“What do you even think about the fact that I am not Dutch?”:

A qualitative study into the self-surveillant behaviour of Dutch women of colour on the dating app Bumble

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ABSTRACT

Swiping, matching and bumbling during one's lunch break, while waiting for the train to arrive, or when going on vacation has become common practice. The dominance of digital dating in contemporary society cannot be denied. However, in recent years, it has also become increasingly clear that not everyone experiences the online sphere in the same way. Women of colour are continuously marginalised, which has implications for how they position themselves online and by proxy on dating apps too. The ways in which women of colour navigate this marginalisation impacts their way of being, becoming a self-surveyor of their own behaviour. Through a Foucauldian lens of self-surveillance, the research examines in what ways self-monitoring arises in the online dating behaviour of Dutch women of colour. This study focused on the Netherlands, because of its interesting racial dynamics that marginalise people from racial minority groups in specific ways. The dating app Bumble was chosen, as it is a self-proclaimed feminist dating app, which is reflected in the app's architecture and functionalities, hence it provides reason to examine whether this also affects the experiences of women of colour on the app and subsequently, their behaviour and dating practices. Through in-depth interviewing with twelve Dutch women of colour, a diverse, complex picture of how a wide range of structures intersect in the negotiation of their Bumble use was illustrated. Self-surveillance arose in various ways, but women also offered resistance and practices that subverted Dutch expectations. The affordance framework provided guidance in analysing the role of technological design in their behaviour, offering that especially visual dominance influences how women think about their self-presentation. Managing authentic impressions through control was an unexpected finding that showed how internalised strategic communication is vital in self-presentation, as these impressions are shaped by technological design and affordances, To a certain extent, it decreased self-disciplinary practices, as the women prioritised authenticity over adjusting themselves to align with Dutch hegemony. This study contributed to online dating research by focusing on the intersectional experiences of women of colour and their behaviour, emphasising the importance of researching meaning making for marginalised communities. It also illustrated the vast extent to which technology influences daily practices, including dating and in what ways it perpetuates systematic societal issues. Overall, the research calls into question what societal implications are regarding individuals' behaviours resulting from these communication technologies and how they impact relationships.

KEYWORDS: *women of colour, self-surveillance, Dutch hegemony, online dating, Bumble*

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1 Introduction

The emergence of dating apps in the 21st century is a salient topic of academic interest. The accelerated digitalisation of societies in the Global North has also instilled itself in dating practices. Over the past years, mobile dating applications have become ubiquitous and severely reduced the former stigmatisation on online dating. These platforms have permeated through many aspects of daily life, and they have significantly affected romantic relationship dynamics (De Ridder, 2021, p. 594). Online dating has changed relationship traditions and society's view on intimacy (Hobbs, Owen & Gerber, 2017, p. 274). The digitalisation of dating has re-shaped the time and spatial realm in which relationship-building dynamics occur and consequently, influencing how individuals experience relationships, dating, and intimacy, as well as the perspectives and narratives they have regarding these themes (Hobbs, et al., 2017, p. 272; Timmermans & Courtois, 2017, p. 59-60).

The interplay between technology and society requires rigorous academic attention, as it is ever-changing and constantly evolving. In between societal structures, algorithmic models and developer choices, application architecture, user dynamics, and the consequent impact on human behaviour and relationships offers diverse research opportunities of which many are yet to be studied (Parry, Filice, & Johnson, 2023, p. 3). Literature on dating apps is expanding, with an increasing focus on societal implications of digitalisation, as well as an increasing intersectional scope, studying the inter-dynamics of social identity and how these affect digital dating navigation. An important facet of the apps is the 'gamification' of dating, as this design choice, is a great driver in how people utilise and interact with others, hence it has highly relevant, tangible implications for dating. The dating app Tinder revolutionised online dating with its swiping interface, making users show interest in other users by swiping them to the right, which is how users attempt to match with others or swiping left, rejecting the profiles they are not interested in. The swipe logic, a term coined by David and Cambre (2016, p. 1), explicates how digital technology has transformed intimacy and romance in some ways. To a certain extent, dating on these apps has been turned into a superficial game with people redefining their dating practices, due to the app's architecture. As the gamification makes dating app use more entertaining and addictive, it changes relationships turning intimacy into a more causal and more anonymous practice (Bandinelli & Gandini, 2022, p. 424; Krüger & Spilde, 2019, p. 1401; Timmermans, Hermans & Opree, 2021, p. 785; Wu & Trottier, 2022, p. 94).

These dating platforms apps have also given rise to entirely new aspects of intimacy practices that are unique to the online sphere, which shapes how people navigate and consider their dating practices and how they choose to shape their relationship approaches (Bandinelli & Gandini, 2022, p. 425; Hobbs, et al., 2017, p. 273). Through the architecture of the online environment, dating apps force users to engage in different types of impression management and self-presentation (Ranzini & Lutz, 2017, p. 82). Studies have shown heightened amounts of self-objectification, self-commodification and strategic impression management (Bandinelli & Gandini, 2022, p. 425; Hobbs, et al., 2017, p. 280; Young & Roberts, 2023, p. 1242).

As self-presentation is a key mechanism on dating apps, users constantly engage in impression management, seeing that initially, a profile is the only information other users have access to (Ellison, Heino & Gibbs, 2006, p. 427). Dating apps users aim to present themselves in a way that shows an idealised version of themselves, while also remaining as authentic as possible, in order to prevent misleading others (Ward, 2017, p. 86). This raises the question as to what extent self-disciplinary behaviour influences self-presentation and impression management, but also the role that society plays in this, as desired impressions are formed through social structures (Tanner, 2024, p. 834).

Thompson (2018, p. 72) briefly discusses the forces that are prevalent on dating apps, which create competitive attitudes among users, through their impression management. They are aware of having to market themselves in a desirable manner, while being restricted to the functionalities that the dating platform has designed. This could lead to internalised self-monitoring mechanisms in users, strategically calculating their value in the "dating market". Thompson (2018, p. 72) also discusses the gendered discrepancy in how women and men experience body surveillance in the online sphere, due to the hyper-awareness of being monitored by an audience. Generally in the online environment, impression management is present at all times but considering that the aim of the apps is to attract other users and match with them, these behaviours may have a stronger presence. Thompson's remarks call for a need to study in what shape and form exactly this self-monitoring emerges in the online dating context and more importantly, what its implications are for user behaviour.

Through a Foucauldian lens, power dynamics can be studied, and subsequently surveillance, discipline and self-monitoring behaviour (Foucault, 1977, p. 215). Specifically, 'Panopticism' describes the internal monitor that citizens of a society may develop, in order to behave correctly, according to what the authority desires (Foucault, 1977, pp. 200-202). Various scholars have employed this metaphor to examine gendered self-disciplinary practices. The "feminine discipline of the body", as Bartky (1998, pp. 27-32) and Bordo (1993, p. 192) call it, explicates how a woman's existence comes with disciplinary practices that women are groomed into by society and its systematic expectations of womanhood and femininity. This gendered disciplinary mechanism has far-reaching ramifications for women's behaviour and how they position themselves in the world, as well as how women present themselves in both physical and digital spaces (De Vries & Peter, 2013, p. 1487; Fardouly, Pinkus & Varanian, 2017, p. 32). The dynamics between online behaviour, impression management, and gendered self-monitoring call into question whether this has implications for dating app users.

1.1 Societal and academic relevance

This thesis aims to further expand Thompson's observations about self-monitoring in impression management on dating apps through an intersectional lens that takes into consideration

the diverse effects of this self-surveillant behaviour for women of colour. This group offers a wide range of undiscovered academic insights for sense-making of the world, as they are often overlooked, especially in digital media studies (Noble, 2018, p. 1; Weber, 1998, p. 14). Though in recent years, literature has increasingly focused on marginalised groups, such as Black women's dating experiences in the context of the Black Lives Matter aftermath, the stigmatisation of gay men of colour, and general research into algorithmic oppression on dating apps, there is still a great gap to fill (Buggs, 2017, p. 538; Conner, 2023, p. 127; Narr, 2021, p. 220). Surveillance theory offers a salient theoretical approach to study the behaviour of women of colour on dating (Bartky, 1998, pp. 27, 34; Bartky, 2020, pp. 682-688; Bordo, 1993, pp. 191-192; King, 2004, pp. 5-7).

Technological design is shaped through the social, cultural, and political construction of society, which leads to a mutual exchange between society and digital technologies (Bivens & Hoque, 2019, p. 443). Current literature shows that dating apps perpetuate societal structures, such as sexism, ethnic bias, racism, sexism, stereotyping, heteronormative gender roles, and structural harassment, which affects marginalised communities the most (Banks, et al., 2024, pp. 2-3; Hwang, 2013, p. 28; Narr, 2021, p. 220; Stacey & Forbes, 2021, p. 372). Power relations within online dating practices need more academic attention, as existing literature tends to be limited to one-sided research, excluding intersectionality (Hanson, 2021, p. 896). However, especially the experiences of marginalised groups provide academic potential to study the consequences these groups face regarding the dynamics of the digital sphere (Narr, 2021, p. 221; Tanner, 2024, pp 832-834).

Asides from the academic neglect of research into women of colour, the role of intersectionality in research has only gained prominence in the past few years. Studying dating apps gives way to a wide-ranging number of factors that are intertwined, each relating uniquely to one another and shaping dating app experiences. For instance, racial structures on dating apps cannot be separated from gender and heteronormativity and vice versa, even though many studies tend to isolate these dimensions (Almond, Rodriguez-Vongsavanh & Taylor, 2021, p. 152; Pond & Farvid, 2017, p. 9; Tanner & Tabo, 2018, p. 200).

Race and ethnicity play a significant role in relationship development and romantic practices, being especially salient for dating apps. Stacey and Forbes describe dating apps as platforms that highlight the relevance of racial dynamics, being "sites where power and culture collide" (2021, p. 374). In the online sphere of intimacy, personal preference, sexual stereotyping, fetishisation, and sexual racism are often confused for one another (Stacey & Forbes, 2021, p. 374). Social desirability bias shows that a hierarchy that exists in attractiveness, based in Western, white ideation of what is considered attractive (Lin & Lundquist, 2013, p. 184). For instance, according to the hierarchy of desire, Asian men and Black women are the least likely to be considered suitable dating partners. This pattern repeats on dating apps, where they are least likely to receive answers and potential matches (Almond, et al., 2021, p. 154; Buggs, 2017, p. 541; Hutson, et al., 2018, p. 5).

In western countries, the idea of what a woman should be like and the way she chooses to design her feminine expression are both heavily determined by a white hegemony, invoking whiteness and encompassing behaviours as the standard, marginalising minorities (Pyke & Johnson, 2003, p. 36). Hegemony is generally understood as the hierarchy that is kept in in place due to the dominating group's ability to hold their power by pushing the narrative that the unequal power balance is in favour of those that are oppressed (Gramsci, 1971, p. 56). In a way, this imbalance occurs partially with the consent of the marginalised groups, as it is deeply entrenched in the societal structure (Paechter, 2018, p. 123; Hamilton, et al., 2019, p. 317). In dating apps, this leads to people of colour often being deemed less eligible (Cole & Zucker, 2007, p. 7). Research has also shown that non-white users from marginalised groups receive different treatment on online dating platforms than white users (Almond, et al., 2021, p. 153). For women of colour, this may imply that they engage in conscious or subconscious decision-making about how their ethnic background influences dating, as being female or presenting feminine is valued on a white/non-white axis (Banks, et al., 2024, p. 3)

These heteronormative structures are racialised, in the sense that its effects materialise in various discriminatory or biased ways per ethnic group (Curington, Lin & Lunquist, 2015, p. 6) Because society has certain expectations of what forms femininity and masculinity should take, this results in certain ethnic groups not being considered as attaining to these norms. Hence, studies continue to find that Asian men are the least popular on dating apps, as they are often deemed not masculine enough, whereas Black women experience the same, because their femininity does not align with what white hegemony expects of traditional femininity in a patriarchal system led by male hegemony (Curington, et al., 2015, p. 6).

In online dating, heterosexual structures are also reproduced, either intentionally or unintentionally, such as the expectation that men are initiators in dating, which means for instance, that they should take the lead by starting the conversation (Comunello, et al., 2021, 1143; Hanson, 2022, p. 897). This heteronormativity that is built into the design of dating apps - a societal structure that deems heterosexuality and its encompassing dynamics as the most natural form of human bonding, while also devaluing relationship behaviour that defies or deviates from this - brings along expectations surrounding gendered behaviour and their encompassing gender roles (Hanson, 2022, pp. 896-897; Parry, Filice & Johnson, 2023, pp. 3-4) ensures that certain gendered behaviour will be displayed.

By employing a Foucauldian lens of surveillance, this thesis examines how women of colour behave on the dating app Bumble and navigate the power dynamics that are prevalent in this online environment. Considering the societal structures in the Netherlands, there is reason to believe that heterosexual women of colour feel the need to adapt their behaviour to fit in with the hegemonic dating practices, which are shaped by Dutch culture. The Netherlands were chosen, because of the country's unique racial relations, due to the colonial history, ideological developments in religious beliefs, and contemporary racial notions. In contemporary Dutch society, whiteness and cultural

homogeneity still take precedence, and racism in the Netherlands has taken on a unique shape, with colour blindness and othering being daily practices in how the Dutch navigate race and ethnicity (Dikmans, 2020, pp. 50-52; Rose, 2022, p. 244). As women of colour in the Netherlands are a minoritised race (Matharu, et al., 2023, p. 148), they are more likely to not fit in with the hegemonic ideals surrounding dating expectations, beauty, and behaviour, offering potentially rich insights into how their behaviour is affected by these cultural dynamics in the Netherlands.

