

The role of the senses in identity construction: a black queer woman's tale

Jaemy Mans

740335

22-06-2025

Erasmus University Rotterdam

Master Engaging Public Issues

First supervisor: Jessica Steinman

Second supervisor: Jess Bier

Word count: 9996



Acknowledgements

This paper is an ode to all of my black queer sisters, the true inventors of magic. The one's that have taught me that I'm allowed to dream and believe no matter the destination of my desires, even during writing a sociology thesis for the first time in my life. It is the biggest form of liberation to realize there is no limit to hope and there is no shame in failure, as long as I try again. A form of liberation I owe to all the black queer women who have held the sun before me in the palms of their hands and figured out a way to make it shine even brighter than before. I want to express my profound appreciation to all of my participants for coming together to work on such a beautiful study and sharing all of your beautiful stories. A special thank you to Sharaenna, Ishfarah and Tanishaley, three of the key people in my life this year whom are so unapologetically themselves, it taught me to love all parts of my identity as dearly and deeply. I am so grateful for the unique bonds we share and continue to share every single day. I would also like to thank my supervisor Jessica, for believing in me throughout this whole time and helping me shape this paper. Without you, this paper would have not been what it is today and I'm thankful for your continuous patience and guidance. Lastly, I'd like to give thanks to Anana Keduama Keduampo, for the life I am granted to live as Jaemy Elisa Mans.

Abstract

This study was conducted to understand the role the senses play in the social construction of black queer women in the Netherlands, in spaces they consider home and in public. The senses inform a large part of our understanding of ourselves and each other, by assigning meanings to experiences and labeling those as our subjective truths. However, once an subjective truth derived from our sensory experience of each other is adopted as a norm, this can turn into amplified experience of alienation for black queer women due to intersectionality. Semi-structured individual interviews were conducted to understand how black queer women construct their own identity through sensory rituals and their unique ways of shaping their sensory embodiment. A joined focus group meeting was held to reflect together on ways in which difficulties are faced while navigating oneself through white work and queer spaces, but also how they resist these through sensory protests. Common themes which emerged throughout the individual interviews, were how associations with certain feelings, events and past memories to sensory rituals made one feel more like themselves. The focus group meeting revealed a complex dynamic between the three identity markers with its unique implications for self representation. However, a main way to protest these, was mostly done through intentionally take up space.

Keywords: sensory identity construction, intersectionality, oppression, black queer women

Introduction

From the ages 4-7, I was the only colored girl at my primary school in Assendelft. Everyday, our class used to have lunch together, all in a big circle, as we discussed the day and what was still on the planning. It was one of those days, when I opened my lunch box and found a banana with a few brown spots on it, of which I had never been a grand fan. While I peeled it and started eating it, the class started making monkey sounds. I remember a certain sensation going through me, one which made me realize later that I'd never fit into the class. The teacher shushed them, as they softly giggled and we continued with the rest of the day. It was the last time however, that I brought a banana to class.

I was not the first child that had ever eaten a banana in class, yet it was the first time that this specific event occurred and one of my earliest memories of racism. When I sat with it a few years later, it became clear to me that I was met with monkey sounds when I started eating my banana, because the visual image of a banana has been associated with monkeys who often eat these. In this specific instance however, it was my black skin which elicited this response, as blackness has often been associated with monkeys, through historically racist depictions and narratives. This example underscores the importance of the senses in informing and shaping our conscious behavioral approach towards each other, as they serve as our primary indicators to provide a subjective understanding of external input. It determines our likelihood of association with spaces and people and teaches us how to move through life in ways that are most optimal to our survival by recognizing patterns between what we observe and how we interpret this (Sekimoto, 2018). However, these observations may also develop into normative ideologies to serve as a foundation for judging what is in line with our expectations. These ideologies can consist of seemingly innocent opinions such as that you prefer not to hang out with someone you consider 'loud', but may subtly develop into stereotypes, prejudices or discrimination once these sensory ideologies are widely shared. Once established and reinforced, such an 'ideology' may be automatically activated and becomes visible in behavior, when we detect deviations from what is considered the standard. Especially in the approach and oppression of non-normative people, the senses are integral for perpetuation of prejudice and stereotypes (Sekimoto & Brown, 2020). As these people fall outside of the white, heteronormative, male standards that inform most of our Western worldview and sense-making, our senses automatically sense deviation and treat them differently than the standard procedure when no deviations are detected.

What happens when several marginalized identities are at play? If our senses are programmed to think alongside the binary lines of the world, how do we respond to people who fall outside of those lines on various areas such as race, gender and sex? Black queer women often become victim of alienation based on their multiple identities which intersect and all individually and combined face their unique ways of oppression (Howard, 2014). This creates tension and a simultaneous

hypervisibility and invisibility in society. Especially when navigating oneself as a black queer woman in the Netherlands, a presumed safe haven for diversity and inclusivity, creates more tension as the idea of discrimination based on one's appearance is nonexistent according to the general Dutch attitude. This also makes it more difficult to speak up about discrimination as it is not recognized or its impact are diminished, which leaves black queer women continuously having to choose between ways of self-preservation and protection (Del Valle, 2018).

Theoretically, this study covers a topic which is largely underrepresented in the studies of the senses, black- and queer studies by focusing on the relation between the senses and multiple identity markers, specifically those of black queer women. Although previous research about the senses and how they work as tools of oppression is present, the focus is rarely specifically placed on black queer women as there is often only attention for the implications of the senses in approaching race or gender individually and mostly originates from the US. Research about the role of the senses in queerness is practically nonexistent. In Europe and the Netherlands specifically, black studies only tend to focus on structural issues and how one navigates themselves through oppressive systems, although navigating oneself through these structures primarily happens through the senses.

Therefore, my paper aimed to answer the following question: *How do the senses construct the identities of black queer women, at home and in public, in the Netherlands?*

By answering this question, I aimed to fill a big gap in the research about the senses and our ways of connecting with one and other by placing the focus on how these are experienced by black queer women. I propose a novel and vital contribution to the field of the senses by expanding intersectionality into the field of the senses, to highlight that *the personal is political*. It is extremely relevant that the political role of racial and gendered identities, and how does connect with each other, needs to be recognized in the studies of the senses. When someone's identity in itself is a site of resistance, this greatly impacts one's situatedness in both private and public spaces. It is important to understand what this looks like and how it is experienced by black queer women to highlight the importance of taking multi-marginalized identities into account. Simultaneously, I'm aiming to provide the tools on how to deal with sensory oppression through the testimonies of the lived experience of black queer women. By placing the power of the narrative in the hands of my black queer sisters and coming together in doing so, I want to highlight the importance of their agency in stories about oppression as they consist of so much more than that.

Conceptual framework

The senses and identity making

To hear, to smell, to touch, to see, to taste. Our 5 senses are fundamental in order to perceive and make sense of the world around us and ourselves. In the West there is a strict divide between the mind and body, between feeling and thinking (Sekimoto & Brown, 2020), which makes the act of sensing to appear as an irrational and ambiguous tool of interpretation and knowledge production, separated from the mind. However, it is argued that the senses originate from inside the body rather than to depend on external input. Merleau-Ponty explained in his book *'The phenomenology of perception'* (2012) that sensation actually consists of attributing qualities to an object, qualities originating from inner beliefs and knowledge. When we for example examine an image we already assume a 'figure' on a 'background', it has an 'outline', which does not 'belong' to the background and which 'stands out' from it.' (Merleau-Ponty, p.40). Merleau-Ponty illustrates with this example that we don't just perceive the world as it, but rather interpret it through our 'informed' perspective and construct the truth based on this. Sekimoto (2018), partially considers this, but also hypothesizes that the body in itself functions as a mechanism of active experience-seeking. To her, the body represents an independent force with the goal to derive meaning through awareness and experiences in the world, according to how it is situated. Our body then, assigns meaning according to how we experience the world. As these frameworks oppose each other to a certain extent, I believe both are crucial in considering how black queer women move and make sense of the world around them.

