

Learn or die: An autoethnography of ECR identities in queer time

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Queer time speaks to those who live in different rhythms. As ECRs (early career researchers), who are, by turns, too feminist, too queer, too old, too young, or too brown for normative conceptualisations of the ECR; queer time may help us understand, and reimagine, the performative, political and pedagogical possibilities of being an ECR. The increasingly used category of 'early career researcher' has an evolutionist ring to it. An ECR is typically conceptualised as a specific career phase, usually extending to 5 years post-doctorate, during which 'new' academics learn what it means to be part of the academy. The identity of ECR is thus conceptualised with a particularly salient temporal dimension and positioned as a *becoming*; an identity that new academics will, through progress and development, transcend in time. These seemingly neutral notions of 'progress' and 'development' toward some other (assumed) more 'ideal' academic identity (Lund, 2012), however, erase or marginalise the ways in which 'different' or non-normative identities are targeted with institutional and personal violence because of racism, sexism, or heterosexism. In order to both understand the pain of erasure for non-normative ECRs and the political possibilities of being 'different' in the academy, we turn to queer time.

Temporality and time have been continual and intimate concerns of queer theory, that help to understand the experiences of those whose identities are lived in different rhythms. Queer identities have long been positioned as 'backwards'; as a 'drag on civilisation' (Love, 2009: 6) and positioned outside "the quotidian temporal rhythms" of family (McCallum & Tuhkanen, 2011: 8) and capitalism (Freeman, 2010). Queer time, therefore, is often positioned in opposition to "the institutions of family, heterosexuality, and reproduction" (Halberstam, 2006: 1). Alternatively, queer time is characterised by lives that disrupt norms of gender and sexuality and are indeterminate, unfixed, imprecise, and refuse to reproduce normative notions of progress, development, and longevity. Drawing on the notion of queer time, we engage in a collaborative autoethnography to explore our embodied experiences as ECRs and reflect on how multiple lines of our identity, including our shared identities as middle class women and our divergences in age, ethnicity, familial status, and sexuality, shaped our embodied experiences of being an ECR. Ultimately, we use queer time to reconceptualise the learning of academic identities not in terms of progress, development, and reproduction, but in terms of being out of step, out of place, and, ultimately, productive of alternatives within the academy.