The emergence of a vast array of various dating platforms, that each target different audiences or with differing objectives in mind, shows how apps choose to strategically engage with the demands of contemporary society, such as Tinder, generally being used as more of a casual hook-up app, and Bumble attempting to cater to the female audience by being a 'feminist' app (Bivens & Hoque, 2019, p. 443 ; Hanson, 2022, p. 900; Mason, 2016, p. 823). The research has isolated Bumble as its study case, because of this self-proclaimed feminism. Its design has specifically been tailored towards securing a safe space for women, arising the question as to which various implications this may have for how users navigate the app (Bivens & Hoque, 2019, pp. 442-443). By designing a platform that takes into consideration how a digital environment can be geared towards women-friendly experiences, women may have more positive interactions, which could affect their dating behaviour as well. Building onto Young and Roberts' research, which studies power dynamics on Bumble for women without taking into consideration the role of intersectionality, this thesis studies these dynamics for women of colour and how they possibly navigate self-monitoring behaviour. This culminates in the main research question of this thesis: *How do Dutch women of colour engage in self-disciplinary behaviour when engaging in online dating practices on the platform Bumble?*

This thesis is divided into several sections, with the following chapter discussing the theoretical framework that elaborate on self-surveillance for women of colour, dating app infrastructures using an affordance lens, and the role of intersectionality in online dating experience. Then, chapter three delineates the research design, which contextualises the study and explicates why interviewing has been adopted with an appnographic approach and providing the limitations, as well as the study's ethical considerations. After that, chapter four presents the study's findings, and the research is concluded by providing research implications, limitations, and recommendations for future research in chapter five.

2 Theoretical framework

2.1.1 The Foucauldian lens: The subject and power

Firstly, to understand the various mechanisms that are being explored in this study, this section briefly provides an overview of Foucault's theory on surveillance and power. His idea on self-disciplining behaviour emerges from the model of power he developed. Foucault observed a change in modern society in how power was exerted, transforming from a public spectacle instigating fear among the population to a more innate, non-violent form of self-correction (Bartky, 1990, pp. 40, 63; Foucault, 1977, pp. 9, 138). Foucault posited that the mechanisms of the modern, western punishment system coerce the body into behaving correctly (Foucault, 1977, pp. 137-139). Where justice used to be served on a basis of punishing the physical body, society became more concerned with the immateriality of beings, emphasising the soul and the mind (Foucault, 1977, pp. 10-11). Rather than modern power being understood as an institution or person who can control others, Foucault sees it as an intrinsic aspect of social relations. In *The Subject and Power*, he observes that state power is individualising and totalising, emerging from pastoral power (Foucault, 1982, p. 782). It found itself manifested in various institutions, becoming an individualising 'tactic', an intentional action produced by someone, encompassing multiple powers, those of "the family, medicine, psychiatry, education, and employers" (Foucault, 1982, p. 784).

In its most extreme form, power restricts, but its various structures and dynamics may enable, induce, seduce, and incite, but it is always "a way of acting upon acting subjects or being capable of action" (Foucault, 1982, p. 789). He states that power cannot be exercised without freedom, there is an interplay between the two. It can bring about change, which can either expand freedom or restrict it (Heller, 1996, p. 83). When power is wielded, certain actions will structure the domain of other actions, but it will also bring about resistance (Foucault, 1982, pp. 791-192). People are never without any power, they are simultaneously the subject and object of power by having to withstand it, while also wielding it (Heller, 1996, p. 80). More importantly, resistance is a key aspect of these power relations, and he states that power is even dependent on resistance. The complexity of a system of power is based in the notion that there is an absence of a group that dominates others. However, Foucault also emphasises that some groups are in a position that allots them more control than others, which he calls the 'non-subjective' aspect of power (Heller, 1996, p. 86), which means that wielding power can produce about unintended change or these strategies.

The modern prison is a highly relevant example of an institution that is driven by this strategic mechanism, in the sense that while prisons exist to discipline individuals into rehabilitation, to shape them into functional bodies for society, prisons actually merely serve as a penal mechanism, punishing society's mishaps, and Foucault remarks that some groups benefit greatly from this strategy, namely capitalist actors, law enforcement, and various actors of the state (Foucault, 1977, p. 155; Heller, 1996, pp. 88-89). In sharp contrast, modern power in the contemporary era is not produced by an overseeing authority or single, central entity, but rather, through mechanisms of

internalised surveillance of the self and consequently, self-correction (Foucault, 1977, pp. 128-129; Bordo, 1993, p. 191).

Constant surveillance prompts the individual to constantly assess their own (public) performance in order to conform with the norms and expectations of the imagined monitor. Through this process, individuals will automatically discipline themselves to fit these norms and expectations, which is conceptualised through the idea of Panopticism (Foucault, 1977, p. 201). Initially, the philosopher Jeremy Bentham developed the architectural concept of a Panopticon - which means 'all-seeing' - a prison designed to oversee the incarcerated, while the inmates are not informed about being actively watched. The surveillance is reinforced through a circular building at the periphery that contains the cells for the prisoners and a tower with wide windows at its centre, designated for the guard to view all the activity happening inside the peripheral building. Each cell has a window on either side of the room allowing the light to pass through and expose the inmate at all times to the monitoring inside the tower. The detainees are subjected to monitoring at all times due to the light exposure, but they never actually know when and if they are being watched (Foucault, 1977, p. 200).

In this way, surveillance can bring about obedience without physical force, violence, or threat (Bordo, 1993, pp. 189-191). Panopticism encompasses a process of internalising surveillance and consequently, self-discipline, emerging from what Foucault calls "the automatic functioning of power" (Foucault, 1977, p. 201). The idea of the constant gaze is that it ultimately leads to self-surveillant behaviour, regardless of whether the 'watched' is actually being monitored. Consequently, direct monitoring is made redundant, as the prisoner will self-correct their behaviour, as to ensure their intrinsic compliance. The prisoner becomes its own surveillant as they are at the mercy of the gaze that the tower lends. Obedience is provided through internalisation of surveillance rather than active force (Foucault, 1977, p. 202). Essentially, to discipline means to enact compliant bodies that are politically, economically, and socially useful (Foucault, 1977, p. 137). The body thus becomes the site of power "inscribed with culturally and historically specific practices and subject to political and economic forces" (King, 2004, pp. 2-3). Consequently, such bodies can be moulded, steered, utilised, and changed however necessary (Foucault, 1977, p. 136). Foucault has taken this idea and broadened the scope by theorising that contemporary society is subjected to the Panoptic gaze, each individual engaging in self-discipline in order to produce a docile body (Foucault, 1977, p. 208).

2.1.2 Disciplining the female body

Though Foucault's ideas were not gendered, a few theorists in the field of gender studies have connected the notion of internalised disciplinary power to women's tendency to adhere to patriarchal expectations. John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* encapsulates this idea of the woman as a surveillant of her own body through the male's lens. He states: "A woman must continually watch herself. She is almost continually accompanied by her own image of herself. […] so, she comes to

consider the *surveyor* and the *surveyed* within her as the two constituent yet always distinct elements of her identity as a woman." (Berger, 2008, p. 46). This passage encompasses Foucault's idea on the internalised gaze and self-surveillance succinctly, in spite of his observations not being gendered. To fill this gap academically, Bartky and Bordo each analysed the feminine through a Foucauldian lens positing that women have internalised various mechanisms to adhere to feminine expectations, providing examples of diet culture, the indoctrination of the skin care industry, and other behaviour that is expected of women, such as smiling and sitting like a lady (Bartky, 1990, pp. 66-71; Bartky, 1998, pp. 28-32; Bordo, 1993, pp. 188-190; King, 2004, p. 7). The disciplining of the body that Foucault discusses has various elevated dimensions for women, with patriarchal forces subjecting the feminine to ideal standards causing women to self-monitor every molecule of their body (Gill, 2019, pp. 11, 15-17).

Bartky (1998, p. 34**)** succinctly describes this point in the following quote: "In the regime of institutionalised heterosexuality, woman must make herself "object and prey" for the man: it is for him that these eyes are limpid pools, this cheek baby smooth. In the contemporary patriarchal system, a panoptical male gaze resides within the consciousness of women: "they stand perpetually before his gaze and under his judgment. Woman lives her body as seen by another, by an anonymous patriarchal Other." (Bartky, 1998, p. 35). The internalisation she defines here refers to the process of how women are socialised to develop a sense that ensures they fit in with patriarchal expectations about their femininity to the point of it seeming like a natural tendency (Bartky, 1998, p. 39; Harper & Choma, 2019, p. 735). Femininity - and it should read as 'white' femininity- as it is inscribed within the idea of the 'feminine ideal', is something to be constantly striving for, an "achievement" in a sense (Bartky, 1998, p. 682).

Along this line, Bartky (1988, pp. 37-38) observes that disciplinary power for women does not have a central point from which it is disseminated. She calls it "discipline that is institutionally unbound", by which she means that not a single institute or individual is telling women how they should behave, act, or compose themselves, but rather society at large has developed such structures that discipline women into a certain idea of how femininity should materialise. This materialises in the disciplinary practices forced upon womanhood that almost seem like a natural, intrinsic instinct. More so, women may choose to engage in this desired behaviour, because they are aware of the societal benefits that it provides them. These may not necessarily be material benefits they think are genuinely good or advantageous to their own being, but rather, the idea is sold to women that if only they monitor their weight, appearance, personality, life goals, and align these with societal expectations, they will find happiness, probably in the form of lifelong marriage with a husband that they will never fail to satisfy (Bartky, 2020, p. 688).

Notably, these observations do not negate women's power, agency, and ability to resist, but rather take into consideration the negotiations that women engage in, to navigate these dynamics. Foucault's theory on power explicitly illustrates that where there is power, there is resistance

(Foucault, 1977, 210; Bordo, 1993, p. 192). The power dynamic in a patriarchal society is not simply top-down with the male gender imposing onto the female, it is an intricate relationship emerging from cultural norms that are in turn subject to change as well (Bordo, 1993, p. 193). Furthermore, Bordo (1993, p. 190) acknowledges that women are also active participants in their own oppression by perpetuating expectations. The standards imposed on the feminine are adhered to by women themselves, even though these practices may undermine women through objectification and sexualisation. Cole and Zucker state that "femininity functions through both coercion and consent" (2007, p. 2).

2.1.3 Hegemony and self-surveillance of the female body of colour

The discussion of femininity calls into question what is meant by that and how society structures around it. Where hegemonic masculinity is constructed through its domination over women, legitimising the power imbalance, hegemonic femininity is more difficult to conceptualise, as academia views it either through a lens that renders women as powerless in their agency regarding the feminine construction of the self or they deem women complicit in the reproduction of the gendered domination of men over everyone else (Hamilton, et al., 2019, p. 316). The social construct of femininity in the western hemisphere plays an important role in heterosexual relationships and the encompassing heteronormative structures of society (Hamilton, et al., 2019, p. 320). The hegemonic interpretation of femininity is based around certain gender practices that are considered desirable, including race (Cole & Zucker, 2007, p. 1). Research has shown that those adhering to white, hegemonic femininity feel like they have greater chances of achieving higher social status, which is also often true for women of colour living in western countries (Hamilton, et al., 2019, p. 322).

Foucauldian surveillance theory offers great potential to theorise racialised aspect of female self-surveillance through a racialised lens, even though Foucault did not discuss his concepts in the context of race, gender, or any other identity markers. The female docile body**,** and especially that of the woman of colour, is an entirely different matter altogether. For them, surveillance has been a standard practice also practically executed by authoritative institutions in the western hemisphere, also in modern times. For instance, in order to oppress, restrict, and subjugate those deemed inferior and a threat to those in power, forced sterilisation was carried out among Black women in the United States and a prohibition on abortions for white women. In this way, government surveyed and controlled reproduction among a racial axis (Bordo, 1993, p. 189; Hamilton, et al., 2019, p. 319; Monahan, 2017 p. 192). Examples of tangible surveillance by authoritative legislation policy making has also influenced the current culture of surveillance. For the body of colour living in the western hemisphere, self-surveillance has become a daily, taken-for-granted practice (Harper & Choma, 2018, p. 744; Prusaczyk & Choma, 2018, p. 181). Jones (2018, pp. 218-220) specifically wrote about self-monitoring behaviour in the context of Black women in the United States, contextualising this

phenomenon in the historical pretence of slavery and American racism, arguing the disciplinary mechanisms that Black women have internalised through assimilating their behaviour with white America, as a result of the hegemonic culture that dominates the country.

Prusaczyk and Choma (2018, p. 180) note that body surveillance and self-objectification - the practice of internalising practices that reduce the body and its appearance to a sexual function for someone else's pleasure - is generally substantially higher among women of colour, and it also manifests differently in comparison to white women, depending on the cultural background of women of colour (Buchanan, et al., 2008, p. 698; Velez, et al., 2015, p. 908). The amount of value that is put on a woman's appearance and sexual appeal is heavily racialised. Even in countries where the majority of the population is not white, western beauty standards sometimes dominate. For instance, in Asian countries, eyelid surgery is one of the most popular cosmetic procedures for women, as it changes their eyes from monolids to a double eyelid, making them look similar to the physical appearance of white people (Frederick, et al., 2016, p. 114). These norms play an important role in how women see themselves, the way they position themselves in the world in comparison to others and mostly other women, and consequently how they might find themselves in a constant state of self-discipline (Harper & Choma, 2018, p. 736).

Moreover, self-monitoring is hardly limited to bodily self-surveillance, as behavioural mechanisms, such as stereotyping of romantic and sexual practices is a great cause for research. For instance, the hyper-sexualisation of Black and Asian women is highly prevalent, where both are deemed exotic, but whereas Black women are stereotyped as more promiscuous and over-sexual, Asian women are assumed to be submissive and more easily subjugated in the bedroom (Curington, et al., 2015, p. 6). Latina women are often subjected to the idea that they have anger issues and are deemed fiery, due to their 'exotic' nature (Christensen, 2021, p. 445). Altogether, there is plenty of reason to study whether women of colour engage in self-corrective mechanisms, in order to appeal to white hegemonic standards, which then are likely to impact their dating behaviour (Harper & Choma, 2019, pp. 735-737; Jones, 2018, pp. 221-222).

2.2 Dating app design

2.2.1 Self-presentation in online dating

By employing a Foucauldian lens in the context of online dating platforms, it also means that light needs to be shed on how the existing power relations are incorporated in the design of the apps, and subsequently, how they then influence user behaviour (Bandinelli, 2022, p. 907). Considering that all technology has been developed in a certain cultural context, it affects and shapes how people navigate the dating apps, as a constant interaction between societal structures and app features emerges (Bivens & Hoque, 2019, p. 443; Young & Roberts, 2023, p. 1241). While the main focus of this thesis is not app design, it does play a key role in how people navigate online dating apps and it contextualises user behaviour.