One's own identity is argued to be formed through embodied practices which are culturally and socially informed (Palipane, 2020). We make sense and find a home in our identities through the multitudes of feeling and associating. In *'Creating Home: Intersections of memory and identity'* (2018), Ratnam discusses important sensory factors of constructing identity and feeling at home, highlighting 'home' as a reflection of self identification. She argues how identity is often found in ethnic food and the ways in which this is eaten, the scents which were predominantly present in the past during one's youth and also the sounds in which someone finds comfort. Due to the associations these factors have with the earliest memories of what a 'home' is and feels, sensory input becomes culturally laden and integral to developing a sense of self (Ratnam, 2018). I hypothesize that especially in the case of black queer women, this plays an important role in the sensory rituals they engage in order to ground themselves in their identities and primarily their 'blackness'.

When we try to make sense of the world us, whether it is intentionally done through experiences of the world or how the body is socially constructed, depends on different factors related to global structures of power. Sarah Ahmed (2006) builds further upon the theory of Merleau-Ponty, arguing that to be bodied and have a lived experience implies that we have an implicit knowledge about how to interpret external input, which is inherited through historically embedded manners of making senses of

the world, largely originating from colonial and patriarchal structures. She highlights that to sense is never a neutral act. This becomes especially important when realizing that the senses are at the foundation of deciding what belongs to the 'normative' (Merleau-Ponty, 2012). The sensory experience of ourselves but especially of others, decides one's humanity and what being human includes, emphasizing that to sense is to have power, as we have the power to judge what is normative according to us and consequently construct a subjective truth.

The danger of this mechanism becomes clear, when analyzing this on a societal scale; as it is argued that society functions as a collective sensory experience (Sekimoto & Brown, 2020). A key marker of society is the deeply engrained sense of belonging in our instincts and direct our behavior (Geurts, 2002). This sense of belonging brings about a need for conformity in order to remain in harmony with the rest and when one cannot bring themselves to do so, it indicates divergence, leading to ostracization, discrimination or alienation from the larger group. As Ahmed underlined how the dominant perspective from which we 'sense' is built upon colonial and patriarchal structures, this primarily targets marginalized identities. An example which illustrates this is the alienation of Indian people as it is often argued that they smell 'bad'. When people have a bad odor, they are met with apathy as they're smell represents the inability to upkeep with one's body, which ultimately could lead to being excluded from society (Trnka et al., 2013).

Race constructed through the senses

A pervasive form of alienation from society often occurs through race; as it is understood as a social construct used to group people based on phenotypical differences such as skin color, or hair texture. One would argue that race is therefore a concept which exists on the body and primarily depends on being visually perceived, however there are various studies which contest this notion. As the senses are argued to exist out of top-down processes, it confirms internalized beliefs about the social hierarchy of race in a variety of ways (Sekimoto, 2018). Understanding race becomes a testament to our capacity of categorizing not only one's appearance, but also sound and smell, as evidence of differences in groups and social hierarchy. Fanon illustrates this well with his example of how a white boy exclaimed 'Look a Negro, I'm scared!' at the sight of him in France (Fanon, 2008). His blackness was not merely an observation, but a confirmation of the existing stereotype that blackness equaled fear. Furthermore, another important research within the field of the senses was conducted by Osagie (2010) as he investigated how race does not have to rely on the visual field in order to be observed, by interviewing blind people about their strategies to sense race. He discovered that people who were born blind were able to deduce one's race through social interactions and engagement of the other senses. Likewise, Jennifer Stoeber (2016) highlighted the 'sonic color line' which enables racial identities and even gender to be constructed around auditory input, drawing a line between whiteness and blackness and allows one to distinguish between what is considered 'black'

and ‘white’ sound. She explains how the ‘loudness’ of black women in specific is often interpreted as being annoying and a mark of less intelligence as it is compared to the ‘softness’ of white dominant culture. Stoevers goes on to argue that there is a ‘socially expected range of sounds’ to ‘aurally’ communicate ‘race’, dating back to the earliest days of slavery in which slaves were prohibited by their slave masters to sing due to the ‘emotionality’ and ‘unpredictability’.

Intersectionality

As of so far, it becomes clear that identity is sensed into being. This can cause marginalization once deviation from the normative ideology is detected. This process is exacerbated when multiple forms of identity are found to not fit within the norm. Black queer women are an example of how not adhering to the normative interpretation of the senses leads to oppression, as they often become invisible and targeted based on each of their identities (Genous-Tate, 2010). In order to understand this dynamic, Crenshaw (1998) explained this as the phenomenon of ‘intersectionality’ with an analogy of traffic in an intersection, which works in all four directions. She posited that discrimination doesn’t follow a continuous flow but rather flows through different directions, as seen in an intersection. Therefore, once an accident were to take place, it could be due to the movements of cars coming from various directions making it hard to determine which car specifically were to be responsible. Similarly, the hurt black women experience due to oppression are no one-way forms of discrimination but are all interrelated. Black women do not simply face racism or sexism, but an intersectional type of discrimination which interacts with their multiple disenfranchised identity markers and cannot exist in separation from each other. Although queerness is not mentioned, it gives an idea of how multiple marginalized identities could potentially result in complex and unique ways of embodiment, but also the oppression they’re met with. I argue that by adding queerness, it results in complex and unique ways of embodiment. This subsequently means that the oppression they face, presents new challenges are experienced more intensely.

Queer phenomenology

Black queer women are continuously defined according to Western standards of humanization and gendering through the ways in which their bodies take up space build upon problematic navigation and interpretation of the senses, exempting their bodies to be acknowledged as human. In ‘Queer phenomenology’ Sara Ahmed defines what it means to be queer by describing it as a means to ‘disturb the order of things’ (2006). Originally coined as a slur to set apart someone as ‘strange’ or ‘weird’, it has been increasingly reclaimed by the LGBTQIA+ community, often used as an umbrella term for all the gender identities (Genous-Tate, 2022). However, ‘queerness’ connotes more than same-sex attraction as Ahmed describes it as an ‘active disorientation’ from heteronormativity. To be queer is the rejection of binary categorization and deviating from the prescribed lines of what is considered

‘normal’, resulting in constant spatial misalignment. Therefore, to be a black queer women, invites resistance as their very identity is contested and oppressed, causing friction in the ways they extend themselves into space as they’re often met with difficulty hypervisibility and rejection. A black queer women’s relationship with her environment consists of a reflection of how she is experienced by the outer world, internalizing social structures of power, which positions her conscious as a mirror of what is projected onto her (Smith, 2021). As her identity consists of a continuous back and forth between her and her environment, in which she receives input about what sets her apart as a ‘black woman’, it creates a deeply rooted tension trying to navigate oneself through who she really is.

