

Internship research report

Woman of color in Dutch Academia



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(Salazar Volkmann, N.D.)

Carried out with:

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Internship Report

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Preface

My internship, which aimed at researching the experiences of Woman of Color in Dutch Academia, took place from the 1st of September 2021 until the beginnings of February this year, though its follow up continues today. The opportunity was provided to me by one of my lecturers at Campus Fryslân, Sepideh Yousefzadeh. Since it was conducted independently, there was no external organization involved nor a supervisor outside the University. Hence, why a section on the internship organization has not been included in this report.

Six women of colour, working in various Academic Institutions of the Netherlands, were interviewed for this research internship, with a focus on their experiences with both research and teaching. The importance of this subject and the added value of the research results was a major driver for this project to be conducted. By initiating this work I hope to contribute to a better understanding of the intersectional experiences that women of color are forced to face on a daily basis when working in the academic field. Hopefully, serving as a consequential detonator to improve work environments and fully eradicate the discriminatory practices that continue to be present today. Later this year, the research was presented at the GWO (Gender, Work and Organizations) Conference of 2022 in an online panel, where additional feedback was provided by those attending the panel.

This internship has been an inspiring learning experience for me and has given me a better idea of what career field I would like to pursue in the future. In addition, I am grateful for all that I have learnt throughout and my greatest thank you to my supervisor Sepideh Yousefzadeh, who not only guided me through this process, but also encouraged me to look beyond that.

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Introduction

As I have progressed through the Global Responsibility and Leadership (GRL) Program, I have discovered a strong affinity for subjects that strongly support my values. Particularly in courses offered by Sepideh Yousefzadeh such as “Diversity, Intersectionality and Global Health” or “Responsible Activism and Global Health”. I was therefore really excited about the prospect of undertaking research under her supervision after hearing her proposal. When starting the process, I was given the option to select between two themes. Finally, I chose to concentrate on the experiences of Woman of Color (WOC) in Dutch Academia. The research period ran from September 1, 2021, to the start of February, requiring a total of 170 hours of work, divided across tasks including performing a literature review, creating a questionnaire, interviewing participants, as well as transcribing, coding and analysing the results.

The learning outcomes of this project were divided into three main points with additional practical skills. (1) I now possess a better understanding of what components come into play when researching the experiences of women of color in Dutch Academia. (2) I was able to carry out research independently and know how to critically reflect on the results. And lastly, (3) I understand how the term ‘Woman of Color’ has a powerful but complex nature that cannot be overgeneralized. Later in the report I elaborate on each of these points.

Finally, throughout this project I also gained experience in carrying out research independently, as well as improving my qualitative research skills, and greatly broadening my theoretical knowledge on subjects such as intersectionality, racism, sexism, as well as discrimination in the academic field or in the Netherlands, among others. All while applying previous knowledge from the GRL Bachelor and my sociology major, which I was following alongside this research.

In the first section ‘About the Internship’, I will describe the research project itself, as well as methods and results. Followed by the second section titled, ‘Evaluation’, where I will give insights into my learning outcomes, internship contribution, and my perspective on the usefulness of my bachelor

About the internship

In this section, I will elaborate on the research process during my internship explaining the methodology I followed as well as the tasks I performed. Next, I will describe the research results, to finally talk about the output and my experience as a participant in the GWO 2022 Conference.

On the assignment

“What are the experiences of women of color in Dutch Academia, in research and teaching, and how does their identity play a role?” is the question I aimed to answer in order to create a better understanding towards the lives of WOC working in such Institutions and the role that their intersecting identities play within this dynamic. For the research itself, six women of color who, at the time, worked for various Academic Institutions in the Netherlands, were interviewed. The interviews mostly centred on their prior experiences with both teaching and research. While their answers varied significantly, big overlaps were found in all the interviews conducted. The project's results led to the discovery of some of the challenging realities for women of color working in Dutch academia.

The research process also sparked a discussion about the ambiguous boundaries within the term "woman of color" itself. And the importance of recognizing these nuances when carrying out this research.

Tasks

It took around 170 hours in total to complete the research between September 2021, and the beginning of February 2022. The duties included conducting a literature review, developing a questionnaire, speaking with participants in interviews, transcribing, coding, and analysing the data. All with the objective of writing an initial paper with these results.

Results

The stories that came forward from the interviews, showcased a range of varying experiences in Dutch Academia, going from pleasant and continuously self-improving working environments to uncovering both overt and covert sexism and racism towards these women at work. During the coding process, some of the main subjects that came up included behaviours towards women of color such as stereotyping and gaslighting, as well as various other 'microaggressions', heightening social pressure to conform as a result of more intense sentiments of job insecurity.

Research outputs

As a research output I wrote a paper that describes this research and its outputs with a critical viewpoint in relation to my positionality. From there I also developed a presentation showcasing the results of the research (see appendix 1). However, I did not write this research, for it only to serve me as a great learning experience, but also with the hopes that it might start a conversation about this subject and positively influence the working environment for women of color working in such Institutions. I therefore expect to further develop my research and potentially continue to focus my career on similar subjects in the future.

One of the follow-up examples that sparked from this internship is my participation in the GWO Conference of this year. The Gender, Work and Organization (GWO) Journal and its conference have served as an international forum for gender studies concerns since 1994. To support ongoing "discussion and analysis of gender relations, the structuring of gender, and gender in organizations," several places have been developed. Bringing together scholars, students, workers, leaders, and social actors committed to the GWO's values and goals from a variety of nations, organizations, and institutions. The Conference took place in Bogotá (Colombia) this year for the first time in Latin America. With the help of Sepideh and my research I attended this year's Conference online. With that, I had the opportunity of receiving feedback on my research from other attendees in the online panel.