These affordances play a key role in decision-making on dating apps, as users have to make choices regarding self-presentation, in the demarcations that the app design presents. Self-presentation in real life is a way of engaging in impression management, curating a version that may be appealing to others, or the 'audience' someone is performing for (Ellison, et al., 2006, p. 417; Goffman, 1959, pp. 10-12). In contrast, self-presentation and behaviour in the digital sphere is mediated by the technological design, which results in unique mechanisms (Ward, 2017, p. 85). On a dating platform, people can carefully curate their profile, choosing how they want to present themselves, but not only are they restricted by what a platform affords, but also by the fact that users expect to meet up in real life at a certain point, thus balancing an authentic presentation of the self and an idealised one (Ellison, et al., 2006, p. 418; Toma & Hancock, 2010, p. 337). This strategic impression management might be facilitated by self-disciplinary mechanisms in the online sphere, especially as online dating emphasises the internalised gaze of other users on the platform, thus performing for this audience (Hess & Flores, 2016, p. 1087; Ranzini & Lutz, 2017, p. 84; Thompson, 2018, p. 72).

The way people are able to self-present is limited within the confines of the application's design, partially shaping the options users have and how they navigate around that. Most location-based real-time (LBRT) dating apps make use of certain perimeters that each user has to establish, regarding which gender they identify as, who they want to date, age range, and distance confines (David & Cambre, 2016, p. 3). Thompson (2018, p. 72) suggests that especially the visual dominance in online dating may create hyper-fixations on impression management among users, emphasising beauty and appearance by way of conveying their social capital and "market value" in the online dating world. While this is apparent for all genders, as all users are subjected to the same interfaces of dating apps, women have historically always had to value their appearance, as for most of history that is what society prioritised and told them would give them more power through being valued, as the previous section explains (Thompson, 2018, p. 72). She also recognises how online media becomes a type of surveillance, typifying dating apps as *omnopticons* - defined as the many watching the many - causing users to self-monitor their online behaviour and presentation of the self.

2.2.2 Dating app affordances

Affordance theory is relevant to apply as it illustrates the relationship between user and platform, and subsequently, how they affect people's behaviour, experiences, and interactions (Christensen, 2021, p. 436). Communication theory describes affordances as the functions of technologies that users perceive from the interaction between them and the features of a platform (Pruchniewska, 2020, p. 2425; Timmermans & Courtois, 2018, p. 60). Gibson's theory of affordances (1979, p. 120) was initially created to describe how animals interact with their surroundings and how to make use of it. Affordances illustrate how the functionalities of technologies are utilised by people, depending on their interpretation of the functions and broader

social structures that partially shape how platforms can be used (Davis & Chouinard, 2016, p. 146; Parry, et al., p. 5; Pruchniewska, 2020, p. 2425; Timmermans & Courtois, 2018, p. 60). App affordances can be placed in between the features of a platform and the final user outcomes, that result from how users interpret and subsequently, apply the artefact's affordances (Davis and Chouinard, 2016, p. 242).

There are six core categories of affordance mechanisms, which are: allow, demand, discourage, encourage, refuse, and request, though these are not meant to be encompassing of all platform possibilities nor should are those limited to these categories. The way in which users utilise technological artefacts is "afforded through degrees" (Davis & Chouinard, 2016, pp. 242-244). Notably, these affordances centre around "cultural and institutional legitimacy", meaning that affordances cannot be considered on their own without integrating the historical and cultural context from which they emerged and the structures in which they currently exist (Davis & Chouinard, 2016, p. 246).

The main affordances identified by scholars specifically regarding online dating applications are immediacy, mobility, proximity, and visual dominance, explicated in Ranzini and Lutz (2017, pp. 82-83), Tanner and Tabo (2018, p. 292), and Timmermans and Courtois (2018, pp. 60-61), to which Chan (2017, p. 247) adds authenticity and Ranzini & Lutz (2017, p. 82) add multi-mediality. Immediacy emerges in various ways, by automating pop-up screens for new matches, giving users instant gratification in their swiping behaviour, but also by advising users to turn on notifications, so they are informed about new matches and texts immediately.

Similarly, mobility refers to the fact that that dating apps are used on smartphones, facilitating its use from any place and at any time essentially, as well as encouraging users to open the app wherever they are, for the possibility of seeing new user profiles (Chan, 2017, p. 247; Timmermans & Courtois, 2018, p. 60). Proximity as an affordance indicates that as most online dating platforms require users to permit access to their real-time location, limiting people to the profiles they see, as they have to be within a certain vicinity from the user (Ranzini & Lutz, 2021, p. 82). Generally, the platforms are designed to have users meet others in their surroundings, whether ten or a hundred kilometres away. The visual dominance aspect is prevalent on dating platforms that emphasise imagery as the foundation of user profiles (Chan, 2017, p. 247; Timmermans & Courtois, 2018, p. 61). Dating apps ask users to connect their various other social media platforms, such as Spotify and Instagram accounts, which is related to multi-mediality. Lastly, dating apps aim to increase authenticity of their users by asking people to verify their profile using the platform's verification service. The design of these apps combines the affordances that shape how users engage with the platforms in varying levels of dexterity (Parry, et al., 2023, p. 6).

2.3 Intersectionality and online dating

For women, moving through the digital sphere entails a constant negotiation between their online behaviour and their self-presentation, wider societal discourse about women of color; as well as dating app design and platform affordances, wherein the tension lies of self-monitoring mechanisms. Intersectionality posits how the various dimensions of identity markers have different dynamics that may result in distinct oppressive experiences (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1242). Intersectional theory addresses a common pitfall in research, where women of colour are analysed through a lens that is merely "the sum of racism and sexism" (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 140). Crenshaw starts her theory from a legal perspective, arguing that to properly dissect legal properties of discrimination, it is necessary to reorganise the way discrimination can materialise for women of colour (Carastathis, 2014, p. 306).

Even within feminist research, there is a dominant idea that patriarchy afflicts its oppressive power onto all women in the same manner, regardless of race, ethnicity, sexuality, age, able-bodiedness, socio-economic class, and other identity markers that influence how people move through the world and in turn, how it views and considers them (Cossins, 2003, p. 89; Crenshaw, 1991, pp. 1244-1245). The ignorance towards the distinct marginalisation of women of colour has led to a one-sided view on gendered oppression, failing to recognise the different dimensions of biased treatment, discrimination, and other marginalisation that non-white, non-cisgender women experience in various manners and are then forced to engage with these structures (Arayasirikul & Wilson, 2019, pp. 1416-1418). To understand this negotiation, this section briefly discusses how women are marginalised in the online environment.

2.3.1 Marginalisation on dating apps

Technology and the digital sphere are designed through human intervention, acknowledging that societal structures are then automatically incorporated into technological design (Parry, et al., 2023, p. 6). The environment of dating apps, with its architecture, functionalities, and affordances poses affects the experiences of marginalised groups and subsequently, how women of colour navigate being online (Tanner, 2024, p. 834). In order to review these affordances in a larger societal context, this section illustrates how social structures are built into the design of dating apps and what possible implications algorithmic bias in online dating design has (Narr, 2021, p. 220). Noble (2018, pp. 1-2) wrote about systemic oppression through algorithmic bias on the Internet, extending academic knowledge on how technology reproduces inequality.

Christensen (2021, p. 446) and Parry, et al., (2023, p. 5) describe how dating apps perpetuate heteronormativity through societal and cultural scripts that are gendered or sexual, encouraging individuals to shape interactions in certain ways, which then replicates existing social norms. For instance, gendered norms in dating see men as the 'leader' in romantic interactions, in terms of initiating interactions, dates, but also sex, which affects the agency of women in their dating choices

(Christensen, 2021, p. 435; Sobieraj & Humphreys, 2021, p. 2; Young & Roberts, 2023, p. 1239). Tanner (2024, p. 831) also posits that affordances of dating apps perpetuate racial structures in their design. For instance, the importance of visuals amplifies the relevance of appearance and steers desirability on dating apps. Being active in an online dating environment requires users to expose information to the public that could be sensitive or carry stigma, which especially subjects marginalised groups to potential biased treatment (Tanner, 2024, pp. 834-838).

Online dating platforms base their algorithms on the behavioural mechanisms that people display in the real world (Parisi & Comunello, 2020, p. 73). This replicates and intensifies the effects of relational homophily - the practice of choosing partners based on shared characteristics - and sexual racism in the digital sphere. Commonly, race and ethnicity are both a determinant factor in whether people find someone a suitable romantic partner, often based in discriminatory bias. This sexual racism, where the choice of potential romantic suitors is influenced by racial bias and consequent racialised stereotyping, is understood to be highly significant in people's dating practices (Hwang, 2013, p. 35; Tanner, 2024, p. 833). White people come out as the most preferred race for dating, which positions them at the top of the hierarchy of desirability (Almond, et al., 2021, p. 154; Lundquist & Lin, 2015, p, 1428; Stacey & Forbes, 2021, pp. 374-375). Racial hierarchies consistently place Black people in the lowest position with Black women receiving the least responses on dating platforms from their non-Black, male counterparts (Peck, Berkowitz & Tinkler, 2021, pp. 306-307). Accordingly, as women of colour have to deal with these built in biases on dating apps, they not only have to consider whether they are desired in the dating scene, but also to what extent they are disadvantaged by affordances and platform design (Christensen, 2021, p. 443). Intrasexual competition suggests that heterosexual people consider their same-gender counterparts as opponents in mating and dating facilitated by desirable characteristics that their potential romantic partners have communicated, such as beauty perceptions, as people highly value appearance in dating (Fisher & Cox, 2011, p. 20; Maner, et al., 2009, p. 75).

Subsequently, in western society, Eurocentric female beauty standards are dominating, which entail preferences for pale skin, light-coloured eyes, straight, blonde hair, and slimmer body builds, which the majority of women of colour's natural features do not entail (Banks, et al., 2024, p. 4; Harper & Choma, 2018, p. 736). Despite limited research on intraracial competition, it could be argued that the collective structure of white hegemonic structures, western and Eurocentric beauty standards, and sexual racism on dating apps could result in self-correcting behaviour among women of colour, as they may think this is necessary to appeal to the online dating environment (Harper & Choma, 2018, pp. 736-737**)**. Algorithms are driven by what user behaviour considers attractive, this is rooted in these Eurocentric ideals, resulting in women of colour automatically being marked as less desirable (Banks, et al., 2024, p. 5). As online self-expression can vary between different ethnic identities, through the use of different social and visual cues displayed in users' profiles (McGrath, et al., 2016, p. 23; Tanner, 2024, p. 838), Almond, et al. (2021, p. 155) describe that people's online

dating practices may then be negatively affected by conscious and subconscious racial and ethnic biases, impacting how they then assess other user profiles. It is suggested that ethnic minorities could engage in homogenising behaviour, in order to blend in with the majority, which could lead to self-corrective mechanisms that women of colour may employ when they engage in online intimacy practices (Almond, et al., 2021, p. 155).

3 Research design

3.1.1 Research context: About Bumble

This section portrays how Bumble works as a dating platform and situates its relevance within this study. Bumble identifies itself as "100 percent feminist", according to the founder Whitney Wolfe Herd, who is also known for co-creating Tinder. Bumble not only aims to subvert traditional gender norms in dating, but also to reduce sexual harassment (Pruchniewska, 2020, p. 2422). Previously, the most important aspect of this was the 'Women-First' feature, a design that forced women to start the conversation with their male matches, but since last year, this has been altered. With public opinion changing on dating apps, Bumble has redesigned the Women-First function allowing women to choose for themselves whether they want to start the conversation with men or give their match the option to answer a question prompt that the women have selected (Roth, 2024, para. 1). However, after matching, users still have only 24 hours to start a conversation, in which both parties need to interact after the first message has been sent, otherwise the match expires. According to Wolfe Herd, this allows the woman to have more control and dictate the direction of the conversation, and subsequently, diminish the number of harassment incidents (Bivens & Hoque, 2018, p. 446). With this, the app claims to successfully challenge heteronormative dating expectations, which has earned them the reputation as the feminist alternative to Tinder.

Bumble's interface is similar to other LBRT dating apps with its visually dominated design and its swipe function to reject or like other users. Currently, a Bumble profile requires an age and gender with specific categories, though the only mandatory options to fill in are woman, man, or non-binary. Users are also obliged to fill in their dating intentions, ranging from fun, casual dates to marriage. Optional information that users may add, includes height, hobbies and interests, qualities in other users, such as openness and emotional intelligence, astrology sign, education level, drinking and smoking behaviour, having children and future wishes around that, religion, and political ideology. Users may include causes they care about from a list provided by Bumble, such as Black Lives Matter, 'volunteering' and 'neurodiversity'. Bumble encourages users to complete their profiles by showing a percentage that reflects to which extent answers to every category have been added. Users are required to add a minimum of four photos when they first set up a profile, and a maximum of six images is allowed. They encourage authenticity, by having various notifications emerge when users select photos, to inform the user to add photos with their face clearly visible, as well as discouraging the use of group photos. Bumble also has a 'Best Photo' functionality that algorithmically determines which photo on a user's profile receives the most right-swipes, which is then selected to be the first photo shown. Bumble provides great academic potential to study the experiences of women of colour regarding online dating, as it might suggest a better or at least different experience in comparison to other popular dating platforms.

3.1.1 Research context: Racial hierarchy in the Netherlands

To contextualise the online dating environment in the Netherlands, its unique racial structures should be explicated. While very little research exists on women of colour living in the Netherlands, it is known that Dutch women of colour experience unique marginalisation, as their gender is incorporated in the way their existence is perceived (Aldemir & Leurs, 2024, p. 3; Stewart, Haynes & Simpson, 2025, p. 605). Dutch history has developed unique oppressive structures for various racial minorities, as a result of colonialism, increases in labour migration, and changing political spheres have created unique conditions that marginalise minorities in different ways (Weiner, 2014, p. 733). The colonial history of the Netherlands has left a profound impact on the current racial and ethnic structures among society. To this day, contemporary racism is shaped, sustained, and perpetuated through this historical precedent, resting in a narrative that considers the social marginalisation of minorities as individual shortcomings, rather than the result of historical oppressive racial practices (Essed & Hoving, 2014, p. 11; Rose, 2022, pp. 242-243; Weiner, 2014, p. 732).

The racial hierarchy in contemporary Dutch society finds its roots in the multi-layered history of the Netherlands. As a result of colonialism, especially people of colour with a cultural heritage from former colonies reside in the Netherlands (Stewart, et al., 2025, p. 601). In the 1960s, the country brought in citizens from Turkey and Morocco as guest workers to achieve economic gain through exploitative migration labour. This especially brought about religion tensions, resulting in Islamophobia to emerge as a commonplace racialised, oppressive structure in the Netherlands (Aldemir & Leurs, 2024, p. 3; Weiner, 2015, p. 585).