Situating the black queer women in The Netherlands

To be a black queer woman in the Netherlands has its unique implications for the ways in which their identities are constructed through the senses. The Netherlands often maintains a reputation of tolerance and high acceptance, inviting diversity and inclusivity, but this remains debatable in practice. In her book ‘White innocence : Paradoxes of colonialism’ (2016) Gloria Wekker argues about the implications of this ‘illusion’ of tolerance and how this works. She describes the paradoxical relationship between its colonial history and the attitude of Dutch people as they consider slavery and its consequences a taboo. Dutch people often argue about being ‘colorblind’ and ‘innocent’, which actually perpetuates the erasure of marginalized identities, specifically those of black queer women. As they so often claim to not ‘see’ racism, it neutralizes the actual suffering and discomfort which deviation from the heteronormative norm brings and makes it harder to monitor discrimination. This makes black queer women both hyper visible and invisible, with an inability to speak up because criticism is deemed ‘unnecessary’ or an ‘exaggeration’. Another important aspect of ‘Dutch tolerance’ is that it is a progressive, queer friendly country, inviting sexual freedom. However, this so-called tolerance has been argued to be centered around white, male and cis gay people from higher classes as the LGBTQIA+ community has become increasingly commercialized, leading to a depoliticization of the movement. As the queer movement became more mainstream it also resulted in further whitewashing of queerness, creating yet another aspect in which black queerness is being erased and hypervisible (Del Valle, 2018).

Moving through the private and public: codeswitching

As black queer women continuously find themselves being both hyper visible and invisible, it is important to understand how this affects their movement between what can be considered the public and private sphere. This distinction was introduced by Jurgen Habermas (1974), dividing society into a space for politics, labor and market and a space for the intimate and emotional and familial . This division has since been contested during the Second Feministic wave, for not only boxing women into the invisibility of the private sphere but also the apolitical approach of the private as it was often considered a site for women to fulfill domestic duties, implying that those are disconnected from

politics (Landes, 2013). From the feminist movement, there were calls to connect the personal to the political, implying that no issue is individual or apolitical, but that they are all tied to systems of the patriarchy and capitalism. In 1983, this was explicitly turned into a recognition of how the bodies of black women in itself embodies resistance to the patriarchy, marking the very existence of black women as radical. Therefore it was also recognized that everything tied to the identity of being a black women implies a threat to the status quo, highlighting the multiple amounts of oppression they face (Collins, 2000).

As the identities of black queer women always remain political in both the public and private sphere, this impacts their ways of moving through spaces as they need to take into account that they're always under regulation. An important phenomenon illustrating the political difference between being at home and in public is the phenomenon of 'code switching' in which one's environment triggers someone to change something about their appearance or behavior in order to not stand out. Especially for black women, this implies changing the way you talk, taking on a different tone and looking more 'representable' (Bonds, 2025). This mechanism is often, used to adhere more to white, heteronormative standards of presenting oneself and implies marginalization in itself. It is a continuous way of navigation yourself through spaces in which you're not welcome, which can lead to a lot of pressure and a sense of disengagement with your identity. I argue that this is also the case for black queer women, and that the queer dimension also entails their own unique implications for what code-switching looks like.

Data & Methods

'The white fathers told us: I think, therefore I am. The Black mother within each of us - the poet - whispers in our dreams: I feel, therefore I can be free.' – Audre Lorde

As Audre Lorde emphasized in *Sister Outsider*; the act of 'feeling' is the most meaningful means of knowledge production and serves as a connection between the mind and body. This research therefore comprised of a qualitative phenomenological approach to extend the theory and bring light to the experiences of black queer women in the Netherlands, within the public and private sphere. A qualitative approach is meant to capture the essence of problems through the experiences of people instead of numerical data (Cresswell, 2013). I opted for this approach to underline that the experiences and feelings of black queer women can not be generalized or translated through numbers and instead recognize the intricate value their testimonies hold as knowledge.

Phenomenology can be defined as the exploration of phenomena through the perception of those who live or have lived through it (Zahavi, 2018). It situates the participant's feelings, thoughts and knowledge acquired through lived experience as a means of knowledge production. Centering the experiences of black queer women was vital to understand our senses in relation to black queer women and can only be realized through their testimonies. By giving each participant the control over the narrative, their agency and self-definition were highlighted and a mutual sense of trust to go deeper into their experiences. I chose to also organize a focus group meeting in addition to the individuals, which is not a usual occurrence within traditional phenomenological research as it is argued that it is not in line with the primary aim of phenomenology. The primary concern here is that it would not allow individuals to encounter their experiences in their own 'uncontaminated' manner (Webb & Kevern, 2001). As a focus group meeting consists of interaction and between people, this could potentially influence the answers of participants. However, I argue that a focus group meeting was highly essential for this research for several reasons. Not only did it allow us to have meaningful conversations which were beyond the topic at hand, it also symbolized an act of community and celebration, which I consider to be extremely valuable and transcends the study in itself. I took great caution in ensuring that all the answers would be as genuine as possible, by making sure everyone had space to talk about their experiences and would not be interrupted while doing so. Afterwards, participants could then add their own insights or share their feelings about what had been shared. This is also in line with what is proposed by Bradbury-Jones et. al (2009) when using focus group meetings within a phenomenological framework.

It was crucial that the sample of this study met several requirements in order to ensure that the topic at hand could be explored. These consisted of being from the African Diaspora, queer (lesbian/bisexual, pansexual), cis-gender women, out in public and being a native Dutch/English speaker. Due to these specific requirements, I've made use of purposive sampling while selecting

participants. I did this because I was intentional about highlighting the stories of these participants. 8 participants agreed to take part in this research with ages ranging from 20-26, which fell within the optimal sample size for phenomenological research (Cresswell, 2013). Prior to the individual interviews, participants gave their informed consent to ensure that data could be used in this research, including both recordings and field notes, and that they were aware that all data would be anonymized and safely stored.

Eight one-on-one interviews were conducted, of which two were through Zoom and six in a space chosen by the participants. Hereby it is important to note that conducting interviews through Zoom has significant effects on interpreting behavior, as you there is a high probability you can miss out on physical and emotional cues (Grey et al., 2020). Due to certain circumstances such as distance and restricted transportation, there was unfortunately no other option at the time. The conversations were held in spaces in which both of them felt safe and allowed free expression, which has resulted in valuable information on how they express themselves. The interviews which took place in real life, were at various locations such as a park, a cafe and at their own homes. Before the one-on-one interviews started, I asked each participant whether the objective of the research was clear to them and informed them about the ability to pause or end the conversation at any time.

The interviews consisted of in-depth open ended questions, which varied from participant to participant based on the flow of the conversation, I deliberately opted for this approach to ensure participants would feel comfortable and the emphasis on it being all for research would be less noticeable. The overall goal of the one-on-on interviews was to explore the participant's own ways of self-identification through the senses, by talking about their behaviors and sensory rituals at home. Although each conversation was completely unique, there were a couple of core questions which I asked everyone. Examples of these are *'When you come home, which sensory rituals make you feel more like yourself'*, *'is there a certain scent that signifies your identity'* and *'if you could design a space which was meant to affirm your identity, what would this smell/sound/look like?'*

Six participants took part in the focus group meeting, which was facilitated in Bar Bario, a BIPOC friendly space in Amsterdam which was familiar to most of them. Unfortunately, two participants were not able to participate, which may have had an impact on the dynamic of the group. However, the individual interviews which were conducted with all participants mitigate the effects of their absence at the meeting. This also underlined the efficiency of combining focus group meetings with individual interviews as has also been shown by Lambert & Loisele (2008). Focus group meetings are argued to be very useful sites of the production of independent knowledge as new topics may come to light that have yet to be mentioned (Stewart & Samdasani, 2014). In this instant; the focus group meeting served several purposes; as a means of reflecting and initiating group conversation about discrimination, hypervisibility/invisibility, situating their identities in the context of society and analyzing their implicit differences in behavior, but also as an act of community and celebration. Through questions such as: *'How do you express your identity in spaces in which you feel*

hypervisible/invisible?, do you feel like you face more discrimination based on the combination of your identity? How do you reclaim your identity?’ and ‘How do you reclaim your identity as a black queer women?’

