

Liminality in Early Career Academic Identities: A Life History Approach

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Abstract : This paper addresses experiences of liminality in the early career phase of academia. Liminality is understood as a process moving from one state (in this case of being non-academic) to another (of being academic), caught between or moving in and out these modes of being. Drawing on life-history methods, a group of academics jointly reflected on experiences of the early career. Primarily focused on the theme of imposter syndrome at this career stage, the authors identified feelings of non-belonging and lack of fit with the academy, tracing the biographical, political, and affective dimensions of such responses. Uncertainty around status within seemingly impermeable hierarchies and barriers to progression in combination with our intersectional positionings shaped by sexism, racism, ableism, and classism, led to experiences of liminality, having not yet fully achieved the desired and potentially illusionary status of established academic. Findings are contextualised within the authors' contrasting disciplinary, departmental, and institutional settings against a backdrop of neoliberalised academia. The paper thereby contributes nuanced understandings of early-career academic identities at a time when this career stage is ever more ill-defined, extended, precarious and uncertain, exposing ongoing impacts of inequities in the contemporary academic milieu.

Keywords : early career, identities, intersectionality, liminality

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