Specifically, women of colour in the Netherlands are continuously marginalised, as generally racial discourse in the Netherlands is avoided, more so, the country considers itself 'colourblind' to race (Dikmans, 2020, p. 54; Rose, 2022, pp. 242-244). Race is a hegemonic power structure that determines social standing through differentiating individuals by biological and cultural means, resulting in racist practices that are often deemed neutral (Weiner, 2014, pp. 732-733). As Dutchness and whiteness are interchangeable, non-white people came to automatically be prevented from being considered 'authentically Dutch'. Positioning the country as racially neutral perpetuates whiteness as hegemonic, and denies systematic racism (Weiner, 2014, p. 732; Sijpenhof, 2020, p. 52). In this way, everyday racism becomes an embedded practice, allowing the marginalisation of people of colour to blend seamlessly into Dutch society, without having to confront it (Dikmans, 2020, p. 49; Essed & Hoving, 2014, p. 18).

3.2 Methodological approach

3.2.1 Interviewing and appnography

In order to answer the research question: *How do Dutch women of colour engage in self-disciplinary behaviour when using the dating app Bumble?* qualitative methodology has been

employed. Qualitative research is aimed at uncovering and portraying phenomena in their natural contexts and attempting to engage in sense-making and the interpretation of these occurrences (Flick, 2007, p. 2). It is suitable here, as an interpretative approach is needed to gain insights into the digital dating experiences of Dutch women of colour. Since the focus is on personal experiences, thoughts, and narratives, a detailed analysis of the topic is required that allows room for in-depth, emotional, and expansive responses, which is not possible through quantitative means, as it lacks the opportunity to achieve comprehensive sense-making (Flick, 2007, p. 2). The objective is neither to find an internally or externally generalised conclusion nor to find a statistical relationship between various variables, thus qualitative methodology is suitable for this study (Flick, 2007, pp. 41-42). Semi-structured, in-depth interviewing is aimed at a profound exploration of how people experience the concepts that are being studied (Johnson, 2011, p. 6).

Especially considering that dating apps are integrated into daily life practices, they have become taken-for-granted, despite its substantial societal effects. Hence, in-depth interviewing is a fitting approach for researching the complex nuances of dating app experience (Johnson, 2011, p. 5). With its intersectional angle, in-depth interviewing allows the study to capture the precise narratives and reflections of the participants, allowing for commonalities and differences to arise as well (Hackworth, 2018, p. 54; Johnson, 2011, p. 9). These differences may arise from the intersections of their identity, which is a substantial part of the participants' experiences and their sense-making, which interviewing captures in a suitable manner (Hackworth, 2018, p. 63). Meaning making plays an essential role in interviewing, giving space for the social context to be a present moderator in how individuals move through the world and how they view it (Warren, 2011, p. 13). Interviewing has limits, considering that it only examines the experiences of the participants at hand and its observations cannot be generalised. However, Cuadraz and Uttal (1999, p. 164) discuss how small samples can be powerful, allowing social theory to be signified by in-depth analysis of individuals.

While the focus of this thesis is behavioural implications on Bumble for women of colour, it is important to emphasise the influence of app design in shaping these experiences, which is why the study takes on an appnographic approach during interviewing (Johnson, et al., 2023, p. 1053). Especially when studying the digital sphere, it is important to consider the dynamics between user and technology, and how they influence one another, rather than solely focusing on either user experience or an application's architecture (Johnson, et al., 2023, p. 1054). This approach also provides a helpful framework for studying online technology and the recruitment process.

An open-ended interview guide was developed, but the questions were not rigid in guiding the conversation. The semi-structured approach is significant for this study, to keep the focus on participants' experiences, allowing each participant to elaborate on their story where necessary, also creating the space required for the interviewees' personal reflections (Charmaz, 2011, p. 7; Pruchniewska, 2020, p. 2426). With the research question in mind, along with an appnographic approach, a portion of the interview was also dedicated to discussions of each participants' profile.

This allows for thorough insights into the participants' thought process regarding the curation of their profile (Cousineau, Oakes & Johnson, 2019, pp. 105-106). The walkthrough method, as described by Johnson, et al. (2023, p. 1054), can be limiting, in the sense that it prioritises user experience by focusing on the app's architecture. By adding an in-depth discussion of rationale behind user choices, it also uncovers the relationship between user and platform and what kind of dynamic is at hand here. The complete interview guide can be found in the appendix.

3.2.2 Conceptualisation and operationalisation

The interview questions delved into participants' experiences with Bumble, their profiles, dating practices, online dating behaviour, their lived experience having grown up in a Dutch environment, cultural, ethnic, and racial background and the impact of that. The main topics of the interview guide were developed to facilitate the interviews, aiming at uncovering as much of the participants' experiences and their reflective thoughts on these. The interviews started with discussing the participants' ethnicities and their view on them, which was then placed in the Dutch context, in order to find out how each participant shaped their ethnic dynamics with Dutch culture. The second topic discussed dating behaviour in a broader sense, linking it back to racial identity and their perceptions on how ethnicity influences their dating experiences. The third topic interwove with these ethnic dynamics in dating by discussing heteronormative structures in positioning oneself in dating, through talking about the role of feminine expression and societal expectations for women of colour. The fourth topic focused on Bumble and the participants' experiences with the platform, while also interweaving previous discussions about identity and dating experience, as most of these topics are of course highly intertwined. Bumble was discussed regarding app design, experiences, and behavioural implications.

The topic list was constructed with the theoretical framework as a guide. Lopes and Vogel (2019, pp. 36-37) and Curington (2020b, p. 275) offered guidance for the research, both being qualitative studies that looked into user experience and behaviour on dating apps. The first topic inquired participants about their personal view on their ethnic identity in relation to Dutch society to contextualise how participants saw their identity, which often led the conversation into stories about experiences of marginalisation and racism. The next section asked questions about dating, in relation to ethnicity and the cultural dynamics that may be prevalent for women of colour, which then led to an intersectional lens regarding dating, allowing various identity markers to be discussed, regarding dating. In the last theme, these topics culminated by asking participants about Bumble and online dating, intertwining previous discussed topics to uncover the various mechanisms at hand for women of colour in the digital dating sphere and subsequently, how they shape their own behaviour.

3.3.1 Sample

The sample includes self-identifying women of colour with a Dutch nationality or being highly familiar with Dutch culture, at least partially identifying with a Dutch ethnicity and being

immersed in Dutch culture, being exposed to it on a daily basis and speaking the language. Literature has shown that among queer women who also date men, there may be significantly different experiences on dating apps and dating practices, as well as the fact that various markers of their identities will lead them to engage in different behavioural patterns than their straight, cisgender peers. Due to the intersectional lens of this study, the recruitment did not actively source for women that strictly identified as heterosexual, in order to organically allow various identities to be studied and uncover the intersectional mechanism at hand (Pond & Farvid, 2017, p. 7). This led to one openly queer participant in the sample that also actively dated men.

In total, twelve interviews were conducted, each lasting from 45 minutes to approximately an hour. The twelve participants self-identified as women of colour, allowing a more inclusive understanding of ethnicity and race, which is especially important in the Dutch context, rather than having to be subjected to a pre-constructed definition that determines which ethnicities may 'belong' to the category women of colour. Taking an intracategorical approach that encapsulates the complexity of social identities allows the intersectional lens to come to fruition (Carastathis, 2014, p. 308). The participants' familiarity with Bumble ranged from periods of a few months to multiple years, with some having deleted the app at the time during which interviews were conducted. Ten out of twelve participants had had experiences with other dating platforms besides Bumble. The ages ranged from 20 to 44, with the majority being in their twenties. Four out of twelve participants had an adopted background. The interviews included participants who had only used the app after the new update, and one participant who had only used to app before the update, which also impacted how they experienced the app. This offers an interesting insight, as it may illustrate how technological development affects people's personal lives and how research into the digital sphere is ever-changing (Cousineau, et al., 2019, p. 96; Wu & Trottier, 2022, p. 93).
The complete participant overview with pseudonyms has been included in the appendix.

3.3.2 Recruitment on Bumble

The recruitment process was partially carried out through the researcher's network and social media flyering, but the majority of participants was assembled through Bumble itself. The use of a dating app for recruitment has only emerged in recent years, opening up novel recruiting considerations and specific strategies with careful considerations regarding limitations and challenges (Gelinas, et al., 2017, p. 3; Sorbello, 2024, p. 29). This section discusses the recruitment process on Bumble, after which limitations of this approach are delineated.

Bumble Date was chosen for recruitment to maximise the chances of finding recruitments that are actively using the app to date men, rather than the Bizz or BFF sections. It is important to note that the recruitment profile's gender was marked as 'Man', in order to ensure that it would show up among women dating men on the app. As much as the platform allowed it, considerations were made to prevent as much deception as possible (Johnson, et al., 2023, p. 1060). That is why the

recruitment profile was set up as follows: the first picture showed a picture of the researcher holding up a physical sign that read “looking for participants for Master thesis”, indicating that the profile did not have romantic intentions. The physical sign was necessary, because Bumble does not permit any text-based images in profiles. A description was added to the bio in Dutch that stated:

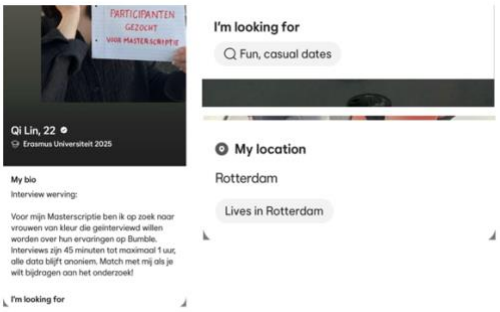
> Interview recruitment: For my Master thesis, I am looking for women of colour that would be interested in being interviewed about their experiences on Bumble. Interviews will take 45 minutes up to 1 hour, all data will be anonymised. Match with me if you would like to contribute to the research.”

Figure 1 below displays what the profile looked like, regarding textual information. As Bumble requires users to add what they are looking for on Bumble regarding relationships “Fun, casual dates” was added as an intention, as it was the least romantic option possible among the predetermined options provided by the app, encouraging other users to create the understanding that the profile was for sole research purposes. The only language that was added to the profile was “Dutch”, to make the number of profiles in the stack smaller, as everyone who could not speak Dutch was automatically filtered out, thus excluding women that are more likely to not identify with Dutch ethnicity and nationality. Personal information was limited to education level, and none of Bumble’s prompts were used, as it would have distracted from the recruitment text if the profile was oversaturated with other information. The maximum number of photos were added to favour the profile in Bumble’s algorithm and for elevated authenticity, building trust.

After matching, depending on whether the user allowed the researcher to start the conversation, initial contact was made with a standardised message thanking the user for their interest, asking whether they had questions upfront, and their availability for an interview. After that, additional contact information was exchanged, such as phone numbers or e-mail addresses, to make an appointment for an interview and inform participants about consent and data processing, as Bumble does not have an option to share files, hence the consent form could not be shared on there. Tinder was also used to recruit participants, from which two participants were found, both being familiar with Bumble, either by actively using the app or having recently had it. The same process was applied, with minimal changes, except for emphasising that the study was looking for participants that had used Bumble.

Figure 1.

Information displayed on the Bumble recruitment profile.



3.3.3 Recruitment limitations

While recruitment was also done in person and on other social media, ten out of twelve participants were recruited through Bumble itself. Creating matches with potential candidates facilitated the process, as potential participants could express interest themselves and Bumble's low-barrier functionalities facilitated contact. However, recruitment is also bound to the app's functionalities and what they afford (Johnson, et al., 2023, p. 1054). The sample ended up with a great number of women with a Surinamese heritage. The platform's algorithm may have facilitated this, because even though the profile was exposed to the furthest distance possible (161 km), this was based on the researcher's location. Bumble encourages in-person meetings, which means that nearby profiles are likelier to be shown. In the vicinity of Rotterdam, a relatively high number of people with a Surinamese heritage reside, which may explain the sample distribution (CBS, 2024).

Moreover, matches were based on the researcher's discretion whether potential candidates would self-identify as women of colour, which could have prematurely excluded potential candidates. To prevent exclusion as much as possible, matches were attempted with any ethnically ambiguous women, based on name, photos and overall profiles. The age distribution is also facilitated by Bumble, as the recruitment profile contained the real age of the researcher, severely limiting options to recruit older women, as they are less likely to be interested in users that are significantly younger, thus having their swiping restrictions confined to an age range that excludes the recruitment profile.

The intersectional lens of this study means that all other social characteristics and identity markers that have not explicitly been mentioned here, are assumed to come up in data collection, but were not actively sourced for (Young & Roberts, 2023, p. 1244). As Flick (2014, p. 4) suggests, this sample is meant to encompass diverse social characteristics to collect as much data on the various experiences women of colour have on Bumble. Dating experience of women of colour is heavily shaped by various intersections, not just gender, race, and ethnicity, but also socio-economic upbringing and background, class, able-bodiedness, age, education, rural or urban environment, and so on, which the research should organically reflect (Carastathis, 2014, p. 308; Cuadraz & Uttal, 1999, p. 2).

3.4 Thematic analysis

The collected data has been analysed using a qualitative coding method carried out in the programme Atlas.ti. Though qualitative research does not aim to develop a generalising theory, coding is a method that allows data to be analysed in a detailed manner, permitting the most valuable themes to be synthesised during the data collection process (Boeije, 2010, p. 83). Additionally, in order to triangulate the data, the coding process facilitates the researcher in connecting the findings to the theoretical framework (Flick, 2014, p. 4). Following Braun and Clarke's explanation (2006, p. 79), thematic analysis is a useful method for this study, as the research's main objective is not to create grounded theory research but rather look into what collected data of individuals says about realities and looking beneath the surface of those realities (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 81). Especially the nuance that can be captured using thematic analysis allows a valuable scrutinisation of the data. More importantly, the ultimate objective of thematic analysis is not to develop theory, but rather to look at individuals' lives, the experiences they have within their lived reality, and how they make sense of the social structures in which they move (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 81).