All the interviews were transcribed and participants had the option to choose their own pseudonyms to guarantee their anonymity. I analyzed all of the information through a thematic analysis to recognize patterns across the lived experiences reported during the interviews and focus group meeting. Through inductive coding, codes were derived from the data of the interviews (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Although I was looking for themes and patterns, I took great caution in ensuring that the uniqueness of each interview was harbored and everyone was mentioned and seen. It lead to a beautiful and very rich collection of testimonies to the infinite ways black queer women shape their existence.

Locating myself within this research

Positionality in research is an important aspect in the ways information is interpreted and conveyed to the wider audience. It influences how someone would look at results and the manner in which language is constructed, hence there will never truly be true objectivity. I stand behind this notion and also acknowledge how vital the acknowledgement thereof is in researches that are meant to make a statement about others. As a black queer women myself, I relate closely to the topic at hand and believe it has facilitated my ability to analyze this topic and understand the sensitivity and vulnerability of this matter. It allowed me to operate as both an ‘insider’ as I also research and relate to the topics at hand, but also reflect upon the observations of others as an ‘outsider’. However, I’m currently in a long-term straight relationship, from a mixed-race descent and have always lived in the Netherlands. I believe that these factors may obstruct me in my research as I’m not able to relate to the experience of a darkskin/brown skin black woman as compared to a light skin woman, whom are often favored due to colorism. My western background gives me the privilege to enter certain spaces whom could’ve possibly been harder to enter for my sisters. My queerness is often not immediately assumed due to my partner and because the biggest part of my dating history consisted of men. All these factors of privilege contribute to a difference in experiences on all aspects of my identity. Therefore I’m fully aware of the caution that is needed in carrying out this research and interpreting the results, but also the potential biases that may be present in my research. I also acknowledge that my identity may cause hesitation for the women I approach to fully open up about their experiences as they might not have a complete sense of safety, leading to incomplete or different answers. However, I will approach this study with full transparency towards my participants and openness to learn and collaborate in order to make sure this study truly uplifts and celebrates black queer women.

Situated in the spaces we call home; ‘I take off my crocs and walk barefeet’

The aim of this thesis was to understand how the senses construct the identities of black queer women at home and in public, as their multiple identity markers interact with each other in such complex and unique ways, creating new dimensions of lived experiences. I had the privilege to interview 8 amazing women and was able to learn about their own rituals and habits through which they construct their identities in a space in which they feel at home, and what this means to them. This first set of interviews brought me to various spaces, in which they felt the most comfortable to express themselves. Each interview had an unique flow, as I wanted them to shape the conversation and see which topics would come up. Not only did all of their experiences provide me with a counter perspective to how they are experienced by society, but it also opened up conversations for the participants’ themselves, as they got to speak about things they don’t usually reflected upon as consciously.

Grounding as an act of association

Embodiment through the senses often seemed to occur through specific sensory rituals, according to the participants. It allowed them to feel more grounded after a long day of work, but in general allowed them to just be. It soon became clear however, that it wasn’t just the rituals but also the feelings they were associated with, that evoked a sense of feeling like themselves. As I sat with Jay to have an interview at her place, she lit an incense with a lavender scent and put on her favorite song in the background. It was an interesting observation as we hadn’t even started the interviews yet, but she already seemed to be engaging in a specific sensory ritual. When I asked her about the incense, she told me; *‘I associate the scent of lavender with love, so every time i turn on lavender incense is because it’s because I want to in a way feel love, or self-love.’* She then later went on to explain to me that her two favorite scents were coconut and a specific citrus-like scent of which she barely had anything left, and had been trying to find again for years. When I asked her about these two other scents, she told me she wants to smell like them all the time and how it made her feel like herself. In this instance, scent in itself seems to be intentionally used as a tool of grounding through the feelings she associates with it. This also supports Sakimoto’s hypothesis of the intentional body (2018), underlining how she purposefully assigns meaning to sensory input.

Another common theme of association which appeared across all of the testimonies of the participants, were the ties their sensory rituals had to their culture and youth. M. mentioned for example how when she went back to her home country, the act of eating with her hands made her feel more grounded, just as how Z. mentioned that her home always smells of black soap and Nigerian food. T. illustrated this beautifully in her response as well, when I asked her what it would look like if she got to design a space which was meant to affirm her in her identity. Instead of only naming

properties of the space itself like the color or interior, she mentioned how she'd make sure the scents of Florida water and Pompeia would be everywhere as it always used to be in her household:

'I also really think that a lot of people do not maybe always understand that it is in that African food that we find home you know how excited me and my friends get we can come together and eat good African food with our hands, I think that that is as much home as you can get or having any cultural food you know you can cleanse your hands with Florida water after i think that that is as home as it can get.'

T. underlined the importance of revoking a sense of home and grounding in her identity, through practicing rituals which are associated with her blackness. Being able to feel the food with your hands, the smell of cultural food and the sensations of cleaning your hand after with Florida Water, all symbolize a sense of home in their identity through the sensory rituals. This is in line with Ratnam's theory (2018) about how the rituals one engages in, are markers for one's identity and allow one to feel more like themselves. T's example alongside those of M. and Z. show what these rituals specifically entail for black people, by mentioning culture specific sensory rituals such as Florida water, eating with your hands and spreading the smell of black soap.

Intentional sensory embodiment

Another important way of sensory embodiment at home, happened through a wide range of unique and meaningful practices. All of these were seen as empowering acts of self expression and crucial to their identities. While me and Z. were walking towards the café in which she wanted the interview to take place, her shoes were already click-clacking loud on the pavement. Once we got situated in the café with a coffee, I asked her about the ways in which she expresses herself. Z said;

'I like to be loud in my looks as a way of self-adornment, even when I'm at home I will put on a whole outfit with a lot of jewelry. When I go out, I always wear loud shoes, big rings and a lot of key chains on my bag because I like the multitude of sounds that's coming off me. People can always hear me coming, it's like an introduction song.'

Like Z, all participants encountered several ways in which they intentionally constructed their identity and expressed it. This happened in a lot of intricate and unique ways, such as significant perfumes, nails, hairstyles and clothes. One thing all of them had in common and was often mentioned was the 'loud' aspect of these ways of claiming their own sensory embodiment. This 'loudness' would then often be expressed through a lot of colors, big sizes, different types of fabric or intensity of smells. As Rasa said; *'I love everything as long as it is bright, creative and there is a lot going on.'*

All of these examples show how black queer women construct their own embodiment through the senses, specifically sight, sound and smell, they integrate it in everything they do and wear. It allows them to claim their own uniqueness and express themselves according to their own terms.

Situated in public with 8 Wet Pussy shots; ‘the Dutch obsession with noise cancelling, fairytales and small boxes’

During the individual interviews, several participants had expressed to me their excitement and need to come together as black queer women, as there are barely any in the Netherlands and there are not many occasions in which it happens. I was then also predetermined to not solely make it about research, but also turn it into an occasion in which we could share a sense of sisterhood together. I considered this to be very important as the conversations about hypervisibility/invisibility and discrimination are vulnerable topics, requiring great caution and care. While the bartender was setting up the table downstairs with a green table cloth and a couple of candles, I decided to get everyone a drink before, as a means of celebrating each of their resilience. Once everyone had arrived, I welcomed and thanked everyone for coming. A sense of excitement was present in the air and I caught their big smiles as I lifted my drink in the air, whereafter they did too. We all cheered with our ‘Wet Pussy’ shots in the air to never stop being our magical selves.

