

Brief Encounter with the Taos Institute

September 2022



Surfing the Liminal

by [Chris Hoff](#), [Family Therapist](#) and Taos Institute Associate

This is the sacred space where the old world is able to fall apart, and a bigger world is revealed. If we don't encounter liminal space in our lives, we start idealizing normalcy. -Richard Rohr

What is Liminal space? What role does it play in the migration of identities, communities, and worlds? And what might support us when traversing these spaces?

My role as a family therapist (among other roles) is a second career for me. Prior to the transition to therapy and consulting, I was an entrepreneur. I started and grew a technology staffing company to a large enough size that I was able to sell it and embark on the journey I am currently on. It was in this transition, from entrepreneur to family therapist, that I became fascinated with what is commonly known as liminal space.

Before discovering any social constructionist ideas, I had my own experience of identity migration and destabilization. It happened when I exited my business and started graduate school. In this effort I left one set of meaning for another. The problem was that all my identity at the time was wrapped up in the entrepreneur identity and life.

In the graduate school I attended we didn't do any actual therapy, until we were a year into the program. This created all sorts of problems for me because I had left one identity (Chris the entrepreneur) for another (Chris the family therapist). But because I had not seen anybody as a therapist for a year, and hadn't settled into any new identity, I experienced intimately what I now know as liminal space.

I have come to believe that my role as a family therapist is largely walking with folks as they navigate liminal space, either voluntarily or by imposition. I also believe that one of the primary skills needed as we embark on the collaboration, dialogue, and worldmaking required of our challenging present, is knowledge and tolerance of liminal space. In this effort I have become quite interested in *speculative structures* to help in the embracing of the uncertainty required in these efforts.

I understand some social constructionist thinkers might be leery of any relational structures, but I believe speculative structures, like future scenarios, provide a needed methodology or map for the *collective adventure* of traversing liminal space. They are a mode of storytelling to help us deal with the uncertainty that is part and parcel of liminal space. They are ripe for collaboration as they are an actor's craft rather than a director's craft. They make space for failure. The narrative is created together rather than prescribed. And finally, it provides a space to work out possible predictions of experiences. Which would help in the effort of continuing forward in this hard work, rather than turning back to more familiar territory.

I eventually settled into my new identity of family therapist and have had an amazing experience along the way. This all was made possible because I entered and moved through liminal space, with a lot of help.