Through a coding process using software programme Atlas.ti, themes are found in the data, allowing comprehensive analysis bringing the research closer to data saturation (Braun & Clarke, 2017, p. 297). The coding process consisted of three rounds during which data was interpreted and consequently allowing the themes to be developed. The first round, open coding, aimed at studying the initial important observations found in the interview data (Roulston, 2013, p. 15). Similarly to categorisation, topics within the data are found and appointed labels, or the open codes (Boeije, 2010, p. 96). The open coding is the first step in scrutinising the data in a way that allows the deeper meanings to emerge. The next phase is axial coding, during which the focus is to find the categories of the open coding and relate them to new, salient categories (Boeije, 2010, p. 108). Axial coding facilitates the process of uncovering the most significant insights of the data. The last round is selective coding, which aims at finalising the data analysis in terms of themes, patterns, and meanings, conceptualising the data in a way that answers the research questions and providing saturated perspectives into the topic at hand (Boeije, 2010, p. 114-116).

3.5 Ethical considerations

Digital recruitment via online dating applications specifically, comes with its own unique ethical considerations. Though online recruitment is becoming increasingly common, the eroticisation of a dating app's environment should be considered (Johnson, et al., 2023, p. 1060). While Broeker and Spector (2024, p. 10) state that dating apps are not necessarily viewed as more private spaces than other online platforms, dating app users do use with intimate objectives in mind, which are considered to belong to a more private domain (Gelinas, et al., 2017, pp. 5-6). Especially considering that 'male' was selected for the recruitment profile, transparency about intentions was

important. Other profile choices were deliberately curated with mitigating ambiguity as a main goal. While contacting participants, the research objective was clearly explicated, candidates were informed about data storage, their anonymity was ensured, and a digital consent form was handed out before each interview, ensuring that participants understood their participation rights. As the study looked into their Bumble presences, discussions of the participants' profiles was also handled with discretion, ensuring that the quotes used in the data analysis do not expose participants' identities.

As the research deals with topics that might be sensitive for some, thus ensuring that participants were fully informed and understood how their data would be used, in order for participants to trust the researcher and feel comfortable in sharing personal narratives. This is also significant in regards to researcher positionality. Studying dating processes in a social context with a marginalised community comes with its own challenges (Cuadraz & Uttal, 1999, p. 16) As a woman of colour, I focused on building trust and a comfortable environment through ensuring a setting in which participants knew they could share their stories honestly without hesitation and without feeling invalidated (Petrychyn, et al., 2020, p.5). Furthermore, it was meant to make participants feel like the research did not invade a personal space that may harm them or their experiences with online dating (Matharu, et al., 2023, p. 145; Petrychyn, et al., 2020, p. 5). However, this also came with its own risks, as some moments during the interview might have been more informal rather than academic, but this added to the authenticity of the participants' answers.

4 Results

The present findings uncover Dutch women of colour's experiences with Bumble and their behaviour. The results identified three main themes supported by the open and axial coding process: negotiating with white, Dutch hegemony, power dynamics on Bumble, and impression management through controlled authenticity. The analysis illustrates the various ways in which the women navigate the intersections of their identities, culture, the Dutch dating environment, and Bumble's affordances and design. Self-discipline arose in diverse ways, emerging from the awareness women of colour have about their position in society at large and in their online dating behaviour informed by the contextual restraints of Bumble.

4.1 Negotiating with hegemony

The non-violent self-correction that Foucault theorises, can be recognised in self-disciplinary mechanisms, that culminate in pro-assimilative attitudes, playing into stereotypes, and prioritising white desire (Foucault, 1977, p. 9; Pyke, 2010, p. 89). Along with Foucault's observations about power, while participants were not being told how to behave or actively being disciplined, structural hegemonic dynamics made them aware of how they had to position themselves in the dating scene (Foucault, 1977, p. 202). These dynamics include how stereotyping was cast onto them, or engaging with exoticisation, and racialised heteronormativity on Bumble (Curington, et al., 2015, p. 6; Matharu, et al., 2023, p. 140). On the other hand, strong notions of resistance co-existed, subverting expectations or engaging in certain avoidant strategies by participants.

Rina (Indonesian, 44) discussed how she used to lean into the exotic image men had of her online, as the white men that she dated often stereotyped her Asian heritage in a sexual context, such as submissiveness (Curington, et al., 2015, p. 6). For her, having been adopted and being raised in an extremely white area in the Netherlands contributed to her willingness to adjust and adhere to the prevailing Dutch structures. She noted that as she got older and further from the white, rural environment she grew up in, it became increasingly clear to her how she used to internalise white, Dutch hegemony, ultimately resulting in her adjusting her dating behaviour to feel a sense of belonging (Pyke, 2010, p. 85). Other participants also imposed white standards onto themselves to a certain degree. While this did not necessarily result in feelings of intersexual competition with white women, they did wonder and at times, feel like the men they dated. Isabella (Taiwanese-Dutch, 23) similarly talked about sexual experiences she had with men she met on dating apps:

> I do always wonder: "do I really like these things or is it just because I was taught that things should be like this, because we live in a society in which men have a lot more to say?" I do think about how men view certain things or whether they have certain expectations of me […]

As posited, the racial hierarchy of desire shows the overwhelming dominance of white males, rooted in the ethnic structures that are informed by the white man's social supremacy (Almond, et al., 2021, p. 154; Lundquist & Lin, 2015, p, 1428; Stacey & Forbes, 2021, pp. 374-375). Non-western women's desire for and interest in white men from western countries stems from notions of improved socio-economic status, security, and privilege (Pyke, 2010, p. 84). While women in the sample may not exclusively date white men, it is a dominant pattern that tends to be perpetuated, especially among women that live in white environments and those with racial identities informed by white and non-white roots. This stems from colourblind ideology in white, Dutch hegemony, that perpetuates whiteness as its norm, resulting in a societal gravitation towards whiteness among people of colour (Buggs, 2017, p. 540). Some participants avoided men with the same ethnic background, on Bumble, following various motivations, such as Varsha (Hindustani Surinamese-Dutch, 22) who said that she does not date Hindustani men, admitting it was a slight bias against her own people.

In all participants, various ways in which they had internalised racial subordination were present, for some at a more subconscious rather than conscious level. For instance, Gabriela (Brazilian, 21) did not realise her racial preference in dating was white, Dutch men, until her friends pointed it out, which shows how Bumble's design subconsciously influences this pattern. Still, she did not entirely agree with this perspective, stating that while it may be a pattern, she was open to dating all kinds of men regardless:

> When we go on dates, my friends and I send each other photos and information of the person we are going to see. Constantly, they will make remarks like: "Oh, right, another Dutch blond". They are telling me the same thing every time I send a photo: "Oh another blond, another one, yeah, you truly do have a type. You are really going for the Dutch guys." so, apparently, that is my type. I did not know. But I only discovered this recently, and perhaps it is true, because there must be reason why I am going on dates with them […]

Abena (Ghanian-Dutch, 24) also talked about how she did not think she had a type, though she let on that she sometimes gravitated more strongly towards white men. This arose from her thoughts on Bumble's audience, stating that she preferred the user base there in comparison to other dating platforms, because:

> […] it is likelier that you will see a Rogier or Florisje or something like that, and there is nothing wrong with any other person, but I do feel like the app has more users that are a bit more educated, or something.

This is interesting, because she considers these classic male Dutch names that are associated with the average higher educated male student, to be better. To her, they convey a sense of intellect, putting Bumble at an advantage to the other platforms, as she is more likely to match with these men. Among the participants, many acknowledged their tendency to date white men was not 'just a preference'. Some participants showed awareness about how this type was shaped through social structures, rather than writing it off as a natural mechanism. As Stacey and Forbes (2021, p. 374) note, sexual racism is commonly veiled as being 'just a preference', discarding how race and ethnicity structure relationship practices. Varsha (Hindustani Surinamese-Dutch) wholeheartedly answered in response to the question whether she had a type: "Yes, I am really biased", referring to the fact that for the majority, she dated white, Dutch men, explaining that her childhood in a white environment shaped her dating patterns

Rina (Indonesian) talked about how her experiences dating white men and men of colour was drastically different, especially as she considered the implications for her own behaviour. Her experiences showed a strongly present self-disciplinary gaze when she dated white men, whereas her experiences with men of colour allowed her to be herself. She noted that when she used to be with white men, she often had to play a certain role often subjected to sexual objectification, which she also facilitated herself, in order to please.

> […] mostly the *sexotic*, thinking that I had to conform to that, so certain sexual practices that we did, or when he asked me to do certain things, and then I would think: "I have to be really good at that" so, actually wanting to over-deliver, having to uphold that being Asian means you have to be great at these things, and then, to just say it plainly: giving great blowjobs, for instance, and similar things, or giving sexualised massages and then particularly about the happy end […] and of course, obedience, the submissive, and then, mostly in bed. In a way, actively wanting to behave like this for him.

From Rina's experience, this racialised, sexual objectification affected her on a personal level and heavily influenced the way she saw herself and thought how she should behave. The Panoptic mechanism seems persistent, turning herself into a docile body that sustains an unequal power dynamic (Bartky, 1998, p. 28). This extreme compliance was eventually followed by strong resistance within the participant, as her awareness on the broader social structures that affected her behaviour ultimately subversive way of being that actively went against Dutch hegemony. She noted how Bumble facilitates her dating practices, providing an environment in which she can actively look for her own type, as well as present herself in a way that attracts what she looks for in partners. In this way, for minorities, Bumble may encourage resistant behaviour, simplifying how users curate the audience of their own dating environment, due to the visual dominance (Narr, 2021, p. 232; Tanner, 2024, p. 240).

This resistance had a strong presence in most interviewees, when they engaged in dating in a white hegemonic society. As women of colour are aware of the marginalisation they experience and how the dating environment may be hostile to them, this may lead to resistance or stronger assimilation, as fitting in is a survival technique (Pyke & Johnson, 2003, p. 48). Some were very outspoken about not wanting to be involved with Dutch white men, often feeling misunderstood or not being treated as a holistic person, but rather just seen as an interesting experiment, reduced to simply a body of colour. Despite Bumble's aim to emphasise personality over appearance, its gamified design and visual emphasis limits the extent to which users are nudged toward seeing people as three-dimensional. Zahrah (Nigerian-Hindustani Surinamese-Dutch, 26) observed that because Bumble is known to have a different audience, this also gives way for men that are looking to experiment to use the app.

Some participants stated that they preferred not to date white men, limiting their interest to men of colour. The women seeking out potential partners from other marginalised groups, offers resistance to Dutch hegemony, subverting the hierarchy of desire, not just through dating within one's own ethnicity, but by being conscious of which social structures are perpetuated within dating and actively refraining from prioritising white men. While interracial dating is commonly considered as more progressive - based on the dominance of intraracial dating - white men seeking out women of colour as experiments is a different matter, and women of colour refusing to go along with that, is a form of resistance. Chappetta and Barth (2022, p. 1063) posit that people may have preferences for the dominant racial group, as a sense of increased social security, providing elevated social status, based on one race's superiority and social benefits that come along with that. Furthermore, women of colour dating men of colour does not mean that they exclusively date within the same ethnic identity, but rather just gravitate towards those whose racial identity is not only white.

Participants tended to feel like they were not always understood by white, Dutch men, unable to find commonalities in how they moved through the world, such as Afia (Ghanian, 20):

> The fact that I would rather go for someone of colour has more to do with being able to relate to those people. I feel like white Dutch people do not always understand the experiences of people of colour, so I notice a disconnect in that.

Chappetta and Barth (2022, pp. 1062-1063) also note that people from marginalised groups are likely to gravitate towards similar people, due to commonalities they have in moving through a society in which they are not dominant. Actively avoiding white, Dutch men also arose from previous negative experiences or from feeling misunderstood, similar to Sifra:

> I just realised that I have not had any positive experiences with white men. I can just sense that they only want to talk to me, because of what I am, not who I am. They always think

that I am exotic and really interesting, because of my colour [..] (Reyna, Hindustani Surinamese-Dutch, 20)

4.2 Power dynamics on Bumble

Women in the online dating scene have to "bargain with patriarchy", which refers to how women navigate norms inscribed on them by society (Young & Roberts, 2023, p. 1246). However, using an intersectional lens, the analysis shows that Dutch women of colour are not just bargaining with patriarchy, but also with the unique power dynamics that arise from racism, the demarcations of technological design, and various cultural influences. The negotiation of women of colour with Dutch hegemony materialises in compliance and resistance, which aligns with Foucault's views on power (Foucault, 1977, p. 308).

The power dynamics also resulted in various ways in which participants would self-discipline and employ a Panoptic gaze, or rather go against the unequal power balance, resisting racialised norms that were perpetuated by Bumble. Women in the sample shared additional considerations they made, internal conflicts they had, and competing thoughts they encountered within themselves, a common practice for women (Young & Roberts, 2023, pp. 1246-1247).

Within online dating culture, almost all participants saw Dutch men as very casual, with most participants recognising that Dutch men had laid-back attitudes, hardly ever looking for serious relationships. This may be perpetuated by Bumble and online dating culture, as these platforms influence desires for long-term commitment by providing a broad network of potential dates and facilitating hook-up objectives (Krüger & Spilde, 2019, p. 1401). Especially Bumble's 24-hour expiration period for matches gives rise to these casual behaviours. While it is meant to encourage pro-active dating and to ensure contact establishment between users, it often leads matches nowhere, as people lack the consistency required to log onto the app. Consequently, most women in the sample engaged in self-discipline to adapt to this environment through lowering their expectations or to negate their expectations in their entirety, which contributes to the normalisation of Dutch men's attitudes and their expectations by proxy, setting a novel standard for what is conventional in dating, causing women to adjust to this (Bordo, 1993, p. 197).

Some participants contrasted the Dutch dating scene with dating practices within the culture of their non-Dutch ethnicity. Nazirah (Aruban, 26) who has spent her life both in Aruba and in the Netherlands observed that Dutch men are not very romantic, in comparison to Aruban men, where dating expectations have been shaped by American - both North and South - popular culture and media. The dominant narrative here can be traced back to a traditional gender framework, that encourages heteronormative behaviours in dating (Hanson, 2022, p. 896). Simultaneously, the cultural difference also arises from the digitalisation of dating, as Dutch dating culture might be just as heteronormative, but due to changing online habits, the behavioural result in dating is oppositional.