Don’t be so loud!

As we discussed the various ways in which the participants moved themselves through spaces in which they encountered feeling hypervisible or invisible, it quickly became clear that one of the main settings in which this occurred was the workspace. T. illustrated this by using the famous Dutch phrase; ‘*Doe maar normaal, dan ben je al gek genoeg*’ (translation: act normal, then you’re already weird enough). She talked about the general unspoken expectation that you’re always supposed to assimilate into the Dutch culture, which generally implies to not stand out too much and be regular. As soon as you do stand out, T. encounters that you’re always looked at in a weird way. This is in support of the idea that society functions as a sensory collective, as the Netherlands perpetuates the idea of ‘normality’ as a form of conformity and harmony (Sekimoto & Brown, 2020). She then mentioned how she ‘changes the ways she dresses, uses her hands and leaves her big rings at home.’ Her idea of not acting too ‘extra’ at work illustrates the experience as a black queer women in itself as a deeply divergent from what Dutch conformity implies. This hyperawareness aligns with Ahmed’s (2006) notion about queerness, noting how she experiences spatial misalignment due to how her embodiment is situated in white spaces

Z. then went on to ask T about whether her behavior could be seen as code-switching, to which T agreed. As Bond (2025) mentioned, she moves through spaces with caution of how she’ll be

perceived and knows where she is appreciated for her identity and where she's not. Therefore, she makes decision to present herself as closely as possible to the standards at her workplace to not elicit any responses or uncomfortable situations. Someone else also agreed and mentioned how she was at an event the other day saying that *'All these white women wore the same jacket and same pants, they want you to be normal and quiet and calm down. And if you don't you're fucked, even if I talk louder it's already like hey! But if I would also on top of that express my queerness? it's too much. It'd too much if I'd dress the way I usually do, my rings would be too much.'*

Like T. the participant expresses her awareness about how her identity is situated in spaces in which she's with white women, underlining several key factors that set her apart. She mentions how it is expected from her that she is 'quiet' and 'normal' and how even the act of talking louder already ostracizes her from the rest. This example correspond with Stoevers' sonic color line theory (2016) emphasizing how black sound is distinguished from white sound, especially in black women, and how it is expected that she needs to abide to the stillness of the whiteness in the room. She recognizes how specifically their loudness would separate her from the other white women in the space and would already result in her being 'fucked'.

The myth of Dutch tolerance; weaponizing the rainbow

Another space about which most of the participants agreed to experience hypervisibility/invisibility in were queer spaces. As mentioned by Del Valle (2018) queer Dutch spaces tend to be white and male dominated. When I was talking about this with M. who has mostly found herself to be in white queer spaces, she said the following; *'The feeling of other queer people feeling so secure and accepted while I feel a little bit weird or like a little bit exposed, I think that kind of sucks. When I'm the only black queer person in the room with white straight people I accept it and it's okay because I know I'm different, but in queer spaces it sucks.'*

M. highlights the role of intersectionality here, and how her blackness influences her experience as a queer women within these spaces. Her blackness is a factor of alienation even though she's with people who share the same identity marker of being queer. She recounts feeling inherently, which is a sentiment that was shared amongst almost all participants. Interestingly, when the topic came up again during the focus group meeting, another participant described these spaces as a symptom of something larger.

'This country pretends to be so open and friendly but they're not, they will pretend but they will be open towards mostly maybe if they're going to be open to queer people it's going to be white queer people and it's going to be white gay men it's not going to be the women and especially not going to be the black queer women. they only use queerness against blackness or muslim people

saying that they need to go because they're homophobic, but you're homophobic too you just never acknowledge it. So i feel like they're using us more than really accepting us.'

The participant highlights several things; firstly the illusion of the open nature of tolerance within the Netherlands but also that this only applies to white queer men. She describes how erasure is systemically perpetuated and that this happens on both the levels of her gender and race. She explicitly describes the different levels of acceptance she encounters and how it places her as a black queer women at the bottom. Furthermore, she also mentions how the Dutch themselves are homophobic too but never mention it and only weaponize it against outsiders. It illustrates how Dutch people inherently believe in the innocence of their own norms, supporting the illusion of Dutch tolerance according to Gloria Wekker (2016).

Boxed into being

A specific feeling was often mentioned during both the individual interview and the focus group meeting when it came to the possibilities to identifying oneself as a black queer women in society. This feeling reflected a certain sense of 'conflict' between their identities, which was projected onto them by society, leading to them to doubt their blackness, femininity or womanhood. This feeling was mentioned by Rasa, as she recounted to often feel alienated due to her skin color;

'As a black woman, you're already seen as aggressive and more manly. I also don't really wear any make up and don't have an hourglass figure or anything, so people don't see me as a feminine person. It has always been made very clear to me that I'm not feminine and I started to believe in that as well.'

Rasa mentions several factors here which lead to masculinization, with skin color as the main one. This is a classic case of intersectionality (1989), in which her blackness influences her womanhood. When I asked participants whether they felt like they faced more oppression based on the combination of their identities, T's example introduced the intersectional layer of queerness, which lead to a conflict in identities;

'I figured out at a young age I was black you know and white people didn't like me but I always had the back of black people but then when I turned out queer I figured out not all black people like me and that was for me very hard to handle that was I think the first real betrayal that I felt in my life'.

Due to the combination of their identities, and the social norms of what is acceptable for each of those components, participants felt like they were not always able to feel like they fulfilled all of the standards. T's encounter describes a decrease in acceptance of her identity, as soon as her queerness became 'public'. It significantly impacts her presence in society, as it seems her queerness is deemed

to conflict with her black womanhood. Both these encounter reflect how the dynamics of intersectionality are impacted, once additional marginalized identity markers are present.

Acts of resistance: 'I'm weird and I'm doing that on purpose'

When discussing marginalized identities, it is easy to become translated through the struggles related with our identities as we often only exist in relation to the white, male and heteronormative norm. However, being a black queer woman is one of the most magical things there is, as our identities encompass all of the unique aspects of life. No matter how many struggles are imposed on us, as Ish said; *'I feel like it's more other people's problems than mine'*. She refuses to view her identity as a struggle, pointing out how she does not care. I asked the participants in which ways they resist towards the biases they are faced with, which resulted in beautiful testimonies to their identities.

I'm here, and you're gonna notice me

At the end of each individual interview, I asked everyone to give me a one word/sentence description which encapsulates their identity. I wanted to know how they viewed their own identity and with what intention they situate themselves in the world or how they intentionally present themselves. When I asked Rasa about this, she gave me her full government name, emphasizing how she acknowledges the importance of each part and how they contributed to her 'unique sense of self'. She emphasized how important it was to her to have ownership over her identity and take in space with it, even if people are not able to pronounce it well. M. told me the first word she thought of was 'big', continuing by saying; *'I'm loud, I take in space, I'm weird and always expanding.'*

All of the answers, whether it were their own names or other words had one thing in common and that was taking up space as themselves and proudly wearing their own uniqueness. During the meeting, it became clear how important the concept of taking up space was when I asked them in which ways they resisted towards the biases they were met with. This attitude was reflected by Samira, when she told us the following; *'I think I put myself indirectly in places where people actually do not expect me. So, for example, in a white office with only white people.'*

Another beautiful statement was made by Z. in which she gave her own version of sensory protest by changing something about her appearance.