Evaluation

In this section of the internship report I will elaborate on the learning outcomes of my internship, both on a professional- and personal level, as well as the competencies I developed throughout this experience. In addition, I will reflect on my potential contribution with this research and what I hope to achieve with the outcomes.

Learning Outcomes

Learning Outcome 1. *Have a better understanding of what components come into play when researching the experiences of woman of color in Dutch Academia.*

Throughout this research I learnt to view race and gender through the lens of social constructionism, the notion that everything that is perceived as reality, is (partially) socially situated (Weinberg, 2014). It is therefore that context is so important. To give an example, racism works differently in the Netherlands than in other countries with other cultures, for instance: the Dutch are often (internationally) portrayed as a liberalized open-minded and sexually freed country. However, despite the mirage of inclusion it portrays, the presence of phenomena such as homo nationalism put emphasis on national identity building and the exclusion of certain groups (Wekker, 2016). Dutch racism can be traced back to both the Dutch colonial past alongside its connection to today's right wing populist parties, and the 'liberal' idea of protecting Dutch sexual freedom by creating an idea of the non-progressive outsider. Both ideas contrast but contribute to another and help portray the complexity of Dutch racism.

Learning Outcome 2. *Being able to carry out research independently and know how to critically reflect on the results*

In order to carry out research one must know how to manage their time effectively as well as knowing how to work independently. While I had guidance from my supervisor all throughout this project, I was expected to carry out the work by myself and was therefore faced with

circumstances where I had to take various decisions that would determine the outcome of my work.

Learning Outcome 3. *I understand how the term 'Woman of color' has a powerful but complex nature that cannot be overgeneralized.*

Within this project I came across the nuances within the category of individuals I was trying to research. "Woman of color" refers to a highly diverse set of people, whose experiences cannot be overgeneralized. It is also a term that carries strong cultural connotations. I've spent a lot of time attempting to comprehend the meaning of this notion during my investigation. What are the term's limitations, and how do I personally relate to it? Who actually qualifies as a person of color? I developed a more organized conception of the idea in conjunction with the viewpoints of the women who participated in this study's interviews, which helped me comprehend and contextualize the subtleties of my findings. WOC may be interpreted as "non-white," but who is to define what that entails? The phrase goes beyond skin color, is intergenerational in nature, and depends on context as well as culture. The fact that we may unintentionally obscure numerous distinct experiences of some of the individuals it concerns, is a key flaw in these words. However, in unity lies great power and by uncovering similar experiences within a very wide range of individuals, we may shed light on a greater systematic problem that affects many. Emphasizing the value of this research.

Besides the previously mentioned learning outcomes, I also developed various practical skills that will continue to be helpful in my future career. These I will present in bullets points below.

- Problem-solving
- Leadership
- Communication
- Critical thinking
- Practical thinking
- Time management skills

Contribution Reflection

As priorly stated, I hope to be able to contribute to better working environments for women of color in Academia, and the eradication of discriminatory practices in such Institutions.

Usefulness of Bachelor Knowledge and Skills

My internship has benefited from the knowledge I obtained while pursuing my GRL bachelor's degree, particularly the knowledge I acquired from my classes with Sepideh Yousefzadeh. Along with my expertise, I pursued a minor in sociology at the University of Amsterdam, which gave me excellent resources and a large bibliography to enhance the results of my research. Since it introduced me to topics I find incredibly intriguing and deeply care about, this experience also benefited my creative thinking and personal growth. For this internship, more general courses like Academic Communication and Qualitative Methods were also crucial because creating reports and managing projects require strong communication, academic writing, and applicable research abilities.

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Salazar Volkman, Mayra. (n.d.). Indigenous right campaign. Retrieved at: <https://www.salazoodles.co.uk/>

Weinberg, Darin. (2014). Contemporary social constructionism: Key themes.

Wekker, Gloria. (2016). White innocence : paradoxes of colonialism and race. Duke University Press.

Appendices

Appendix 1.1

(Research outcomes presentation Women of Color in Dutch Academia)

Woman of Color in Dutch Academia

Intership research outcomes



(Salazar Volmann, n.d.)

Slavery and academia are spaces in which we were never meant to survive. And some of us didn't. But those of us who are still here, we try to use our dreams, create and follow maps left for us from the past. We do this to persist here.

(Jones, 2018)

“What are the experiences of women of colour in Dutch Academia, in research and teaching, and how does their identity play a role?”

DISCLAIMER:

Woman of Color, a culturally charged term that is context dependent



(Salazar Volmann, n.d.)

The Dutch Context:

COLONIAL PAST (Jones, 2007)

HOMONATIONALISM (Puar, 2007)

DUTCH WHITE INNOCENCE (Wekker, 2016)



Methodology



Qualitative research preparation

Extensive literature review



Data Collection

Six interviews with Women of Color in Academia were conducted



Data Analysis

Through coding the data results were analysed



Results:

microaggressions

(In)visibility

pressure to conform

gaslighting

Stereotyping

"Being labelled as angry and aggressive is a fear. "

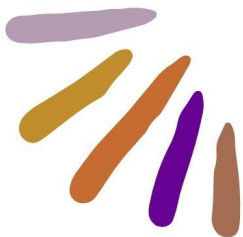


"If she says something is problematic she is being validated but with me that is seen as a complaining "buitenlander" (foreigner). I cannot raise this topic without being seen as subjective."



"Maybe if I conform now, at a later stage I might be able to say something. But perhaps that change will never come"

" Also, the feeling of being uncomfortable when conversations in Dutch do not convert to English when you are around. And when they do it, they look at you as if they feel that they are doing a favour to you. "



"Unless I am talking about the topic specifically, like "African entrepreneurship" I really do not highlight my colour or my heritage. As a teacher, I really try to down-play it because it is really on show"



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(Salazar Volmann, n.d.)