While Bumble might position itself as being more mindful about gender equality and an alternative option in which women have control, similar power dynamics are still strongly present. From the interviews, it seems that self-discipline on Bumble can also be perpetuated or resisted by the app design and how users interact with it. To scrutinise these dynamics, the affordance framework that was earlier presented, offers insights into the interplay between Dutch hegemony and technological design. The extent to which participants thought about Bumble's design, how they interacted with it and how it impacted their experiences varied greatly.

From the interviews, it often arose how online disinhibition affects the experiences participants had with online dating platforms. This disinhibition arises from the anonymity that the platform grants, allowing users to be less conscious about their online conduct, often reverting to sexual objectification, harassment, racial stereotyping, and sexual racism (Matharu, et al., 2023, p. 141). Dating app design and its affordances amplify antisocial behavioural practices, such as stereotyping and harassment, which is reflected in the participants' experiences. Rina discussed instances where men harass her in her private messages on dating apps about sexual behaviours expected from Asian women:

> "[…] just in my DMs, already asking questions about that, you know? "So… are you good at this? Are you good at that? […], because, I have read about… or it has been said that… Asians are good at that."

Other women in the sample also noted that most harassment was strongly connected to their ethnic identities, even when the men did not explicitly mention it in their messages. Gabriela mentioned conversation starters she often endured, on other dating apps and Bumble.

> South-American women and Latina women are often assumed to be women with big butts, which are questions I often get asked. You could start the conversation with any first message and despite that, they choose to ask me: "so, do you have a big ass?"

Marathu, et al. (2023, p. 141) further explain that especially men's digital behaviour is mediated by the online context that affords them substantially less restraint regarding social norms and the written and unwritten rules of society. Participants noted discrepancies in digital interaction, recognising that a lot more anonymity is afforded to men. Though Bumble is not completely anonymous, the digital space still allows a certain distance, especially emotionally speaking. providing a veil to users' online conduct, as people do not have to be confronted with their behaviour in person. Gabriela said: *"*Most guys only dare to do it [harassment] online and then when they see me in real life, they keep their mouths shut."

Participants extensively discussed navigating the vast and diverse ways in which they were subjected to stereotyping, illustrating how they negotiate with white, Dutch hegemony in dating. The white gaze of desirability has resulted in the exoticisation of the body of colour, turning it hyper-sexualised, while marginalising it through othering (Curington, 2020b, p. 271). For the women in the sample, gendered, racialised, and cultural stereotyping intersected, but also educational backgrounds, class, and specifically, Honey (Turkish-Surinamese-Dutch, 23) mentioned how her body as a plus-sized woman was often a topic of particular interest for some of the men she encountered. Most participants mentioned sexual objectification and sexual racism in the form of fetishisation (Stacey & Forbes, 2021, p. 374). Women talked about being reduced to their body, and especially their body of colour. Honey also specifically mentioned her experience as a plus-sized women, a dimension amplified by her ethnic identity: *"You can really tell when someone likes me solely, because I am plus-sized, not because of who I am as a person."* Nearly every participant in the sample talked about how they felt that some men were only interested in them as an experiment, as participants were frequently being told by the men that they "had never been with a Black/Brown/Asian/etc. woman before".

Matharu, et al. (2023, p. 140) posit that white men exoticise women of colour based on the assumption that they can "enter a world of experience'. In Isabella's case (Taiwanese-Dutch), this even went as far as a participant receiving messages from a man that she dated that from this point on, he only wanted to be with Asian women, after having dated her.

Isabella noticed that from her dates' perspectives, many were comfortable with her ethnic identity, because they found her non-Dutch side to be interesting and 'exotic', while her Dutch side made white men feel at ease, as she was still able to understand the culture. In a way, for men this creates the idea of a woman who is a perfect balance of Dutch-ness and exoticness, making her appealing to date. She said: "I get the sense that they really like that I understand Dutch culture, but simultaneously, I am still exotic to them."

In response, most participants choose to ignore these messages to prevent themselves to be further subjected to similar harassment, which Chan (2018, p. 309) recognises as a "passive tactic" to engage with harassment. However, most women were also more vigilant about their online conduct, as a result of these experiences. A few participants mentioned being careful with using photos that showed their entire body or photos in which men were likelier to be sexually objectify them. These mechanisms are also self-discipline, but rather than producing a docile body, it is connected to safety and protection (Foucault, 1977, p. 208). Women resisted intimidation and other harassment, but in order to do so, they felt like they were the ones who had to adjust their online presence (Pruchniewska, 2020, p. 2424). On the other hand, participants also talked about how they did not do anything to prevent harassment, as they felt that it is unfair for them to adjust to men's misconduct. This aligns with Brightwell (2019, p. 248) and Pruchniewska's (2019, p. 2426) observations about

how the burden falls on women to do the free, emotional labour that comes along with combatting patriarchal structures.

Participants were mostly aware of Bumble self-marketing as feminist, recognising this in how they used the app though mostly this was met with criticism, However, there were also varying perceptions on Bumble's audience, a great majority had a more positive perception of users there. Interestingly, some women noted that the way Bumble was set up, allowed men to be more performative about their ideals and values. Reyna (Hindustani Surinamese-Dutch) said: "*I know that they are being fake, I know that they are saying they care about women, but they don't actually, there are a lot of men on Bumble that are just there for sex".* Participants were overall positive about Bumble's attempt to take into consideration how online dating may harm women, but many criticised the approach, stating that it is a superficial solution and does not solve any structural issues, which Young and Roberts (2023, p. 1250) also conclude in their research. Some participants were overtly negative about Bumble, deleting the app altogether, mostly as a result of frustrations with its functionalities. It was more common among participants that they liked being able to start the conversation for various reasons, but often experienced that the power it granted them diluted over time. While for most participants, Bumble did feel like a safer environment, and for most it was their most used and most likeable platform, none felt like it was highly efficient at solving structural issues that they ran into, specifically in their dating experiences as women of colour. Isabella (Taiwanese-Dutch) said:

> I do not think that I would call Bumble a feminist app, yeah, at the end of the day, it is still a dating app and solely because women need to start the conversation, it does not mean it is actually feminist, conversations are never one-sided. Additionally, I get the sense that it works just like any other dating app […]

Bumble's design obstructs earlier mentioned considerations regarding romantic rejection based on ethnicity and appearance for the majority, but still, participants had anxiety about their identities. Sifra (Hindustani Surinamese-Dutch) said: "I'll look at someone's profile and think "what would you even think about the fact that I'm not Dutch?" However, it still gives rise to new forms of being marginalised, seeing that some men would swipe right on the women in the sample, viewing them as experiments rather than potential romantic interest they were seriously invested in. Furthermore, Bumble's design still amplifies stereotyping abilities, despite its attempt to counter problematic application design that is supposed to 'improve' user behaviour. Its affordances are similar to the most popular dating apps, with a few different functionalities (Bivens & Hoque, 2019, p. 454; Young & Roberts, 2023, p. 1250).

4.3 Controlled authenticity

Finally, the last theme presents how participants prioritised authenticity in their self-presentation Bumble, which also partially mitigated the effects of self-surveillance. Digital self-presentation functions through controlled image management and desired impression-making (Ellison, et al., 2006, p. 418). Participants presumed their online dating presence to be representative of how they saw themselves, steered by the fact that the women mostly aimed to successfully meet up in real life with matches, deeming it necessary to be honest in their self-presentation.

However, upon closer inspection, disciplinary practices and self-monitoring did arise in impression management, even though participations were not highly aware of their strategic approaches. This may be explained by the fact that Toma and Hancock (2010, p. 347) posit that strategic communication is highly internalised, which means that although participants may not set out to be strategic, it is embedded in their online conduct. This subconscious strategic approach is in line with how Foucault sees obedience (Foucault, 1977, p. 202). The women in the sample discipline themselves into shaping their impression management that appeals to the online dating scene in the Netherlands. The visual dominance of Bumble plays a key role here, as the profile design makes users prioritise the photos that they choose.

As dating apps reproduce heteronormativity through traditional gender scripting, traditional masculine and feminine roles are emphasised, thus influencing user behaviour (Christensen, 2021, p. 446; Parry, et al., 2023, p. 5). In some ways, some participants were more vigilant about how their femininity would be interpreted in relation to their racial identity, such as Sifra (Hindustani Surinamese-Dutch) reported more vigilant behaviour in her online conduct when interacting on dating apps by avoiding especially Surinamese slang when she is initially texting matches, in order to come across as more traditionally feminine.

Alike, the stereotyping that women encountered influenced their behaviour, such as darker women in the sample often being subjected to the 'angry Black woman' stereotype, making them more conscious about their profile curation about how they wanted to be perceived (Curington, 2020a, p. 335). The women made conscious considerations about potential ways in which they will be subjected to stereotyping, which added a layer of self-discipline. Bartky (1998, p. 30) writes about how women are not to violate feminine norms, otherwise they will become 'loose women', unfit to be subjugated by patriarchal power. For instance, Abena (Ghanian-Dutch) explicitly chose photos in which she was laughing, as she said that people, and especially men often assume she is not a nice person or not *gezellig* - a classic Dutch word used to describe cosiness and fun - which she aimed to avoid by selecting photos that could 'prove' the opposite. Sifra (Hindustani Surinamese-Dutch) talked about how she is perceived on Bumble, which illustrates how people women with dark skin tones and Black women are easily assumed to be more aggressive: "People often ask whether I am angry, and it makes me think: where are you getting that idea from, because it cannot be my face. In none of the photos I have selected, I have an RBF [resting bitch face]."

Bordo (1993, p. 186) and Bartky (1998, p. 32) both discuss how the feminine ideal is soft and compliant, both physically and psychologically. Varsha (Hindustani Surinamese-Dutch also talked about the pressures of western society to be hairless as a woman and compared it to the treatment that white women receive. The visibility of body hair is a common point of stigma, especially for women of colour. She said: "when I go on dates, to feel feminine, then I will really shave my legs, just go get a certain feeling, I do feel more feminine. She elaborated that she still shaved when she dated a man who explicitly told her he does not care about it, showing that "it has been deeply instilled inside of me". Especially in online dating, where users only have access to a static version of the other (Toma & Hancock, 2010, p. 336), women tend to engage in self-disciplinary behaviour that ensures that the picture they have painted online aligns with how they are in person, hence presenting a hairless body online, means a hairless body in real life.

As a result of the stereotyping, participants also felt like they had to prove themselves much more in a white environment. For instance, men often assumed about Abena (Ghanian-Dutch) that she could not speak Dutch and it had been admitted to her by a date that he felt more attracted to her after finding out she spoke Dutch as a native language. This led her to feel like she always has to put in more effort, in order to be considered "normal" in the Dutch dating scene, for instance, through using more intellectual vocabulary. This is also perpetuated by the fact that self-presentation on a Bumble profile is initially only granted on a textual and visual basis. Users cannot add videos with sound or voice recordings; hence these types of stereotypes cannot be mitigated by its design before matching.

The digital environment of Bumble is set up in a way that encourages users to present themselves authentically in a controlled manner. However, from the participants' experiences, the notion is challenged as to what authenticity means, when user behaviour is always bound to the digital infrastructure, as affordance theory illustrated (Christensen, 2021, p. 436; Sobieraj & Humphreys, 2021, p. 3). Generally, users are not highly aware of how app design influences their interactions, engagement, and behaviour, due to lack of platform transparency, but also as a result of high levels of internalised app navigation, blurring the lines between what users have agency over and what is nudged by a platform.

Participants discussed feeling the need to continuously update photos, to feel more representative in their self-presentation, as well as diversity in their photo selection, depicting a variety of social settings, optimally reflecting their lifestyles. Additionally, Ayani (Curaçaoan-Antillean-Dutch, 21) noticed during the interview how she used the Best-Photo first functionality which showed that users mostly swiped right on an image in which her whole body was visible, thus the platform encourages objectification in this way. The visual dominance affordance is one of the main determinants in how users fill in their self-presentation, knowing that this is what makes the first impression on other users (Tanner, 2024, p. 841).

Curating a profile is inherent impression management, as the profile set-up is designed to make users think about in which ways they want their profile to represent themselves (Ward, 2017, p. 85). This became clear from the interviewees, when they discussed the choices they made, regarding their profiles. In various ways, the women of the sample talked about strategies they employed in their self-presentation, as well as their conduct on the app. For instance, Varsha (Hindustani Surinamese-Dutch) talked about how she first scoured one of her straight male friend's Bumble, to get a grasp of how women choose to present themselves on the app.

> I watched along with the Bumble of a friend of mine, and everyone was very beautiful, very sexy, and then I thought, everything but that, that is not who I am. So, I am going to do it differently, this profile is literally who I am as a person.

Rina (Indonesian) explicitly looked for men of colour to date, which she stated on her profile. She used various other cues, facilitated by Bumble in order to convey what she herself was looking for and to attract the kind of men that she wanted to date. She also compared her current self-presentation approach to how she used to think about impression management:

> […] while in the past, I would fill out the profile a lot less, more so, in the hopes of "as long as someone gives it a like". I would also dress a lot skimpier, which is something that I noticed a big difference in , and photos from certain angles, you know, in my opinion, in which I would look the most beautiful… summer pictures, for instance, in a bikini, a lot more lovelier and softer, wanting to appeal to what a man is looking for.

Especially here, the self-disciplinary behaviour in self-presentation is highly prevalent, illustrating how she curated her profile strategically in a way that would attract men, whereas now she prioritises authenticity over traditional gender scripting in terms of desirability. Her behaviour can be recognised as a form of resistance. Ward, Rosenscruggs & Aguinaldo (2022, p. 371) recognise how increased agency over these choices facilitate subversion of existing gender norms that put women in passive roles.

While Bumble does offer a space for romantic rivalry, considering that a dating app is a gamified space in which people literally are put in a market environment, intrasexual competition was not highly common (Fisher & Cox, 2011, p. 20; Maner, et al., 2009, p. 75). Some participants insinuated slightly competitive feelings, but more so stemming from their marginalisation experiences, being aware that certain standards were imposed on them, resulting in the feeling that they needed to prove themselves. This may be explained by the fact that among the sample, more freedom was found in how the women defined and construed their femininity. When Honey (Turkish-Surinamese-Dutch) talked about femininity and expression, she said: "Currently, for me,

and you know, in 2025, we have come a long way with gender stereotyping, it is a lot less difficult, everyone is just doing their own thing", referring to how gender expectations have become a lot less rigid".