'I think the way you present yourself like let's say here in Holland like you have to dress and be normal and wear the same the way you carry yourself is an act of rebellion it's an act of active protest, I will not abide, I will not listen. I often have bleached eyebrows and people then ask me 'why?' and I tell them 'why not?'. I'm just weird and doing that on purpose.'

Z. recognizes that it's highly unusual to have bleached eyebrows amidst the culture of 'normality' in the Netherlands, and actively counteracts in her daily life, labeling it as an act of rebellion.

I see and celebrate you

One of the main things which was mentioned throughout all of the interviews and the meeting, was the importance of coming together with your meeting, in order to be able to be and accept yourself. Ish elaborated on the idea that other people seemed more troubled by her identity than she was, by highlighting how her community has always celebrated her identity through music, food and culture. She mentioned how she was always told to be proud and love herself as she is. When I asked the others about the importance of community, they agreed with Ish. T. elaborated by saying; *'I think that community enables this space where you can also really explore who it is that you are and what your identity is. I think that that's why so many queer people have found their home in queerness.'* This also corresponds with how Mel encountered to have found a way of self acceptance through others and allowed her to fully claim herself as a 'lesbian' rather than just queer. Jay also gave a specific example of discovering her sense of self through community; *'there was this girl, I was 13 too when i found out about her, she was also queer and she was so loud with her queerness like she didn't even know she was being loud she was just herself, that is so cool. I really like those people and she was a big inspiration to be authentic.'*

Each of the participants highlighted the importance of being able to extend yourself into a space in which you are accepted, seen and celebrated. A community which is equally loud, weird and authentic as them to create space for one and other to be. The statements by M. and Jay also go further to show what the impact is of being surrounded by such a community as it motivated them to discover a new version of themselves which aligned more with them.

Discussion

The goal of this thesis was to examine the ways in which the senses construct the identity of black queer women, at home and in public.

The conversations revealed several important concepts in sensory identity-making, and how they felt like their identities were situated in space. The main finding illustrated their intentionality in exercising their sensory rituals to ground, supporting Sekimoto's hypothesis (2018) about the body being active in seeking experiences and assigning meaning to those. Jay's statement also adds a new dimension to this intentionality, as she purposefully utilizes scents to also return back to the site of recognition in her identity again. Another important factor of sensory rituals were it's associations, which often turned out to be feelings, events from the past and one's heritage. T's example alongside those of M. and Z. showed what these rituals specifically entail, by mentioning culture specific sensory rituals such as Florida water, eating with your hands and spreading the smell of black soap. Not only do these example support Ratnam's concept (2018) of identity as a home, they also expand it by showing how black queer women utilize sensory rituals against systemic erasure.

When it came to the role of the senses in public, participants described the Netherlands as a collective sensory experience with a specific sensory consensus of what belongs to the normative, which is in support of Merleau-Ponty's idea of norms constructed by the senses and Sekimoto & Brown (2020). From their encounters, it is always expected from them that they should conform to the norm of not standing out and acting 'regular' in terms of talking, acting and dressing. This became very clear through T's experience of her work space, and how she copes with being in a space in which she feels pressure to conform. The very act of deliberately taking off her jewelry and changing the way she talks, bears evidence of how those factors are used in expressing identity but also the political weight they carry amidst the Dutch culture of simplicity. It underlines how the very site of identity and it's attributes are acts of resistance in itself for T. and also according to Ahmed (2006), but also that she does not always want to carry those politics with her and sometimes rather wishes to be invisible.

The other participant's encounter about being in a space with white women who all looked the same, was together with T.'s a very important example of both code switching and the sonic color line theory by Jenniver Stoeber. It illustrated how code switching occurs through more than just mannerisms and talking according to Bond (2025), by bringing in the concepts of attributes which are associated with her identity. These attributes in itself, already appear to carry a inner sense of divergence from community and therefore stand out in white-dominated space. Furthermore, both statements introduce a new dimension of queer embodiment and adds onto the sonic color line theory (2016) , as the participant also mentioned that the impact of expressing her queerness through clothes or other attributes such as jewelry and their 'loudness' would only worsen the situation. By emphasizing how specific ways of styling oneself is attributed to the intersection of race, gender and

queerness, it produces a unique type of sonic presence. These attributes in itself can then already cause divergence in workspaces.

Feelings of invisibility were often encountered within white queer spaces, which makes them feel alienated. An important factor in this process is their blackness, but also the combination of their blackness with their queerness and womanhood. This is in accordance with Crenshaw's theory about intersectionality (1989) and adds onto it by illuminating the unique combination between multiple marginalized identity markers. They also revealed how erasure of black queer women happens on a systemic scale, by prioritizing white gay men and how they feel like their identities are only convenient to mention when it is with the goal of weaponization towards foreigners. This form of weaponization seems to come forth out of the idea of "White innocence" as described by Gloria Wekker (2016). They do so in such an extent that they even believe that they need to protect their innocent norms of freedom and acceptance from outsiders such as Black people and Muslims, as they are considered as threats. They believe and perpetuate the idea that they need to protect their norms of freedom and acceptance from outsiders such as Black people and Muslims, as they are considered as threats. Rather, this is highly hypocritical, as a participant highlighted that Dutch people themselves are racist and homophobic themselves too. As Wekker (2016) argued, this pushes black queer women into a state of erasure in which both their identities and the issues surrounding it are deemed to be non-existent.

Intersectionality also played a big role in feeling secure in one's identity, which was often made more difficult due to social conceptions of how they should behave and look like, leading to sensory conflicts. The combination of being black and a woman in itself, often brought about a constant masculinization of their femininity. The queerness in combination with their blackness lead to a sense of alienation from their blackness. These examples showcase unique and novel contributions to the field of intersectionality and deepens the understanding of the complexity of these dynamics.

A powerful addition to this study, was the inclusion of forms of sensory protest by black queer women. It shows the innovation and perseverance to build a lasting meaningful existence within spaces that continuously attempt to erase them; but will never really accomplish in doing so. One of these protests was the practice of intentionally taking in space. This could take on different shapes, such as physically taking up space somewhere you're not expected to show up as a black queer women, but also through changing your appearance in radical ways as opposed to the norm. Lastly, the need and appreciation for being celebrated by coming together was highlighted, which even happened through the process of this research. By coming together, sharing drinks and anecdotes, it also became an act of sensory celebration and simultaneously taking in space. This is incredibly important as it allows black queer women to have a space in which they can extend themselves without any fear and are motivated to explore and cultivate their uniqueness.

Conclusion

Throughout this thesis, different ways of sensory embodiment, expression, and resistance have been explored in order to understand the question; *How do the senses construct the identities of black queer women at home and in public, in the Netherlands?* I started off by exploring how black queer women give meaning through their own identities through sensory rituals and how they embody their identities. The interviews revealed the importance of realizing a sensory sense of home by implementing attributes that carry associations with specific feelings and their youth. This expands the concept of identity as a home with specific rituals of black queer women, such as eating with your bare hands or using Florida Water. Identity embodiment frequently happened by appealing to sight, sound and smell through their clothes, jewelry, hair, make up and specific fragrances. All of these attributes allow them to uniquely express themselves and make a statement about who they are, aligning with the idea of an intentional body, but also adding that these attributes are not solely personal but also political. During the meeting, we explored the ways in which sometimes identity is left at home, through changing mannerisms, leaving big jewelry at home and lowering their tone. It reflected a recognition of the politics associated with their identities and accessories, and how the ‘loudness’ which is associated with their black queerness, becomes another layer which requires codeswitching in spaces in which their queerness is not welcome, as well as how these attributes carry their own sonic presence. Lastly, forms of protest were shared which consisted of taking up space and the importance of coming together as an act of celebration through music and sharing anecdotes.

