

Disciplining online dating talk, disrupting gender norms: Digital turn-taking & making the first move on Bumble

In 2014 the self-proclaimed feminist app dating Bumble emerged with a mission to disrupt traditional gender dating practices and empower women through a turn taking protocol in which only women may initiate conversations with men after matching. However, in-depth interviews with forty-five Bumble users suggest that connecting and conversing is complicated by gendered online dating practices and app design and rather than cooperative principles of conversation. In this presentation, I apply and Microanalysis Of Online Data (MOOD) (Giles et al., 2015) to Bumble's "first move" architecture and messaging protocols to map out the digital conversation floor and Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (Jewitt et al., 2016) to analyze how gender, power, and online dating are constructed through Bumble's discourses. Findings demonstrate that Bumble's in-app disciplinary communication directives and unreciprocated invitations to take the floor have the potential to negatively reduce women's sense of agency and power in online dating interactions. As of 2023, the digital intimacy platform is one of the most popular dating apps, with over 50 million active users globally, giving Bumble power to influence digital dating discourses and norms. This research contributes to methods in digital discourse studies and the growing body of literature dedicated to understanding digital intimacies through online talk (Chan, 2021; Licoppe, 2021; Mortensen, 2015; Thompson, 2022).

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