Another interesting matter that made some participants behave in self-monitoring behaviour, was educational stigma that some participants were aware of, resulting in their conscious decision to exclude education information on their profiles. Varsha (Hindustani Surinamese-Dutch) stated that she usually avoided the topic of education when she was enrolled in her MBO study programme, noting that men were a lot more interested in her HBO schooling than when she talked about MBO. In the Netherlands, especially people of colour are likely to be enrolled in these educational levels, in comparison to university education, which may also increase stigmatisation for women of colour (Joosen & Slotboom, 2021 p. 48). Similarly, Abena (Ghanian-Dutch) said:

> So far, I have obtained two MBO (secondary vocational education) diplomas and I know that generally, it is looked down upon, and even though I am starting HBO (higher vocational education) in September, but still, I thought: no, I will not include that in my profile, because I am aware of how it might be regarded by others.

Overall, constant tensions were found in control, agency, and authenticity. Participants were aware of being subjected to a digital environment that came with restrictions, but it did not necessarily mean that they considered themselves powerless. Different ways of manoeuvring around these tensions were found through tactful decisions in their online dating, vetting other users, and avoiding further issues by monitoring their own self-presentation.

5 Conclusion

5.1 Research implications

Through a Foucauldian lens of self-surveillance, this study aimed to examine whether women of colour in the Netherlands engage in self-disciplinary behaviour in the online dating environment, with a specific focus on Bumble. The research lies at the intersection of racial and ethnic identity, Dutch hegemonic structures, dating, and technology and situated women of colour in broader online dating discourse, aiming to fill the research gap of the interplay between various identity markers, the societal context, and behavioural implications, which studies in online dating often forego. The results have provided insights into the research question: *How do Dutch women of colour engage in self-disciplinary behaviour when engaging in online dating practices on the platform Bumble?* The interviews illustrated how the women in the sample navigate Bumble, online dating, informed by Dutch society at large in regard to their identities through an intersectional lens. The identified themes: negotiating with hegemony, power dynamics on Bumble, and impression management as controlled authenticity, contributed to a more profound understanding of the experiences and behaviour of women of colour in the online dating sphere, with a specific focus on Bumble, the self-proclaimed feminist dating app.

The results uncovered how power dynamics that are prevalent in Dutch hegemony are also perpetuated in online dating for women of colour. While complete docile bodies of colour are not produced through the exertion of hegemonic power, like Foucault posits about contemporary society, there certainly are wide-ranging ways in which women of colour have to self-monitor, as they have internalised certain dynamics that have taught them how to position themselves in Dutch society (Bordo, 1993, p. 192; Foucault, 1977, p. 136). The data analysis showed that to a certain extent, a Panoptic gaze is always present among the women of colour. Having grown up with and in Dutch culture, they were constantly Othered and confronted with their racial heritage that separates them from what is considered '*gewoon*' Dutch [ordinary] (Rose, 2022, p. 243; Weiner, 2015, pp. 575-576). Othering treatment was strongly present in various ways that ranged from subtle to more aggressive, commonly materialising as racial micro-aggressions. This is in line with research on Dutch racism, identifying it as everyday racism, having been normalised to the extent that it is not recognised as a problematic embedded structure anymore (Dikmans, 2020, p. 49; Essed & Hoving, 2014, p. 18). These experiences have formed the basis of how women of colour navigate Dutch culture and thus shape their dating practices.

Studying Bumble opened up various angles into examining self-disciplinary practices, as mediated by platform design. The results showed that the architecture of digital dating influences how people behave, as well as the other way around, as technology is adapted and altered to human behaviour as well. According to the company itself, Bumble's affordances have been developed through a feminist lens, though this was not a unanimous experience among participants. The majority was either not fully aware of its feminist infrastructure or felt that it was not living up to its

promises. Even though a majority of women in the sample felt like Bumble's user base was different in comparison to other online dating platforms, they still experienced marginalised practices by male Bumble users. The Women-First function of Bumble was mostly positively received, however participants still felt limited in their control over their Bumble experiences and how their male counterparts behaved. The 24-hour window afforded to matches mostly increased frustration among the women, and it lowered their expectations in the quality of their dating experiences, which were already impacted by the perceived casual dating environment in the Netherlands (Sobieraj & Humphreys, 2021, p. 10).

While its design may be called feminist, the app architecture still simplifies human interaction, because of its gamification and self-commodifying properties, and in spite of the app's approach, it does not manage to resolve structural problems that women of colour encounter (Young & Roberts, 2023, p. 1248). On one hand, some women perceived the Bumble audience to be substantially different in comparison to other platforms, in terms of audience, and in some ways user behaviour. On the other hand, the participants noted many instances of harassment, sexual racism, fetishisation were still prevalent. Bumble's architecture of gamified practices, superficiality, and visual dominance facilitates digital disinhibition and hence, is also prone to further problematise societal oppression (Matharu, et al., 2023, p. 141; Timmermans & Courtois, 2018, p. 61). Most women were not convinced by Bumble's ability to either be a fully feminist platform or improving gendered harassment that women experience.

Similarly, participants did go along with certain heteronormative scripts, which were also perpetuated on Bumble. Especially as a result of the update that grants men the ability to start conversations if women choose to allow it, some participants noted that they felt like they did not have more agency over their dating experience, in comparison to other platforms. Rather, some participants felt like Bumble gave men more space to be performative about their values. While Bumble's design aims to encourage users to be more intentional about dating through curating profiles around personal values, principles, and transparency, some women felt like this gave male users the opportunity to adopt tactical behaviour that misrepresents what they are looking for, such as keeping up the pretence of being feminist.

In their online dating behaviour, the women were vigilant about their racialised beings, both intrinsically and extrinsically, meaning that they were aware of their 'Otherness', as well as frequently reminded of their Otherness by the men they encountered on dating apps. In line with the literature, almost every participant had been subjected to stereotyping and sexual racism, which had several implications for their dating practices (Banks, et al., 2024, p. 5; Stacey & Forbes, 2021, p. 375). In navigating these dynamics, the women implemented different self-disciplinary behavioural strategies, such as pro-assimilative attitudes, hyper-awareness of Dutch culture, emphasised feminine expression, playing into stereotypes, and interracial dating. Having been conditioned into certain ways of thinking from a young age, this also bled into the women's dating practices in their lives as

adults (Pyke & Johnson, 2003, p. 36). Assimilation materialised due to internalisation of Dutch hegemonic structures among participants, that resulted in their adaptation to the culture (Hamilton, et al., 2023, p. 329). This also depended on in which environment participants were raised, as those with stronger ties to their non-Dutch heritage found themselves less likely to identify with a Dutch ethnicity and to integrate into Dutch society. Among participants that showed a weaker connection to their non-Dutch side, simultaneously, stronger tendencies to date interracially with white men were observed.

Two lines of thinking are prevalent in dating research, one arguing that interracial dating is more progressive, arguing that commonly people date within their racial own racial boundaries, which means that when people tend to engage in racially homophilic dating, it perpetuates stratification among different ethnic groups (Lin & Lundquist, 2013, p. 207). The other observes that people generally gravitate towards the dominant racial status - which is white people in Western countries - for assumed social elevation, hence minority groups frequently end up settling with white partners (Chappetta & Barth, 2022, p. 1063; Pyke, 2010, p. 84). Among participants, it seemed that the second theory resonated with the experiences they had, as participants showed awareness as to why they exclusively dated white men and how this pattern had been developed.

Consistent with Bordo (1993, p. 191) and Bartky's (1998, p. 27) notions regarding the Foucauldian discipline of the female body, the results illustrate how it arises in subtle ways that the women of colour impose on themselves without the active intent to do so. As Foucault's theory states, the women of colour in the sample have adopted internal mechanisms, informed by their societal condition. As internalisation and normalisation play key roles here, as Dutch hegemony exercises power in a way that teaches women of colour to produce a docile body intrinsically, without needing to be told what to do and how to behave (Foucault, 1977, p. 136). The female body of colour that is docile, carries out disciplinary practices in dating, as a result of having normalised certain behavioural methods by their external environment, through assimilative attitudes. Some participants sometimes showed complicity in the stereotyping they were subjected to, feeling like they had to fulfil certain expectations. This was also shaped by childhoods, the environments in which the women in the sample grew up in, and the distance they had to their non-Dutch culture. Self-discipline for women is as Bartky (1988, p. 37) described, a passive practice, socially constructed and normalised to the extent that women do not recognise their behaviour as being subordinated based on their gender. The results illustrate how Dutch hegemony is kept in its place, normalising the power dynamics on an everyday basis, seeping through the personal sphere by shaping romantic interactions between individuals (Hamilton, et al., 2023, p. 317). Experiences from the women in the sample illustrated that the woman of colour is in a unique position, as she is constantly reminded of being 'different' and the Other. The way women in the sample navigated around this power imbalance was partially by being compliant. This is not a surprising observation, considering that there are social benefits to reproducing hegemonic structures. Hamilton, et al.,

(2023, p. 329) discuss how women of colour may adopt white traits, adhering to white patriarchy through assimilation. However, equally common was resistance and subverting Dutch hegemonic structures in dating behaviour, through rejecting stereotypes, curating profiles to attract a non-white audience, and seeking out like-minded users on Bumble.

While participants did not experience high levels of pressure to intrasexually compete with white women for men, they did often note how certain expectations about women's behaviour informed by white standards affected them. For instance, Black women and women with dark skin in the sample were highly aware of how they are likely to be perceived as more aggressive, loud, and angry, which led to vigilance and self-monitoring in how they presented their online selves (Curington, 2020a, p. 335). Additionally, often, the women were exoticised by white men, who did not expect the feminine expression of women of colour to coincide with white hegemonic femininity but were rather interested in the fact that they are not similar to white women at all. This coincides with Matharu, et al.'s (2023, p. 140) conclusions about the white male's dating behaviour in relation to women of colour, seeing them as exotic experiments, delineating how the digital realm opens up new ways for fetishising and sexual racism.

Considering that the women talked about growing out of their internalised racism, noting substantial differences in how they positioned themselves in relation to white femininity and its encompassing standards as they matured, they also felt a greater need to see their own value and have this be reflected in their online dating behaviour. Low levels of intrasexual competition with white women may be explained by the fact that authenticity was prioritised among all participants, as presented in the last theme. For some women, this behaviour could have been facilitated by the fact that Bumble was perceived as a safer online dating environment, in which women felt like they could be more authentic. This drive for authenticity among the women can be interpreted as a resistance strategy, allowing the woman of colour to go against hegemonic standards, simply by being herself.

Yet also, upon further examination, placing authenticity in the online context calls into question how it is shaped by platform functionalities. In line with Bumble's feminist beliefs, the programme encourages authenticity, but within the demarcations of the digital sphere. Technological design moderates how authentic self-presentation may be expressed through functionalities, nudging, and other architecture (Ranzini & Lutz, 2017, p. 91). While Bumble's affordances give rise to a wide range of user interpretations, online behaviour is still partially shaped by the platform architecture (Parisi & Comunello, 2020, p. 70). The internalisation of strategic communication also plays a key role here, as the women may feel like they do not engage in intended impression management, because of their activity on Bumble, they have subconsciously adopted strategies and behaviours that they do not immediately recognise in themselves.

Overall, dating app sentiment was quite negative, even though eleven out of twelve participants were still active on at least one dating platform. Most negative ideas arose from the specific issues they ran into regarding harassment, but also broader problems that recur on dating

apps, such as low levels of commitment and the increasing casualisation of dating, leading to exchanges with potential dates that would not lead anywhere (Bryant & Sheldon, 2017, pp. 9-10). The insights of this study have shed light on women of colour's online dating behaviour in the Netherlands, but they have also illustrated that it may be time to re-examine the tangible implications of dating app use. Considering the amount of evidence that showcases the complex issues that arise in the digital dating sphere and how it has tendencies to exacerbate structural inequalities, it calls for dating apps to transform their approaches and put in the effort to develop platform design that addresses these systematic issues.

5.2 Overall limitations

This study recognises several limitations that are important to discuss. Firstly, the research chose to focus on women of colour, rather than specific racial and ethnic identities, which allowed for a diverse sample that enhances the intersectional lens in the study (Carastathis, 2014, p. 308). However, it also reduces the study's capacity to focus on specific racial and ethnic identities, as it is not feasible to fully grasp the experiences that certain races and ethnicities experience. Considering that this research is the first of its kind, it was deemed as too restrictive to limit the research to one specific racial group. While the sample does contain a diverse group of women, the sample still lacks inclusion, as women from the Middle-Eastern North-African region or with an Arabic background were not represented in the sample. Especially considering widespread Islamophobia in the Netherlands, future research should focus on this by first demarcating the racial, cultural, and ethnic background of the sample, and then gathering data on the role of intersectionality from there. However, it should be noted that Carastathis (2014, p. 308) discusses how research that is limited to a certain category runs the risk of undermining the intersectional lens, as the restricted focus may not be able to fully allow various identity markers to organically emerge.

Related to this, the research did not specifically examine other identity markers, such as disability, educational background, socio-economic status, and age, but rather choosing to let these axes emerge organically. This benefitted the authenticity of intersectionality among participants' experiences, but it also meant that these various axes may not have received the academic scrutiny that they require to paint a more complete picture of how women's behaviour in online dating is affected and shaped by these dimensions. While two participants did briefly discuss how educational background affected their online dating behaviour, other factors, such as religious beliefs and able-bodiedness did not emerge in the interviews. This may be, because it was not deemed relevant enough by participants or the research was not focused enough to allow these narratives to emerge.

Additionally, while the research used Bumble as a case study, it had to be situated in the broader online dating scene, thus the interview guide was developed in a way that touched upon different platforms as well, as it contextualised Bumble's feminist design in the online dating environment, thus allowing more profound insights into how the app is used and what its social

implications are. Most participants had multiple dating apps installed or were experienced with multiple platforms, but this also affected how participants answered the questions, resulting in ambiguity regarding the platforms. The research could have more profoundly considered this imprecision by formulating questions that allow the answers to be more defined and bound to one platform. Similarly, other dating platforms also offer valuable academic insights, and the results illustrated how Tinder specifically marginalises the women of colour in the sample substantially more than other platforms. This calls for more research into how a hook-up environment and platform design affects women of colour, which has been done, but most commonly in an North-American college context, without taking into consideration other axes, such as education, age, and social status (Christensen, 2021, p. 432; Eschmann, et al., 2024, p. 1588; Hanson, 2022, p. 894; Spell, 2017, p. 172).