This research has opened a real life pathway to community, which is so important in our identities to celebrate ourselves and one and other, as was also highlighted by the participants themselves. It was beyond beautiful to see the participants also bond in real life over shared experiences and find a place in which they were free to truly be. I deeply admire each and every single one of my participants for their vulnerability, wisdom and thank them from the bottom of my heart for their valuable input.

Bibliography

- Ahmed, S. (2006). Orientations: Toward a queer phenomenology. *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 12(4), 543-574.
- Bonds, M. Y. (2025). The Art of Pretending: The Psychological Impact of Code-Switching On African American Women Leaders in Chicago Public Schools (Doctoral dissertation, National University).
- Bradbury-Jones, C., Sambrook, S., & Irvine, F. (2009). The phenomenological focus group: an oxymoron?. *Journal of advanced nursing*, 65(3), 663-671.
- Chandola, Tripta. "Listening into Others: Moralising the Soundscapes in Delhi." *Ethnography*, vol. 13, no. 1, 2012, pp. 107–122.
- Collins, P. H. (2000). *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment*. Routledge
- Crenshaw, Kimberlé Williams. 'Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics.' University of Chicago Legal Forum (1989)
- Cresswell, J. (2013). Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches.
- Del Valle, S. (2018). The Personal as the Political: The Everyday Resistance of LGBTQ+ WOC in the Netherlands.
- Genous-Tate, Z. (2022). #Blackqueergirlmagic: A Phenomenological Study on the Lived Experiences of Black Lesbian Women in Higher Education Leadership (Doctoral dissertation, Clark Atlanta University).
- Geurts, K. (2003). *Culture and the senses: Bodily ways of knowing in an African community* (Vol. 3). Univ of California Press.
- Gray, L. M., Wong-Wylie, G., Rempel, G. R., & Cook, K. (2020). Expanding qualitative research interviewing strategies: Zoom video communications. *The qualitative report*, 25(5), 1292-1301.
- Habermas, J. (1974). The public sphere: an encyclopedia article. *New German Critique*, 3, 49–55.
- Kathryn Linn Geurts, *Culture and the Senses: Bodily Ways of Knowing in an African Community* (Berkeley: University of California, 2002).
- Lambert, S. D., & Loiselle, C. G. (2008). Combining individual interviews and focus groups to enhance data richness. *Journal of advanced nursing*, 62(2), 228-237.
- Landes, J. B. (2013). The public and the private sphere: A feminist reconsideration. In *Feminists Read Habermas (RLE Feminist Theory)* (pp. 91-116). Routledge.
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (2012). *Phenomenology of perception* (D. A. Landes, Trans.).
- Neubauer, B. E., Witkop, C. T., & Varpio, L. (2019). How phenomenology can help us learn from the experiences of others. *Perspectives on medical education*, 8, 90-97.
- Osagie K. Obasogie, "Do Blind People See Race? Social, Legal, and Theoretical Considerations," *Law & Society Review* 44, no. 3 (2010): 585–616.
- Palipane, K. (2020). Socio-sensory practice and its potential for identity, plurality and dissonance. *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 41(6), 756-777.

- Ratnam, C. (2018). Creating home: Intersections of memory and identity. *Geography Compass*, 12(4), e12363.
- Sekimoto, S. (2018). Race and the senses: Toward articulating the sensory apparatus of race. *Critical Philosophy of Race*, 6(1), 82-100.
- Sekimoto, S., & Brown, C. (Eds.). (2020). *Race and the senses: The felt politics of racial embodiment*. Routledge.
- Stewart, D. W., & Shamdasani, P. N. (2014). *Focus groups: Theory and practice*. Sage publications.
- Stoeber, Jennifer Lynn. *The Sonic Color Line: Race and the Cultural Politics of Listening*. New York University Press, 2016
- Webb, C., & Kevern, J. (2001). Focus groups as a research method: a critique of some aspects of their use in nursing research. *Journal of advanced nursing*, 33(6), 798-805.
- Zahavi, D. (2018). *Phenomenology: the basics*. Routledge.

APPENDIX I: Ethics & privacy checklist



CHECKLIST ETHICAL AND PRIVACY ASPECTS OF RESEARCH

INSTRUCTION

This checklist should be completed for every research study that is conducted at the Department of Public Administration and Sociology (DPAS). This checklist should be completed *before* commencing with data collection or approaching participants. Students can complete this checklist with help of their supervisor.

This checklist is a mandatory part of the empirical master's thesis and has to be uploaded along with the research proposal.

The guideline for ethical aspects of research of the Dutch Sociological Association (NSV) can be found on their website (http://www.nsv-sociologie.nl/?page_id=17). If you have doubts about ethical or privacy aspects of your research study, discuss and resolve the matter with your EUR supervisor. If needed and if advised to do so by your supervisor, you can also consult Dr. Bonnie French, coordinator of the Sociology Master's Thesis program.

PART I: GENERAL INFORMATION

Project title: The role of the senses in identity construction: a black queer woman's tal

Name, email of student: Jaemy Mans

Name, email of supervisor: Jennifer Steinman

Start date and duration: 23-3-2025, 3 months

Is the research study conducted within DPAS

YES - NO

If 'NO': at or for what institute or organization will the study be conducted?
(e.g. internship organization)

PART II: HUMAN SUBJECTS

1. Does your research involve human participants. YES - NO

If 'NO': skip to part V.

If 'YES': does the study involve medical or physical research? YES - NO

Research that falls under the Medical Research Involving Human Subjects Act ([WMO](#)) must first be submitted to [an accredited medical research ethics committee](#) or the Central Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects ([CCMO](#)).

2. Does your research involve field observations without manipulations that will not involve identification of participants. YES - NO

If 'YES': skip to part IV.

3. Research involving completely anonymous data files (secondary data that has been anonymized by someone else). YES - NO

If 'YES': skip to part IV.

PART III: PARTICIPANTS

1. Will information about the nature of the study and about what participants can expect during the study be withheld from them? YES - **NO**
2. Will any of the participants not be asked for verbal or written 'informed consent,' whereby they agree to participate in the study? YES - **NO**
3. Will information about the possibility to discontinue the participation at any time be withheld from participants? YES - **NO**
4. Will the study involve actively deceiving the participants?
Note: almost all research studies involve some kind of deception of participants. Try to think about what types of deception are ethical or non-ethical (e.g. purpose of the study is not told, coercion is exerted on participants, giving participants the feeling that they harm other people by making certain decisions, etc.). YES - **NO**
5. Does the study involve the risk of causing psychological stress or negative emotions beyond those normally encountered by participants? YES - **NO**
6. Will information be collected about special categories of data, as defined by the GDPR (e.g. racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs, trade union membership, genetic data, biometric data for the purpose of uniquely identifying a person, data concerning mental or physical health, data concerning a person's sex life or sexual orientation)? **YES** - NO
- 7.** Will the study involve the participation of minors (<18 years old) or other groups that cannot give consent? YES - **NO**
8. Is the health and/or safety of participants at risk during the study? YES - **NO**
9. Can participants be identified by the study results or can the confidentiality of the participants' identity not be ensured? YES - **NO**
10. Are there any other possible ethical issues with regard to this study? YES - NO

If you have answered 'YES' to any of the previous questions, please indicate below why this issue is unavoidable in this study.

