



Stranger in a Strange Land: Tips for surviving a close encounter with the Dutch academic system

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Content

- Diversity in Research
- How to survive Dutch academia

Part I



THINKING DIVERSELY

Diversity in Research

Populations vary in their characteristics:

- Gender/Sexual Orientation
- Age
- Civil Status
- Disability
- Ethnicity
- Language

Social scientists wouldn't have any problems with including these characteristics in research samples

But what about in our approaches to carrying out the research?

The composition of our research team?

I'm diversity aware!

Let's try a 'thought experiment'

I'm gender aware!
I don't gender stereo-type!

OK – let's test that hypothesis!

Think of a hospital.
Picture a medical doctor.
Picture a nurse.

Did you 'see' this?





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Or this?

Disability \neq Inability

Another exercise

A person in a wheel chair wants to enter a room – however the door is not as wide as the chair.

Whose problem is this?

How Old is Old?

- To a teenager, 30 is old
- The UN defines old as 60
- Variation in EU countries for 'old age pension'

- 'Old' is a function of perception
- Does 'Tenure Track' create feeling 50+ers don't count?

The mature employee/team member?

- inflexible
- unwillingness or inability to adapt to new technology,
- not dynamic
- resistant to change,
- complacent – ‘coasting down to retirement’
- nothing new to contribute

I'm diversity aware

- Recognising the strengths of a mixed team – it's about perceptions
- Different ways of working
- Finding solutions to the challenges of diversity (eg ask a gender expert to help with the application form section on 'how we address gender in our project'!)

Part 2

SURVIVING IN DUTCH ACADEMIA

Puzzling things about Dutch daily life

- Food
- Sobriety unleashed eg Carnival



- Invitations – time keeping and handshaking
- Directness (grow a thick skin!)

It's not all bad.....

- I've learnt more about my own country because I have to explain, justify.....
- Cars respect people walking and on bikes
- I can be myself – not categorised

How to survive (I): the culture of work

- Don't forget you are a researcher – analyse the situation!
- Understand the social rules of the work place

My top tip:

Decisions are not taking in meetings – they are made before hand – do your strategizing beforehand

My top tip:

Get a mentor (formal or informal)

- External validation is key (within the UT modesty is required)

How to survive (2): social life is also important for career development

- Learn Dutch – practice with secretaries and support staff
- Don't expect Dutch colleagues to socialise after work:

My top tip:

join a club or get involved in an activity (also important for partners to avoid social isolation)

Some remarks to our Dutch hosts

- Allow time and space for discussion
- Support your non-Dutch colleagues in learning Dutch
- Don't expect your non-Dutch colleagues to enthusiastically part-take in (weird) Dutch cultural activities (eating cake seems to be universally acceptable though!)
- Sex & sexuality

Try to understand your hosts

- Simon Sharma's *An Embarrassment of Riches: An interpretation of Dutch culture in the Golden Age*
Overvloed en Onbehagen: De Nederlandse cultuur in de Gouden Eeuw
- You can also be puzzling to Dutch people

Thank you for listening

My thanks also to my colleague and mentor
Carla Millar
for the material on 'perceptions of age' and for
guiding me through the path of promotion.