5.3 Recommendations for future research

This research posed interesting insights into online dating behaviour for women of colour, but it has only scratched the surface of an expansive field in which technology, behaviour, and society and its various structures intersect. Especially considering that most participants noted feelings of frustration, exhaustion and aversion towards dating apps, there is reason to study why they would still use it, despite its downsides. Considering that the women in the sample are also forced to engage with exoticisation, digital-sexual racism, and other specific manifestations of marginalisation that arise in the online sphere (Matharu, et al., 2023, p. 141). The behavioural implications that arose in this specific study require more academic attention, to contribute to meaning making and gather insights into how non-dominant groups navigate through platforms that consistently marginalise them (Noble, 2018, pp. 1-2). Similarly, this research also did not consider motivations or reasons why women were on dating apps. From the participants, it seemed that those looking for a serious relationship experienced more frustration with Bumble than those who were not, which alludes to the fact that user motivations may have different behavioural implications.

The Foucauldian lens uncovered insightful observations into the participants' experiences, as well as interesting implications, both theoretical and practical, however it also calls into question from which other angles the experiences of women of colour could be approached. Existing literature has touched upon other behavioural implications of dating platforms, such as empowerment mechanisms and various forms of resistance offered by women of colour, which should be further explored through an intersectional lens (Sobieraj & Humphreys, 2011, p. 2; Thompson, 2018, p. 74).

This research has superficially discussed the algorithmic side of platforms, but future research could offer more profound insights into algorithmic design and behavioural implications for marginalised groups. This thesis centralised the experiences of women of colour themselves, but it is also noteworthy to consider how these big tech corporations create technology that has mediated

implications with its design choices and may cause more harm the most vulnerable among the population in the process, including women of colour (Wang, 2023, p. 269).

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Appendix A Interview guide

1 Persoonlijke informatie / *Personal information*

- Wat is je leeftijd?
  What is your age?
- Waar ben je geboren?
  Where were you born?
- Hoe lang woon je al in Nederland?
  How long have you lived in the Netherlands?
- Waar ben je opgegroeid?
  Where did you grow up?
- Waar woon je nu?
  Where do you currently live?
- Wat is de afkomst van je (biologische) moeder?
  What is your biological mother's origin?
- Wat is de afkomst van je (biologische) vader?
  What is your biological father's origin?
- Wat is je etniciteit and ras?
  What is your ethnicity and race?
- Hoe definieer je zelf je etnische identiteit?
  How do you define your ethnic identity?
- In hoeverre beschouw je jezelf als Nederlands en niet-Nederlands? Waarom?
  To what extent do you consider yourself Dutch or not Dutch? Why?
- Hoe zie je jezelf als een vrouw van kleur?
  In what ways do you see yourself as a woman of colour?

2 Nederlandse context / *Dutch context*

- Zien Nederlandse mensen jou wel eens als anders?
  Do Dutch people see you differently?
- Op welke manier?
  In what ways?
- Welke ervaringen heb je met als 'anders' behandeld worden door de Nederlandse samenleving?
  What kind of experiences do you have with being treated 'differently' by Dutch society?
- Welke ervaringen heb je met discriminatie en racisme?
  What kind of experiences do you have with discrimination and racism?
- Hoe beïnvloed dit hoe je jezelf en je afkomst ziet?
  How does that influence how you see yourself and your ethnic heritage?

3 Dating gedrag / *Dating behaviour*

- Hoe lang date je al?
  How long have you been dating?
- Wat zoek je zelf in daten?
  What are you looking for in dating?
- Wat zijn gewoontes die je hebt met daten?
  What kind of habits do you have with regards to dating?
- Hoe dragen ze bij aan wat je zoekt in daten?
  How do these contribute to what you are looking for in dating?
- Wat voor invloed heeft je etnische achtergrond en cultuur op je dating gedrag?
  What kind of influence does your ethnic background and culture have on your dating behaviour?
- Geeft het vrijheid of juist niet? Waarom?
  Does it liberate you or not? Why?
- Hoe zie jij daten in je niet-Nederlandse culture achtergrond?
  How do you view dating in the culture of your non-Dutch heritage?
- Hoe zie je Nederlandse dating cultuur?
  How do you view Dutch dating culture?
- Hoe herken je dit in mannen die je datet?
  How do you recognise that in the men that you date?
- Zijn er gewoontes of gebruiken die (Nederlandse) mannen hebben die afwijken van hoe jij zelf daten ziet? Op welke manier?

  Are there habits or practices that (Dutch) men have that divert from how you view dating? In what ways?
- Hoe ga je daar mee om?
  How do you navigate that?
- Heb je een bepaald type man dat je datet? Kan je het type beschrijven?
  Do you have a specific type of man that you date? Can you describe it?
- In hoeverre zien mannen met wie je omgaat in een romantische context jou als een vrouw van kleur?
  To what extent do the men that you date see you as a woman of colour?
- Waar merk je dat aan?
  How do you recognise that?
- Komen hier bepaalde problemen of ongemakken bij kijken?
  Do any problems or does any discomfort arise with that?
- Hoe ga je daar zelf mee om? Verandert het jouw gedrag?
  How do you handle that? Does it change your own behaviour?

- In hoeverre heb je ervaringen gehad waar Nederlandse mannen je anders behandelden tijdens het daten door je etnische identiteit?
  To what extent have you experienced that Dutch men treated you differently during dating because of your ethnic and racial identity?

4 Vrouwelijkheid / *Femininity*

- Waar denk je aan bij vrouwelijkheid?
  What comes to mind with 'femininity'?
- Hoe vul je vrouwelijkheid zelf in?
  How do you shape femininity?
- Denk je vaak aan je eigen vrouwelijkheid? Qua uiterlijk, maar ook gedrag?
  Do you think about your own femininity often? Regarding appearance, but also behaviour?
- Denk je dat je etniciteit een invloed heeft op hoe jij je eigen vrouwelijkheid ziet?
  Does your ethnicity influence the way you view your own femininity?
- Hoe geef je dit vorm tijdens het daten?
  What kind of role does it play during dating?
- Denk je aan hoe anderen jouw vrouwelijkheid waarnemen en beoordelen? Waarom?
  Do you think about how other people observe your femininity and judge it? Why?
- In hoeverre denk je dat vrouwelijke standaarden opvolgen belangrijk is in daten? Waarom?
  To what extent do you think that following feminine expectations is important during dating? Why?
- Denk je of merk je dat mannen jouw vrouwelijkheid beoordelen gebaseerd op je etnische identiteit? Waarom?
  Do you think about how men judge your femininity based on your ethnic identity? Why?
- Hoe zie jij de verwachtingen die de Nederlandse samenleving heeft over vrouwelijkheid?
  How do you see the expectations that Dutch society has regarding femininity?
- Vergelijk je jezelf wel eens met witte Nederlandse vrouwen? Op welke manier?
  Do you ever compare yourself to white, Dutch women? Op welke manier?

5 Bumble en online daten / *Bumble and online dating*

- Hoe lang zit je al op Bumble?
  How long have you been active on Bumble?
- Hoe ervaren en bekend ben je met dating apps?
  How experienced and familiar are you with dating apps?
- Wat zijn de redenen dat je op dating apps zit?
  What are your reasons for being active on dating apps?

- Waarom heb je ervoor gekozen om specifiek Bumble te downloaden?
  Why did you specifically choose to download Bumble?
- Welke andere dating apps heb je gebruikt naast Bumble?
  Which other dating apps have you used besides Bumble?
- Hoe lang heb je deze andere apps gebruikt?
  For how long have you used these other apps?
- Vind je dat Bumble zich onderscheidt van andere dating apps? Op welke manier?
  Do you think that Bumble differentiates itself from other dating apps? In which ways?
- Wat vind je wel en niet leuk aan Bumble qua platform? Waarom?
  What do you like and do not like about Bumble as a platform? Why?
- De oprichter van Bumble noemt het een feministische dating app. Wat zijn jouw gedachten over feminisme?
  Bumble's founder calls it a feminist dating app. What are your thoughts on feminism?
  - Denk je dat het nodig is in online daten? Waarom =?
    Do you think it is necessary in online dating? Why?
  - Herken je dat de functies van de app daadwerkelijk feministisch zijn? Waarom?
    Do you recognise that the functionalities of the app are actually feminist? Why?
  - Heeft het een effect op hoe je de app gebruikt? Op welke manier?
    Does it affect how you use the app? In what ways?
- Denk je dat het een effect heeft op de profielen van de mannen die je ziet op Bumble? Waarom?
  Do you think it affects the men's profiles that you see on Bumble? Why?
- Laten we jouw profiel bespreken en wat voor keuzes je hebt gemaakt in het samenstellen van je profiel.
  Let's discuss your profile and the choices you made regarding its curation.
- Welke keuzes heb je gemaakt met betrekking tot de gekozen foto's?
  How and why did you select the photos?
- Welke keuzes heb je gemaakt met betrekking tot de gekozen prompts? En je bio?
  What considerations do you make when adding prompts and your bio?
- Welke keuzes heb je gemaakt met betrekking tot de toegevoegde extra informatie? Educatie, werk, lengte, sterrenbeeld, etc.

  What considerations do you make regarding the added information? Education, work, height, astrology sign, etc.
- Waar hoop je op dat andere Bumble gebruikers naar kijken als ze jouw profiel zien?
  What do you hope other Bumble users see when they view your profile?
- Waar ben je naar op zoek bij andere profielen?
  What do you look for in the profiles of other men?
  - Wat voor invloed heeft dit op je eigen gedrag?

How does this affect your ow behaviour?

- Heb je dingen die je doet om de kansen te maximaliseren voor matches?
  What kind of practices do you engage in to maximalise your matches?

- Heb je het idee dat je veel van jezelf moet veranderen op Bumble om goed over te komen? Waarom?
  Do you feel like you have to change yourself a lot on Bumble to make the right impression? Why?
- Zit er een groot verschil in hoe je jezelf ziet in het echt en hoe je jezelf presenteert op de app? Op welke manieren?
  Are there discrepancies in how you see yourself in real life and how you present yourself on the app? In what ways?
- Hoe reageren mannen op jouw Bumble profiel?
  How do men generally respond to your Bumble profile?
- Hoe verlopen gesprekken op Bumble?
  How do conversations go on Bumble?
- Welke onderwerpen snijd je vaak aan?
  What kind of topics do you use often?
- Beginnen mannen vaak direct over je etnische identiteit?
  Do men often start talking about your ethnic identity?
- Afhangende van hoe mannen op Bumble zich gedragen met je, hoe pas je je daarop aan?
  Depending on how men on Bumble behave towards you, how do you adjust yourself to that?
- Als je dates hebt gehad via Bumble, hoe verliepen die?
  If you have had dates via Bumble, how did they go?
- Na die dates, heb je je gedrag daarna aangepast op Bumble? Waarom?
  After those dates, did you adjust your behaviour on Bumble? Why?
- Heb je het idee dat je jezelf in de gaten houd op Bumble en ervoor zorgt dat je je anders gedraagt dan je normaal zou doen? Op welke manier?
  Do you feel like you are watching yourself on Bumble? Do you think Bumble is causing you to behave differently than you would usually? In what ways?

Appendix B Participant overview

Participant	Identities	Age	Place of origin	Current province of residence
Abena	Dutch/Ghanian	24	Larger urban city in the Netherlands	Zuid-Holland
Afia	Ghanian	20	Larger city in the Netherlands	Noord-Holland
Ayani	Curaçaoan/Antillean/Dutch	21	Outskirts urban area in the Netherlands	Zuid-Holland
Gabriela	Brazilian/Dutch	21	Urban area in the Netherlands	Utrecht
Honey	Dutch/Turkish/Surinamese	23	Larger city in the Netherlands	Zuid-Holland
Isabella	Dutch/Taiwanese	23	Taiwan	Zuid-Holland
Nazirah	Aruban/Dutch	26	Aruba	Noord-Holland
Reyna	Hindustani Surinamese/Dutch	20	Larger city in Netherlands	Zuid-Holland
Rina	Indonesian	44	Indonesia	Friesland
Sifra	Hindustani Surinamese/Dutch	23	Hongkong	Zuid-Holland
Varsha	Dutch/Hindustani Surinamese	22	Larger city in the Netherlands	Zuid-Holland
Zahrah	Nigerian/Hindustani Surinamese/Dutch	26	Rural area in the Netherlands	Zuid-Holland

Appendix C Overview of codes

Open codes	Axial codes	Selective codes
• Being cautious towards dating Dutch men • Being open to date all kinds of men • WOC playing ignorant on purpose regarding questions about their ethnicity	Resistance	Negotiating with hegemony
• Embracing Dutchness • Being marginalised by own ethnicity • Feeling Dutch	Assimilation	
• Being biased against own culture • Internalised western culture • Internalised xenophobia	Internalisation	
• Considering oneself as 'just' Dutch • Type is white, Dutch men • Having a *kleurtje* (a bit of colour)	Normalisation	
• Going along with stereotypes • Having to continue to play a certain role as a WOC • Being whitewashed or regarded as such	Compliance	
• Angry Black woman stereotype • Micro-aggressions in the form of sexual objectification • Assumed submissiveness • Ethnic assumptions about behaviour	Stereotyping	Power dynamics on Bumble
• Feeling like you have to prove your beauty • White male as the norm • Subconsciously exclusively dating white men	Hierarchy of desire	
• Being desirable for white men • Cultural curiosity displayed by white men	Exoticisation	

• Standing out as a WOC • Being an experiment for white men		
• Refraining from dating within own culture • Having a type based in ethnicity and race • Being othered by non-Dutch culture	Homophily	
• Digital disinhibition • Sexual racism • Sexual objectification	Harassment	
• Having more autonomy on Bumble • Limitations of women-first function • Bumble's audience being perceived as better	Role of technological design	
• Dutch beauty standards • Comparing oneself to white women • Expectations about feminine behaviour	Expressions of femininity	Impression management as controlled authenticity
• Thinking about men's perception • Feelings of having to prove oneself as not being like other WOC • Being perceived as angry in photographs	Internalisation of external gaze	
• Marketing oneself as desirable for men • Strategic profile curation • Continuously updating photos • Disseminating a certain lifestyle	Internalised strategic communication	
• Diluted power mechanism during conversations on Bumble • Stereotyping facilitated by dating app • Digital harassment	Limitations of app design	