This research is about the lived experience of black queer women, therefore it is necessary for me to obtain information about the ways in which they identify themselves in order to ensure that they fit into the research.

What safeguards are taken to relieve possible adverse consequences of these issues (e.g., informing participants about the study afterwards, extra safety regulations, etc.).

Participants are informed before participation in the research which information will be collected, alongside the informed consent form in which they can indicate at any moment that they want to drop out of the project. Furthermore, all information will be anonymised and participants will have full access to the paper before publication to decide whether they want to modify their stories and agree with how everything was worded down.

Are there any unintended circumstances in the study that can cause harm or have negative (emotional) consequences to the participants? Indicate what possible circumstances this could be.

Inquiring information about events in which they have felt discriminated against may cause them to relive the moment and consequently re-experience the negative emotions they might had been experiencing at that moment.

Please attach your informed consent form in Appendix I, if applicable.

Continue to part IV.

PART IV: SAMPLE

Where will you collect or obtain your data?

From the participants

Note: indicate for separate data sources.

What is the (anticipated) size of your sample?

8

Note: indicate for separate data sources.

What is the size of the population from which you will sample?

unknown

Note: indicate for separate data sources.

Continue to part V.

Part V: Data storage and backup

Where and when will you store your data in the short term, after acquisition?

On my computer

Note: indicate for separate data sources, for instance for paper-and pencil test data, and for digital data files.

Who is responsible for the immediate day-to-day management, storage and backup of the data arising from your research?

____ Me _____

How (frequently) will you back-up your research data for short-term data security?

On a weekly basis

In case of collecting personal data how will you anonymize the data?

I will anonymize data by using pseudonyms and erase personal information from the recordings/transcriptions.

Note: It is advisable to keep directly identifying personal details separated from the rest of the data. Personal details are then replaced by a key/ code. Only the code is part of the database with data and the list of respondents/research subjects is kept separate.

PART VI: SIGNATURE

Please note that it is your responsibility to follow the ethical guidelines in the conduct of your study. This includes providing information to participants about the study and ensuring confidentiality in storage and use of personal data. Treat participants respectfully, be on time at appointments, call participants when they have signed up for your study and fulfil promises made to participants.

Furthermore, it is your responsibility that data are authentic, of high quality and properly stored. The principle is always that the supervisor (or strictly speaking the Erasmus University Rotterdam) remains owner of the data, and that the student should therefore hand over all data to the supervisor.

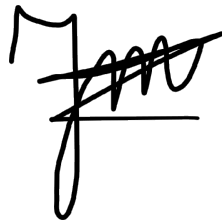
Hereby I declare that the study will be conducted in accordance with the ethical guidelines of the Department of Public Administration and Sociology at Erasmus University Rotterdam. I have answered the questions truthfully.

Name student: Jaemy Mans

Name (EUR) supervisor:

Date: 23/03/2025

Date:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Jaemy Mans', written over a horizontal line.

APPENDIX II: Informed Consent Form

Name of the research project	The role of the senses in identity construction: a black queer woman's tale
Purpose of the study	This research is led by Jaemy Mans. You are cordially invited to participate in this study. The aim of this research is to understand how the senses partake in the social construction of the identity of black queer women.
Course of events during the investigation	You will participate in an open-ended interview and focus group meeting in which you will be asked questions about self-identification in relation to the senses and how you experience discrimination based on the senses in both the public and private sphere. You must be at least 18 years old to participate in this study. Prior to the interview, all participants will complete a short questionnaire. This includes questions about background data and personal characteristics. During the interview and focus group meeting, a topic list will be used to delve deeper into the personal experience of the employee. An audio recording will be made of the interview, so that the conversation can be worked out ad-verbum (word for word) later. Field notes will also be made to keep track of important topics and body language.
Potential risks and inconveniences	- There are no physical, legal, or economic risks associated with your participation in this study. You don't have to answer questions you don't want to answer. Your participation is voluntary and you can stop your participation at any time. - There is some discomfort associated with your participation in this study, due to the sensitive nature of the subject. You don't have to answer questions you don't want to answer. Your participation is voluntary and you can stop your participation at any time.
Compensation	You will not receive any compensation for participation in this study. The broader aim of this research is to broaden the knowledge about participation and the social role of museums in the heritage field.
Data Confidentiality	Your privacy is and will remain maximally protected. No confidential information or personal data from or about you will be disclosed in any way that will allow anyone to recognize you. Before our research data is published, your data is anonymized. Some simple examples of this:

	1. Your name is replaced by anonymous, meaningless combination of numbers. 2. Your age itself is not processed, but placed in a category. For example: age: between 18-25 years / between 25-35 years etc. 3. Your place of residence is not used, but the province in which you live. A publication will either use anonymous data or pseudonyms. The audio recordings, forms and other documents made or collected in the context of this study will be stored at a secure location at Erasmus University Rotterdam and on the secure (encrypted) computers of the researchers. The research data will be made available to persons outside the research group if necessary (e.g. for a check on scientific integrity) and only in anonymous form; in this case to an investigation committee of Erasmus University Rotterdam that has powers to do so.
Voluntary	Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. As a participant, you can stop your participation in the study at any time, or refuse to allow your data to be used for the study, without giving reasons. This means that if you decide not to participate in the study prior to the study, this will not affect you in any way. You can also withdraw the permission you have given to use your data up to 5 working days (reflection period) after the interview. In these cases, your data will be removed from our files and destroyed. Stopping participation will not have any adverse consequences for you or any compensation already received. If you decide to stop your cooperation during the investigation, after the reflection period of 5 working days, this will also have no consequences for you in any way. However, the data you have provided up to the point where your participation stops will be used in the study, including the protection of your privacy as described above. Of course, no new data will be collected or used. If you decide to stop participating in the study, or if you have any questions, complaints, or want to express your concern, or any form of harm or inconvenience due to the study, please contact the study leader: Jessica Steinman
Declaration of consent	Signing this document indicates that you are at least 18 years old; that you are well informed about the study, the way in

	which the research data is collected, used and handled and what risks, if any, you could run by participating in this study If you had any questions, you indicate by signing that you were able to ask these questions and that these questions have been answered clearly and clearly. You indicate that you voluntarily agree to participate in this study. You will receive a copy of this signed consent form. I agree to participate in a research project led by Jaemy Mans. The purpose of this document is to establish the conditions of my participation in the project. 1. I received sufficient information about this research project. The purpose of my participation as an interviewee in this project has been clearly explained to me and I know what this means to me. 2. My participation as an interviewee in this project is voluntary. There is no explicit or implicit compulsion for me to participate in this study. 3. My participation means that I will be interviewed by researcher(s) from Erasmus University. The interview and focus group meeting will be about 60 minutes. I give the investigator(s) permission to make recordings (sound/image) and take written notes during the interview. It is clear to me that, if I do object to one or more points as mentioned above, I can stop my participation at any time, without giving a reason.
	4. I have the right not to answer questions. If I feel uncomfortable during the interview, I have the right to stop participating in the interview. 5. I have received an explicit guarantee from the research director that the research leader will ensure that I cannot be identified in any data, reports or articles published by the investigation. My privacy is guaranteed as a participant in this study. 6. I have received a guarantee that this research project has been reviewed and approved. For objections regarding the design and/or execution of the research, I can turn to Jessica Steinman 7. I have read and understood this form. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction and I have voluntarily agreed to participate in this study. 8. I have received a copy of this consent form which is also signed by the interviewer.

Signature and date	Name Participant	Name of the research leader
	Signature	Signature
	Date	Date