forward to this conversation!

Sincerely,
Amy